RETICENCE IN EFL SPEECH PRODUCTION: A STUDY OF LEARNERS' ANXIETY AND VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract: The present study aimed at expanding our knowledge of Iranian EFL university students' willingness to communicate in order to provide a clear picture of these learners' preferences toward L2 communication. Two dimensions of reticence, learners' approach toward communication and their perception of communication were analysed in relation to their vocabulary production ability and language anxiety as contributing factors. For this purpose, 156 undergraduate learners learning English as a foreign language filled in the Unwillingness-to-Communicate Scale (Burgoon, 1976), Vocabulary-Size Test of Controlled Productive Ability (Laufer & Nation, 1999), and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). The results of the study showed that the learners had an avoidance tendency and negative perception about communication. Moreover, the analysis of the results revealed a negative correlation between the learners' avoidance and negative attitude toward communication and their productive vocabulary knowledge, a positive relationship between the learners' avoidance and negative attitude toward communication and their anxiety level, and a negative correlation between the learners' productive vocabulary knowledge and their anxiety level. The results also demonstrated that avoidance showed a stronger relationship with vocabulary knowledge and anxiety than with negative attitude. The results point out the importance of diminishing the learners' reticence and its impact on successful learning experiences and achievement. It is suggested that teachers and instructors should encourage learners to participate in classroom discussions and help them to take risks and speak.

Keywords: reticence, avoidance, negative attitude, productive vocabulary knowledge, anxiety

1 Introduction

Upon Hymes' (1972) introduction of the term 'communicative competence', researchers followed the shift in the field of language learning and teaching away from a focus on grammar toward a closer examination of learner language with a focus on communication. Many studies delved into the efficacy of the communicative approach, and they generated promising findings (Cieniewicz, 2007; Hashimoto, 2002; Lee & Ng, 2010; Zarrinabadi & Abdi, 2011; Zou, 2004). Learners' ability to actively communicate in English has, thus, become one of the priorities of English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) teaching. According to Cieniewicz (2007), language learning is an active process which entails talking; learners can learn better and recollect more when they participate in classroom activities to communicate with their peers. Relating to this, Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, and Linnell (1996) pointed out that "participation in verbal interaction offers language learners the

opportunity to follow up on new words and structures to which they have been exposed during language lessons and to practice them in context" (pp. 59-60).

While the role communication plays in language learning has been taken for granted, teachers have reported difficulties experienced by learners with communicative activities (Liu, 2005a; Liu & Jackson, 2009; Pica et al., 1996). Liu (2005a) stated that learners are often seen to be silent in communicative activities. Moreover, they do not voluntarily participate in language classrooms most of the time (Liu, 2005a). In this regard, Lee and Ng (2010) argued that when it comes to speaking in an L2, learners become more apprehensive and tense when asked to engage in conversation. This passivity and unwillingness to participate in language classroom activities are known as reticence or unwillingness to communicate (Ellis, 2008). The reticent person is defined as an individual who evades "social, verbal interaction"; who is unwilling "to communicate unless prodded, disposed to be silent; not inclined to speak freely; reserved" (Barnhart, 1952, p. 834). The concept of reticence was first introduced in language studies in 1965 by Gerald Phillips. According to Phillips (1968, p. 40), a reticent person is one "for whom anxiety about participation in oral communication outweighs his (her) projection of gain from the situation". This is because learners "believe it is better to remain silent than to risk appearing foolish" (Phillips, 1968, p. 168). Some reticent learners are those individuals whose personality style is reflected in their inability to perform well in public or private up to a desired standard. Some are characterized by unwillingness to participate in normal communication situations, and others are identified "by a variety of dysfunctions that impaired their communication but did not seem to fit the cases commonly dealt with by speech teachers or speech pathologists" (Sokoloff & Phillips, 1976, p. 331). Other researchers referred to reticence as speech fright (Liu, 2005b), and speech anxiety (Cieniewicz, 2007).

Generally speaking, reticent students are unwilling to engage in classroom discussion, ask questions or give responses. They are passive and over-dependent on the teacher. This could be indicative of students' avoidance of communication; it may force them to adopt a silent mask, though they develop in the knowledge domain. Reticence can also be detected from a negative approach learners adopt toward communication. To these learners, communication is an inefficient activity that only wastes their time. These are two dimensions of reticence. Regarding the first dimension of reticence, Burgoon (1976) observed that reticent learners tend to avoid communication rather than approach it. And in the second dimension of reticence, learners have a negative perception of communication rather than a rewarding attitude toward it. Although the avoidance dimension is more detrimental in terms of learners' performances compared with negative perception toward communication, both types hinder the learners' language development.

