

# Reticence of Speaking in a Maldivian ESL Classroom: Causes and Solution

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## ABSTRACT

Although teachers adopt various approaches in their teaching to improve the language skills of the students, reticent behaviour of the students in speaking lessons often frustrates teachers. Hence, the present study aims to investigate the factors contributing to the reticent behaviour of students in ESL classrooms, strategies used by Maldivian students to cope with speaking anxiety and how teachers attempt to alleviate the problem of reticence in ESL classroom. To fulfill this aim, the present paper addresses the following questions: (1) what do Maldivian students and teachers notice as the factors contributing the reticence in speaking in ESL classrooms? (2) What strategies do Maldivian learners use to cope with speaking anxiety? (3) What strategies do Maldivian teachers adopt to effectively cope with student's reticent behaviour of speaking in ESL class? The data was taken from seven participants; four teachers and three students through face-to-face interview. Further, classroom observations was done to gain more information about the behaviour being studied. The research findings showed that different social psychological factors, fluency factors and cognitive factors make the learners to be reticent in ESL classroom. Furthermore, students employ various strategies, such as avoidance strategy, seeking help from friends, using mother tongue, writing and rehearsing what they want to say in order to cope with the problem of reticence. The findings also showed that teachers attempt to alleviate the problem by altering the teaching methods and building a stress free classroom environment for the students. Surprisingly, the results showed that teachers give less importance to speaking skill as it not tested in exam. Therefore, it is recommended to include speaking in when Maldivian students do IGCSE exam.

**KEYWORDS:** Reticence, speaking anxiety, linguistic competence, communicative competence, oral proficiency

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*"I worked as hard as I could. I'm not fluent but I felt like I made real headway. The language is beautiful*

(Lisa Williams, n.d)

Undoubtedly, Lisa William's statement unveils a common problem that most of the second language (L2) learners experience when learning L2. Certainly, a significant number of L2 learners put their maximum effort in mastering the four skills of language; reading, listening, writing and speaking, but most of the learners do not become fluent in speaking. Generally speaking, most of the learners are able to write what they have in their heart and mind using awesome and colourful words; however, when it comes to speaking, most of them hide in their shells. Is this a problem of the teaching pedagogy or is this a fault of the learners? According to Juhana (2012), the personality of the learners play a vital role in determining how quickly they achieve fluency. This is because the students who are good at taking risk become more talkative and develops their speaking skill quickly; in contrast, it takes more time for the shy learners to speak confidently.

It is obvious that today, several language teachers are disenchanted with the snail-like progress of traditional

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teaching approaches that focus on mastering the structures, which leads them to follow the late-blooming methods of teaching that open the doors for the learners to "practice their communicational skill in different contexts"( Ozsevik, 2010, p.28). Yet, it could be said that, still, in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms of Maldives, speaking is considered as the Cinderella skill and teachers are more inclined on improving the reading and writing skill of the learners. Could this lack of opportunity given to the learners be the reason for them to be reluctant in language classroom? Definitely, the necessity of finding an answer to this question raised the curiosity in doing this research.

### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

In this globalized world, English is the Lingua Franca that is kept at the center of communication in education, business and economic sectors (Latha & Ramesh, 2012). In other words, people use English as the medium of communication in local and global contexts, in order to meet the international demands of the rapidly changing world. This made people to realize the necessity of learning English language for their career advancements, and a great number of people are curious to become competent in English as they desire to get well-paying jobs (Thi & Sam, 2011).

Evidently, in the present world, most of the companies not only look for candidates who are good at delivering technical skill, but also, they comb to find applicants who are proficient in English. Consequently, this sparked the interest of teaching English in most of the schools all over the world.

Definitely, speaking is one of the most important skills that needs to be practiced in language classrooms, as it enables the learners to send and receive messages and information from one another in different contexts. Nevertheless, previously, English language teaching was focused on assisting the learners to grasp the sounds, words and grammatical structures of the language, which means developing the *linguistic competence* of the learners was at the heart of language teaching. (Richards & Rodgers, 2008). However, today, ESL teachers believe that developing linguistic competence alone is not sufficient in enabling the learners to get along in the modern society. This vindicates the importance of providing ample opportunities for the learners to involve or participate in speaking activities, as the involvement in negotiation compels them to express their feelings and thoughts, which definitely advances the communicative competence of the learners (Soo & Goh, 2013). In agreement with this, Harmer (2003) enunciated that "if students are not using English everyone is wasting their time" (p.131). In this regard, L2 teachers need to adopt Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the modern language teaching approach, which focuses on improving the communicative skill of the learners, rather than aiming on mastering the structures of the language (Ozsevik, 2010).

Unquestionably, though teachers scratch their heads about incorporating different techniques to improve the language skills of the learners, they often experience quietness in the classroom, as the learners remain as non-participatory learners, making the classroom a frustrating place for both teacher and the students (Soo & Goh, 2013). In line with this, Riasati and Noordin (2011) asserted that teachers wish the learners to show a great curiosity to take part in the speaking activities; nevertheless, most of the learners are unwilling to speak in the English period. According to Horwitz et al (1986), learners in the target language classroom feel reluctant to speak, because they believe that they are being constantly monitored and evaluated during the process of speaking activities (as cited in Donald, 2010). This makes the learners to measure their success of learning L2 based on their level of proficiency in using it for communicative purposes, which leads the learners to take speaking as the greatest challenge in the process of learning the target language (Pinter 2006, cited in Juhana 2012).

Additionally, it appears natural for the learners to experience distinct types of language anxiety, which leads them to be quiet in ESL classroom (Azarfam & Baki, 2011). For instance, some learners may feel shy to speak in front of the class because of fear, while some may worry because they lack the topical knowledge and vocabulary to express their ideas; consequently, when being asked to talk in front of the classmates, they become nervous and tend to neglect the opportunity given to them (Hamouda, 2013). This silent behavior of the learners has become a real concern of L2 teachers and it is believed to be a serious problem, as it would definitely hinder the development of oral proficiency skill of the learners (Soo & Goh, 2013).

## 1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Maldives, English is used as the medium of instruction in primary, secondary and tertiary level institutions to boost the English performance of the learners. This is why English is considered as one of the compulsory subjects in all the schools and the students need to have a pass in International General Certificate of Secondary Examination (IGCSE) if they want to apply for a job. Nevertheless, most of the school graduates find it difficult to speak fluently in real life situations despite learning the language for ten to eleven years. Therefore, it is high time to enhance the communicative competence of Maldivian learners.

Undeniably, with the introduction of CLT approach, students are expected to partake in interactive learning activities to improve their communicative competence skill even though they withhold their contribution by remaining silent (Tong, 2010). In actuality, the most problematic and difficult task for the teachers is making the learners talk or engage in the speaking activities. Shockingly, even when teachers rephrase the question or provide comprehensible input related to the question, the passive learners do not respond to the question which makes the class a boring place for both teacher and students (Abebe, Demis & Deneke, 2015).

It is true that the silence in the ESL classrooms leads the language teachers to develop a false belief about the capability of the learners. This is why when the learners do not respond to the teachers' questions, sometimes, the teachers assume that the learners do not have aptitude and motivation to learn the language, which in turn leads the teachers to put more effort on helping the students who contributes well to the classroom discussion, thinking that they are the stars of the language classroom. As a consequence, the reticent learners believe that it is useless to speak in English periods (Donald, 2010). This confirms the importance of being aware of the individual differences of the learners in order to tailor the lesson according to the communication needs of the learners rather than ignoring them (Jung, 2011). Regarding the issue of reticence, Jung (2011) further stated that the high expectation of the teachers engender frustration in the learners' mind and they tend to believe that they should never come up with an utterance unless they can produce it correctly. Accordingly, it could be said that reticence acts as an obstacle in developing the oral skill of the learners. This makes it urgent to examine the main factors that discourage the learners to speak up in the class.

Notably, teachers make several complaints regarding why some learners are ready to communicate in various situations, while other students remain as non-participatory learners and it raised several scholars' interest in identifying the factors that contribute to this serious problem (Jung, 2011). The countless current research conducted on the topic of reticence indicated that Asian learners are quiet and remain passive without volunteering and responding to the questions initiated by the teacher though they have the correct answer in their mind (Chang, 2011; Hamouda, 2013; Abebe, et al., 2015). In support of this, Donald (2010) affirmed that the silent behavior of the Asian learners will deprive them from achieving fluency in the target language and it is essential to encourage the learners to participate actively in speaking activities in order to become proficient speakers of the target language. Hence, being an Asian

country, it is crucial to conduct a study on the topic of reticence to confirm whether or not Maldivian learners behave in a similar manner.

### 1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

It is evident that teaching in ESL classrooms of Maldives is still very much teacher-oriented and the aptitudes and creative knowledge of the learners are generally overlooked. In Maldives, mainly, the use of English is limited to the classroom context and Maldivian learners have minimal exposure to use English outside the classroom. The learners rarely get opportunities to participate in authentic communicative activities though schools offer extracurricular English programs like English club activities. This could be one of the main reasons why learners do not develop oral proficiency skill and it is necessary to explore this problem in order to assist the students to become active speakers in the language classroom. To be specific, the purpose of the current study are:

- To identify the factors contributing to the reticent behaviour in ESL classrooms.
- To identify the strategies used by Maldivian students to cope with the speaking anxiety.
- To identify the strategies teachers employ to cope with the student's anxiety in speaking in ESL class.

To fulfill these objectives, the research will focus on addressing the following questions.

### 1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Q1: What do Maldivian students and teachers notice as the factors contributing to reticence in speaking in ESL classrooms?
- Q2: What strategies do Maldivian learners use to cope with speaking anxiety?
- Q3: What strategies do Maldivian teachers adopt to effectively cope with student's reticent behaviour of speaking in ESL class?

It is necessary to seek the answers of these question by relating it to Maldivian context.

### 1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Evidently, there is no solid study conducted on the issue of reticence in ESL classrooms of Maldives; therefore, the present research is significant in that the findings obtained from this study will help to uncover the factors that contribute learners to be reticent in ESL classrooms of Maldives. Hence, hopefully this study will help the Maldivian L2 teachers to decode the causes of reticent behaviour of the learners before labeling them as the weakest and demotivated learners. When teachers have the theoretical understanding about the factors that contribute to reticence of speaking and solutions to this problem, they will attempt their level best to cope with issue and will try to alleviate the speaking problems that they come across in the class. The curriculum designers will also be benefited from this study, as it will help them to consider the factors of speaking anxiety when making future plans for change and improvement.

Furthermore, it will also assist the students to comprehend the causes of their nervousness in speaking and from this; the learners will learn to overcome their anxiety in speaking,

which in turn motivates them to improve their speaking skill, leading them to become proficient speakers in future.

### 1.6. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study on reticence of speaking focuses on lower secondary eighth grade learners of a Maldivian school. The respondents of this study, students and teachers are selected from one school. Due to the time constraints, this study involves only twelve students and three teachers as respondents. The study examined the reticent behavior of lower secondary learners and how teachers alleviate the problem in the classroom; hence, it will be useful for teachers and learners to facilitate effective teaching and learning in ESL classrooms.

### 1.7. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

#### Reticence

Learners' anxiousness and nervousness to speak in ESL classrooms.

#### Speaking and anxiety

Speaking is a productive oral skill which consists of producing utterances verbally to express views and ideas.

Anxiety is a normal feeling that arise due to tension and worrying about something. It has a huge impact on learning L2 as it acts as a block factor for effective learning.

#### Linguistic competence versus communicative competence

**Linguistic competence** is the learners' knowledge about the grammatical structures, words, pronunciations and spellings and it leads the learners to think about the words and structures that need to use when speaking. On the other hand, **communicative competence** involves knowledge of the whole linguistic competence, knowledge about socio cultural code of language and knowledge about verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that help the learners to involve in social interaction confidently by using appropriate utterances.

#### Oral proficiency

The learners' ability to use the target language in real-life contexts outside the classroom.

### 1.8. ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis is divided into five chapters excluding the reference section and the appendix section. This chapter, chapter one entails a brief introduction and general background knowledge about the research topic. Further, the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, significance and scope of the study with the definitions of key words are outlined in this chapter.

The second chapter presents a *literature review*, which reviews the theoretical and empirical literature related to the topic, 'reticence of speaking in ESL classes. Hence, based on the topic, it presents problems associated with reticence, factors that contribute to the reluctance of speaking, coping strategies used by the learners and different techniques employed by the teachers to overcome the problem.

The third chapter deals with the methodology or the research design followed to undertake the study. It will

provide a rich detail about the participants, instrumentation, data collection procedure and data analysis procedure. Next, chapter four presents data analysis and results of the study in relation to the research objectives and questions.

The last chapter explains the findings of the study with reference to empirical literature. Additionally, this final chapter draws conclusions based on the finding and specifies implication to be followed by the teacher and the students. This chapter closes by highlighting the limitations of the study and making suggestions for future research in this field.

**1.9. SUMMARY**

In a word, this chapter provides an overview of the topic which consists of the background information, objectives,

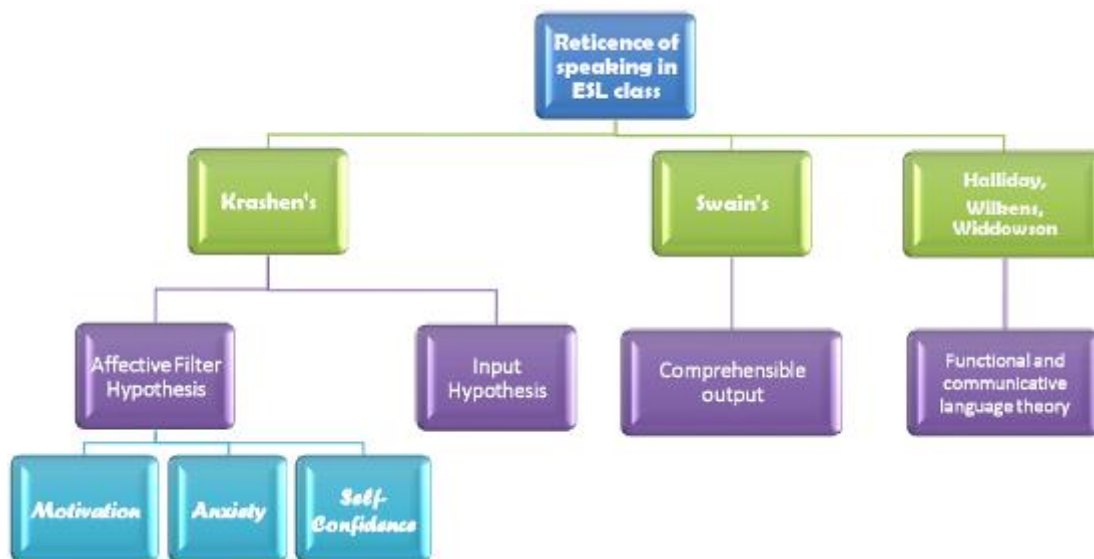
**2.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

research questions and scope of the study. The next chapter will examine the literature related to the topic.

**2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**2.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents an account of literature related to the study. This review begins with a theoretical framework related to the study, followed by a review of the importance of teaching speaking in ESL classroom. It also includes a conceptual framework which shows the different factors that contribute the learners to experience reticence in ESL classroom. The definitions of reticence as outlined by other researchers and the model of reticence is also explained in this part. It concludes with empirical studies related to the causes of reticence and strategies used by the students and the teachers to deal with the problem of reticence.



(Figure 2.1)

Unquestionably, Krashen’s theories made countless contributions in L2 acquisition and learning (Schütz, 2014). The above diagram elucidates that Krashen’s ‘Affective Filter Hypothesis’ and ‘Input Hypothesis’ play a crucial role with the speaking difficulties encountered by L2 learners, which makes these two theories important for the current study.

