

EFL Students' Reluctance in Participating in English Speaking Activities at University College of Applied Sciences: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract

This study tackles the main reasons behind EFL students' reticence in participating in speaking activities in the English language classrooms at the University College of Applied Sciences (UCAS) in Gaza, Palestine. As an emerging issue in the field of teaching and learning English, speaking reticence has attracted the attention of many researchers whom focused on the Asian context of learning English, particularly in China and Japan. Therefore, the researchers decided to investigate this issue in the Gaza Strip in Palestine in specific. Through a questionnaire distributed on 140 participants from different departments and specializations at UCAS, the researchers were able to collect data for the study analysis, which adopted mixed method. The qualitative results supported the quantitative ones, so that the study outcomes would be helpful to decrease the Palestinian students' speaking reticence and to be taken into consideration for further research studies.

Keywords

Students' Reticence, Speaking Activities, University College of Applied Sciences

1. Introduction

We live in a rapid growing world in all fields such as, economy, culture, politics, and education. To fulfill higher levels of education, the majority of nonspeaking English countries started to focus on language acquisition for their students. So, mastering English language is an inevitable need. In fact, the world requires ob-

taining more than one's mother language to communicate, to travel, to learn, to make business or to improve living conditions. Besides, nobody can ignore the rising opportunities upon perfecting English, especially if you are a second language learner who aspires to pursue your postgraduate studies abroad. Certainly, learning a new language takes time, effort and sometimes money, but the joy you feel when you accomplish this purpose makes it worth (Crystal, 1997) [1].

According to many researchers, speaking is the most desired skill to learn. Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 201) stated that "A large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking" [2]. We believe as L2 learners and teachers that English speaking is the key skill that facilitates communication process among individuals and nations because English became the popular widely used language. The need for developing speaking skills in L2 contexts emerged because students or persons who learn English nearly do not speak a lot. Meanwhile, they write, read and even listen much more. Consequently, some problems for L2 learners appeared, e.g. speaking reticence, which means that some students do not speak or participate in English speaking classrooms. Such problem has reasons led and expanded it among some students. Thus, we notice that reticence is a significant phenomenon that faces L2 learners and hinders in their learning progress.

2. The Study Objectives and Questions

The two researchers began their English teaching and training since 2005 in different academic institutions in Gaza among which they have worked as English language instructors at UCAS. The *GENERAL ENGLISH* course is one of the obligatory courses that aim at developing the UCAS students' speaking skills through a diversity of contexts, material and situations. The researchers noticed that some students are not taking part in the speaking tasks of the *General English* course; nonetheless, this issue was discussed with other staff members to discover that they have reticent students in their male and female classes as well. Therefore, it has been decided to dedicate this study tackle the main reasons behind students' reticence in participating in speaking activities in the English language classrooms at UCAS. Upon reviewing the previous studies about speaking reticence, we realize that not many studies have discussed this phenomenon in an extendedly or directly, especially studies regarding reticence within student learning anxiety in L2. Actually, it is a nascent issue since majority of the studies, we found, were conducted in the beginning of the last decade 2000s. Thus, the study of reticence attracts the attention due to the significance of oral competency in Second Language Acquisition (Liu & Jackson, 2009) [3]. This study is concerned with one central question *i.e.* what are the main reasons behind students' reticence in participating in speaking activities in the English language classrooms at UCAS? Five sub-questions were derived from the main question as follows:

- 1) Are the reasons behind such reticence related to students' language competency?

- 2) Are the reasons behind such reticence related to students' self-confidence?
- 3) Are the reasons behind such reticence related to students' shyness and anxiety?
- 4) Are the reasons behind such reticence related to the teachers themselves?
- 5) Are the reasons behind such reticence related to lack of motivation?

3. Definitions

Upon defining speaking, we find that most of the used definitions deal with speaking as method for communication and message delivery. In Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (P. 1479), "Speak" is "to talk to somebody about something; to have a conversation with somebody" [4].

"Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information" (Brown (1994) and Burns & Joyce (1997) cited in Florez, (1999: p. 1)) [5] [6] [7].

"Speaking means that the students repeat sentences or dialogues, or chant English words" (Baker & Westrup, 2003, p. 7) [8].

3.1. Definition of Reticence

As an emerging phenomenon in EFL teaching and learning, speaking reticence has many definitions provided by some researchers.

3.1.1. Phillips (1965)

Phillips formulated a definition for reticence as "a personality-based, anxiety disorder" (Phillips, 1965 cited in Keaten & Kelly, 2000, p. 166) [9] [10].

3.1.2. McCroskey (1977)

McCroskey linked reticence with anxiety when he stated that reticence is "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" McCroskey (1977) cited in Liu, Zhang & Lu (2011, p. 20) [11] [12].

3.1.3. Keaten & Kelly (2000)

Keaten and Kelly presented a reasonable full-fledged definition for reticence reflects the reality of it when they said "Reticence is a communication problem with cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions and is due to the belief that one is better off remaining silent than risking appearing foolish" (Keaten & Kelly 2000, cited in Li & Lui, 2011: p. 961) [10] [13].

3.2. The University College of Applied Sciences (UCAS)

According to the official website of UCAS, it is a Palestinian academic institution of higher-education in Gaza Strip, Palestine. It was established in 1998 as a technical and vocational education College and is currently accredited by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education as a University College offering Bachelor and diploma degrees in more than 40 different distinguished

technically and technologically-oriented programs.

4. Related Studies

Through looking into prior studies, nearly all findings identified basic reasons for reticence such as lack of language proficiency, teachers' role, students' lack of confidence, language anxiety and shyness and absence of motivation.

Now, the researchers of the current study shall look in more details at those areas in the following sections to see what other researchers analyzed and discussed. We tried to separate some factors that cause speaking reticence to facilitate and overcome any overlap between similar reasons, e.g., lack of confidence, low motivation and language anxiety. We noticed that in most of the studies we came across researchers have preferred inserting student's lack of confidence and low motivation within learning anxiety. However, we saw that dedicating separated sections for each cause might be more beneficial to achieve better understanding for the relationship of these causes and reticence.