A growing body of research discusses various reasons for learners' reticence to speak in language class, including fear of public failure (e.g., being laughed at due to mistakes); low proficiency level; anxiety; cultural beliefs (e.g., the significance of showing respect by listening to the teacher instead of speaking up); personality trait (e.g., introversion or extroversion); the educational system; gender difference; and dearth of vocabulary knowledge (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Jackson, 2003; Liu, 2005a, 2005b; Liu & Jackson, 2009). Regarding anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that learners who face language anxiety turn defensive, tend to sit passively in the classes, and become unwilling to participate in the conversation. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the (foreign) language learning process" (p. 128). In this type of anxiety, foreign language learners experience nervousness and

apprehension when learning or using L2. Learners exposed to L2 communication tend to withdraw from interaction and strive for ways to escape class activities. Therefore, learners are incapable of processing information in L2 and demonstrate poor performance (Zhang & Head, 2010). It can be implied that most anxious language learners are weak in class communication.

Similarly, poor vocabulary knowledge is seen as a key factor underlying academic failure (Liu, 2005a, 2005b). According to Crozier and Badawood (2009), words direct speech production. Likewise, Nation (2001) saw vocabulary knowledge as one of the language skills crucial for fluent language use. Lack of adequate vocabulary knowledge, thus, results in many language learning difficulties. It has also been blamed as one of the main causes of reticence (Liu & Jackson, 2009). Liu (2005b) quotes one of his participants: "I always found my vocabulary is so small that I didn't know how to tell others my ideas. I was very anxious and feel bad. So I have to keep quiet. And this is very common to students in the University" (p. 12). Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners become handicapped in expressing themselves or understanding others. Wilkins (1972) wrote that "while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (pp. 111-112). Schmitt (2000) categorized words as receptive and productive lexical knowledge. Receptive knowledge is usually linked to listening and reading skills and productive knowledge is linked to writing and speaking skills. Broadly speaking, the lexicon that is comprehended when heard, seen or read forms an individual's receptive lexical knowledge. On the other hand, productive words denote words which can be produced within a context at one's own will or choice. It seems reticent learners, even if they have well-developed receptive or productive lexical knowledge, are weak in producing words and communicating orally (Liu, 2005a, 2005b).

In spite of general awareness of the importance of spoken English and oral communication, EFL/ESL teachers are often concerned with learners' reticence. Students are found to be passive learners of the L2 if they prefer not to use it during classroom communication (Liu & Jackson, 2009). However, the causes of learner reticence in the L2 classrooms cannot be generalized or simplified as being applicable to all learners. Moreover, it has been found that the particular causes for learner reticence differ according to the context. Accordingly, the present study aimed to examine the possible relationship between reticence and two main factors, vocabulary knowledge and language anxiety. In particular, the study examined two dimensions of reticence in the context of Iranian EFL university students' foreign language anxiety and productive vocabulary knowledge i.e., whether learners avoid or approach communication and whether they regard it as an inefficient or a rewarding activity. The study pursued the following research questions:

RQ1: Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL university students' reticence and their vocabulary knowledge?
RQ2: Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL university students' reticence and their anxiety?
RQ3: Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL university students' anxiety and their vocabulary knowledge?

2 Highlights of previous research on reticence in L2

Assessing reticence in language learning, research has argued of its debilitative effects on learners' accomplishment. In one study, Zarrinabadi and Abdi (2011) attempted to analyse

the relationship between Iranian learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) inside and outside the classroom and their language learning orientations. Sixty-seven female and male intermediate students were asked to complete willingness to communicate and language orientation questionnaires. The analysis of the findings revealed that language orientations are more connected to the willingness to communicate outside the classrooms than inside. They also reported a trait-like type of WTC relating to the fact that female and male generally avoid communication with one another.