The affective filter, prompted by anxiety, self-confidence and motivation has an impact on success or failure of the students. In other words, the higher motivation and the stronger self-confidence will lower the affective filter, helping the learners to become remarkable performers. In contrast, high anxiety will raise the affective filter, impeding input from reaching the language acquisition part of the brain (Krashen, 1982). Therefore, it is indispensable to lower the affective filter, by creating a relaxed atmosphere, where teachers focus on meaningful communication without pointing out all the grammatical mistakes made by the students (Krashen 1982).

The ‘Input Hypothesis’ argue that the exposure to language data or language input supports to develop the productive skills like speaking and writing automatically (Krashen, 1982). This implies that accuracy and fluency emerges over time as the learners hear and comprehend more input; thus, teachers do not have to worry about teaching speaking directly (Krashen, 1982). This affective filter hypothesis and input hypothesis are important for the current study for various reasons. Firstly, it explains the importance of maintaining an enjoyable and stress free classroom in order to minimize anxiety; hence, in speaking lessons, teachers can lower the affective filter to promote communication skill of the learners. Secondly, based on input hypothesis, in speaking lessons, the teachers can use conversational adjustments and modifications to make the teachers’ ideas more comprehensible for the learners. However, the question is, why do the learners struggle in speaking the target language after receiving input for nine or ten years?

Swain (1985) claimed that even if the teachers stick to the target language and provides comprehensible input, it will be a waste of time if the learners do not use in different contexts. Swain (1985) further stressed that the language output; the language that the students produce is crucial in developing the automaticity. Obviously, just explaining how to ride a bicycle will not help the rider to ride it, unless, the person steps towards the bike with the key, unlock it, get on it and push to practice how to ride it. This suggest that Swain’s output hypothesis is imperative for this study, as it is essential for L2 learners to communicate using the target language in order to try out several means of expressions. Through this way, the learners will get opportunities to come up with various utterances that they never tried before, which in turn help them to see how the language

works (Zhang, 2009). As a consequence, teachers should have a clear picture of the language theories that lead to develop the communicative competence of the learners.

The functional approach of language teaching emphasizes to involve the learners in language activities that assists them to practice the functions of language used in real-life situations. The influential figures of functional theory; Halliday (1970), Wilkens (1972) and Widdowson (1989) asserted that not only the grammatical features of language are essential, but communication is also necessary to use the language meaningfully. Consequently, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged which gives importance to meaningful communication (Lavadenz, 2011). The Chinese proverb, ‘give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime’ clearly depicts this approach (Xia, 2014). This means teachers ought to allocate to time to teach the learners how to use the language, rather than spending most of the time in teaching the structures of the language, as it will help them to use the language confidently in real life situations, without showing the reticent behaviour.

### 2.3. THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Undoubtedly, nowadays, teachers work their fingers to the bone in order to develop the communicative competence of the L2 learners so that they have a good command of the target language to face the challenges of this globalized world (Yu, 2008). It is true that previously, when the teachers followed the conventional teaching methods, they believed that the learners pick up maximum from the lesson when they keep quiet and listen to the teacher. It is clear that if the teachers have this misconception and neglects giving importance to oral communication skill, it will hinder the oral language development of the learners. Therefore, in addition to listening to others, learners should be given ample opportunities to respond to others by involving in real life related social interactions (Yu, 2010). With regard to this, Rahman (2010) mentioned that it is essential to involve the learners in a lively communication process that assist the learners to transmit their thoughts, feelings and ideas.

Certainly, the oral communication in L2 classrooms teach the students to think critically and present themselves as speakers in various speaking contexts (Yu, 2010). This means apart from improving the fluency of the students, they will also develop various other elements needed for communication, such as body language and facial expression which maintains the spontaneity of the conversation by making speaking a ‘natural thing’ for all the learners (Rahman, 2010). This view is also supported by Wiliam (2010) stating that giving opportunities for the learners to develop their speaking skill to the full potential will enable them to enhance their linguistic skills and grammatical. Further, they learn communication strategy like taking turns when negotiating developing their confidence in using the target language in meaningful spontaneous interaction. Apparently, it can be said that the opportunities given to communicate in the ESL classrooms help the learners in acquisition of the target language.

Speaking is considered as an important thinking tool that helps the learners throughout their whole life. For instance, the speaking activities like arguing and debating teaches the learners how to justify their point of view, which provides them with a prosperity of real communication experiences. Consequently, it encourages the learners to take risk in the speaking activities, which in turn prepares them to express themselves confidently in their later life (Morneau, 2013). In short it could be said speaking is not acquired magically, but speaking is a skill that is learned through speaking.

### 2.4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

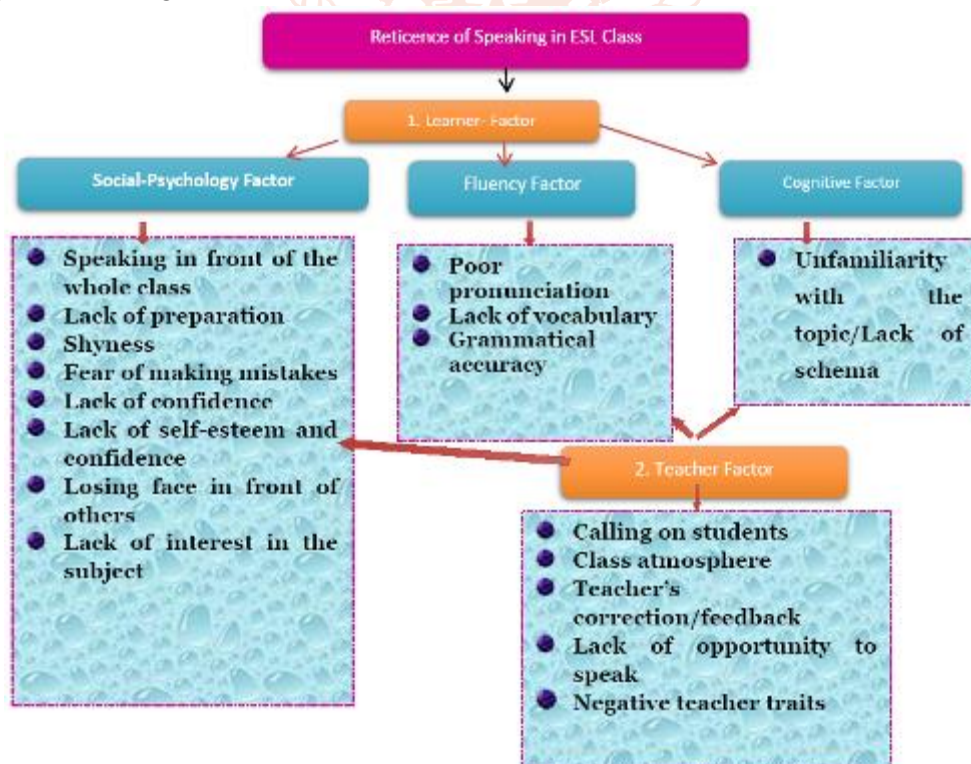


Figure: 2.2

For the purpose of this study, **learner-factor** and **teacher factor** are adopted as the two broad categories that contribute to reticence in ESL classrooms. Depending on the analysis of the articles, the two main categories are divided into various sub-categories as displayed in the diagram.

The first factor, **'learner factor'** as indicated in figure 2 include; social-psychological factors, fluency factor and cognitive factor. In this research, the social-psychological factor is meant as the thoughts, feelings, attitude and behaviour that lead the students to behave in particular way due to the presence of others, while the fluency factor is considered as the learners' capability to use vocabulary, grammatical and phonological structures in their speaking. Hence, poor pronunciation, lack of vocabulary and grammatical accuracy are included as the sub-categories of fluency factor. Finally, cognition includes the learners' inability to use their existing schema and topic knowledge to speak about the new themes present by their teacher in the English period.

The second factor, **'teacher factor'** means the strategies followed by the teacher that inhibits the students from taking part in the lesson. As it could be seen from the figure, teacher factor is inter-related with the other three main factors, because the way how the teacher deal with the students will have influence on the personality of the students, and the teaching approaches used will have impact on achieving structural features and schematic knowledge. Briefly, the presences of the factors displayed in the diagram determine the reticent behaviour of the learners. If so, then what is reticence?

**2.5. DEFINITION OF RETICENCE**

Researchers' attention in the concept of reticence began after Gerald M. Phillips published the first article about 'reticence' in 1965. In that era, Phillips conceptualized reticence as a disorder of personality and anxiety, but later, he modified it as two dimensions; cognitive and behavioural, in which the former represents avoidance of communication due to learners' individual faulty belief system, while the latter shows avoidance of communication due to learners' incompetency (Keaten & Telly, 2000).

Depending on the groundbreaking idea of Phillips (1965), the researchers, Keaten and Telly (2000) re-conceptualized the concept and came up with an additional dimension, 'affective component', which denotes avoiding communication and keeping quiet, in order not show any foolishness to others. It is evident that the idea of Keaten and Telly is quite different from Phillip's view, and today, the scholars combine the views of Phillips and Keaten and Telly to define the term reticence, which is experienced by ESL learners.

Recently, a study conducted by Soo and Goh (2013) defined reticence as the silent, passive and non-participatory behaviour displayed by the L2 learners due to their misconception that they lack the capability of speaking. In contrast to this, in a similar study carried out by Hashemi, Hadavi, Shomoossi and Rezaeian (2013) described reticence as learners' quietness and unwillingness to speak because of their controlled behaviour or fear of anxiety. Even though the two meanings are similar with regard to behaviour of the learners, they are deemed different concerning the cause of reticence. In relation to the aforementioned definitions, in this paper, reticence will be described as the learners' anxiousness, nervousness and apprehension to speak in ESL classroom.

**2.6. THE MODEL OF RETICENCE**



**Figure: 2.3**

As illustrates by the above diagram, '*need*', '*perceived incompetence*', '*helplessness*', '*anxiety*', '*devaluation*', and '*withdrawal*' are considered as the six components of the model of reticence. The reticent learners are completely aware of the *need* of communication in the social world, however, their negative evaluation makes them to avoid involving in communication. Therefore, it can be concluded that though the learners comprehend the importance of communication to build their identity or to reach their goals, due to their '*perceived incompetence*', they avoid taking part in communicative tasks (Keaten & Kelly, 1995, as cited in Keaten & Kelly, 2000). In other words, learners believe that they are incompetent in expressing their thoughts. This is where the presumption made by Philips comes in this model, which stated that 'reticent learners view themselves as poor communicators'. The scholars, Leary and Kowalski (1995, as cited in Keaten & Kelly, 2000) supported this assumption stating that reticent learners have a doubt about their capability which develops a social anxiety in them, preventing them from conveying the desired feelings and views in social situations. This confirms the assumption that there is an association between learners' perception about their speaking ability and avoidance of communication (Keaten & Kelly, 2000).

The third component of reticence model, '*helplessness*' refers to the learners' belief about their lack of control over the outcomes of their attempt to speak. The reticent learners view 'good' speakers as those who are capable of speaking spontaneously without rehearsing and giving a forethought about what they want to express. This leads the learners to experience helplessness as they believe that their attempt to speak is useless, which in turn leads them to avoid communication tasks in fear of making mistakes in front of the fluent speakers. The learners' expectations about communication leads them to develop a feeling of *anxiety* which contributes to *devalue* the importance of speaking, leading them to follow the *withdrawal* pattern, which means the learners avoid putting themselves in situations which requires them to speak (Keaten & Kelly 2000). It could be said that all the six components of the reticent model acts as the root factors that contribute the learners to be reticent in ESL classroom.

## 2.7. LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND SPEAKING

A number of researchers who shed light on language anxiety described it as anxiousness or uneasiness learners experience in L2 classrooms (Subasi 2010; Azarfam & Baki, 2012; Melouah, 2013). As it can be seen from L2 classrooms, a lot of students freeze up when they are asked to partake in oral communication activities and this could be termed as speaking anxiety that cause the learners to remain calm without contributing to the lesson (Melouah, 2013). Basically, this speaking anxiety is triggered by three factors; *communication apprehension*, *test anxiety* and *negative evaluation* (Subasi 2010; Azarfam & Baki, 2012; Melouah, 2013; Shirvanizadeh & Zare-ee, 2014). For the present study, two of the abovementioned elements are central; *communication apprehension* which emerges because of fear and shyness to express one's thoughts and *negative evaluation* which arise owing to how others would evaluate one-self negatively (Melouah, 2013). Related to negative evaluation, Azarfam and Baki (2012) stated that if students with speaking anxiety have a negative experience, it will act as a reminder in speaking lesson which gives root to remain

reticent even though they have rich general knowledge about the topic under discussion. If so, what would be the problems related with the issue of reticence?

### 2.7.1. PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED TO RETICENCE

The rapidly growing literature on reticence behaviour of students revealed that it has a great impact on the teaching and learning process (Li & Liu, 2011; Soo & Goh, 2013; Riasati, 2014; Shirvanizadeh & Zare-ee, 2014). First of all, the negative attitudes of the reticent students turn the teachers' plan upside down, and make it challenging for the teacher to get active participation from all the learners (Li & Liu, 2011). This is supported by Soo and Goh (2013) who contended that students' withdrawal and anxiety of communicating, restricts the teacher from achieving the intended objectives of the lesson and consecutively prevents the learners from making progress. The fact that the students remain silent in the class shows that it deprives them from sharing their knowledge, which prevents peers and the instructor benefitting from it (Li & Liu, 2011; Shirvanizadeh & Zare-ee, 2014). It could be said that lots of learning occurs by exchanging ideas and perceptions with others. As mentioned by Li and Liu (2011), class discussions fuel high quality thinking and charge the battery of the demotivated learners making all the learners benefit from the learning process, and the students will feel that "they are crucial members of the class community" (Shirvanizadeh & Zare-ee, 2014, p.50).

Undeniably, the present teaching pedagogies provide opportunities for participation and expect the learners to communicate and interact with each other (Shirvanizadeh & Zare-ee, 2014; Abebe et al., 2015). As a consequence of the importance given on communication, speaking has become a challenge for the learners (Tuan & Mai, 2015) and the students tend to measure their achievement of L2 learning based on how fluent they are in using the target language (Juhana, 2015). Relating this to the current study, the same phenomenon is seen in Maldivian classrooms and teachers seem to categorize the strength of the learners based on how much they contribute to the class discussions.

As suggested by Li and Liu (2011), reticence has a negative impact on the self-confidence of the learners and they suffer from mental block during the speaking activities. Therefore, students find it difficult to find out and correct the errors they make which leads them to follow the avoidance strategies (Shirvanizadeh & Zare-ee, 2014). Furthermore, since the reticent students are less involved the learning process, they easily forget the materials that they learned compared to the active participants (Li & Liu, 2011). However, most of the teachers fail to recognize the anxiety experienced by the learners and label them as low ability or low motivated learners (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009) and ignore this serious issue without taking any measures (Riasati, 2012) which means teachers should be aware of the reason why students become reticent.

### 2.7.2. CAUSES OF RETICENCE IN ESL CLASSROOM

A number of researchers have used different strategies to identify the causes of reticence. By reviewing the previous researches carried out in this field showed that the causes emerge from the learners and from the teacher.

Hamouda (2013) conducted a study with one hundred and fifty eight university students doing English Listening and

Speaking course to identify the reason why students act passively in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. It revealed that *low proficiency* is one of the causes that lead the students to be reticent in ESL class. A similar study conducted by Abebe et al., (2015) with three hundred university students, to identify the causes of learners' reticence in EFL class discussions confirmed that low proficiency is a factor that contributes to learner reticence. On the contrary, Soo and Goh (2013) argued that students with higher level of proficiency also experience the same level of reticence as low proficiency learner. This is because the high proficient learners do not want to be labelled as 'show off' by their classmates (Chang, 2011). Nonetheless, it can be debated that the data collection procedure used by the researchers leave rooms for gap in the researches, as the survey questionnaires used included closed ended questions which minimizes the chance of getting views from the learners. Hence, for the present study, the appropriate use of interviews with an open-ended questionnaire is indispensable to offer analytical account of the sources of reticence.

