

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In ESL/EFL, students of English as a second or foreign language are commonly reticent. Reticence is “the students’ unwillingness to speak and participate in classroom activities” (Riasati, 2014). This becomes a phenomenon that occurs in all contexts, especially in speaking. When students speak in a second (SL) or foreign (FL) language, they may feel anxious and more reluctant to participate in English conversation (Horwitz et al., 1986 as cited in Liu, 2005). The SL/FL learners are passive in class and choose not to use the target language most of the times, especially when they are practicing speaking and responding to the teacher in the classroom (Aghazadeh & Abedi, 2014).

Many learners, especially Asians, would rather feel safe by being passive and silent than being active in the class discussions because they fear of making mistakes and also feel afraid if they are evaluated negatively by their friends (Siew et al., 2012). Previous research has suggested that Asian learners have low participation in speaking classes (Aghazadeh & Abedi, 2014; Liu & Jackson, 2009; Tani, 2005). Low participation is defined as an obstacle which appears when the learners are confined in the classroom (Tani, 2005). On the contrary, Asian learners are very talkative outside the class (Tani, 2005).

In school life, teachers sometimes have problems getting students to respond to instructions in the classroom. High school learners are typically perceived as passive and reluctant to participate in classroom discussions. They are unwilling to

give responses, they do not ask any questions, and they are highly dependent on the teachers (Tsui, 1996 as cited in Aghazadeh & Abedi, 2014).

Students who have good self-confidence are willing to participate more actively in the speaking class. However, other students who lack self-confidence tend to feel embarrassed and nervous easily when they practice English in a speaking class. Being reticent in the speaking class is not good. There are various reasons why students feel reluctant to speak in second or foreign language classroom situations such as fear of making mistakes, being laughed at, low proficiency in the target language, previous negative experiences with speaking class, habits to be passive in the English class, and lack of confidence (Liu & Jackson, 2009).

Some of the factors that account for the success of foreign language learning are the willingness to engage in SL/FL communication, motivation to learn a language, language exposure, competence perception, language anxiety, personality, intelligence, and the social context (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Conrod, 2001). Willingness to communicate in second or foreign language is a good thing for the learners' actual use of the target language in communication; therefore, the learners can build their self-confidence and master the second or foreign language well.

Learning another language as a second language is a process which require risk taking and are problematic (Horwitz et al., 1986 as cited in Donald, 2010). Learners will need more efforts to learn and practice the second language. They also would feel anxious and afraid of making mistakes in learning that language. As stated by Horwitz et al. (1986, p.128), "learning second language is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to

reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic”. Some learners will feel challenged to practice more in second language, but some other learners will be reticent because they feel lack of confidence and they feel they are not proficient in that language, therefore they are having an anxiety reaction in the ESL class.

The writer is interested in conducting this research because the aforementioned studies focus on the speaking skills of college students (Aghazadeh & Abedi, 2014; Chalak & Baktash, 2015; Donald, 2010; Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu, 2005) while studies on speaking reticence among middle school students are underrepresented. Understanding the cause of middle school students’ reticence in the classroom will contribute to the discussion of why students are reluctant to speak and of how to remedy the situations.

1.2 FIELD OF THE STUDY

This research is related to the field of applied linguistics.

1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research focuses on students’ perception of speaking reticence in second or foreign language learning. The researcher would conduct this study in Kebon Dalem Junior High School.

1.4 PROBLEM FORMULATION

The writer, in this research, formulated two problems related to the students in speaking class:

1. What do students perceive as the causes of reticence in speaking class?
2. What kind of support system do they want to have in speaking class?

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

With regards to the problem mentioned above, this research is conducted to achieve the following objectives:

1. to investigate Junior High School students' perception of the causes of reticence in speaking class.
2. to explore the support system that learner's want to have in speaking class.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research aimed to examine what students perceive as the causes of reticence in learning English. Hopefully, the result of this study would enrich the understanding of why students are reluctant to speak and of the ways to encourage students to be more confident while they communicate and participate in the English class. Furthermore, the writer expected that this research can be used as a reference for the students of Kebon Dalem Junior High School when they responded to the teacher's instructions, communicate, and participate actively in the speaking class.

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERM

Reticence

Reticence refers to the feeling of anxiety, embarrassment, and fear of making mistakes while they practice their speaking in front of the class or participate in the class discussions (Li & Liu, 2011).