Liu (2005a) investigated reticence, anxiety, and performance of Chinese university students in oral English lessons. In the first phase of the study, he had a 124-item survey filled in by 570 first-year undergraduate students at three proficiency levels. In the second phase, he selected three language classes and asked the students to write reflective journals for six weeks. Then, the teachers observed the classes and wrote a weekly record of the students' reticence and anxiety in class activities. The analysis of the results showed that many students were reticent and nervous in oral English lessons and tests, more proficient students were less reticent, and the reticent students tended to be more anxious during classes. According to the findings, reticence and anxiety negatively affect students' performance. Moreover, the results revealed that students' reticence was different in various tasks, and it changed significantly during the term and during the final test. Likewise, Liu, Zhang and Lu (2011) conducted a case study of reticence and anxiety in an English poetry class. Twenty-four Chinese undergraduates and their teacher were assessed through surveys, observations and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that (a) the students were reluctant to interact with other students, and many of them did not dare to risk speaking English in the classroom and remained silent; (b) during class discussions they felt relaxed, though most of them became anxious when they wanted to speak in English; (c) as the term progressed, their reticence and anxiety decreased and they tended to participate more in interpersonal oral communication.

Lee and Ng (2010) analysed the willingness to communicate model of MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998). They argued that willingness to speak is determined not only by the learners themselves, but also by the situation they are in. According to their study, it is imperative that situational variables (like topic and participants) are taken into account. Some other pedagogical factors, like the lesson objectives and task types, were also seen to indirectly influence the learners' willingness to interact with their classmates. The study also explored the effect of the types of teaching techniques the teacher used on students' reticence. The findings revealed that the teacher's teaching techniques significantly impacted the students' reticence level. Assessing Chinese learners' journals on English learning experiences, Liu (2005a) mentioned the dearth of vocabulary as one of the sources of learner reticence in oral English language classrooms. One of the students stated that "my poor vocabulary caused a lot [of] trouble in talking [to] each other in English. So we seldom speak in English" (Liu, 2005a, p. 12). This poor vocabulary knowledge impeded the students from answering or expressing themselves so they remained silent in the class. Even if the students made contributions to class discussions, their speech was short (Liu et al., 2011). Limited vocabulary, moreover, results in learners' inability to follow the instructor or understand what s/he says (Chau, 1999). Chau asserted that "being reticent is probably a good tool to conceal [the] inability to follow or understand the lessons" (p. 53). This is because learners "could not express themselves fully due to a lack of vocabulary or technical terms and [it] took a long time to respond since [learners] found it difficult to translate their ideas into English" (Jackson, 2003, p. 464). However, Crozier and Badawood's (2009) study did not reveal a significant relationship between the students' receptive vocabulary knowledge and their reticence and shyness. They argue that "the vocabulary test scores obtained by this sample

were largely above the population norm, and it is possible that a wider range of scores is necessary for a moderating effect of verbal competence to be found" (p. 267). So, a study examining the possible role of vocabulary knowledge in relation to learners' reticence seems necessary. This study, as a result, was an attempt to examine two aspects of reticence in relation to language anxiety and vocabulary knowledge in learners' language learning.

3 Research methods

In order to answer the research questions and find out if there is a relationship between Iranian EFL university students' reticence, vocabulary knowledge and anxiety, a series of tests were used to gauge Iranian EFL students' English language proficiency, their anxiety levels and the size of their vocabulary. The following sections describe the research process in detail.

3.1 Participants

To conduct the study, 181 Iranian university learners learning English as a foreign language were initially invited to take part in this study at a university in Iran. Convenience sampling was utilized to select the participants. Prior to the study, the students took an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (Allen, 2004). The results of the OPT led to the selection of the learners who were at intermediate level. Thus, 156 participants categorised as intermediate learners were selected to participate in the study. The learners majored in Translation Studies in their first year of undergraduate studies. There were 89 female and 67 male students. The learners were between 20 and 27 years of age, with the mean age of 23 years. All of the participants spoke Persian as their first language and learnt English as their foreign language at the university. Their socio-economic status was homogeneous: 88% of their fathers and 72% of their mothers had a university degree.

3.2 Instruments

Oxford Placement Test (OPT)
To make sure that the participants' proficiency level was homogeneous, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (Allen, 2004) was utilized. The test consists of two parts: listening (100 items) and grammar (100 items). The learners were first asked to listen to sentences read by a native speaker and choose one of the two options provided for each sentence. Following that, the learners were required to read grammar questions and choose one of the three options provided in each sentence. Wistner, Sakai and Mariko (2009) reported the Cronbach's α of 0.80 for the OPT, which made the test reliable for the purposes of selection.