Juhana (2012) did a comparable study to identify the psychological factors that inhibits learners from speaking and the results uncovered that *fear of making mistakes* is another factor that hinders students from speaking in ESL class. This is because the learners are usually *afraid of being laughed at by their classmates* and are worried of *losing face in front of others*. This argument is in congruent with Hamouda (2012) who proved that students' expectance to be perfect lead them to be *afraid of committing mistakes and making errors* in ESL class. However, since the study of Juhana (2012) focused only on the psychological factors that contribute to reticence, the research overlooked how teacher factors affect reticence in ESL classrooms, which signifies that it should be a central aspect of this study.

Another source of reticence is *shyness*, which arises due to natural nature of the learners (Hamouda, 2013). In other words, the quiet nature of the students or introverted learners feels shy to speak in front of the whole class. This finding is in line with Juhana (2012) who outlined that the natural behaviour of the learners causes them to be named as shy learners. Contrastingly, Abebe, et al., (2015) admitted that in addition to introversion factor, *lack of confidence, self-esteem* and *unfamiliarity with the topic* affect shyness and give an intimidating feeling to the students when being asked to speak in the class. This argument parallels to that of Hamouda (2013) who reported that the self-rating of the students gives them a feeling of uneasiness as they do not believe that they are capable of performing well in speaking lessons. However, concerning this, an interesting finding is put forward by Hashemi et al., (2013) who claimed that some students prefer to remain silent because the other participants are too active in the class. This could be true, because the extroverted learners seem to dominate the discussion, which lead others to keep quiet.

Another similar study done by Tuan and Mai (2015) investigated the factors that affect the speaking problems of the learners at Le Thanh High School and it demonstrated that lack of interest in the subject is one of the main factors that makes the students to be silent in the class. The same finding has been supported by Hamouda (2013) who elaborated that the learners' boredom with the subject

prevents them from involving actively in class discussions. Nevertheless, when considering the study of Tuan and Mai (2015), it appears that the subjects were taken only from Le Thanh High School; hence, it cannot be considered as the representatives of the subject from other provinces.

Using interviews and observations, Zhipping and Paramasivam (2013) studied why international students suffer from anxiety and how they cope with their fear of speaking. It showed that various factors *like poor pronunciation, lack of topical knowledge or vocabulary and incompetent grammatical skill* lead the learners to remain silent in the class. This finding is consistent with the results of Hamouda (2013) who explained that students are unwilling to participate in class discussions, as they are worried about using incorrect grammatical features and when they express their views, they often have to stop in between for the reason that they lack the repertoire of vocabulary related to the topic. This is where the teachers need to focus on the importance of Krashen's comprehensible input theory comes in when helping the learners to speak up in the class. This means teachers also have a hand in making the learners reticent.

The study conducted by Abebe et al., (2015) in this field showed that *negative teacher traits* demotivates the learners and provoke anxiety which inhibits students from taking part in the lesson. This point is further illustrated by Melouah (2013) explaining that the strict and authoritative error-correction techniques used by the teachers humiliate the learners which affect the speaking skill of them. In addition to this, unfortunately, some teachers make a mistake by not giving equal number of chances to all the students in the class; rather, they often allocate turns to the brightest students in the class. Furthermore, another study conducted by Hosni (2014) to identify the speaking difficulties faced by the young learners indicated that teaching strategies followed by the teacher also minimize the number of opportunities that learners get to use the target language in communication. This seems to confirm Swain's output hypothesis that suggested the importance of using the target language to improve speaking skill and the present study will focus on checking how much opportunities Maldivian learners get to use L2 in their classrooms.

Unquestionably, from the forgoing discussion, it is apparent there are several causes that make the learners to be reticent in ESL classrooms, but the question is how do the learners cope with the problem of reticence?

### 2.7.3. STRATEGIES USED BY THE LEARNERS TO COPE WITH THE PROBLEM

Undeniably, L2 learners use numerous approaches to get along with the serious problem of reticence (Zhipping & Paramasivam, 2013; Hamouda, 2013, Baktash & Chalab, 2015). In particular, most of the students follow the avoidance strategy when they are being called on to respond to a question or a discussion, showing their unwillingness to take part in the lesson. In other words, the learners have a preference to remain silent and listen to the conversations views presented by their colleagues, without volunteering to answer the questions posed by the teacher (Zhipping & Paramasivam, 2013). In consonance with this, Hamouda (2013) affirmed that reluctant speakers remain quiet in the



class as they lack the adequate content knowledge to respond to the discussion by using their own thoughts and opinions. Listening to their friends' expressions and utterances open their mind to various ideas and assists in improving their linguistic skills. This indicates that listening to the conversations also play a crucial role in improving the speaking skill of the learners. It has been conclusively shown that listening skill and speaking skill are intertwined and listening to various English materials like radio and television programmes promote speaking skill of the students (Noon-ura, 2008, as cited in Morozova, 2013).

In some cases, learners pretend that they are busy or avoid making eye contact with the teacher in order to escape from being the target of the teacher (Zhipping & Paramasivam, 2013). The crux of the matter is that the students want to get away from the unpleasant situation, because either they are uncertain of the answer or disinterested in the topic under discussion. With respect to this, Hartley and Karinch (2007) pointed out that learners who are evasive or learners with low self-esteem tend to avoid making eye contact with the instructor and look elsewhere of the room during the class discussion. This demonstrates and confirms the idea that the learners who are suffering from communication apprehension tend to avoid engaging in discussion, due to their fear of experiencing embarrassment in the class. Pertaining to this, it can be considered that Krashen's 'Affective Filter Hypothesis' is applicable to the present study.

Zhipping and Paramasivam (2013) stated that some ESL learners tend to use non-verbal expressive reaction, such as giving a smile to the teacher to hide their shyness and real feelings. In other words, students mask their feelings in difficult situations by giving a simple grin to the teachers. In relation to this, Spielman and Randofsky (2001) asserted that learners employ non-active passive strategies and ignore the opportunity given to them by distancing themselves from taking part in challenging tasks. On the other hand, Iizuka (2010) pointed out that in ESL classrooms, some learners face the problem of language anxiety by following positive strategies like putting a greater effort and getting well-prepared for the tasks.

Another common strategy that learners prefer to use is seeking help from their friends. As pointed out by Baktash and Chalak (2015), the students listen to the responses of their peers or ask their friends to give them ideas before saying anything. In compliance with this, Hamouda (2013) noted that the insufficient topical knowledge and linguistic skills lead the students to depend on their friends' ideas when responding to the questions of the teachers. It is evident that the learners feel comfortable to get cooperation from their friends, rather than seeking clarification from the teacher. The main reason behind this cooperative interaction is that the learners want to avoid unnecessary embarrassment by confirming whether their answers are correct or incorrect before they share with the whole class. In contradict to this, Tuan and Mai (2015) implied that when the learners lack the content knowledge, they often use their mother tongue in L2 class, because it is natural and convenient for them to form sentences in their first language. Obviously, L2 learners of Maldives usually adopt this strategy when they are asked questions in L2 class. However, it is clear that the use of L1 in ESL classrooms will not help

the learners in improving the speaking skill of their target language (Izuka, 2010).

In addition, prior to contributing the class discussions, some learners "think silently and rehearse what they have in their mind" (Hamouda, 2013, p. 29). In accordance with this, (Baktash & Chalak, 2015) mentioned that a number of learners think quietly and write what they want to say and just read out what they have written without attempting to speak spontaneously. Additionally, some learners write a summary of what they want to speak and prepare some questions in advance to ask their instructor (Hamouda, 2013). However, it can be argued that just reading out what is written on the paper will not enhance the spontaneous communication skill of the learner (Baktash & Chalak, 2015). Therefore, teachers need to be aware of the coping strategies used by the learners so that they can get the attention of the learners when they follow these avoidance strategies.

The aforesaid points indicated that students struggle in different ways to deal with the reticence; thus it is important for the teachers to incorporate different strategies in helping the learners to overcome the problem of reticence.

#### 2.7.4. HOW TEACHERS CAN ALLEVIATE THE PROBLEM

Noticeably, reticence has a great influence on the teaching and learning process; consequently, the researchers working in this field have proposed several techniques that can be used by the teachers to alleviate the problem.

Firstly, teachers should adopt the modern CLT approach, which allows the learners to use language meaningfully (Soo & Goh, 2013; Tuan & Mai, 2015; Abebe, et al., 2015). This means instead of relying on filling the learners' minds with grammatical features, the focus should be given on developing the communicative competence of the learners, so that the learners can use the language in various contexts (Li & Liu, 2011). This confirms the importance of following functional and communicative language theory put forward by Halliday, Wilkens, and Widdowson. In relation to the use of CLT, Soo and Goh (2013) suggested to make the students aware of the objectives of the speaking lessons, as it will assist the learners to know their role in CLT classrooms. This is because it will help them to think of the different types of questions that will be asked by the teacher, which in turn will raise the curiosity of the reticent learners to take part in speaking lessons as they get time think about the context beforehand (Li & Liu, 2011). In brief, CLT emphasizes interaction by allowing the learners to use language in authentic contexts.

Another recommendation is that teachers must give enough opportunities for the learners to use the target language (Hamouda, 2013; Hosni, 2014; Shirvanizadeh & Zare-ee, 2014, Tuan and Mai, 2015). For instance, the class activities can be connected to English club activities and this can be further expanded by allowing them to involve in activities which require them to use language outside the school (Hamouda, 2014). In the same way, Hosni (2014) averred that learners should be involved in extra speaking activities which open the doors for them to use language meaningfully outside the classroom context. Definitely, this will help the learners to know the usefulness of learning to speak in the target language, which in turn will motivate them to engage in the speaking activities. However, since speaking is not

tested in most of the schools, the number of speaking activities that teachers give is less compared to the number of reading and writing activities they give to the learners (Tuan & Mai, 2014). Undoubtedly, in ESL classrooms of Maldives, the same case is evident and this makes the present study essential for Maldivian teachers.

Apart from that, it will be beneficial for the teachers to know how their role in the class affects the learners' willingness to speak in English periods (Abebe, et al., 2015). Most importantly, teachers need to think about their teaching style, because the use of teacher-centered approach, which makes the teachers to dominate the class discussion, does not open the floor for the learners to express their views and perceptions (Riasati, 2012). Using this reasoning of Riasati, it can be hypothesized that for the purpose of enhancing learners' willingness to speak, it is better to employ the student-centered methods of teaching. This is because it leads the teachers to act as a facilitator by giving opportunity for the learners to participate actively in the lesson and ultimately improves their fluency in the target language (Lisa, 2006)

Regarding the style of the teacher, Shirvanizadeh and Zare-ee (2014) affirmed that the unmotivated teacher and the inappropriate behaviour of the teacher have great influence on students' motivation to speak. The same view is proven by Zhipping & Paramasivam, (2013) who stated that how the teacher delivers the lesson, how the teacher acts in the class and how the teacher talks with the learners have impact on their motivation to speak. For instance, if the teacher uses a harsh manner to correct all the utterances that the learners produce, it will humiliate them in front of their peers leading them to form a question in their mind about their capability of speaking the target language (Hamouda, 2013). Consequently, instead of showing that all their utterances are wrong; it is advisable to model the correct response in a non-threatening manner, in order to develop the self-confidence of the learners (Melouah, 2013). This means teachers should behave in a supportive manner to reduce the learner anxiety.

Teachers can use various techniques to reduce the anxiety of the students. In this regard, utmost importance should be given to maintain a friendly, supportive and non-threatening learning atmosphere, where the learners can voice out their views, without fear of being ridiculed by the teacher and friends (Juhana, 2012; Hamouda, 2013; Melouah, 2013; Soo & Goh, 2013; Shirvanizadeh & Zare-ee, 2014; Hosni, 2014; Tuan & Mai, 2015). With reference to this, Riasati (2014) believed that the relaxing learning atmosphere will build a rapport between the teacher and the students, boosting learners' confidence to speak in the class. This is why Zhipping (2013) suggested the teachers to take a step in bringing humour to the class through the use of verbal and non-verbal expressive reactions.

Another technique that can be used is helping the students to cope with the problem of anxiety, by conducting activities that allow them to work in groups or pairs (Abebe, et al., 2015). In line with this, Shirvanizadeh and Zare-ees' (2014) study revealed that group works change the monotonous atmosphere of the class as students cooperate with each other in exchanging ideas and learn from each other. Thus, it is advisable to give pair works and group works based on interesting topics in order to help the reticent learners.

Finally, selecting topics that are interesting and familiar to the learners will encourage them to contribute to class discussions (Hamouda, 2013; Melouah, 2013; Shirvanizadeh & Zare-ee, 2014; Tuan & Mai, 2015). If the topic is unfamiliar, learners will not have enough vocabulary to express their ideas. Hence, teachers need to provide vocabulary related to the topic and comprehensible input to prevent the learners from continuing to remain as passive learners (Abebe, et al., 2015). This means teachers should follow Krashen's input theory when incorporating speaking activities in ESL classrooms.

Evidently, all of the previous researches focused on identifying the causes of reticence and presenting solutions to the problem, but most of the studies did not identify the perspectives of the teachers; in consequence, further study on finding teachers' perspectives on reticence is of great need. Furthermore, as most of the researches were conducted with university level students, it is essential to conduct a similar study with school students to see whether the same causes are experienced by the students in ESL classrooms of schools.

## 2.8. CONCLUSION

Obviously, one of the major challenges that ESL teachers face is the difficulty of making the learners involve in oral communication skills, because most of the time, the teachers are unaware of the reasons why the learners remain as reticent learners in the class. Most importantly, even though the teachers have a wonderful plan on how to deliver the lesson, they fail to deliver lesson according to their plan, as the learners prefer to remain as passive learners. Therefore, the present study will focus on making the teachers aware of the different factors related to the teachers and the learners that cause the students to be reticent in the class. This means with the help of this study, they can think about the problem from different angles, which in turn helps to identify the reticent learners by looking at how they behave in the class. As a result, the teachers can follow productive strategies to overcome this problem, building a lively classroom where the students willingly take part in speaking activities.

This study will help to enrich the current literature on reticence, as the follow-up qualitative approach will help to get diversified perceptions about the issue from both students and the teachers. The research is valuable for the curriculum developers as they would know the importance of addressing the problem of student reticence when developing the curriculum. Although reticence of speaking is a central aspect of ESL classrooms, it is still an under-researched area in the context of Maldives classrooms. Therefore, the current study is designed to analyse why Maldivian ESL learners are reticent to speak, how they cope with the situation and how the teachers attempt to overcome the situation. It is believed that the results would contribute to the acquisition of ESL speaking skill of the learners.

## 2.9. SUMMARY

This chapter presented a review of literature related to reticence of students in ESL classrooms. The definition of reticence, empirical studies related to reticence and the gaps highlighted in the literature will provide a basis for data collection and findings of this study. The next chapter presents the methodology followed for the current study.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on outlining the methodology used for the current study. The following sections consist of theoretical framework, research paradigm, research design, context of the study, population and samples, research instruments, data collection procedure and data analysis procedure. Further, the procedures used to determine the reliability and validity are clearly discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, how ethical consideration is addressed at different levels in this research are discussed in this section, followed by a summary as the last part of this chapter.

#### 3.2. RESEARCH PARADIGM

The word paradigm is originated from the Greek word '*paradeigma*', which means a *pattern* and Thomas Kuhn, in 1962, used this word to show the framework used by a group of scientists to display the structure for investigating problems and uncovering solutions (Thomas, 2010). Recently, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) described a 'paradigm' as a worldview, a complete set of assumptions, beliefs and approaches based on which the research takes place. In other words, it is a framework that directs the behavior of the researcher. The two main paradigms; *normative and interpretive* define the ontological, epistemological and methodological principles of the researcher. The *normative paradigm* is a deductive approach used by the researcher to study human behavior or natural science, aiming to prove or disapprove the theory generated. On the contrary, interpretive paradigm is an inductive approach followed by the researcher, focusing on gaining understanding of their experience of the world around them based on the data gathered. In this view, the theory emerges from pieces of collected information (Cohen et al., 2007).