4.1. Language Proficiency

Through analyzing findings of 38 English language teachers in Hong Kong, Tusi (1996) found that they reflected on low language competency as being the main factor for students' reticence [14]. Tusi (1996) used videotaping and audio recordings to find that many Hong Kong students are reticent for other causes as lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes and being laughed at [14]. Tusi's study is considered one of the most prominent, which many other researchers have highlighted in their studies such as Donald (2010) [15]. He found that the incomprehensibility of input by some university students in Taiwan was the first mentioned reason, besides fear of committing mistakes behind their speaking reticence. In his literature review, Donald (2010) considered the results of Tusi (1996), Allwright & Bailey (1991), and Chaudron (1988), where they stated that some students are afraid of being misunderstood and they do not comprehend everything the teacher say, so they appear reticent [14] [15] [16] [17]. Along with these studies, Zhang and Head (2010) discovered that not all students at a Chinese university understand everything in the class due to their poor language abilities in English [18]. The study based on a designed course targets group activities and researchers inserted insufficient language input as main cause for remaining silent by some Chinese students. In another study conducted on 3 teachers and 100 students from different majors in a listening and speaking classroom at a Chinese university, Liu (2005) concluded that the students are active in pair work, but few volunteered to respond to their teachers or to engage in group discussion (Liu 2005) [19]. She used mixed instruments (reflective journals, interviews and observations) for one academic term to find that low English proficiency got the highest percentage among other factors. In addition, we find that the incomprehensibility of input and fear of making mistakes are connected causes to language competency and they give more justification for students' reticence. In contrast, Liu (2005) reached for other factors that not

many researchers discussed before e.g. lack of familiarity with given tasks by the teachers and the teaching style in the university [19]. In general, Chinese students are known for being silent in classes and they only speak if they are asked to do. This is due to the habit in schools as many students indicated in their reflective journals (Liu 2005) [19]. In another study by Liu and Jackson (2009), they found that the more the students were proficient in language, the more they are active in participation in speaking activities, besides being more exposed to spoken English means being more active students (Liu & Jackson, 2009) [3]. They designed a 124-item questionnaire, including 20 especially for speaking reticence, distributed on nearly 547 students with varied levels in a Chinese university. One of the worth mentioning results is that students were active during pair work, but they were less in responding to teacher's questions (Liu & Jackson, 2009) [3]. This point suggests a question: is reticence here because of the students themselves and their language ability or is it due to the nature of the questions teachers ask in the class? Finally, we also find that researchers as Williams and Andrade (2008) mentioned language proficiency as an indicator for reticence, especially Japanese students' fear of having language mistakes during speaking classes, after analyzing more than 30 questionnaires [20]. While Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) stressed through their study on 30 students at discussion groups that the more competent the students are in L2, the more active speakers they will be and surely, they will avoid any state of reticence [21].

4.2. Teachers' Role

Many people might exclude teachers as a cause for speaking reticence, still they play a significant role and in many studies, they are remarkable factors behind reticence. Considering Tusi (1996) findings, she found that teacher's intolerance of silence and shifting to acquire answers from other students lead to create silent students (Tusi, 1996) [14]. Similarly, Donald (2010) also found that the extended waiting time given by the teacher to the student may represent more pressure on him and creates nervousness [15]. Therefore, student's reticence increases in the speaking class. Moreover, Donald (2010) aroused a common finding, which is teacher's correction of errors in some places, might be intimidating for some students and it causes reticence [15]. This result is new and it is worth considering for further researches. Other researchers who threw light on teachers' role are Li and Liu (2011) [13]. In their brief study about reticence in a Chinese ESL class, they stated that this phenomenon deprives L2 reticent students to benefit from language activities and it even forbids other students and teachers to gain benefit from these silent students. They dealt with the Chinese belief that the teacher is authoritative over students and the other concept of teachers as being the main source of knowledge (Li & Liu, 2011) [13]. Despite that they did not conduct any empirical study, other writers agree upon this point, especially in China and Japan. For instance, Zhang and Head (2010) found that some students fear of losing face or say things that do not match with teacher's opinions as the sole source of knowledge [18]. Littlewood (2000) provided a convincing

explanation for this saying [22]:

“The passive behavior of Asian students is not innate but has been instilled into them by growing up in a cultural and educational environment which discourages independent thinking and regards the teacher not as a facilitator of learning but as a person in authority” Littlewood (2000) cited in Zhang & Head (2010: pp. 2-3) [18] [19] [20] [21] [22].

Some students are reticent because they usually anticipate that the teacher’s reaction towards their answers will be disappointing (Cutrone, 2009) [23]. In his study about overcoming Japanese EFL learners’ fear of speaking, Cutrone (2009) found that the participants of his survey wish for their teachers to be more friendly, kind and have a sense of humor to alleviate class tensions and encourage students to speak [23]. In their study, Williams and Andrade (2008) found that the targeted 31 students strikingly talked about the negative evaluation of teachers as a reason for speaking reticence [20]. They even mentioned that some teachers use their eyes to express dissatisfaction with some answers by students (Williams & Andrade, 2008) [20]. Wu (2010), in the study about relationship between anxiety and learning, came across teachers-dominating atmosphere in the speaking classes [24]. By using Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and Communicative Language Teaching Attitude Scale (CLTAS), Wu (2010) found that teachers speak more than their students do and they steer the learning process by themselves without allowing their students to be part of it [24]. Consequently, students remain silent in that class. Finally, Zhang and Zhong, in their recent review of some research studies in 2012, presented some actions that teachers commit intentionally or unintentionally but they cause reticence [25]. For example, the used manner of error corrections might terrify and demotivate students to participate and accordingly they turn to be reticent. Lack of support provided to students and talking more than students are another examples lead to reticence among L2 students (Zhang & Zhong, 2012) [25]. The statements of Zhang and Zhong (2012) are very beneficial and related [25]. Nevertheless, they would be more verified if they were derived through practical studies rather than just review for other studies.