The Unwillingness-to-Communicate Scale
To check the learners' reticence in speech communication, Burgoon's (1976) Unwillingness-to-Communicate Scale (UCS) was applied. The questionnaire assesses two dimensions of communication reticence: approach-avoidance (AA) and reward (R). According to Burgoon and Koper,

> The AA dimension represents an individual's tendency to avoid or participate in interpersonal and small group interactions … The R dimension, by contrast, reflects

attitudes toward communication, whether one considers it a valuable, honest, and personally rewarding enterprise or feels socially isolated and regards communication as a deceptive, manipulative, or unprofitable activity (1984, pp. 608-609).

The questionnaire consists of 20 items (10 items for AA and 10 items for R). A mean score of $M \geq 25$ on AA shows that learners would rather avoid communication than participate in class interactions. Similarly, a mean score of $M \geq 25$ on R reveals that learners think of communication as an unprofitable activity than as a rewarding interaction (Burgoon & Koper, ibid.). Therefore, in terms of AA, reticent learners opt to avoid class discussion and in terms of R, they prefer isolation and adopt a negative attitude toward communication. All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree. Burgoon and Koper (ibid.) reported a coefficient alpha reliability of 0.95 and 0.92 for AA and R, respectively.

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)
FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was employed to check the learners' anxiety. The FLCAS is a self-reporting questionnaire that asks students to reflect on their feelings and attitudes about learning a foreign language. An example of an FLCAS item is "*I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language classroom*". The scale is composed of 33 items on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), the Cronbach's α of the scale is 0.93.

Vocabulary-Size Test of Controlled Productive Ability (VTCPA)
To measure the learners' productive vocabulary knowledge, the VTCPA developed by Laufer and Nation (1999) was employed. 'Controlled productive ability' refers to the ability to use a word when learners are required to do so in any kind of task, such as sentence-writing task or fill-in task. Vocabulary lists from five frequency levels and completion item types were utilized. Each item was provided in a meaningful context and the first letters of the target item were presented. The first letters prevented learners from filling in another word which would be semantically proper in the given context. The number of the letters for each word was determined by the reduction of possible substitutes to the tested vocabulary. The test includes 18 items at each of the 2000, 3000, 5000, University Word List (UWL), and 10000 word levels (Laufer & Nation, 1999). A sample item is the following one: The thieves threw ac___ in his face and made him blind. [acid] (Laufer & Nation, 1999, p. 46)

Accordingly, only one correct word would be the answer. To mark the test, the correct word produced by a learner scored 1 and the incorrect word produced by him/her scored 0. It is also easy to interpret:

> Each level represents 1000 words, except the UWL level which represents a list of 836 words. A learner's percentage score on a level is a very rough indication of the number of words known at that level (for example, 9 out of 18 equals 50%; and this would roughly equal 500 out of 1000 words). Deciding whether a learner has satisfactory mastery of a level is a matter of judgment and depends on what level is being considered, but is probably around 15 or 16 out of 18 (85% or 90%) for the 2000 word level, indicating that less than 150 words at that level are not readily available for productive use (Laufer & Nation, 1999, p. 41).

The analysis of the internal consistency of the instrument through KR21 coefficients of reliability revealed an internal consistency of 0.86 (Laufer & Nation, 1999).

3.3 Procedures

The learners were first asked to participate in the OPT so that the researchers could select a homogeneous group of participants in terms of language proficiency. Having selected the participants of the study, the researchers distributed the questionnaires and the test in January 2016 during the learners' regularly scheduled class period. First, the UCS and FLCAS were given to the students. The participants were encouraged to ask the researchers if they did not understand an item. They were also encouraged to respond honestly. The learners were assured that their responses would be anonymous and would not affect their final marks. It generally took 20 to 30 minutes to complete the questionnaires. After collecting the questionnaires, the VTCPA was administered. Similarly to the UCS and FLCAS, the instructions were provided for the learners before they started completing the test. It generally took 50 to 80 minutes to complete the test. The questionnaires and the tests were collected and coded. The data were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 22. Descriptive statistics and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were applied to analyse the data. Pearson correlation was used since the questionnaires and the test produced continuous data.