Obviously, it is essential for an educational researcher to have clear idea of research paradigm as it has an influence in choosing the right research design. This means it enables the researcher to adopt a particular way to gather and analyze the required data in order to meet the purpose of the research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010, as cited in Kim, 2013). In this regard, interpretive approach is the most appropriate method for the current study to explore the factors that contribute to the reticence of ESL learners. The interpretive paradigm, having its ground in anthropology, sociology and psychology, guides the researcher to understand the social interaction and social context in which individuals act (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The use of this method will assist in gaining evidence from what teachers and students say and what they do, which in turn helps the researcher to construct meaning from what is going on in the research context. To put it in another way, an interpretive paradigm is beneficial for the current study to gain more insight of the lower secondary students' reticence to speak, how they cope with the problems and how their teachers deal with the problem by identifying perceptions from the respondents and observing their individual characteristics. According to Creswell (2012), a qualitative approach is in line within interpretive paradigm and it is useful to seek understanding of social phenomena in a natural setting. Hence, for this study, qualitative method appropriately fits with the objectives of the research. In a qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument of the study; thus, it is evident that the researcher can obtain a thick description from the participants regarding the problem (Creswell, 2012).

#### 3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is the blueprint used by the researcher to obtain the answers of the guiding research questions (Creswell, 2012). To explore the issue raised in this research, a qualitative case study approach is used for two main reasons. Firstly, it will be difficult to understand the behavior of the teachers and students without knowing the context as human behavior is influenced by the setting in which it occurs. Secondly, it is indispensable to obtain views and perspectives from the teachers and the students to know the reality behind the way they behave. This means the use of case study will help in gaining better understanding of the current phenomenon in the ordinary context (Wahyuni, 2012). Furthermore, since little is known about the reticent students in Maldives, qualitative case study is the most appropriate method to develop a valid understanding and propositions for further study. In this regard, Johnson and Christensen (2008) asserted that qualitative method is useful when we have little understanding of the phenomenon and we expect to learn more about the issue.

Relating to case study, Zainal (2007) describes it as a method useful for helping the researcher to observe the data thoroughly in a particular context with a small number of respondents as the participants. In a similar manner, Yin (1984) defines the case study research method "as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). For the current study, single case study which focuses on one particular issue will be used as it allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon through different lenses. It is evident that a researcher cannot manipulate the behavior of the participants; however, the use of single case study approach will allow the researcher to focus on one particular event at a specific time by observing the participants in real-life contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

#### 3.4. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The study will be conducted in an English medium, government school (school 'A') of Maldives. The school is a secondary school and has a population of about 1500 students. School 'A' is selected as it is the place where the researcher works and it will be easier to maintain rapport with the participants. The school has an English club to provide extra opportunities for the learners to practice English. The school also has other extra sports clubs and uniform body activities in order to prepare the learners for the real world. There are about 103 staff in the school and out of which, 15 are local English teachers.

#### 3.5. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Creswell (2012) described sampling as the selection of participants and the setting to be studied. As the current study focuses on identifying the causes of students' reticence to speak in ESL class, it is essential to get perceptions and views from the students and teachers.

Hence, the purposive sampling or criterion based sampling techniques is used to conduct the current study. Purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting the participants and sites to study (Creswell, 2012). The use of purposive sampling will enable to select the participants who are

capable of expressing views about the issue based on their personal experience (Cohen et al., 2007).

For the current study, four English language teachers, who are currently teaching to grade eight and nine at school 'X' will be selected. Teachers and students from grade ten will not be included in this study, as the teachers will be following the drilling technique to prepare the students for IGCSE exam. Hence, the researcher might not get the opportunity to observe a speaking lesson to achieve the intended purpose of the study. In order to get perspectives

from the learners, total three students; 1 student of high level achievers, 1 student of average level achievers and 1 student of low level achievers will be selected from grade eight and nine with assistance from the teacher. These students aged thirteen to fourteen have been studying ESL for about eight to nine years. The researcher selected different levels of students instead of selecting all low level non-participatory learners, because it will help to get views even from the high achievers to explore why they hesitate to participate in speaking activities.

**Table 1: The schedule of semi-structured interview**

	Participants	Total number of participants
Semi-structured interview	teachers from grade eight and nine	4 Teachers
Semi-structured interview	1 students of high level achievers, 1 students of average level achievers 1 students of low level achievers	3 Students

### 3.6. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Prior to collecting the data, approval from Villa College will be taken and the researcher will send a letter to Ministry of Education requesting for permission to conduct the study. When permission is granted, a letter with the research proposal will be sent to the selected school to provide information about the research and to select the participants for the study. Next, the interview guide will be pilot tested with the two teachers and the questions will be rephrased according to their suggestions. Teachers will be selected according to their willingness to participate and the students will be selected by the teacher, but the students will be given the chance to withdraw if they are not willing to take part in the study. The interviews will be scheduled and conducted depending on the convenience of the participants. Finally, the interviews will be transcribed, a process of changing the recorded data into written form for the ease of reading (Gibbs, Clarke, Taylor, Silver & Lewis, 2010) and rechecked.

**Table 2: Plan of the data collecting procedure**

DATE	ACTIVITIES
<i>First and Second week</i>	- Getting approval from the college - Getting permission from Ministry of Education - Approaching the selected school
<i>Third and fourth week</i>	- Pilot test the interview guide and finalize the interview guide - Select the interview participants
<i>Fifth and sixth week</i>	- Get consent from the parents as the participants are under 18 - Conduct the interviews - Observe the classes
<i>Seventh and eighth week</i>	- Transcribe the interviews
<i>Ninth week</i>	- Recheck the transcriptions with the peer review group.

### 3.7. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Researchers use various research instruments or data collection tools to explore the chosen topic. It is crucial to select the appropriate instruments to collect the data and the selection of the instrument type depends on the nature of the study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Therefore, as this study focuses on identifying why the learners hesitate to speak in ESL class, various data collection tools, such as observation, semi-structured interview and focus group discussion will be used to conduct the study.

#### 3.7.1. OBSERVATION

Observation is a qualitative method that assists the researcher to gather firsthand information about the situation or behavior being studied (Mack, Wood song, Macqueen, Guest & Ynamey, 2005). It is a distinctive method that provides opportunity for the researcher to analyze the behavior of the participants by approaching them in the real setting. In other words, the evaluator has the chance to explore wide array of behavior and capture different varieties of interaction to evaluate the selected topic, which means the researcher can develop a holistic perspective about the topic by learning about various issues that the participants are unaware of and unwilling to discuss in the interview (Mack et al., 2005). In agreement with this, Creswell (2012) stated that participant observation allows the researcher to understand the situation in a natural setting by finding unexpected outcomes. Hence, classroom observation will be used as one of the main methods to collect the data concerning the strategies used by the learners to cope with the problem of speaking and the methods used by the teacher to alleviate the problem of reticence.

Before observing the classes, the researcher will seek permission from the teacher. The researcher will observe 2 periods of the class from which the interviewees are selected for two weeks. The observations will be recorded in the following format while the teacher delivers the lesson.

**Table 3: Sheet used to record the observation**

Date	Time	Speaking problem encountered by the student.	Coping strategy used by the students.	Method used by the teacher to alleviate the problem.

### 3.7.2. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Interview, a qualitative data collection technique used by the researchers helps them to grasp the view point of the participants. Undoubtedly, what is in the mind of the respondents is unobservable; however, face-to-face interview can aid the researcher to elicit what is hidden in respondents' mind by posing questions and listening attentively to them (Mack et al., 2011). In support of this, Patton and Cochran (2002) enunciated that the aim of the interview is not to set the participants' mind in a particular way; rather, the purpose is to access the perspectives of the person to get a vivid picture of the topic.

To conduct the current study, semi-structured interview will be used, because it leads the researcher to encourage the participants to give unrestricted responses and assist to explore the topic in depth by getting the perceptions of the respondents in their own words (Mack, et al, 2011). In this study, three lower secondary students and four lower secondary ESL teachers will be interviewed and the interview will last to 15 to 20 minutes. The researcher will use an open-ended questionnaire to elicit the responses of the participants. The first section of the interview guide will include questions that focus on identifying the background information of the participants and it will help to maintain a rapport between the respondents and the researcher. In the interview guide, most of the questions are set up in an open-ended way and probing questions are included in order to dig the most relevant information to obtain a rich data from the participants (Jacob, 2012).

The researcher will conduct the interview in the work place of the selected teachers following a time convenient for them, because the interview location and time might have an impact on the way they give the answers. The interview with the students will be conducted once the session ends after taking permission from their parents. According to Creswell (2012), the interviewees should feel happy and relaxed to answer the questions, so that they can freely express their feelings and views. Since the goal of the interview is not to influence the participants, the researcher avoided using questions like *"Don't you think ...?"* or *"What you mean is...?"* As an alternative, the researcher asked for elaborations by using phrases, such as, *"What do you mean by ...?"*, or *"Would you talk about it more?"* The interview is conducted in English and recorded after seeking permission from the participants.

### 3.7.3. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Qualitative data analysis (QDA) involves various procedures by which the researcher gives meaning to the data collected by forming explanations and interpreting the situations studied based on the collected data. In QDA, there is no formula that has to be followed and the researcher does not have to use numbers to find the result; instead, the researcher looks for relationships and themes to describe the phenomena (Gibbs, Clarke, Taylor, Silver & Lewis, 2010). The qualitative researcher conceptualize the collected data by identifying new concepts and refining the concepts depending on the purpose of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this study, the 'thematic analysis' approach will be used whereby the researcher will analyze and report the data by following six main phases; familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report as suggested by (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As a first step, the interviews will be transcribed and checked visually by comparing with the audio to look for inaccuracies of transcription. Next, the transcriptions will be read and re-read several times in order to become more familiarized with the data and to get general idea of the participants. While reading the transcript, a special attention will be given to identify the repeated patterns and to note down the interesting ideas or information.

Next, the initial codes will be produced by identifying the features which can be assessed in a meaningful way based on the study. According to Creswell (2012), coding involves examining the data and labeling codes which could be a term or an expression that defines the statement which is given by the participants. Thus, when coding, the segments of the transcription will be highlighted and coded. Descriptive coding which summarizes the main idea is the common type of coding which will be used in this study.

In third phase, the identified codes will be categorized into themes and all the extracted data will be grouped within the identified themes. During procedure, a table will be drawn to show the listed codes, respondents and extracts. As the last act of this phase, the relation among the codes will be identified and brought together under different headings which will be derived based on the three research questions.

The themes will be reviewed and refined at two levels in the fourth phase. At level one, all the organized extracts will be read to see the coherent patterns between the extracts. If the theme does not fit the data, it will be discarded or a new theme will be created. At level two, the themes will be reviewed by relating to all the data, in order to check for any data missed in the first coding process and create a thematic map.

In phase five, the researcher identify the essence of what each theme is about and determine what aspect of the data each theme captures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the final phase, the researcher will write a report based on the reviewed themes by taking extracts and evidence from the data.

### 3.8. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF TH STUDY

On the whole, the qualitative research should be believable, reliable and trustworthy and the researcher should ensure the reliability and the validity of the study by addressing it in different ways because the dependability, credibility and confirm ability of the research depends on it (Creswell, 2012).

#### 3.8.1. RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY

Reliability is related to the consistency, replicability and stability of the result. It can be referred to the capability of the scholar to gather and record the data precisely. It is concerned whether the same results would be obtained every time when the scholar replicates the same study with the same or comparable respondents (Wahyuni, 2012). As stated by Denscombe (2010), since case study rely on subjective data, it is necessary to enhance the dependability of the research by providing a vivid description of the procedure of the research. In the same vein, Creswell (2012) enunciated that the reliability of the study can also be maintained by providing clear information, evidence and mentioning the investigator's positions. Therefore, in this study, the procedures of the research and position of the researcher will be clearly explained.

#### 3.8.2. VALIDITY OF THE STUDY

Validity of a study measures what it is intended to measure. Specifically, validity deals with the accuracy and truthfulness of the study. The two types of validity used in most of the researches are '*internal validity*' which means the degree to which the research findings truly reflects the reality and '*external validity*' which refers to the extent to which the research findings are applicable in other similar contexts (Creswell, 2012). To maintain the internal validity of this study, as suggested by Doyle (2007, as cited in Carlson, 2010), '*member check*' or '*respondent validation*' will be used as it provides opportunity to the participants to evaluate the transcripts of their interview. This means the participants will get chance to make suggestions, edit, elaborate or delete their own words prior to analyzing the data. In this way, the researcher can check for any plausibility in the study by asking questions like '*Am I on the right track?*' or '*Did I transcribe the way you expressed it?*' (Carlson, 2010). In this study, to do the respondent validation, the researcher will sit with the participants to discuss their views about the transcripts, in order to save time and prevent the transcriptions from losing. In addition, the internal validity of this study is also strengthened by having a peer group to validate the transcripts by cross-checking it with the audio clips. In qualitative researches, external validity can be maintained by giving a thick description to those who want to use the findings to make judgment about the degree which it can be used (Wahyuni, 2012). Hence, these measures are considered in the present study by providing detailed information about research procedure, assumptions and findings to those who want to use the results.

#### 3.8.3. TRIANGULATION

Triangulation is the central method used in qualitative research to maintain the validity and reliability of the study. It involves collecting and analyzing the data by following more than one way (Carlson, 2010). Cohen et al. (2007) affirmed that to strengthen the validity of the study, triangulation can be done by using various methods to obtain information. Therefore, in this study, semi-structured interview and observation will be used as data collection techniques. This will ensure the trustworthiness of the study, as the researcher can corroborate the various data sets with each other. Similar to maintaining the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher needs to think about how the participants will be affected from the study. In other words, the researcher should focus on the importance of addressing ethical consideration in conducting a research.

#### 3.8.4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Undoubtedly, it is important for a researcher to think about the ethical issues when conducting the research. Resnik (2011) defined ethics as "*norms for conduct* that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior" (p.1). William (2006) highlighted five key principles for ethical consideration; voluntary participation, informed consent, risk of harm, right to service, confidentiality and anonymity. Keeping these principles in mind, in the current study, the volunteered participants will be used and they are free to withdraw according to their wish. Further, they will be assured about the confidentiality of their participation. Thus, the names of the respondents and the school will be kept confidential by using pseudonyms. In addition, the information gathered from the participants will be kept securely by keeping it in password restricted file and the participants were guaranteed that transcripts could only be seen by the researcher, the supervisor and the peer group who do the cross-checking of the transcripts.