4.3. Self-Confidence

While many researchers focused on lack of language competency and teacher’s role as causes for speaking reticence, we find that others concentrated on the psychological side reticence. In several studies, the most second factor for students reticence was their fear of negative evaluation whether from teachers or from peers. This certainly attributed to lack of self-confidence that reticent students witness. In earlier studies for Phillips (1984, 1986 & 1997) in Keaten & Kelly (2000, p.167), he stated that reticent speakers believe that “effective speakers are born not made” [10] [26] [27] [28]. In fact, Phillips tended to take a debatable dimension regarding if speaking as a skill is innate or acquired, yet the connotation of his statement might indicate the strong self-confidence that reti-

cent speakers lack. Phillips (1984, 1986 & 1997) also found that hesitant speakers fear of the reaction of others and they may underestimate themselves to avoid appearing as fool [26] [27] [28]. Indeed, this happens a lot and other researchers highlighted, since lack of self-confidence plays an essential role in increasing reticence among L2 speakers in schools, universities or even mature students as in our study. However, Keaten and Kelly (2000) themselves see that reticence is associated with behavior [10]. Upon reconceptualizing the model of reticence, they found that some people are reticent because of what is called “helplessness” where reticent speakers see failure as an inescapable result of talking (Keaten & Kelly, 2000) [10]. In a new domain was researched by McCrosky, Fayer and Richmond (1985), we find that even some Puerto Rican students seem to doubt their self-confidence and believe that it is a reason behind their communication apprehension, which is a state similar in its features to reticence [29]. Through targeting more than 600 American and Puerto Rican students at a university in Puerto Rico, the researchers found that Puerto Rican students are more apprehensive to talk in English, where Spanish is their first language. The expected dominating finding was that Puerto Rican students doubt their self-confidence and abilities to communicate in English. Moreover, many Puerto Rican students prefer that people do not talk to them in English (McCrosky, Fayer and Richmond, 1985) [29].

Cutrone (2009), in his study about overcoming Japanese EFL learners’ fear of speaking, found that students’ fear of negative evaluation and stress of exams are major hindrances for learning speaking [23]. Correspondingly, Japanese learners seem to be more reluctant to talk in any position where they will stand in front of their colleagues (Anderson, 1993) [30]. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), Williams & Andrade (2008), Sae & Sanborn (2004) and Zhang & Zhong (2012) found that the low self-confidence and fear of negative evaluation lead some students to lack the experience in speaking and hence, they became more silent in L2 classrooms [20] [21] [25] [31]. Self-confidence is fundamental for students to learn a new language, especially to speak it. In her study about anxiety in oral English classroom in China, Liu (2007) found that fear of losing face and the inability to express ideas due to lack of self-confidence are considerable reasons that contribute to students’ anxiety during their listening and speaking class [32]. Finally, Liu, Zhang and Lu (2011) also reached to the same factors that cause reticence in an ESP poetry class in a Chinese class [12]. They noticed that some students lack of self-confidence and inability to express themselves got them to be more anxious in the poetry class and speak less.

4.4. Language Anxiety and Shyness

To review what was written about anxiety and shyness, we have to be aware that there are some causes for students’ anxiety in learning process. The more the student becomes anxious the more he/she becomes reticent speaker. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) noticed that students’ fear of committing mistakes

while learning and fear of disappointing assessment by teacher or peers augment their sense of anxiety and shyness, which means turning to be reticent speakers in L2 classroom [21]. Through reconceptualizing Phillip's definition and reasons of speaking reticence, Keaten and Kelly (2000) found that anxiety is another cause for reticence because those who are reticent find themselves helplessly incompetent to speak and if they were in a speaking situation, they assume failure in advance and consequently leads to anxiety (Keaten & Kelly, 2000) [10]. On the other hand, some researchers see that the anxiety that leads to reticence arises from the existence of large number of students in the class as Spolsky (1989) cited in Cutrone (2009, p.56) stated that "Anxious learners generally speak, write, and participate less in the large classroom than relaxed students" [23] [33].

Upon analyzing her surveys and students' reflective journals, Liu (2007) reached for several reasons where 27 students see them as causes for speaking anxiety such as; lack of preparation, lack of practice, lack of vocabulary, low English proficiency and fear of committing mistakes [32]. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) gave Liu (2007) interesting percentages for each finding and her study and methodology might be one of the best in the field of identifying speaking anxiety among students [32]. In a similar study to Liu's (2007), we find that Williams and Andrade (2008) pointed out that their 243 Japanese university students know that their low language proficiency, their fluctuating self-confidence and the discouraging remarks of their teachers made them more anxious and shy in the EFL classroom [20] [32]. Thus, they became more reticent in speaking and discussion activities. Researching the relationship between learners' anxiety and learning strategies, Wu (2010) stated that the deconstructing attitudes of language teachers via dominating the entire process of learning and even talking more than students creates an atmosphere of frustration and indifference for students [24]. Thus, they shift to become passive silent learners besides their shyness, which might be existed due to cultural or behavioral reasons that encourage collective work rather than individual one in learning such as China and Japan. In the last and most recent reviewed research, we see that Zhang and Zhong (2012) findings related to their study about causes of language anxiety among Chinese students are parallel to those discussed above [25]. Teachers' manner of correcting students' mistakes, the inadequate given amount of support and talking more than their students establish what students called tension or speaking reticence. Furthermore, students' aggregated concerns of appearing as fools when they speak L2 and their fear of peers' evaluation are other factors that mount their reticence.