4 Results and discussion

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the learners' responses to the reticence and anxiety questionnaires and vocabulary knowledge test. According to the results, the mean score of the learners' unwillingness to communicate was $M = 70.42$ ($SD = 9.72$). The AA revealed the learners' tendency toward communication i.e., whether they participate in or avoid communication. The mean score of AA ($M = 36.25$, $SD = 7.40$) indicated that the learners had a tendency to avoid rather than to participate in communication and this explains their high level of reticence. On the other hand, R referred to the learners' attitude toward communication i.e., whether they see it as a valuable activity or as an unprofitable interaction. Similarly to AA, the mean score of R ($M = 34.57$, $SD = 5.57$) showed that the learners had a negative attitude toward communication. Based on the results, it can be concluded that the learners are unwilling to communicate, are disposed to be silent, and are not inclined to speak freely. They avoid class interactions rather than participate in them, and have a negative perception rather than a positive one of class discussions. Moreover, it can be noted that the first dimension of reticence, i.e., avoidance tendency, has a higher mean score compared with the second dimension, i.e., negative attitude toward communication. Table 1 also shows the mean score of the learners' foreign language anxiety level ($M = 92.22$, $SD = 19.45$). The mean score of the learners' productive vocabulary knowledge was also $M = 46.08$ ($SD = 10.84$). In an attempt to reduce the reticence level of Chinese learners, Zhang and Head (2010) reported that the learners who were allowed to participate in the course design had a higher mean score ($M = 84.5$) of class involvement, positive attitude change and increased motivation compared with the learners who were not allowed to participate in the course design ($M = 74$). Liu et al. (2011) analysed learners' responses to statements indicative of sociability and risk-taking. The study argued that "the students, though having a desire to and being willing to communicate with others in the class, seldom actively participated in interpersonal interactions" (p. 24). Similarly, Liu and Jackson (2009) reported that "students ([particularly] those with a score of (90) wished very much to avoid speech communication" (p. 73).

According to Liu and Jackson (2009), more than 60% of the learners were active during pair work but they became passive when responding to their teacher.

	N	Actual range (Possible range)	Mean	Std. deviation
Vocabulary knowledge	156	25-68 (0-90)	46.0833	10.84254
Anxiety	156	48-132 (33-165)	92.22	19.451
Reticence	156	44-89 (20-100)	70.4256	9.72987
AA	156	20-50 (10-50)	36.2538	7.40850
R	156	28-47 (10-50)	34.5769	5.57765
Valid N (listwise)	156			

AA Approach-Avoidance
R Reward

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of learners' reticence, anxiety and vocabulary knowledge

4.1 Reticence and productive vocabulary knowledge

To explore whether the learners' avoidance tendency and negative attitude toward communication were related (see RQ1 above) to their productive vocabulary knowledge, Pearson correlations were employed.

		Vocabulary knowledge	Avoidance	Negative perception
Vocabulary knowledge	Pearson Correlation	1	-.262**	-.217**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.006
	N	156	156	156

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Results of the Pearson correlation between AA and R and vocabulary knowledge

The results of Table 2 reveal that there are significant correlations between the learners' productive vocabulary knowledge and their avoidance and the negative attitude ($p <$ .01). Pearson correlation indicate that the learners' avoidance moderately correlates with vocabulary knowledge ($r = -0.26$). However, the correlation is negative. It shows that the higher the avoidance level is, the lower their productive vocabulary knowledge will be. This may be due to the fact that the avoidance of communication keeps learners from interacting with classmates and acquiring new words. In contrast, highly active learners who communicatively interact with their classmates and teachers possibly know a larger number of words. With respect to the negative attitude, the results show a negative correlation between the negative perception and the learners' productive vocabulary knowledge ($r = -0.21$). This suggests that the learners mainly intend to elude interactions in the class since they think communication is worthless. This can relate to their poor word knowledge. It appears that

learners who value interpersonal communication highly have a rich vocabulary and express themselves more in the target language. According to Zarrinabadi and Abdi (2011), poor vocabulary is a serious issue for language learners since limited vocabulary in a second language impedes successful interaction and leads to misunderstanding or miscommunication. Table 2 further demonstrates that avoidance had a stronger negative correlation with the learners' productive vocabulary knowledge compared with negative attitude. This suggests that avoidance is more closely related to vocabulary knowledge.