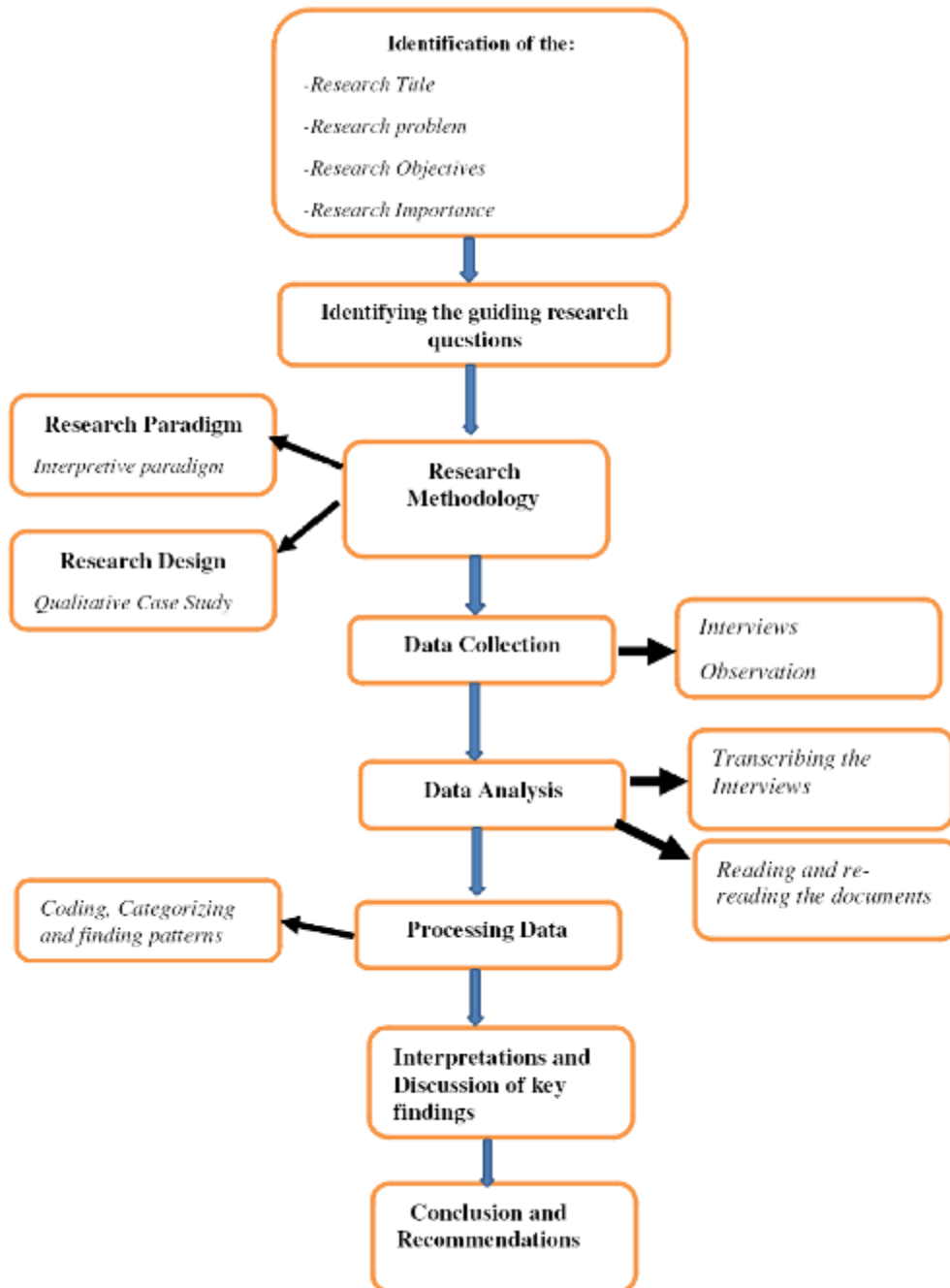
Cohen et al. (2005) asserted that informed consent is the most important norm of ethical inquiry. Hence, a consent letter was sent to the principal of the school to get permission for conducting the research. The participants were also briefed about the purpose and procedure of the research permission will be taken from parents prior to conducting the research as under eighteen students will be interviewed in this study. Overall, the code of conduct of research is followed when designing and conducting the research.

3.9. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Table 4: Overview of research objectives and methodology

Objectives	Guiding Research Question	Source of Data	Types of Data	Technique of Analysis
To identify the factors contributing to the reticent behaviour in ESL classrooms.	Q1: What do Maldivian students and teachers notice as the factors contributing the reticence in speaking in ESL classrooms?	Students and Teachers	Interviews and Observations	- Coding, categorising, -Finding patterns, -comparing and discussing the data
To identify the strategies used by Maldivian students to cope with the speaking anxiety.	Q2: What strategies do Maldivian learners use to cope with speaking anxiety?	Students and Teachers	Interviews and Observations	-Coding -Categorising -Finding patterns, -comparing and discussing the data
To identify the strategies teachers employ to cope with the student's anxiety in speaking in ESL class.	Q3: What strategies do Maldivian teachers adopt to effectively cope with student's reticent behaviour of speaking in ESL class?	Teachers	Interviews and Observations	-Coding -Categorising -Finding patterns, -comparing and discussing the data

Figure: 3.1  
Flow Chart of Research Process



### 3.10. CONCLUSION

This chapter presented, the theoretical framework, research design, sampling procedure, data collection and data analysis procedure. In addition, the concerns related to trustworthiness and ethical consideration are also outlined in this chapter. The next chapter will shed light on explaining the findings of the study.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of the data collected from an international school, School 'X', in Male'. The analysis of data from both interviews and observations has contributed to understand why the learners are reticent in ESL classroom, how the students deal with the problem of reticence and how the teachers attempt to alleviate the problem of reticence in an ESL classroom of Maldives. According to the responses of all the participants, it is noted that the speaking skill is considered as the 'Cinderella' skill in ESL classrooms of Maldives. The data is discussed under the themes emerged during the analysis process in order to address the three research questions;

Q1: What do Maldivian students and teachers notice as the factors contributing to reticence in speaking in ESL classrooms?

Q2: What strategies do Maldivian learners use to cope with speaking anxiety?

Q3: What strategies do Maldivian teachers adopt to effectively cope with student's reticent behaviour of speaking in ESL class?

### 4.2. Research Question 1

The research question one is focused on identifying the factors that contribute to the learners to be reticent in ESL classroom according to the views of both teachers and the students. The analyzed data from both interviews and observations are explained under two main categories; '**Learner Factors**' and '**Teacher Factors**'. The learner factors are divided into '**Social-Psychology Factors**', '**Fluency Factors**', and '**Cognitive Factors**' while the teacher factors explains the style of the teacher. According to the data analyzed, three of the four teachers interviewed agreed that speaking is an important skill though they focus more on reading and writing skill, either due to the lack of importance given to it in the curriculum or since it is not tested in the IGCSE exam in Maldives. According to Teacher 1 (T1),

*Usually speaking lessons are not conducted because it is not tested in our education system, I mean, in secondary grades. So that's also a problem for negligence of that skill*

The same idea is pointed out by Teacher 2 (T2) and Teacher 4 (T4) stating;

*Mostly because those [reading and writing] are the skills that are tested and we don't test the speaking skill of the students in exam.*

[Teacher 2]

*We don't really focus on speaking, because it is not assessed in the test but in listening, we do tell students to listen and discuss with one another, so in that way they are actually practicing speaking.*

[Teacher 4]

The above quotes show that though teachers believe speaking is an important skill which needs to be practiced in ESL classrooms, the lack of importance given to speaking in the curriculum leads them to focus more on other skills, such as reading and writing.

### 4.2.1. Learner Factors Social-Psychology Factors Shyness/Nervousness

A common factor that cause the learners to be reticent in the ESL classroom is the '**shyness**' that learners have to express what they have in their mind. As mentioned by three of the respondents, some children are a bit shy to speak in the English period.

*I think some students are shy*

[Teacher 1]

*Some children, they are a bit shy in speaking out*

[Teacher 2]

*They are shy first of all*

[Teacher 3]

This finding is also supported by the lesson observations. It was observed that when the students were asked to speak, they refused and asked their friends to speak out and one of the students went in front of the class and stayed for few minutes without saying a word and returned to the seat. Hence, the teacher gave the opportunity to another student. The data from the three students' interviews also revealed that they feel shy and nervous to speak out in the English period.

*I feel shy to talk in front of my friends*

[Student 1]

*I feel nervous and shy in speaking lessons*

[Student 2]

*I just feel shy, not because my friends would laugh*

[Student 3]

### Personality and Lack of Confidence

Surprisingly, the findings also showed that the **personality** of the learners also contribute to reticent behaviour of the speakers. As said by the three teachers;

*...different types of students are there...*

[Teacher 1]

*They don't want to participate*

[Teacher 2]

*It's always the talkative students who are taking initiatives but the others tend to be silent*

[Teacher 3]



As stated by the teachers, though they are good at English, they are less willing talk in the speaking period due to their personal style. Therefore, they remain as the silent students while the extroverts dominate the speaking period. For instance,

*There are some students who are good at studying, but they don't want to speak in the class, but their reading and writing skills are notable*

[Teacher 1]

Particularly, this was evident in the behavior of the students when the class was observed. When the teacher asked volunteers to speak for the given topics, around five students responded out of the twenty seven students in the class, which made the teacher to select different students. Even then, one of the students did not want to respond to the teacher. Thus, the teacher posed various questions to the student, but she just smiled and stayed without reacting. A private talk with the teacher clarified that the student only asks the things that she does not know in low and soft voice which even others might not hear. Even in group discussion, the student rarely talked with the other students.

Furthermore, the statements given by almost all the teachers and the students indicated that Maldivian students **lack confidence** to speak in English period. Therefore, sometimes, the teachers have a pleasant small talk with those students to make them ready to speak in the English period. As stated by T2

*We may ask them to come personally and then have some chit chats with them so that they won't have that shyness.*

Even the following statements given by the students show that lack of confidence play a huge role in making them hesitant speakers in ESL classrooms.

*I'm not that good in language*

[Teacher 1]

*Feel shy because I'm not confident and I think I'm not fluent like the other students.*

[Student 2]

Clearly, comparing oneself with the other students indicates that low confidence level of the student affects their readiness to speak in classrooms. However, sadly, the classroom observation also revealed that the learners used to compare themselves with other students in class. In one of the speaking periods, when the teacher asked a student to speak, she replied

*"Miss, she is better than me, she can talk",* which means the student does not believe that she has the potential to speak in front of the high level students in the class. Similarly, students' reply to the question *"How good are you in language?"* proved that students are not certain of their level of capability in the subject, because even the high level student interviewed mentioned that she is an average student in the subject as an answer to the aforementioned question.

**Fear of Making Mistakes and Losing Face in front others** Clearly, **'fear of losing face in front of peers'** are also another common problem preventing speaking and is

prominent in the interview data. Talking about this issue, all the teachers commented:

*They are hesitant because some students might laugh that even happened*

[Teacher 1]

*Since they don't know the exact word to use they don't come up because their friends might laugh at them*

[Teacher 2]

*They want to avoid becoming embarrassed in front of their friends*

[Teacher 3]

*Some student would not speak at all...because they might be humiliated in the class*

*Some students are not aware that it's a mistake, but those students who are aware*

*They would laugh...so they feel embarrassed to talk more. So they would keep quiet.*

[Teacher 4]

In the same way, two of the students also completely agreed that sometimes they prefer to remain silent as their friends might poke fun at the way they speak. For example, one student said, *"I feel afraid that friends will make fun"*. In contrast to this, student 3 said, *"I just feel shy, not because my friends would laugh"*. Another student stated, *"Sometimes I fear that I might make mistakes and others might laugh"*. From this excerpt, it also unveiled that **'fear of making mistakes'** is also a factor that makes the learners to be reticent in the speaking period. In the same manner, to the question *"Why do you feel shy to speak?"* another student also replied, *"Because I makes lots of mistakes"* demonstrated that students definitely have fear or apprehension in them which make them to be reluctant speakers. The same problem is illustrated by the teachers' comments given below;

*The whole class started to laugh, so she wanted to come just right away to sit on her seat. So after that I don't think she will be.*

[Teacher 1]

*Since they don't know the exact word to use they don't come up because they fear that their friends might laugh at them.*

[Teacher 2]

*They might be afraid of making mistakes*

[Teacher 3]

*Some students would not speak at all, because they are afraid that they might make mistakes and be humiliated in the class"*

[Teacher 3]

Concerning the same issue, all the students agreed that it makes them hesitant to **speak in front of the whole class or public**. The students feel uncomfortable and nervous to speak in front of public or assembly. The expressions;

*I won't feel comfortable to present a speech in front of the class or in the assembly.*

[Student 1]

*I'm afraid to speak in front of others. I feel shy to present a speech in front of the class or in the assembly.*

[Student 2]

*Sometimes, I feel nervous to present it to the whole class.*

[Student 3]

Relating to this, the following excerpts from two of the teachers affirmed that students are unwilling speak in front of the whole, so instead facing all the students, the students would prefer to sit at their place and speak.

*Usually we make groups, because individually if we do speaking lessons a lot of hesitations are there*

[Teacher 1]

*Sometimes, they will sit and talk because they don't want to come in front of all the students.*

[Teacher 2]

The same problem was observed in the classrooms when the students were given chance to present what they have discussed in the groups. When it was the time to present, some students asked the teacher "Miss, can I stay here and present" which clearly indicates that the students fear to face the public.

### Lack of Interest in the Subject

Two questions were asked to identify the students' interest in the subject and their interest in speaking. The purpose of the two questions is to see whether the students' interest in the subject has any relation to their hesitation to speak in the ESL classroom. To the question, "How would you describe your interest in studying English", Student 1 and Student 3 replied, "I don't like it much", and "I'm not that interested in studying English" accordingly. These students also mentioned that they do not have much interest to take part in the speaking lesson. Interestingly, to the same question, student 2 stated, "I like it"; however, she also affirmed that she does not enjoy the speaking lesson though sometimes she take part in speaking lessons. In addition to the social-psychology factors, there are some factors like grammatical accuracy, phonological awareness and competency to use vocabulary which affects the willingness to speak in the ESL classroom.

### Fluency Factors

#### Low-Proficiency

One of the most common fluency factors identified by all the three teachers is 'Low-proficiency' level of the students. The findings indicated that students are not fluent enough to express the ideas that they have, which in turn influence them to use their mother tongue when speaking in ESL classrooms. It seems that most of the students cannot stick to the target language when speaking due to low proficiency; thus, the more fluent students dominate the lesson. In response to this, the following comments were revealed by the teachers,

*All the students might not know how to speak very fluent in English.*

[Teacher 1]

*Some children, even though, they have the idea, they don't know how to put that into words. They are having difficulties in presenting their thoughts into words.*

[Teacher 2]

*It's very difficult for them to like stick to only English in English period, as well, sometimes, when they talk, very often they used to switch to mother tongue, the Dhivehi language.*

[Teacher 3]

*They will use their native language and talk to one another and tell the other students who are in charge or more dominant.*

[Teacher 4]

Interestingly, the findings uncovered that though the weaker students remain as reticent speakers most of the time, it is not always the same; in contrast to this, sometimes, even the high level student follow the same manner in the speaking period. This view is evident from comment given by T3

*Even there are weaker students who are very talkative in their nature so they also speak though they are weak, but yes mostly the weaker students remain silent...there are some students who are good at studying but they don't want to speak in the class, but their reading and writing skills are notable.*

[Teacher 3]

This was something which was observed in the speaking period. During the group discussion time, one boy was keenly writing what they could talk about the topic while the other students also cooperated. The boy was very much into the task which made the researcher to believe that he would be the one presenting it to the whole class. However, to the surprise of the researcher, the boy handed over the notes he wrote to another student. As explained by the teacher, he was the top scorer of the class and he writes marvellous essays while the student who presented scores 'D' grade in exams.

Another idea recurred through the data set which is considered as a problem encountered by learners is '**poor pronunciation**'. Mostly, the students are unaware of the phonemes or sounds of the target language which cause them to mispronounce the words and those students who are aware of how to pronounce those words used to laugh at them. Therefore, learners tend to avoid attempting to speak. As pointed out by the teachers;

*Some student's pronunciation might not be good. In the last lesson also what happened was one student pronounced 'her' the wrong way, then the whole class started to laugh.*

[Teacher 1]

*The fluency factors, the vocabulary, the grammar, the pronunciation skill-all these things are making them shy to come forward to participate in the speaking lessons.*

[Teacher 2]

*Mostly, it's pronunciation that I have noticed. Students they tend to mispronounce lots of words and sounds, the phonemes they are not very familiar with.*

[Teacher 4]

Based on this issue students 1 specified, “I feel afraid to pronounce the words that I don’t know how to say” while student 2 also reported, “I experience pronunciation problem”, showing that pronunciation is common problem that the learners experience when speaking. This view was also surfaced during observation as one of the students pronounced the word ‘either’, wrong way and another student asked the teacher how to pronounce few words.