4.5. Lack of Motivation

As a secondary reason for speaking reticence, some EFL studies and researchers discussed low motivation in the learning process for L2 students. Liu (2005) found in her study that participants' lack of motivation and reticence emerge from the fact that they are demotivated to learn spoken English, while they are

highly encouraged to learn to get high grades in exams and assignments (Liu, 2005) [19]. This factor is completely different to the outcomes of Liu, Zhang and Lu (2011) [12]. The students in their study talked about various reasons for their low motivation in speaking class e.g. they are not prepared for classes, they have no interest in the given topic and finally they consider that other students, who are more active, increase their lack of motivation and consequently they become reticent students. The aforementioned reasons by (Li, Zhang & Lu, 2011) seem pertinent, especially that some teachers suggest hard or dull topics for speaking discussion and this means more silence and reticence by some students [12]. An identical result for Helgeson (1993) who noticed that his Japanese university learners seldom take the initiation in conversations or bringing up new topics and they did not try to challenge their teachers or they barely asked for explanation as a matter of low motivation they have [34]. In another Japanese context, Cutrone (2009) concluded that some learners are not ready to deal with the modern western style in learning that depends on group discussion and work more than individualism [23]. Cutrone's finding seems to be new in terms that he tackled the cross cultural aspects that contribute in increasing speaking reticence, which many researchers ignore and only focused in the learning environment inside the country itself not researching students themselves outside their surroundings, for instance Japanese or Chinese learners in UK or USA. Finally, Sae and Sanborn (2004), in their study about learners' willingness to learn, found that students' lack of motivation is caused by their fear of change of culture and previous educational experiences [31]. Most of Asian learners adopted themselves to a particular system of learning where teachers are the center and in some studies, they are the sole source of knowledge and none can confront them. Thus, some students began to lose motivation in the classroom and became reticent speakers (Sae & Sanborn, 2004) or as Beeb (1983, p.43) claimed, "Language learners are often silent because they consider talking in classroom as a "high risk-low gain proposition", which means that some reticent students are already lost their motives to speak or even participate [31] [35].

Nearly all above-mentioned researches dealt with the Asian context, China and Japan. Moreover, they were concerned with school or university students. Our study is much more focused on a new category, a mix of fresh and mature graduates study English in a two-year diploma programs in the Arab region and in a country hardly any research or researcher discussed, which is the Gaza Strip in Palestine through diploma students at the University College of Applied Sciences, Gaza.

5. Research Methodology

The whole population was 215 students who were officially enrolled in the General English course. So the study sample, based on the *Online Sample size calculator* "Raosoft" available on <http://www.raosoft.com/samplesize.html>, were 139 who represent diversity and mixture of university students from various specia-

lizations and departments [36]. Their specializations are: Information Technology, Administrative & Financial Sciences, Engineering Professions, Educational Sciences, Health Professions, Humanity Studies, Rehabilitation Sciences, Computer Technology, and Industrial Professions. Concerning the approval of the participants to be involved in this study, their consent forms were gained through Survey Monkey website. In the introduction page, we provided them with the target of the study and then we asked their approval whether they agreed to be part of the study or not.

5.1. Instruments

While many researchers used interviews, observations, video recordings and surveys to identify the main reasons of speaking reticence, we designed a questionnaire to collect the data. The main motive to choose the questionnaire is that it enabled us, as researchers, to collect some functional information related to our participants' language proficiency (McKay, 2006) [37].

There is a 5-item subsection for language competency in the beginning of the designed questionnaire. Such factor was very significant in other researchers' studies about speaking reticence and we do believe that it would be in our study because Palestinian English diploma students are not different from other L2 learners as in Japan and China. In addition to functional information, we also got some information that measures our participants' beliefs, opinions and attitudes regarding some points that may cause their reticence (McKay, 2006) [37]. Finally, questionnaires are easy to construct, they are popular method in the domain of social sciences nowadays, and finally they save time and effort (Dornyei, 2003 & 2010) [38] [39].

5.2. Instruments Design

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section asked for general information from the participants such as; gender, age, academic qualification and job. The second section dealt with the quantitative side of the data, where we used Likert Scale. This scale handled a series of statements connected to the target topic. These statements measured attitudes, opinions and beliefs (Dornyei, 2010) about basic factors that cause reticence in speaking in English language classroom in the diploma programs at UCAS [39]. For example, the participants dealt with four categories such as; language competency, self-confidence, language anxiety and shyness and the teachers' role. Each category of those has five sub-statements talk about the major points that the participant can express his/her opinions among a scale ranges from of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly disagree.

These statements were very helpful for the quantitative analysis because they are short, simple and understandable for the respondents. Furthermore, they address crucial factors related to their reticence in speaking activities.

In the second section of the questionnaire, we provided four open-ended

questions that give the participants feeling of individual contribution, express their opinions and give more information in details (McDonough & McDonough, 1997) [40]. In the first question, the respondents are asked to write about their reasons or motivations behind developing English speaking. For the second question and third questions, we addressed motivation as a factor for speaking reticence, especially that we included some new points were not discussed in other studies talk about motivation. The last question we provided the participants with an open question to write about other reasons for their speaking reticence. Such answers are expected to give more insights and causes for this phenomenon, which might be worth concentrating for recommendations and further researches. The four open-ended questions are:

- 1) Why do you want to develop your speaking skills?
- 2) To what extent do you think that lack of motivation such as; being unprepared or having no interest in the speaking topics is a reason for reticence? Explain.
- 3) What are other reasons you think that cause reticence in your participation in speaking activities?
- 4) To what extent do you think that the afternoon timing for Diploma classes is a cause for speaking reticence, for example, being tired after a long day?

In fact, the open-ended section also acted as indirect interviews because we wanted the participants to write and express their points of view about reasons of speaking reticence without any interference or involvement by me. Furthermore, it provided us with good extracts for the qualitative analysis written by the respondents.

6. Data Analysis

More than 150 questionnaires have been received, but 140 participants were chosen for this study and eliminated the others for two major reasons *i.e.* unserious responses, and incomplete and irrelevance answers for the open-ended questions. It is worth mentioning that 140 respondents are enough, bearing in mind that the population of the enrolled students in the general English course were 215 students at UCAS that can be represented by only 139 students, with 5% margin of error and confidence level 95%.