Liu (2005a) argued that vocabulary knowledge plays a significant role in learners' reticence. The analysis of journals, observations and interviews revealed that lack of vocabulary knowledge was one of the main factors related to the learners' failure (Liu, 2005a). Jackson (2003) further asserted that nearly ninety of the respondents explained that they could not express themselves fully because the dearth of vocabulary knowledge kept them from participating in class discussions. The findings of the current study indicated that the Iranian EFL learners involved in this study show a high level of reticence in their communication in the language classes. According to Phillips (1984), non-reticent learners intensely express their willingness to interact and highly value interpersonal communication. However, reticent learners think they are inept at answering questions and participating in discussions. In other words, they believe that they "lose more by talking than by remaining silent" (Phillips, 1984, p. 52). In accordance with Phillips (1968), reticent learners may or may not truly have incomplete social skills, though they think they do. The participants of this study seem to think that they have incomplete social skills and are not fully competent to participate in L2 communication. The study also reported that the learners have an avoidance tendency and a negative perception of communication. Moreover, the learners tend to avoid communication rather than adopt a negative attitude toward it. The findings demonstrate that the Iranian EFL learners who participated in the study are reluctant to participate in the class interaction.

4.2 Reticence and foreign language anxiety

To assess the second research objective (see RQ2 above), whether the learners' avoidance and negative attitude toward communication were related to their foreign language anxiety level, Pearson product-moment correlations were used.

		Anxiety	Avoidance	Negative perception
Anxiety	Pearson correlation	1	.543**	.490**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	156	156	156

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Results of the Pearson correlation between AA and R and anxiety

Table 3 shows that there were statistically significant correlations between the learners' anxiety level and their avoidance and negative attitude ($p < .01$). There is a positive correlation between the learners' avoidance and their foreign language anxiety, $r = 0.54$, which means that a high level of anxiety is directly related to the learners' avoidance of class interaction. As their anxiety increases, they show more reluctance toward communication. In

an analysis of learners' reticence and anxiety in English poetry class, Liu et al. (2011) reported that most of the learners were unwilling to risk speaking English during the class, although they were advanced learners and had the desire to communicate with peers. "Also, even though these students were fluent in English and normally had no difficulty using the language, they did not feel confident and remained passive and reticent in the class" (p. 30). Hashimoto (2002) argued that lower language anxiety correlates with higher language perceived competence and motivation. Therefore, learners would experience lower pressure and are eager to be involved in the class interaction.

Similarly, the learners' foreign language anxiety revealed a positive correlation with the learners' negative attitude toward communication ($r = 0.49$). The higher anxiety they experience, the more negative attitude the learners adopt in interaction. Table 3 further demonstrates that anxiety showed a stronger correlation with avoidance tendency compared with negative attitude. It shows that anxiety is more closely related to avoidance. Jackson (2003) also reported that lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes are among the main reasons for learners' reticence. As a result, learners are unwilling to answer in front of the whole class, and when called on by their teacher they respond in a barely audible voice. The results of Kelly, Keaten, and Finch's (1996) study are consistent with those described here. Hence, it can be discussed that "because reticent individuals appreciate the importance of communication, while simultaneously fearing negative outcomes, it is not surprising that they report elevated levels of anxiety associated with communicating" (Keaten, Kelly, & Finch, 2000, p. 144). Generally speaking, learners' unwillingness to speak and interact directly contributes to the anxiety they experience in classes. The more anxious the learners are, the less they communicate with others. Zhang and Head (2010) asserted that anxiety is a response from the reticent speaker; reticent learners realize the need for interaction but perceive themselves as helplessly ineffective. This is because reticent learners believe that it is better to be quiet and allow people to think they are a fool than confirm it by talking (Keaten & Kelly, 2000).

4.3 Productive vocabulary knowledge and foreign language anxiety

The study further explored the possible relationship between the learners' anxiety level and their productive vocabulary knowledge to give a better picture of the learners' performances (see RQ3 above).