**Grammatical accuracy and lack of vocabulary** are also obstacles to spoken English. Usually, before expressing the thought, learners think about which tense and which words to use in their utterance and if they do not have sufficient vocabulary related the topic, it would be difficult for them to come forward and speak in front of others. As identified by the students;

*If don’t have enough vocabulary it’s difficult... if don’t have enough vocabulary it’s difficult.*

[Students 1]

*It will be difficult without knowing the words... sometimes I stop when unsure of the tense.*

[Student 2]

*Sometimes I don’t know what to say about the questions asked by the teacher...sometimes I make grammar mistakes.*

[Student 3]

The views suggested by the teachers also support this idea of the students as shown by following excerpts,

*The fluency factors, the vocabulary, the grammar, the pronunciation skill-all these things are making them shy to come forward to participate in the speaking lessons.*

[Teacher 2]

*They might not know the proper vocabulary or the word or the grammar.*

[Teacher 3]

From the observation, it was found that some students asked from teachers and friends about which words to use. Also, two students stopped in between speaking, as they were not sure of which word to use and when they could not think of the exact word, they used their mother tongue. This lack of vocabulary might also be the reason some students started to talk in Dhivehi instead using the target language.

### Cognitive Factors

All the students interviewed attributes the reason of being reticent to **lack of topic knowledge**. The students’ expressions indicates that they have difficulty in speaking about topics which they do not have much knowledge; rather, they prefer exciting topics about which they have sufficient background knowledge. For example,

*I don’t like topics like football and I don’t have much knowledge about it and I hate when the teacher takes topics like that...“I don’t know how to talk about the topic.*

[Student 1]

*It’s easy to speak when the teacher gives real life related topics like cultures which we are familiar with.*

[Student 3]

This is also supported by the data yielded from teachers’ interview;

*They will gather the information and then they will know what they have to talk about and I make sure that it is a topic familiar to the students, otherwise it’s going to be very difficult.*

[Teacher 1]

*They don’t know the exact word to use  
They might not know a lot of information about the topic*

[Teacher 3]

*If it is a new topic, then won’t know what to talk about- I mean they won’t have much ideas to present.*

[Teacher 4]

This was observed from the learners when they spoke, as one student asked the teacher to change the topic when he got the topic ‘**media**’. Likewise, another student asked, “Miss, can I talk about Facebook, I don’t know anything about media”. This is why T1 said that she always make sure the she select topics which are familiar to the students.

### 4. 2.2. Teacher Factors

The most common teacher factor noted by all the students is the ‘**lack of opportunity**’ given by the teacher to speak in the classroom and outside the classroom. The students’ reply to the question “How often do you have speaking lessons?” showed that teachers arrange few opportunities to speak in English period, as student 1 said, “rarely” and student 2 replied “sometimes”. However, student 3 answer, “once a week” as an answer to the same question. Shockingly, all the students mentioned that their teachers never open doors for them to speak outside the classroom. Likewise, all the teachers also accepted that they never give opportunities for the learners to practice speaking outside the classroom as the following quotes indicate;

*We’ve never practiced speaking outside the classroom, it is a very sad thing I must say.*

[Teacher 1]

*I never give opportunities to practice speaking outside the class*

[Teacher 3]

*We don’t have many activities outside the classroom. So students are not given that kind of opportunities by us, but we do tell them, we do encourage them to listen and to speak to others.*

[Teacher 4]

As an answer to the same question, T2 stated that she used to give opportunities for them to interview with their grandparents about different cultural issues; however, this does not mean that students would practice speaking the target to do the interview though they present it in English to the whole class. Regarding the same issue, the findings showed that the teachers never attempt to give equal importance to all the four skills; reading, writing, listening

and speaking. Instead, more focus is given on improving the reading and writing skill of the learners as depicted by quotes given below;

*We give a lot of writing, reading and not speaking. We couldn't give much focus to listening exercises and speaking lessons as well...to be honest very few for every week or every other week we try to have a speaking lessons, but somehow we couldn't, but at least twice a month we can say that we try speaking lessons.*

[Teacher 1]

*Once in a while we used to include- may be twice or thrice in a month, we use to give them some lessons that give importance for speaking...we used to include speaking tasks but it's not possible always to give speaking lessons, because examinations, our syllabus also focuses on reading and writing task, so every day we can't give the lessons only on speaking.*

[Teacher 2]

*I used to include reading skills, writing, listening and also speaking, but mostly I focus more on the reading and the writing skill.*

[Teacher 3]

*We don't incorporate all the four skills, we focus on reading, writing and listening, speaking we do conduct very little.*

[Teacher 4]

Another common view among all the students is that they would be able to speak out if they were given adequate time to get ready for the speaking activity. This means '**lack of time given for preparation**' is another speaking problem that student encounter. The excerpts given below properly reveals this idea,

*If I get enough time, then I can speak.*

[Student 1]

*Time is needed for practice around 20 minutes.*

[Student 2]

*May be I won't feel shy if I get enough time to get ready.*

[Student 3]

Two teachers holding the same opinion believed that giving more time assists students to present something productive though they usually give on the spot speaking activities. For instance, the two teachers said;

*If I give more time, if it's a double period if I give more time like fifteen minutes then they will be more ready because they have something to say then that's why they also feel more confident about it.*

[Teacher 3]

*Usually, it is on the spot tasks when explaining the lessons, asking questions like that it's open and if it's a group activity, then we do give time like fifteen minutes or thirteen minutes to talk one another and it's useful.*

[Teacher 4]

On the other hand, T1 does not believe that the amount of time given to the learners make them more prepared to speaking activities, as even after giving two to three weeks, students hesitate to do the presentations. As outlined by T1;

*don't think it depends on this preparation time because presentations-for group presentations that is also speaking... we usually give 2 weeks or 3 weeks to plan in the class as well as to get comfortable with the students or within the groups but even in that case not all the students go like in front of the class and present, I think it's not about the time that we give. It was observed that in one of the speaking periods, the teacher allocated ten minutes for the students to get ready for the presentation and during this time, the students discussed and noted down the points that they want to say. Nevertheless, in the other speaking period, the other teacher just gave the five topics; 'media', 'internet', 'fashion', 'sports' and 'travel and tourism' and asked the students to speak for at least three to five minutes without allocating preparation time, which made the learners to struggle in coming up with ideas related to the given topics.*

The data yielded also demonstrated that '**negative teacher traits**' also influence the learners to remain as reticent speakers. As stated by the students, the strict attitude of the teacher and the correction style followed by the teachers sometimes make them to stay silent next time in fear. As stated by the three students,

*"Teacher is very strict...sometimes it makes me stay silent in fear",*

[Teacher 1]

*"Sometimes point out names and sometime indirectly tell the mistakes without mentioning our names...we won't try next time if the teacher is very strict".*

[Student 3]

However, relating to the same problem, the student1 declared,

*"Sometimes, the teacher tell it indirectly to the whole class or sometimes give personal feedback",*

[Student 1]

This shows that teachers do not always correct the mistakes made by the students on the spot; rather, they attempt to reduce the anxiety level of the students by giving indirect feedback. Regarding this issue, T2 holds the same view, as she believes that if the students are corrected on the spot, they would hesitate the second time they attempt to speak. For instance, she detailed;

*We don't correct them on the spot because that may hinder them to come forward again in such activities... I used to say the corrections of general mistakes that they make so that the children who make those mistakes will understand...So it won't hurt them otherwise, they will feel shy the next time when they forward to give a speech or present a speaking task.*

When the speaking lessons were observed, the teachers never called students' name when correcting the mistakes they made. The teacher corrected the general mistakes made by the students without calling their name. Nevertheless,

teachers sometimes **call on names** to make the students to speak in the English period. As mentioned by T2

*We have to just push them in order to speak, call their names and then ask questions and make them talk.*

[Teacher 2]

*Sometimes if have a group work, we always request the student who doesn't speak must come out and speak.*

[Teacher 4]

This indicates that teacher do not call the names of the students to ridicule them, but this method is followed to encourage the students to speak in classroom.

#### 4.3. Research Question 2

The second research question is focused on identifying the strategies that Maldivian learners use to cope with speaking problems that they encounter in the speaking period. The findings showed that the students employ various strategies to cope with speaking problems.

**Seeking help** from both teachers and friends is one of the common methods pointed out by all the students. This method is used to clarify their doubts or when they do not know what to say about the topic or the questions asked by the teacher. As stated by the three participants;

*Sometimes I ask from my friends*

[Student 1]

*I ask from the teacher...I take help from students when I don't know the answers.*

[Student 2]

*Ask the teacher about the doubts...May be tell a friend about it and ask about their opinion about it.*

[Student 3]

The second method that most of the students use to deal with the speaking problem is **planning and practicing** what to tell about the given topic in advance. In order to practice, they used to write down the points and silently rehearse what to say about the topic as shown by the comments given students;

*I write it and read...hen I don't know the words, sometimes I think about it before I say it...often before I say the sentence, I practice it.*

[Student 1]

*Most of the time silently rehearse the ideas.*

[Student 2]

*After noting down the points, till it's our turn we use used to rehearse*

[Student 3]

The students also agreed that often use their **mother tongue** when they are unable to use exact vocabulary relate to the given topic. As mentioned by the three participants;

*I use Dhivehi words also.*

[Student 1]

*When I don't know the words to use I switch to mother tongue.*

[Student 2]

*Switch to mother tongue*

[Student 3]

The interview data generated illustrated that students often follow the **avoidance strategy** by ignoring the questions asked by the teacher, by keeping silent and by giving a smile to the teacher. The students pointed out;

*Ignore the question and listen to others*

[Student 1]

*I listen to friends and get ideas about what to say and keep silent*

[Student 2]

*I ignore the question and listen to others...give a smile and keep silent*

[Student 3]

The observation also showed that the students employ the above-mentioned methods to deal with the speaking problems that they encounter. In the first lesson observed, out of the five students, three students used their mother tongue. Additionally, some students asked the teacher to give ideas related to the topic. One student also followed avoidance strategy by telling the teacher to select another student instead of her. Even the teacher asked various questions to one of the students to make her speak, but she gave a smile and did not respond to the teacher. It seemed that few students never looked at the teacher in order to avoid speaking. Since in this lesson, the teacher did not give any time for the students to discuss; therefore, most of the other strategies were not identified from this lesson.

In the second lesson, various coping strategies used by the students were displayed. After the discussion period, when it was time to present, some students refused to present and gave the opportunity to other students. During the discussion time, the students called the teacher several times and asked for ideas and sought help from the teacher. While presenting what they have discussed, one student was having problem on how to pronounce the word 'elegant' and she asked it from the teacher. All of the students in the groups wrote down the points related to the topic and read it to the class and while presenting, and some students used their mother tongue when they were unsure of the words to use.

#### 4.4. Research Question 3

Research question three is targeted to find out the strategies that teachers adopt to alleviate the reticent behavior of the students. The results showed that teachers encourage speaking in the classroom by employing different strategies.

#### Teaching Methods/Communicative Language Teaching

According the data generated, two of the teachers noted that they prefer to play the role of a facilitator allowing the students to participate in meaningful negotiations. In other words, teachers use student-centered teaching approach to motivate the learners to speak in the classroom. The following statements from the two teachers ascertained that

students were given the opportunity to play the main role in the lesson.

*Now, mostly we are not following the teacher-centered method because we are giving all the importance to the students, we are just the facilitator or the guides. We are just helping them to improve or to correct only. Most of the part-the children are taking most of the part in the activities of the classroom. We are just guiding them.*

[Teacher 2]

*Mostly, the students are given the chance to play main role in the lesson, so I can say that more than traditional methods, we follow student centered methods*

[Teacher 3]

On the contrary, T4 explained that mostly she uses the traditional method in the English period even though she encourages speaking through discussions.

*Usually, it's the traditional method but we give chance to speak through discussions.*

[Teacher 4]

Based on this, T1 confirmed that she does not stick to only one method of teaching; as an alternative, she used to follow both traditional and communicative method of teaching though she is not well acquainted with the communicative language teaching method.

*I think even today we practice both communicative and traditional methods in an English Language Classroom. I think by knowing or not knowing, we have been using the communicative method.*

The data illustrated that teachers need to guide the students in a friendly manner and rather than just giving a speaking task, teachers need to give them lots of information about topic. Furthermore, when shy student makes an attempt to speak, teachers have to encourage the student by reinforcing and giving compliments. The following quotes from teacher clearly show this;

*To start the theme we don't conduct a speaking lesson but before that a lot of explanations will be given.*

[Teacher 1]

*If a student who makes mistakes and then if comes up and speak, then we reinforce that encourage the student, give compliments.*

[Teacher 4]

On the whole, based on teaching methods and role of the teacher, the observation showed that teachers use both traditional and students-centered approaches in the classroom. Also they encourage the students to speak in the classroom by following different techniques. For example, the teachers used to activate the prior knowledge of the learners by giving various ideas related to the topic so that it would be easier for the learners to speak about the topic. Additionally, in one of the lessons, the teacher asked various 'yes' or 'no' questions to a student in order to make her speak about the topic. However, one mistake made by the teacher was noticed as she interrupted in between when a

student was presenting what they discussed about the given topic.

### Task type

The interviews confirmed that teachers frequently give role plays, debates and group activities to improve the speaking skill of the students. As set forth by all the teachers, the students enjoy working together and group work is really helpful when most of the students are unfamiliar with the topic.

*If they are not familiar with the topic-like what I said before, they will do it in groups.*

[Teacher 1]

*For the children those who are reluctant to speak, the group activities will help them a lot so that they will get the ideas from other group members.*

[Teacher 2]

*I used to give them role plays or debates pair work, in which both the students have to talk...I used to give role plays a lot and then when I begin even if it is a writing or reading passage, I used to ask brainstorming questions.*

[Teacher 3]

*We give them group tasks and let them share their ideas. They work together and enjoy. So the students feel comfortable to talk.*

[Teacher 3]

The observation showed that in contrast to what T2 mentioned, in the speaking period, time was not given for group discussion and the students had to talk individually.

Regarding task type, T2 also expressed that giving project works as presentation is also a method she follows to make the student to speak in the classroom.

*Some projects or something like that to interview their the local people, or the people at home to ask about the stories traditional stories like 'Rannamaari', all those things and all we used to inculcate and then get the feedback from their parents and grandparents also. After, clarifying, they come and present at random, so we used to give them opportunities for that also.*

### Role of the topic

Another method used by the teachers to enhance speaking skill is selecting topics that are related to the real life of the students. Additionally, teacher select topics thematically so that students would get ideas related to different kinds of topics. As presented by the teachers, when selecting the topics, they consider the interest of both boys and girls as the thinking of them varies a lot.

*We have thematic lessons-theme right- we conduct our lessons based on themes...they will gather the information and then they will know what they have to talk about and I make sure that it is a topic familiar to the students, otherwise it's going to be very difficult.*

[Teacher 1]

*I used select the topics related to the common problems or common activities going on those day. For example, when we have World Cup or Olympics, we used to give activities related to it.*

[Teacher 2]

*I used to take topics that are related to them. They are like teenager. What could be their interest? Interesting topics. Like some girls might like 'fashion'. They will be very much into fashion or celebrities. Boys might be very much into sports. Something like that they will be interested in like 'social media', so these kinds of things that they are interested in. Also, a topic that they have lots of information, otherwise, they will not be able to speak.*

[Teacher 3]

*When we take-we have like themes for each week and if it's a theme that these students are very familiar, then I notice their speaking is a bit more, conversations are a bit more. They have more to say.*

[Teacher 4]

Furthermore, teachers believe that when students are familiar with the topic, they are capable to speak more about the topic. The class observations also proved this view, as in the first lesson, some students asked the teacher the topic that they got, because they were not familiar with the topic. They straight away said to the teacher that they do not have much ideas related to the topic 'social media'. Further, few students asked the teacher to give ideas related to the topic so that that could at least say something related to the topic. In contrast, those students who had ideas related topics like 'sports' and 'Facebook' presented interesting points related to the topics.