After sorting process, we started to deal with the quantitative figures from the scaled statements. We re-divided the 20-scaled items into four categories as planned from the beginning; language competency, self-confidence, language anxiety and shyness and teacher's role. We began to report the percentages and to focus on the higher and lower ones to identify the main reasons of speaking reticence stated by the respondents. Then, a discussion about such percentages was through linking with previous studies that mentioned in the literature review and justifying some figure depending on our experience and students' viewpoints.

For the qualitative data, we worked on classifying the participants' answers for

each question. For example, in the first question related to developing speaking skills, we found that there are two demands as developing careers and willingness to communicate and study. For the second and third questions about motivation, we looked for answers that the majority indicated about preparation for classroom, interest in speaking topics and evening time of classes. In the last question about other expected reasons for speaking reticence, we only concentrated on mentioning new reasons students brought up like lack or practice for English speaking and we were keen not to re-mention or write in details about similar factors mentioned in the questionnaire in order to avoid repetition.

7. Results

After retrieving questionnaires from 140 respondents, we started to analyze the scaled statements of the online questionnaire, which aim at identifying opinions of participants about reasons of speaking reticence in the speaking classroom. Because we could not categorize the twenty statements into the four planned sections shown below, we did that in this section in order to have clear and detailed analysis for this part.

7.1. Language Competency

Percentages of this section show that lack of enough vocabulary was the highest reason with 35.7% agree and 25% strongly agree, while the other highest percentage was 25% disagree. Concerning grammar, ten participants agree and strongly agree with it 7.1% and 14.3%. Meanwhile, 42.9% disagree as the highest percentage. For pronunciation, second highest percentage after disagree was agree 25%. About fluency, the highest percentages are agreeing 39.3% and strongly agree 7.1%. Finally, comprehensibility of input took 42.9% disagree (**Table 1**).

7.2. Self-Confidence

In this section, participants gave diversity of percentages. We found that 42.9% were neutral regarding feeling nervous when they start speaking in English and the second highest percentage is agreeing 28.6%. Second statement had close percentages between disagree 39.3% and agree 32.1%. Success in speaking turn had the highest percentage of disagree 42.9%. Fourth item about self-confidence also took a large percentage in terms of disagree 35.7%. Finally, negative previous experience was not different for other statements, where it scored another negative high percentage 42.9% of disagree (**Table 2**).

7.3. Language Anxiety and Shyness

We found that not many students are shy in general because the highest percentage is 39.3% disagree and second one is neutral 25%. Fear or embarrassment got the highest percentage in agree 46.4% and second highest is in disagree 32.1%. Third statement about number of students at speaking classroom also had high percentages in agree 46.4% and strongly agree 14.3%. Disliking to be in a mixed

class recorded high percentages in disagree 50% and neutral (25%). Final statement also scored high negative percentages in disagree 50% and strongly disagree 39.3% **Table 3**).

7.4. Teacher's Role

In this section, we found a variety of percentages. Considering student's participation as a waste of time, a high percentage recorded in disagree 46.6% followed by equal percentage of 7.1% for both strongly disagree and agree. Second statement had high percentage for neutral 32.1% followed by disagree 25%. Teacher's intimidating comments recorded the highest percentage in disagree 50% and equal percentage of 17.9% for both neutral and agree. Teacher's control over activities got the highest percentage in agree 35.7%, while 25% in disagree. Final statement got a high percentage with agree 42.9% and third highest percentage of strongly agree 10.7% **Table 4**.

Table 1. The respondents' percentages related to Language competency.

#	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Response count
1	I talk less because I do not have enough vocabulary	7.1% (10)	25.0% (35)	7.1% (10)	35.7% (50)	25.0% (35)	140
2	I talk less because my grammar is weak	0.0% (0)	42.9% (60)	21.4% (30)	21.4% (30)	14.3% (20)	140
3	I talk less because I do not know how to pronounce a lot of words	0.0% (0)	39.3% (55)	21.4% (30)	25.0% (35)	14.3% (20)	140
4	I talk less because I am not fluent in English	3.6% (5)	10.7% (15)	25.0% (35)	39.3% (55)	21.4% (30)	140
5	I talk less because I do not understand everything in the class	21.4% (30)	42.9% (60)	21.4% (30)	10.7% (15)	3.6% (5)	140

Table 2. The respondents' percentages related to Self-confidence.

#	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Response count
6	I feel nervous when I speak English	7.1% (10)	17.9% (25)	42.9% (60)	28.6% (40)	3.6% (5)	140
7	I talk less because I cannot express myself in the right way	0.0% (0)	39.3% (55)	28.6% (40)	32.1% (45)	0.0% (0)	140
8	I talk less because I already know that I will not success in my speaking turn.	7.1% (30)	42.9% (60)	17.9% (25)	14.3% (20)	3.6% (5)	140
9	I talk less because I lack self-confidence	14.3% (20)	35.7% (50)	7.1% (30)	25.0% (35)	3.6% (5)	140
10	I speak less because I have negative previous experience in speaking in classrooms	10.7% (15)	42.9% (60)	28.6% (40)	14.3% (20)	3.6% (5)	140

Table 3. The respondent's percentages related to Language Anxiety and Shyness.

#	Statement	Strongly disagreed	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Response count
11	I talk less because I am a shy person in general	14.3% (20)	39.3% (55)	25.0% (35)	14.3% (20)	7.1% (10)	140
12	I do not speak because I am afraid of embarrassment	3.6% (5)	32.1% (45)	14.3% (20)	46.4% (65)	3.6% (5)	140
13	I do not like to be in a large English classroom (more than 15 students)	10.7% (15)	17.9% (25)	10.7% (15)	46.4% (65)	14.3% (20)	140
14	I do not like to participate in a mixed class (males & females)	17.9% (25)	50.0% (70)	25.0% (35)	3.6% (5)	3.6% (5)	140
15	I do not like to talk with other students	39.3% (55)	50.0% (70)	7.1% (10)	0.0% (0)	3.6% (5)	140

Table 4. The respondents' percentage related to Teacher's role.