		Anxiety	Vocabulary knowledge
Anxiety	Pearson correlation	1	-.188*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.018
	N	156	156

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. Results of the Pearson correlation between anxiety and vocabulary knowledge

The results of the analysis revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between the learners' anxiety and their vocabulary knowledge ($p < .05$). Although it is significant, the correlation is low, thus the relationship between anxiety and vocabulary

knowledge appears to be very weak. However, it should be mentioned that the negative correlation is indicative that the learners with lower vocabulary base have higher anxiety ($r =$ -0.18). Based on the findings, it can be concluded that vocabulary knowledge should be considered as one of the factors related to the learners' anxiety; the higher the productive vocabulary knowledge of the learners is, the lower their foreign language anxiety level will be.

5 Conclusions

The present study aimed to explore the possible relationship between Iranian EFL university students' unwillingness to communicate and their foreign language anxiety and productive vocabulary knowledge. In particular, the study investigated two dimensions of reticence: approach-avoidance (AA) and reward (R) in relation to the learners' language anxiety and vocabulary knowledge. Regarding their approach toward communication i.e., avoidance or participation, the analysis of the results demonstrated that the learners showed avoidance toward classroom interaction. Regarding their perception of communication i.e., effective activity or worthless interaction, the analysis of the results showed that the learners had a negative perception about the class interaction. Moreover, the results of the correlational analysis revealed that a) the learners' avoidance and negative attitude toward communication relate negatively to their vocabulary knowledge and vice versa; b) the high level of anxiety is in direct relationship with the avoidance and the negative attitude the learners adopt; c) a good lexical base helps the learners to have lower anxiety and accordingly achieve better results. It is also worth mentioning that avoidance showed a higher correlation with vocabulary knowledge and anxiety level compared with negative perception factor. Thus, the learners mainly avoid class interaction rather than regard it as an ineffective practice. However, it should be mentioned that the two dimensions are detrimental in terms of the learners' language learning.

Reticence is a serious phenomenon in EFL/ESL classes which manifests itself in different behaviours on the part of learners in classes. Reticence as an affective filter hinders the learners' ability to take in the available target language message and acquire the language. According to Sokoloff and Phillips (1976, p. 345), "for the most part, [the learner] does not understand how to analyse others, s/he cannot phrase communication goals, and s/he cannot identify and work with the components of the rhetorical situation". The learner, as a result, does not progress. However, it should be mentioned that reticence does not necessarily mean failure or incapability on the part of the learner. The learner may be rich in the knowledge domain but refrains from class interaction because of negative attitudes toward communication or the fear of others' judgment.

Both teachers and students should be aware of the fact that reticence is a serious problem preventing learners from speaking a foreign language. It is recommended that teachers provide the students with a relaxing, friendly, and supportive atmosphere for learning the foreign language (Hashimoto, 2002; Liu & Jackson, 2009; Zou, 2004). According to Phillips (1984, p. 35), "imposition of arbitrary threats like grades on speeches, peer criticisms, and the variety of personality-attacks that result from instructor criticism" should be abandoned. Teachers should support learners and teach them to support each other (Liu, 2005b). This supportive environment helps learners feel free to participate in class discussion (Zou, 2004). Learners' efficacy and confidence should also be boosted in order to decrease their anxiety and nervousness (Izadi, 2012). Moreover, teachers are required to improve

students' interest and motivation in speaking in the target language. This will help learners to become more active in class activities. Teachers should also consider that there is a pressing need to seek practical strategies to help passive learners become more active in classrooms in order to speak in oral activities (Izadi & Nowrouzi, 2016).

In any inquiry there are a number of deficiencies. The present study was not an exception and the researchers faced some limitations throughout the study. The first limitation of the study is related to the explanatory power of the study. Obviously due to the design of the study (i.e., correlational design) and the limited number of independent variables considered in the research, the range of explanatory power is limited. A mixed method study indicating the causal relationships is thus recommended to clearly depict the effect of vocabulary knowledge and anxiety on reticence. Therefore, the issues should be further explored in similar contexts with students of varying backgrounds. Moreover, although there were no cultural issues that contributed to the learners' reticence (Izadi, 2012; Zarrinabadi & Abdi, 2011), a cross-cultural study examining the sociocultural factors is suggested to provide a clear picture on learners' approach toward communication and their perception of communication. Another limitation is related to the limited number of participants. Only 156 subjects were included in the study, and any generalizations based on the obtained results must be made cautiously.

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