### Reducing Anxiety

As emphasized by all the teachers, it is very important to reduce the anxiety of the learners. This may be the reason why T1 stated, "I never give individual speaking to any student yet". Similarly, the other teachers also highlighted that they always mingle the most talkative students with the least talkative students as it will help them to talk about the different ideas that they have. Also, it seems that teachers keep familiar students in the same group so that it would be easier for the learners to express their views. The following views from teachers reveal this;

*We use to give group works, and also that the other children in the group, they can help in language speaking task and all.*

[Teacher 2]

*If it's a group work means, everybody will be working so they will not be taking much time, Everybody's ideas will be included and I used to mingle the talkative ones with the silent learners so that they will have ideas and get help from their friends.*

[Teacher 3]

*I try to make groups and when-when making groups I try to put students who are familiar with each other based on their competence level.*

[Teacher 4]

The views of the teachers clarified that it is essential to keep a friendly atmosphere by maintaining a good rapport with the students in order to encourage them to speak in the classroom. The teachers used to build the trust between the teacher and students by talking them privately and having chit chats with them. This helped out in developing the confidence of the learners as well as revealed by the excerpts below;

*If it is very bad fluency, then, sometimes speak to the students privately and explain this is how you have to pronounce it*

[Teacher 1]

*We try to create the rapport with the students so that once the rapport is being made normally we have seen that the children-getting confidence so that they can speak the next time.*

[Teacher 2]

*After giving the group tasks, I always go and talk to them in English. If they are like freezing or if they are not able to speak I give them idea...also, I try to build trust between the teacher and the students and between students as well.*

[Teacher 4]

Moreover, the interview data also showed that teachers try to follow a friendly method during the error correction time. As described by the teachers, they do not correct the errors made by the students on the spot; rather, they indirectly give feedback about the general mistakes made by the students so that it will not embarrass them in front of others.

*If a student makes a mistake I don't point them in front of others but to the whole class I say this is how you pronounce it or write it tell pronounce, so the students who know it will pronounce it correctly.*

[Teacher 1]

*We don't correct them on the spot because that may hinder them to come forward again in such activities. After completing the task in general in the class I used to say the corrections of general mistakes that they make.*

[Teacher 2]

*If while they are speaking if they make a mistake, fluency or grammar mistake at the time they make the mistake, I used to correct them...sometimes if we give direct feedback in front of all the students, they might again these students might hesitate later on, But sometimes, if it's is very important, then directly I used give but otherwise, I give indirect feedback to the students.*

[Teacher 3]

*If a student makes a mistake, I obviously don't correct them in front of all the students on the spot. I just ignore that mistake and I just make mental note and once the class is finished I just bring the student aside. Some excuse may be to carry the books and then I have conversation with the student and tell this is how you pronounce this word.*

[Teacher 4]

The observation showed that teacher gave feedback to the students at the end of the lesson though once on the spot correction was used by one of the teachers.

**4.5. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the three research questions were addressed by analyzing the data gathered through interviews and observations. In summary, various learner factors, such as social-psychology factors, fluency factors, and cognitive factors make the learners to be reticent in ESL classrooms. Furthermore, teacher factors like the role and style of the teachers also leads the student to remain as reticent speaker. Therefore, students employ several approaches like seeking help, planning and practicing, using mother tongue and following avoidance strategy to deal with the speaking problems they encounter in speaking periods. Likewise, teachers also attempt to alleviate the problems of reticence by following different techniques like altering the teaching methods, selecting topics that are interesting to the learners, reducing anxiety of the leaners, maintaining a friendly classroom atmosphere and giving different kinds of tasks in the classroom. A detailed discussion of the findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

**5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

**5.1. INTRODUCTION**

This final chapter begins with a summary of main findings related to the research questions. Then, discussion of the key findings will be presented in relation to the literature. Following this, it will offer various implications to the secondary teachers of Maldives on how to improve the speaking skill of the leaners. Next, a part which focuses on explaining the limitation of the study will also be included in this chapter. The end of this chapter focuses on presenting directions for further research.

**5.2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

The findings of the all the three research questions are presented in Figure 1 given below. It shows the perceptions of teachers and students as to the learner factors and teacher factors that cause the students to be reticent in a Maldivian ESL classroom. Further, it also displays the strategies that students follow to cope with speaking problems that they encounter and the techniques that teacher use to alleviate the speaking problems that students encounter in ESL classrooms. Figure 1 is explained briefly under the section of ‘discussion’.

Research Question 1			Research Question 2	Research Question 3
<b>Factors contributing to Reticence of Speaking in ESL Classrooms</b>			Strategies Maldivian Learners Use to Cope with Speaking Anxiety	Strategies do Maldivian Teachers to Effectively Cope with Student’s Reticent Behaviour of speaking
<b>Learner Factors</b>		<b>Teacher Factors</b>	-Seeking help -Planning and practicing -Using mother tongue -Avoidance	-Friendly atmosphere -Reducing Anxiety -Role and style of the teacher -Role of the topic -Teaching Methods/Communicative Language Teaching
<i>Social Psychological Factors</i>	<i>Fluency Factors</i>	<i>Cognitive Factors</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	
<b>Shyness/nervousness</b> <b>Personality</b> <b>Lack of confidence</b> <b>Losing face in front of others</b> <b>Fear of making mistakes</b> <b>Speaking in front of the whole class</b> <b>Lack of interest in the subject</b>	Low proficiency Low proficiency Poor pronunciation Lack of Vocabulary Grammatical accuracy	Lack of topic knowledge	Friendly atmosphere Reducing Anxiety Role and style of the teacher Role of the topic Teaching Methods/Communicative Language Teaching Task type	

**Figure 5.1: Summary of the findings. Learner factors that contribute reticence of speaking is given in red colour and teacher factors that cause reticence in classroom is given in green colour. The next two columns show coping strategies used by the learners and teachers to overcome the problem.**

**5.3. DISCUSSION**

The descriptions of the three students’ and four teachers’ perspectives on possible factors contributing the reticence in speaking in ESL classrooms show that learner factors, such as social psychological factors, fluency factors and cognitive factors contribute the students to be reticent. Similarly, teacher factors like the strategies used by the teachers directed the students to behave in the same manner.

**5.3.1. SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS**

As in Figure 5, seven social psychological factors emerged from the findings that led the students to choose to be reticent. Out of the seven factors, the most common reason mentioned by the participants is the shyness or nervousness of the learners.



### Shyness/Nervousness

This theme emerged as the most common factor that caused the students to be reticent in the speaking periods. Sadly, this factor caused some of the students to remain silent without volunteering to speak and also it made few students to come back to their seats even after attempting to speak in the class. This finding is relevant to an empirical study examined by O'Connor, Cappella, McCormick, and McClowry (2014) who asserted that volunteering style of the shy learners are less compared to the outgoing students. This means shy students are more tempted to stay away from involving in social interaction with their peers. The findings of this study also showed that the shy students themselves believe that they feel nervous to disclose their feelings to their peers in conversations. This belief is proven by Condon and Ruth-Sahd (2013) stating that the nervousness of the shy learners make them slow to share their thoughts and feelings spontaneously, as they do not feel comfortable to involve in open conversations. Therefore, they prefer to stay at sidelines and withdraw themselves from the spontaneous talks that happens in the classroom. This suggests that ESL teachers need to employ various techniques to make the shy learners to speak, instead of letting them to stay at the corner of the class throughout their whole educational life.

### Personality and Lack of Confidence

According to the findings of the study, personality style of the students also play a role in making the students to be reticent. As mentioned by the teachers, though some students are top achievers of English, their natural nature makes them to be silent, leading the other talkative students to have control over the speaking lesson. The study of Hamouda (2013) also revealed that the silent nature of the introverted students cause them to avoid taking part in communicative activities. Similarly, Juhana (2012) also stated that natural nature of the learners make the learners shy, which in turn cause them to remain as silent learners. Interestingly, Hashemi et al., (2013) stressed that dominating style of the extroverted learners lessens the opportunity that the introverted learners get in the classroom. Consequently, teachers have to equal the number of opportunities that they give to all the students in the class. It is obvious that personality of the students is directly related to the confidence of the students.

In this study, lack of confidence is another top reticent factor that emerged from this study, as the students participated in this research believe that their peers are more fluent than them in speaking. As a result, they tend to request to the teachers to select the most proficient students to the speaking activity, withdrawing themselves from facing the others in the class.

This showed that these learners lack the affective strategies, such as motivation and self-confidence which help to perform remarkably as stated by Krashen in 1982. It was also evident from the teachers' comments that these students wanted to avoid the criticism that they would get from other students in the class. In other words, these students lack faith in themselves which leads them to avoid taking part in challenging oral tasks. This finding is similar to the empirical study conducted by Ebata (2008) which stated that learners' lack of belief about their own capability acts as an obstacle that impedes themselves from achieving the tasks that are targeted to attain speaking skill. Juhana (2012)

also affirmed that lack of confidence arise when students start to believe that their weak oral fluency would not make others to comprehend what they express. Therefore, to avoid this problem, as expressed by the teachers in this study, they attempt to build the confidence of the learners by having small conversation with the students. The scholarly studies showed that successful experiences and satisfaction from good relationships assist to develop the self-confidence of the learners, which in turn acts as a drive in achieving the target language and experiencing real communication (Ebata, 2008 & Xiaolu, 2006). This means teachers need to be aware of the theories and practical experiences that help to develop the self-confidence of the learners.

### Fear of Making Mistakes and Losing Face in front Others

One of the noteworthy findings of this study is that students hesitate to speak to avoid getting embarrassed in front of their peers. The students feel that they might be humiliated, as they sometimes experience this problem in the classroom. For instance, one of the teachers said that the students who are aware of the mistakes made by others tend to laugh at them which demotivates them. This finding is supported by many empirical studies. Riasati (2014) contends that students have an apprehension that their speaking skill might be negatively evaluated by their peers and teacher while they are speaking. Regarding this, Jamshidnejad's (2010) research revealed that most of the students' concern about making mistakes cause them to lose face in front of others. However, if the students feel that they are able to communicate accurately without making mistakes, then they are more willing speak. In the same manner, few other researchers asserted that students are afraid to speak in language classroom, as they feel that their classmates might make fun of them and receive negative comments from their friends when they make mistakes. Therefore, they want to avoid looking foolish in front in front of others. (Juhana, 2012, Zhipping & Paramasivam, 2013; Hamouda, 2013, Baktash & Chalak, 2015). Interestingly, one of the students mentioned that she is not concerned of how her friends might perceive her, but she is just afraid of committing mistakes of content or grammar. This means the student want be perfect and does not believe that making mistake is part of learning process. Based on this, Juhana (2012) reported that students' expectation to be perfect in speaking makes them anxious and afraid of speaking in the classroom. This is why teachers need to convince the students that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process.

When the students were asked how much they are ready to speak in front of the public, the three students mentioned that they are afraid to speak in front of the public because they do not get opportunities to experience it. Yee and Abidin (2014) stated that students' lack of motivation and fear of speaking in a public unknown to them makes them anxious. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage the learners to speak in front of public.

### Lack of Interest in the Subject

Obviously, lack of interest in the subject plays major role in motivating the learners to speak in the language classroom. The study of Abebe et al., (2015) revealed that when the student are uninterested in the subject, they are reluctant to speak in the language classroom. The same finding is confirmed in this study as two of the three students mentioned that they do not like the subject and they hate to

take part in speaking lesson. According to the findings, one of the teachers said that she mostly stick to the traditional method of teaching, which might be the reason why students hate the subject, because when the teacher relies on drilling the lesson, the student will not be able to comprehend how the study of the subject will be useful for them in later life. Teachers need to promote active learning to drive the students to learn the language and to maintain their interest in the subject (Hue, 2010).

#### 5.4. FLUENCY FACTORS

##### Low Proficiency

Unexpectedly, the result showed that though low proficiency students mostly hesitated to participate in the speaking lessons, few high proficiency students also refused to take part in speaking activities. Similarly, a low proficiency student willingly presented what was discussed in their group. This finding is in congruent with the study conducted by Soo and Goh (2013) who debated that high proficiency level students are also unwilling to participate in speaking activities. With respect to this, Chang (2011) contended that the high proficiency students refuse to speak in order to avoid showing off their capability to others. Relating to low proficiency students, the past research of Abebe, et al., (2015) showed that students with poor level of English prefer to be silent in speaking period, which is similar to the findings of this study as most of the students who refused to speak were low proficiency learners. This means teachers need to be alert in making both high proficiency and low proficiency students ready to speak in the language classroom.

##### Poor Pronunciation

In line with previous research, poor pronunciation is found to be another speaking problem encountered by Maldivian students. As mentioned by the teachers, students' lack of awareness about the phonemes or sounds of the language make them to mispronounce some words like 'either'. Hamouda's (2005) study is in conformity with this finding, as it also found out that the inaccurate pronunciation of the learners makes them afraid to speak in front of the fluent students. Undoubtedly, pronunciation has a great effect on interaction, because mispronouncing the words will make it difficult for the listener to understand the message given by the speaker. This issue of pronunciation is also noted by the three students interviewed. As stated by Liu (2005), the sounds of language are different in different parts of the world; hence, the students find it difficult to understand it and apply it in their speaking. As a result, students want to avoid this obstacle by remaining silent in the classroom. However, the sound system of Dhivehi Language is quite close to the sound system of English; thus, a little effort from the teachers would be helpful enough for the students to improve their pronunciation and speaking skill.

##### Grammatical Accuracy and Lack of Vocabulary

Grammatical accuracy is another source of reticence factor revealed from this study. According to the students, when speaking, they are often concerned about which tense to use in different situations. Additionally, their insufficient vocabulary based on different topics also makes it difficult speak fluently. In relation to this, previous scholars also found out that grammatical accuracy and inadequate vocabulary make the students feel anxious and keep quiet in

the classroom (Liu, 2005). Almost all the participants agreed that lack of vocabulary is an obstacle for verbal communication. The students mentioned the exact words do not come to their mind at the time of speaking. Lightbown and Spada, (2006) affirmed that only a limited number of information will be processed by the learner at on time. This may be the reason why the learners cannot think of the words related to the topic at the time of speaking. Similarly, as mentioned by Krashen (1982) when the learners stop to ensure the accurate grammar, the learnt grammatical knowledge acts as an 'editor' and 'monitor'; however, it is obvious that in terms speaking, the speaker cannot spend much time in thinking about whether they need to use present tense or past tense, as speaking is a continuous process and the flow of the presentation will not be there if the speaker spends too much time to think about grammar and the word to use (Liu, 2005).

#### 5.5. COGNITIVE FACTOR

Related to previous research, the findings of this study also showed that students are not interested in speaking about topics that are boring to them. Further, they also pointed out that *unfamiliarity with the topic* makes it difficult for them to speak. This is why the interviewed teachers attempt to select topics that are interesting to boys and girls. With respect to this, Liu and Jackson (2009) asserted that students' interest in the topic plays a major role in making them to play an active role in the lesson. Learners appear to be more prepared to speak about certain topics about which they have enough topic knowledge, because they can use appropriate register related to the topic confidently when speaking. As pointed out by Riasati (2014), the learners' lack of interest and lack of topic knowledge influence their willingness to speak contributing them to remain silent in the speaking period. This means in order to increase students' degree of willingness to speak, it is essential to consider topics about which learners have ample knowledge.

#### 5.6. TEACHER FACTORS

##### Lack of opportunity

According to the findings, students do not get enough opportunities to speak in the classroom as their teachers focus more on improving the reading, writing, and listening skill of the students. Shockingly, teachers never give opportunities to the students to practice speaking outside the classroom. This is mainly because speaking is not tested in the IGCSE exam in Maldives. In regard to this, Hamouda (2014) stated that limited exposure to the target language acts as an obstacle in developing the communicative competence of the students. As it is seen from the teachers' comments, as the curriculum do not give central place in improving the communicative command of the students, they give limited opportunities to the student to negotiate with each other. In relation to this, Hosni (2014) emphasized that having chances to take part in authentic communicative activities like visiting different place where they can use English will help the them to use the target language authentically in different situations. This confirms Swain's claim that just giving comprehensible input would be of no use if the learners do not get opportunities to practice speaking in different contexts. Consequently, the curriculum developers and teachers should focus on giving maximum opportunities for the learners to practice speaking inside and outside the classroom.

### Lack of time given for preparation

The findings also unveiled that the speaking period is more productive when students get enough time to get ready for the speaking activity. The students also agreed that though they are shy, they can speak if they get enough time to plan before speaking. Related to this, Liu (2007) stated that lack of time given for preparation affects learners' anxiety level making them feel nervous in standing in front of the class to speak.