#	Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Response count
16	The teacher sometimes finds my participation is a waste of time	21.4% (30)	46.4% (65)	10.7% (15)	21.4% (30)	0.0% (0)	140
17	The teacher does not encourage me to speak	17.9% (25)	25.0% (35)	32.1% (45)	17.9% (25)	7.1% (10)	140
18	The teacher's comments intimidate me when I speak	10.7% (15)	50.0% (70)	17.9% (25)	17.9% (25)	3.6% (5)	140
19	The teacher sometimes does not control the speaking activities well	3.6% (5)	25.0% (35)	21.4% (30)	35.7% (50)	14.3% (20)	140
20	The teacher sometimes does not divide the participation between all students	10.7% (15)	25.0% (35)	10.7% (15)	42.9% (60)	10.7% (15)	140

8. Discussing the Quantitative Results

After analyzing the first section of the questionnaire, we found many participants reported significant percentages regarding reasons they saw that cause their speaking reticence. Below, we will only talk about the causes of factors that had high percentages.

8.1. Language Competency

8.1.1. Lack of Vocabulary

As a part of student's language proficiency necessary for speaking in English speaking classrooms, we noticed that lacking enough vocabulary made some respondents talk less got the highest percentage among other sections. Seventeen

students between agree and strongly agree (35.7% - 25.0%), believe that their weakness in having an adequate reservoir of vocabulary represents a barrier for them to speak in a second language. We think that such finding was not widely tackled or found by other researchers in this field, except Liu (2005 and 2007) [19] [32]. She stated that lack of vocabulary was one of the reasons behind her student's reticence.

8.1.2. Weak Grammar

Another issue students reported here is that their weak grammar makes them reticent to speak. We found that fifty respondents (7.1% and 14.3%) agree and strongly disagree with this statement. It is not something strange that Palestinian students in the English language diploma programs will be same as other L2 learners in China or Japan in terms of fear of committing mistakes or not having good grammar to speak. This is what we have come through other researches, were nearly most of them stated that student's low language competency, especially fear of committing mistakes as in Tusi (1996), Donald (2010), Liu (2005 and 2007), Liu and Williams and Andrade (2008) [14] [15] [19] [20] [32]. In fact, having weak grammar was the first and most important finding that previous researchers concluded and our finding is no different. This indicates that good structure will help L2 students to gain benefit from language speaking classes, where students are asked to communicate, participate, discuss and sometimes deliver presentations.

8.1.3. Pronunciation

Another reticence-provoker some participants highlighted is their inability to pronounce some English words appropriately. Thus, they remain silent in speaking activities due to such technicality. In fact, upon reviewing other studies, we did not find a clear direct mention or finding for this issue, even within language competency. Most results focused on fear of committing mistakes, low vocabulary and incomprehensibility of input as prominent factors cause speaking reticence among some Chinese and Japanese students. Therefore, we decided to include this statement about pronunciation in our instrument to test it and we found that it was serious. Fifty participants agree 25.0% and strongly agree 14.3% out of 140 stated that they do not know how to pronounce some words in English. Consequently, they are less active participants in our speaking classes.

8.1.4. Lack of Speaking Fluency

As second language researchers, we intentionally inserted this statement because we feel that fluency is a crucial element for L2 learners. Once the student is fluent and has good amount of vocabulary and correct grammar, speaking in English will be much easier. The obvious proof for our opinion here is that 85 participants responded positively about their lack of speaking fluency (55 agree 93.3% and 30 strongly agree 7.1%). With the previous research studies we have reviewed, none of the researchers talked about such factor causes speaking reticence. Many discussed the issue of being silent in the classroom by Chinese stu-

dents like Liu (2005) or the concept of preferable collective work by students rather than individual participation like Wu (2010), but none has come across students' fluency [19]-[24]. This finding is not surprising for us, especially that L2 learners at UCAS are not exposed to other spoken English situations outside the classroom.

8.2. Self-Confidence

Unlike the majority of previous research studies, where lack of self-confidence was one of the main reasons for speaking reticence as in studies of Phillips (1984, 1986 & 1997), Keaten and Kelly (2000) and the Puerto Rican experience of McCrosky, Fayer and Richmond (1985), the Palestinian respondents in our study showed variety of opinions and percentages in terms of self-confidence [10] [26] [27] [28] [29]. For example, "I feel nervous when I speak English" we expected that it might have a high rate of positive responses, but we found that only 45 participants agree and strongly agree forming total percentage of 32.2%, while 60 persons are neutral 42.9%. We do not know about that, but maybe they felt that this statement represents a sense of embarrassment, so they chose to be neutral rather than with or against. Concerning "expressing oneself", we found that positive and negative responses were very close (45 agree and 55 disagree). In studies of Liu (2007) and Zhang and head (2011), they stated that students' lack of confidence led to inability of expressing ideas and even expressing themselves, which caused their speaking reticence [18] [32]. Meanwhile, in our findings there were two zeros for (strongly disagree and strongly agree), which means that respondents totally refuse this idea and apart from the 100 aforementioned persons, the other 40 participants are neutral. Regarding the rest three statements in this section, "success in speaking turn", "lacking self-confidence" and "negative previous experience", we did not find remarkable percentages that indicate or show that they are reasons for Diploma students' speaking reticence.

8.3. Language Anxiety and Shyness

As previously discussed and found in many studies, language anxiety and shyness are another factor indicated by our participants, but it was not so similar to others. For example, we highlighted the issue of talking in front of others and the sense of embarrassment as Zhang and Zhong (2012) talked about students' fear of peers' negative evaluation [25]. Our respondents were on the same track since half of them stated that they are reluctant in speaking classes due to the feeling of embarrassment (total percentage of 50% are agree). This factor could be also connected with empower students' self-confidence too. We cannot address or resolve the issue of embarrassment without considering all mixed elements contribute in it. We thought that such feeling could be because of existing in mixed classes with other gender. However, the participants stated low percentages about this "I do not like to participate in a mixed class (males & females)" where

only ten had positive responses, while 95 others had negative answers. This means that majority of respondents do not find any problem to be co-educated. Actually, we do support this idea of mixed education, especially in language classes, where students can share, communicate and discuss topics with other gender within speaking activities.

Second noteworthy factor respondents increasingly agree with is being in a speaking class with more than 85 students. These 85 persons represent 60.7% of the total and they agree and strongly agree that having more than 75 students in speaking classes will create sense of reticence, where some of them will not have the chance to speak in his/her turn. The more students we have in the class the less the opportunity to participate will be. It is worth mentioning that few of the previous studies have talked about this. We find that Spolsky (1989) stated that Japanese learners contribute less in larges classes than be more relaxed and Liu, Zhang and Lu (2011) who found that having students who are more active than others increase lack of motivation for reticent students [12] [33]. Yet, we did find a direct reference to the suggested or preferred number of the students in the speaking class. It might be true that having 30 students or less in the English speaking class at UCAS is the best solution to encourage students to speak. On the other hand, other contexts could find it difficult to accomplish as in schools or other universities, but we find that it is reasonable number to have for an English language speaking class.

8.4. Teacher's Role

Through looking into the five statements included in this section, we found that only two are worth considering. Before we discuss them, we have to say that other statements got low percentages among respondents. Less than 50 persons found that the teacher finds their participation is a waste of time, the teacher does not encourage them to speak and teacher's comments intimidate them. Meanwhile, teacher's lack of control over speaking activities was positively agree on by 50 agree (35.7%) and 20 strongly agree (14.3%). Actually, some teachers might need to acquire sense of control over speaking activities. If you let some students speak without defining time boundaries, they will continue elaborately exceeding their time and other's opportunity to speak. Those who lost such chance will seem to be reticent, but in reality, they are not. We were concerned with this point in terms of classroom management, which is mainly the teacher responsible for. Similarly, other researchers found that lack of control or allowing some students to speak more than others is a reasons for speaking reticence as in studies of Tusi (1996), Donald (2010), Li and Liu (2011) and Zhang and Head (2010) [13] [14] [15] [18]. They found that shifting to the ready students to get the answer or extending the waiting time for some students create pressure on them and turn them to reticent students. We did not follow the same track, but we suggested the idea of controlling speaking classroom activities because it involves several techniques from one hand and emerging problems in the other one. Certainly, losing control in that situation will lead some students to feel that

their participation is unworthy or feel that they will not have the turn to speak as others had and undoubtedly, they will be reticent.

The second notable statement that got high percentage of positive responses is that “The teacher sometimes does not divide the participation between all students”. We see that it is connected with the previous idea of classroom control because establishing good control over speaking activities means that the teacher is motivating all students to participate. The teacher, in many previous studies, was the sole source of knowledge (Zhang and Head, 2010) or he steers the learning process alone by lecturing more than students speak (Wu, 2010) [18]-[24]. Whereas, the teacher, in our research, is responsible for managing the learning process through mutual exchange of benefit and discussion with students. We have to say that in English classes at UCAS, the teaching plan is flexible, especially by teachers of oral communication courses. They allow students to contribute or comment on the course outline to reach for ultimate goals, which means that teachers are not authoritative over students as we found in the Chinese experience (Li and Liu, 2011) [13]. The aforementioned opinions of respondents about teacher’s lack of control over speaking activities and inadequate division of speaking turns are attributed to weak understanding or practice for classroom management techniques’ by some of those teachers.

9. Qualitative Results

Upon collecting the data, we began to look for significant results and reasons stated by the participants in these open-ended questions. We found the following results and insights.

9.1. Question (1) “Why Do You Want to Develop Your Speaking Skills?”

We retrieved 135 answers for this question out of 140 and we have categorized them mainly two types depending on interests. The first category deals with respondents’ desires to improve their speaking skills to develop their job opportunities and to be able to communicate with foreigners and international organizations. For example, “I want to develop or improve my speaking skills in order to be more able to communicate with foreign peoples and to work with NGOs and UNDP.” In addition, “In our home ‘Gaza strip’ there is a lot of international organizations INGO’s which require English language to apply in their jobs, And I was interested in applying for these jobs.” A strong comment attracted the researchers are utilizing English in the field of work to spread the Palestinian Cause to the whole world, in particular through journalism “I want to talk about the Palestinian cause to the world and publish.”

The second part includes the mixed need of language for communication and for studying. For instance, “English is the passport that can allow the person to enter any country because English now is the most popular language in the world”. For study, some students talked about this too “Speech the most impor-

tant methods of communication and because I want to complete Higher Studies.”

9.2. Question (2) “To What Extent Do You Think That Lack of Motivation Such as; Being Unprepared or Having No Interest in the Speaking Topics Is a Reason for Reticence? Explain”

In this question, we found many expressive responses, where students talked about their opinion of role of motivation, in terms of preparation and interest in the speaking topic, as a speaking provoker. For instance, some participants found that being unprepared for the speaking class creates sense of stupidity, embarrassment and increases their silence or reticence. For example “Yes, being unprepared is the main cause for reticence and the lack of preparation leads to a sense of stupidity”. Another student said, “He/she may say that if he participates with unprepared that may embarrass him between his/her classmates. Concerning lack of interest in the speaking topics, one participant stated the following “If I don’t have any interest in the speaking topics, I will be silent.”

Another domain was linked to lack of motivation in English speaking class is the negative impact on self-confidence due to having no interest in the topic itself. For instance, “In case I wasn’t well prepared, definitely I will have a lack of confidence to speak about a topic I don’t know a lot about it.”

The teacher also has his role in this point, because some respondents indicated that it is the responsibility of the teacher to select and prepare for topics that interest and stimulate students to speak. Otherwise, an atmosphere of boredom and discontent will dominate.

A Student:

“If the teacher does not interest in the speaking of the topic, how I can feel the importance of it! And sure it will be a boring discussion, and I will be just waiting and wondering “When it will end this boring lecture”. And the teacher should prepare for his topic to know what will he speak and tell the student.”

9.3. Question (3) “To What Extent Do You Think That the Afternoon Timing for Ucas English Classes Is a Cause for Speaking Reticence, for Example, Being Tired after a Long Day?”