### Negative teacher traits

According to the comments given by the some students, the authoritarian style and the correction technique followed by the teachers, sometimes stops them from taking part in speaking lesson. Hosni (2014) confirms this finding stating that teachers' attitude and style has a dramatic influence on learners' willingness to speak in the classroom. The data showed that teacher mostly follow indirect method to give feedback to the students though they sometimes give on the spot feedback depending on the type mistake made by the students. Interestingly, one of the students said that the constructive feedback given by the teacher is really helpful in avoiding mistakes made in speaking. This means the student value the correction method followed by the teacher. Based on this, Liu (2005) mentioned that the friendly correction style followed by the teachers lead students to develop the communicative skill of the students. On the contrary, the authoritative style of the teachers tend to demotivate the students from voicing their opinions in the classroom (Jamshidnejad, 2010). The findings also showed that some teachers force the students to speak in the classroom not to let them stay silent in the classroom. However, based on this method, Schultz (2013) confirmed that rather than forcing the introverts to speak in the classroom, teachers need to inquire the reasons why they stay silent in the classroom and encourage them to speak by following positive techniques. The points discussed here showed that teachers need to be careful when selecting students to speak and when giving feedback to the learners.

### 5.7. STRATEGIES USED BY THE LEARNERS TO COPE WITH THE PROBLEM

The views of the three students indicated that they often seek help from their friends and teachers when they are unsure of what to say about the topic. Sometimes, they used to ask their friends whether they are on the right track or not. In compliance with this, the past researches also showed that students' lack of topic knowledge leads them to get assistance from their friends before sharing their opinions with the whole class, as this friendly interaction with each other aids in avoiding the embarrassment (Hamouda, 2013, Baktash & Chalak, 2015). Hamouda (2013) further stated that it is consequential for teachers to help the students in formulating their thoughts in order to increase their confidence in speaking.

As identified in the previous researches, this research's findings also illustrates that students usually write down their thoughts and rehearse it before sharing it with others in the class. Hamouda (2013) and Baktash and Chalak (2015) enunciated that students silently rehearse their thought in their mind and even write a summary of everything thing that they want to present to the class. This is because they are aware that they will not be able to speak spontaneously and fluently due to their low proficiency.

Another common coping strategy found out in this study is that students stick to their mother tongue in different situations when they lack the content knowledge and vocabulary to express their thoughts. This leads the present author to concur with Tuan and Mai's (2015) argument that lack of vocabulary skill and topic knowledge leads the students to use their mother in the L2 classrooms, because they are sure that it will help them to express their thoughts more effectively though it does not assist to develop communicative competence skill.

The findings also showed that keeping silent, ignoring the question and giving a smile to the teacher are three avoidance strategies followed by the participants of this study. As mentioned by the students when they are unsure of the exact words and ideas related to the topic, they prefer to remain silent. This finding is in line with another study carried out by Zhipping and Paramasivam (2013) who reported that the inadequate knowledge of the topic leads the reluctant speakers to remain silent and listen to the thoughts presented by their friends. Zhipping and Paramasivam (2013) further stated that students used to give a smile to their teachers to hide their shyness and ignore the questions asked by the teacher to get away from the unpleasant situation. Hence, teachers need to be aware of these various strategies by the learners to cope with the problem of reticence.

### 5.8. STRATEGIES USED BY THE TEACHERS TO ALLEVIATE THE PROBLEM

#### Teaching Methods/Communicative Language Teaching

The findings confirmed that most of the teachers follow the student-centered teaching approach where they give the main role of the lesson to the students. In other words, teachers attempt to establish an atmosphere where students take the responsibility of learning. This will help to promote autonomous learning which equips the students with skills needed for communication (Riasati, 2014). Jia (2013) is also in line with this view stating that encouraging students to construct meaning by taking responsibility of their own learning will help to promote linguistic interaction with their peers. The findings also revealed that the teachers use CLT method by giving chance to the learners to use language in different contexts. Li and Liu (2011) stated that instead of focusing on giving the knowledge about grammatical features, it will be beneficial to make them use language in meaningful contexts, because it will develop the communicative competence of the learners. However, sadly, as the participants mentioned, still some of the Maldivian teachers are not much aware of the CLT method of teaching and follow the old traditional method, taking control of the lesson and giving less time for the students to talk. In relation to this, Morozova (2013) affirmed that teacher-learner interaction and learner-learner interaction is necessary in the language classroom context, as this exposure will make the learners use language every now and then. Therefore, this practice will lead the students to come out of their shells and open their mouth in the language classrooms. For this reason, teachers have to work their level best to follow the modern methods of teaching in the ESL classrooms.

The findings showed that teachers encourage the students by reinforcing and giving compliments to the attempts that they make to speak out in the classroom. Furthermore,

rather than giving speaking tasks to a topic which they do not have enough information, the teachers used to activate learners' prior knowledge and give information related to the topic to help them in responding to the speaking task. Even the study showed teachers have small talks with the students though one participant said that the teacher is strict. In this regard, Brophy (1989) explained that talking privately to the students and encouraging their contributions will help to bring withdrawn students to the speaking task. Hence, teachers have to play a great role in encouraging the learners to speak out in ESL classroom.

### Task type

It was evident that all the students enjoy taking part in different activities; namely, role plays, debates and group works. As outlined by the teachers, group works are really useful when some students do not have ideas related to the topic. Kurihara's (2006) study confirmed that when students work in groups, the inhibited learners will also feel it easier to express their views and at least one of the members in the group will be able to come up with ideas related to the topic. Riasati (2014) in this regard, indicated that rather than working individually, students feel more comfortable to exchange ideas in groups as their friend's proficiency level will almost be similar. Likewise, the observations of this study also showed that the participants in this study are more willing to speak in small groups as they had the opportunity to get help from each other. As some of the teachers of this study pointed out, they used to give short talks and presentations as speaking tasks; however, students feel hesitant to speak even though they give time to prepare. In relation to giving short presentations, Kurihara (2006) stated short presentations induce anxiety as it makes the classroom more formal to the learners. In general, teachers have to vary the type of speaking activities that they give instead focusing only on individual tasks.

### Role of the topic

As the findings revealed, Maldivian teachers consider various things when selecting topics, namely, interest of the students, age level of the students and learners' familiarity with the topic. Hence, topics are selected thematically depending on the interest of the boys and girls. Riasati (2014) ascertained that familiarity with the topic and the curiosity in the topic plays a vital role in arousing learners' willingness to speak in the classroom. This means topics related to learners' real life stirs their motivation and desire to participate actively in the lesson.

### Reducing Anxiety

The findings showed various strategies that teachers use to reduce the anxiety of the student in the speaking period. For instance, the most talkative ones and less talkative ones are mixed when grouping the students. Similarly, the familiar students are also kept in the same group to minimize their apprehension in sharing their ideas. With regard to this, Jia (2013) admitted that mixing different level of students helps to engender willingness of all the students to engage in the task boosting the confidence of the learners who have language anxiety problem. Thus, it leads to conclude that creating a non-threatening learning environment would be helpful to increase the willingness of the reticent learners to speak in the classroom.

The study found that maintaining a friendly atmosphere is another important thing that teachers consider in order to make the reticent to speak in English speaking period. The teachers build a rapport with the students and improve their confidence to speak out. With respect to this, Febriyanti (2015) enunciated that it is important to build a rapport and have a harmonious relationship between the teacher and the students, because it will make the shy and silent learners feel free to speak without any stress and fear. Similarly, Latha (2012) also confirmed that creating a friendly atmosphere and friendly relation with the students strengthens the bond between the teacher and the students. This helps to shed their shyness, enabling them to feel free of pressure when expressing their opinions in the classrooms. The researchers, Liu and Jackson (2009) recommended that giving maximum opportunity to the reticent speakers to speak in a positive learning environment will gradually reduce the tension of the students, which in turn will make them ready to speak out in the classroom. On the whole, it could be said that seeing the concern of teachers for the students will develop their confidence to face others.

### 5.9. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In light of the analysis and discussion presented above, it could be said that teachers who organize speaking tasks and evaluate the performance of the students should consider various factors in order to minimize the reticent behavior of the students. Firstly, teachers need to consider how they deal with the students, because the strict manner and error-correction techniques used by teachers seemed to have a great impact on students which contribute them to remain reticent in the classroom. Therefore, teachers need to incorporate various friendly manners when correcting the errors made by the students, minimize the opportunities that students get to compare themselves with their friends, stop pressuring or forcing the learners to speak and avoid humiliating students in front of others (Riasati, 2011). Lightbown and Spada (1999) suggested teachers to consider errors as a natural part of the learning process. Hence it is advisable to avoid correcting errors on the spot as it will discourage the students, and reduce the confidence of the student who attempt to speak in the classrooms. This means though teachers are expected to play a doctor like role in diagnosing the errors made by the students, it will be helpful if it is done indirectly without hurting the feelings of the students which is the method used by most of the teachers interviewed in this study.

Secondly, the topics selected and activities planned can also cause pressure and distress on students. The topics and activities should be interesting and appropriate to the age level of the students in order to make them speak out. To do this, teachers can have a discussion or pose questions to identify the areas in which students are interested in (Riasati, 2011). Learners' curiosity to speak can also be raised by giving games as speaking tasks. For example, games like picture describing and guessing through wh-questions can be expanded into speaking tasks which will be less threatening to reticent students (Ansari, 2015).

Furthermore, it is necessary to conduct the activities in a way that reduce the anxiety of the students. For instance, rather than giving individual speaking tasks, small group discussions which encourage cooperation among peers in the group would be beneficial for the students. However, as

mentioned by Riasati (2014), when making groups for group discussions like role plays and debates, teachers should focus on keeping the students in homogeneous groups to increase more space for contribution and involvement of anxious learners.

Creating a non-threatening environment is another factor that should be taken into account in speaking lessons, because students might hesitate to speak due to their fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation as shown by the result of this study. Regarding creating a relaxing and supportive environment, Cutrone (2009) recommended teachers to be patient with reticent students by making them feel more relaxed and assuring them of their capability instead of showing annoyance to their reluctance. In other words, learners should see the classroom as an enjoyable and supportive environment where they can participate in communicative activities without any fear or stress.

Moreover, providing ample opportunities for the learners to speak inside and outside the classroom would help the reticent students to battle against their anxiety of speaking. This is a point that Maldivian ESL teachers need to consider, as very little importance is given to speaking activities compared to reading and writing activities in ESL classrooms of Maldives. To tell the truth, the participants in this study never got the opportunity to practice the target language outside the classroom. Jung (2011) pointed out that students should get the chance to do interactive task-based activities to practice using English outside the classroom by questioning foreigners and presenting their views and inside the classroom. This kind of authentic task will assist the learners to be more confident in using the target language and enhance their interest in speaking out inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, Maldivian students could also be made to do speaking test when they sit for IGCSE English as a Second Language Examination, because it will lead the teachers to give maximum opportunities to the learners to use English inside and outside the classroom. Similarly, the students will also try to make use of the speaking opportunities given by the teachers, rather than aiming to stay as reticent students throughout the whole educational life.

The teacher should also take responsibility of identifying the coping strategies used by the reticent students and help them in developing those strategies by attending to their needs and concerns. This does not mean that teachers need to support the students in using their mother tongue when they have difficulty in expressing their views, because it will lead the students to undermine the value of using the target language in speaking tasks. Ansari (2015) suggested the importance of encouraging students to use maximum English when talking to their friends and teachers. It was evident from this study that Maldivian teachers encourage students to use English in the classroom when talking with each other and teachers. However, based the fact that Maldivian learners do not get ample opportunities to practice English regularly, it is important for teachers to organize their lesson in a way that provides notable support for the learners to use English on daily basis.

Finally, as far as teaching approaches are concerned, it seemed that still teachers follow the traditional method of teaching in Maldives though some teachers try to use other

approaches like CLT and student-centered approach in teaching. Whatever the method is used, rather than practicing speaking phrases, serious attempt should be made on improving communicative competence of the students which would be helpful for the students to use English in real life situations.

On the whole, this study has clearly shown that the factors which contribute Maldivian students to remain reticent ESL classroom is completely common to the factors experienced by other Asian students. The findings suggest that teachers need to identify possible ways to obliterate all the factors that hinder students' willingness to speak in the language classroom. Apart from that, teachers have to create supportive environment where learners encouraged to speak confidently without any hesitation or fear. In this sense, students should be allowed to use language in different contexts so that they can apply the knowledge in real life situations. The curriculum developers also should emphasize the importance of practicing speaking skill in ESL classrooms.

#### 5.10. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Undoubtedly, the present study reached a number of conclusions regarding the highlighted research questions. However, there are some limitation related data collection. Firstly, some students hesitated to give the interview. Also some of the teachers were unable to give the interviews due their busy schedule.

In addition to this, it is evident that qualitative researches needs more time to do the research; however, the researcher got a limited time to collect the data which made it difficult to collect data. Due to limitation of time, the present study might not be perfect in reaching complete answers of the research questions; thus, it provides basis for further study.

#### 5.11. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research is based on identifying the factors that contribute Maldivian learners to remain reticent in ESL classroom. Hence, to find out these factors, how learners cope with those problems and to identify the strategies that teachers adopt to alleviate the problems, the present study employed a qualitative approach following interviews and observations. As this study lasted for about one week, it is needed to conduct more in-depth study following other types of qualitative approach. Furthermore, only two observations were done to reach the answers the research questions of this study; therefore, to identify more about the strategies that teachers and learners use cope with the problem, few more observations could have been done by the researcher.

Additionally, it was difficult to get the viewpoints of the students through individual face to face interview. Therefore, another study could be done with the students by giving a questionnaire so that they can write their without any hesitations. On the whole, to seek out more factors which cause students to be reticent, further analysis is needed.

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## **Appendix A: Letter from Ministry of Education Teachers' Interview Guide**

1. Can you give a description of yourself?
2. What's the highest qualification you have?
3. How long have you been teaching?
4. How do you plan your lessons/scheme to incorporate the four skills of language learning?
5. How often do you include speaking lessons?
6. How do your students respond to the speaking exercises?
7. How much willingness do all your students show to take part in the speaking lessons?
8. How often do you give them opportunity to practice speaking outside the classroom?
9. What are the speaking problems encountered by your students in a speaking lesson?
10. What are the factors/causes that make your students to hesitate in contributing to the speaking lessons?
11. How often and how do you correct the mistakes made by your students in speaking lessons?
12. How do you deal with the reluctant speakers
13. What are the things that you do to overcome the speaking problems encountered by your students?
14. What kind of teaching methods do you follow in your classrooms?

## **Students' Interview Guide**

1. How long have you been studying English?  
➤ Ask probing questions: How would you describe your interest in studying the subject- English?

## **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SPEAKING PROBLEMS**

1. How much do you like to take part in speaking lessons in English period?
2. How often do you have speaking lessons?
3. How often does your teacher arrange opportunities to practice speaking outside the classroom?
4. How do you feel in speaking lessons?
5. Imagine you got the chance to present a speech in front of the class or in the assembly. How would you feel?
6. How much time do you need to get ready for a speaking activity?  
➤ Does that mean if you get enough time to get ready for a speaking activity, you will not hesitate to take part in the lesson?
7. How does your teacher correct the mistakes that you make in the speaking lesson?
8. How good are you in language?
9. Imagine your teacher asked you to speak on a topic about which you don't have a background knowledge. Would you be ready and able to speak on the spot without getting ready for it?
10. How often do you stop when speaking when you are unsure of the tense that you need to use?
11. How often do you teacher give you speaking activities?
12. How do you deal with the speaking problems that you encounter?
13. In what situations do you switch to your mother tongue in speaking lessons, why?
14. When do you get help from your friends in the speaking periods?
15. What are the different strategies that your teacher uses to correct the mistakes that you make in speaking lessons?
16. How would you describe the classroom climate in the English period?
17. Do you ignore the questions that your teacher pose to the whole class
18. How often do you silently rehearse the ideas that present to the class?