In this question, which was not discussed or brought up before, participants recorded approximate responses of agree and disagree. We found that 75 respondents mentioned that being exhausted after a long day of work is certainly cause reticence during speaking lectures. E.g., some students talked about the problem of losing concentration, which weakens their ability to speak “I strongly agree with that saying because I believe that being exhausted or sleepy student whether because of work or not having a good period of rest at home, will affect his attention as well as his concentration.” Another extract taken from students’ “You know the work and the stress during the day before the besides classes deplete our energy and concentration.”

Other student connected the stress he/she faces in the job and how it affects

on the speaking and participation in activities to an extent that he/she desperately wants to leave to home. “For me, I was always under stress after a long day of work, and sometimes I had a headache and I just wanted to finish the day and come back to my home.”

9.4. Question (4) “What Are Other Reasons You Think That Cause Reticence in Your Participation in Speaking Activities?”

We put this question to enable participants to express other reasons that cause speaking reticence. However, no new reasons were stated, except the lack of practice that students complain about because they do not use English language in their daily life, besides the nonexistence of English native speakers to talk with to develop speaking fluency. For instance, one student said, “The main reason I think, because of I haven’t practice English in daily life.” while another one stated, “The other reason is that we are not taking with native speakers. It is important to take with native speaker or someone who speak English well at least once a week.” Finally, a respondent talked about positive environment saying “Ummm, lack of English speaking environment that pushes us to communicate in English and improve our language skills.”

10. Discussing the Qualitative Results

10.1. Question (1)

In respect of developing speaking skills, Palestine as a country, and Gaza Strip as an area, is no exception in aspiring to learn the English language. It is world language of communication and instruction in several respected universities even in some countries that English is not the official language. The participants of this study were not divergent from other L2 learners concerning their natural needs of developing their English speaking skills. The majority of them mentioned that they need good English speaking skills to improve their vocational statuses. Nowadays in developing countries, the key success to promote oneself in his/her career or to begin a new job is to have adequate English language skills enable him/her to read, write and listen to any correspondence or letter or email at work, besides speaking with foreign delegations and visitors if one’s work requires that. Another need stated by participants was to communicate and study. Certainly, it is true that English oral skills now are necessary for communication with other around the continents. Therefore, having the proficiency to deal with their questions and talks became a must for any person who seeks for enrollment. Even after approval and travelling, students still need good English speaking skills to manage themselves in daily life and academic life during his/her under or postgraduate study.

10.2. Question (2)

Motivation was a factor that contributes in some students’ speaking reticence and it was researched by others in terms of that students are encouraged to study

to gain high marks in assignments and exams (Liu, 2005) [19]. Others like (Helgeson, 1993), Cutrone (2009) and (Sea and Sanborn, 2004) who spotted light on the aspect of challenging culture by students, who refrain to talk during the speaking class fearing teacher's dissatisfaction or trying the individual trend or work in the classroom and consequently such students lose motivation and turn to be reticent [23] [31] [34]. In fact, we did not deal with low motivation from this angle because our students in the Diploma programs at UCAS are not in a position of challenging teachers or trying new systems of learning. They already know that they can express their viewpoints, participate and discuss during speaking class. Furthermore, teachers encourage them to work individually and try everything modern in the learning process. Our main concern in the research questions was the psychological fears or bounds that drive some students to be reticent speakers such as; having no interest in the proposed topics or being unprepared. We think only the similar study of Liu, Zhang and Lu (2011) found that these two factors were majorly behind the participants' lack of motivation to take part in the English language speaking classes [12]. The answers we received mentioned above were logical for L2 learners. No teacher can expect that his students will be fluent and active speakers and participants if they did not have at least some information, ideas and vocabulary about the topic. Over and above, selecting boring and difficult topics to talk about by the teacher will make things in the classroom worse than before regarding mounting students' lack of motivation and self-confidence.

10.3. Question (3)

We involved another sub-factor associated with motivation, which was physical fatigue which means that most of the participants attend classes after a long tiring day of work or do not have enough sleep. The answers reflected what really students suffer, and we absolutely do not blame them. Speaking, as a process, needs focused mind able to arrange ideas, to look for words and to comprehend what is being discussed and shared by students. In addition to that, it requires alert motivated students full of desire to attend to the classroom in a time suits them and their instructors too. We are saying this because even teachers experience tiredness if they are part-time lecturers at UCAS and work in other places before coming to the UCS classes.

10.4. Question (4)

Last question was open for all participants to talk about other causes of speaking reticence that we, as researchers, did not broach in our scaled statements or other three open-ended questions. Some of them stated that nothing besides what was mentioned is worth considering, but the majority brought up the issue of English language speaking practice. Certainly, lack or absence of speaking practice outside the classroom leads to unstable status in the speaking process. Most of the students do not use their oral skills after they finish the lectures and they

keep waiting for other classes at UCAS. What about graduating and leaving UCAS? This means more detachment from the language and speaking. In fact, many students join conversation courses to develop their speaking abilities and fluency, but the problem is that these courses are temporal and upon the end, students go back of their daily life routine and no longer use language they gained from the speaking courses. Thus, it was not astonishing that lots of respondents put this “lack of practice of English speaking” as an additional speaking reticence provoker.

11. Final Conclusion

Speaking reticence is a novel outcome in the English teaching and learning process and it is an annoying factor for both teachers and students. For Palestinian students at UCAS, there were three fundamental factors found in this research. First, students witness a lack in language competency represented in insufficient vocabularies, weak grammar, mispronunciation of some words and poor fluency. Second, the teacher is another cause of reticence in terms of controlling classroom and dividing participation equally. Third, low motivation is shown in the lack of preparation and interest in the speaking topics, besides the hard living circumstances that force the students to have part-time jobs, besides their full-time study effect on their physical and mental concentration and willingness to participate. Finally, it is recommended to conduct further researches to investigate the speaking reticence among other university students in Palestine, besides studying the speaking reticence in other specialized courses such as communication skills courses at UCAS and other Palestinian universities.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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