

A Structural Model of L2 Speaking Confidence: The Roles of Reticence and Pronunciation Anxiety in Indonesian EFL Contexts

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Abstract

This study addresses the role of affective factors in shaping learners' oral communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where psychological barriers often hinder speaking performance. Drawing on Second Language Acquisition perspectives that emphasize the interplay among affective variables, reticence, anxiety, and self-perceptions in language learning, this study examines the structural relationships among L2 reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and L2 speaking confidence, with a particular focus on the mediating role of pronunciation anxiety. A quantitative correlational design was employed involving 141 university-level EFL learners from three higher education institutions in Indonesia. Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire and analysed using Structural Equation Modelling with SmartPLS 4. The results indicate that L2 reticence significantly predicts pronunciation anxiety, confirming a strong positive association between learners' reluctance to communicate and pronunciation-related anxiety. However, the direct effects of pronunciation anxiety and reticence on L2 speaking confidence were not statistically significant, and the mediating role of pronunciation anxiety was not supported. These findings indicate that the proposed direct and indirect pathways linking reticence and pronunciation anxiety to speaking confidence were not statistically supported in the present sample. The study contributes to the growing body of research on affective factors in Second Language Acquisition by providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian EFL context and highlighting the need for further investigation into the factors associated with learners' speaking confidence.

Keywords: L2 speaking confidence; L2 reticence; pronunciation anxiety; structural equation modelling; Indonesian EFL learners.

1. Introduction

In recent years, psychological variables in second language (L2) acquisition have attracted considerable scholarly attention due to their profound impact on learners' communicative competence. Constructs such as motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, and willingness to communicate have been widely recognized as critical determinants of L2 learning success (Elshahawy, 2020; Liuhuizi & Yasin, 2024). Among these, language anxiety and speaking confidence are notably influential in shaping oral language performance. Specifically, learners who experience high levels of anxiety tend to exhibit reduced participation and diminished linguistic output, whereas those with higher self-confidence are more inclined to engage in communicative tasks (Salim, 2022; Dong, 2023). In the Indonesian EFL context, challenges such as fear of negative evaluation, pronunciation difficulties, and cultural reticence often impede learners' willingness to speak, thus compromising their L2 proficiency. Recent studies have emphasized the interrelation between these psychological constructs and oral fluency, underlining the need for a more nuanced understanding of their structural dynamics (Money Penny & Aldrich, 2022; Zamir & Jabeen, 2023; Malik et al., 2024).

Specific attention has been directed to the affective factors of L2 reticence and pronunciation anxiety, which have emerged as significant barriers to speaking confidence among EFL learners (Baran-Lucarz, 2014; Al-Mukdad, 2021). Reticence, often rooted in sociocultural expectations and prior negative experiences, inhibits students from seizing opportunities for oral practice (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Badrasawi et al., 2021). Similarly, pronunciation anxiety, stemming from self-perceived inadequacies and fear of peer judgment, deters learners from participating in speaking activities (Yousif, 2025). These affective filters create a cycle in which limited participation reduces opportunities for communicative practice and development.



Consequently, understanding how reticence and pronunciation anxiety interact with learners' speaking confidence is important for explaining variations in oral communication performance and informing pedagogical support in EFL contexts.

Despite extensive efforts to improve speaking skills in EFL classrooms, many Indonesian learners continue to encounter challenges in oral communication. Previous studies have reported that learners often experience hesitation when participating in classroom discussions and concerns about making pronunciation errors during spoken interaction (Izadi & Zare, 2016; Hussain et al., 2025). L2 reticence manifests as a persistent hesitation to engage in classroom discourse, often driven by fear of negative evaluation or perceived linguistic inadequacy. Simultaneously, pronunciation anxiety exacerbates these challenges by instilling fear of making phonetic errors, which further diminishes learners' confidence in their oral abilities (Tsang, 2022). Consequently, a substantial portion of Indonesian EFL students remains silent during speaking activities, limiting their opportunities for practice and improvement.

To address this persistent issue, there is a need for a comprehensive examination of the structural relationships among L2 reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and speaking confidence. While prior research has explored these variables individually, there remains a gap in understanding their interconnectedness and the pathways through which they affect oral communication. Employing Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) provides an appropriate analytical framework for examining both direct and indirect relationships among these psychological constructs. Through a clearer understanding of the mediating role of pronunciation anxiety between reticence and speaking confidence, this study seeks to generate empirical evidence that may inform the development of targeted pedagogical interventions aimed at reducing anxiety, strengthening self-efficacy, and enhancing learners' speaking confidence in EFL contexts. Such insights may contribute to more informed instructional practices and psychologically supportive learning environments.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) has been widely recognized as a robust methodological tool for analysing complex relationships among affective factors in L2 learning, particularly in relation to learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), anxiety, and perceived competence (MacIntyre et al., 2002). SEM facilitates the identification of latent variables and the estimation of both direct and indirect pathways, making it especially suitable for testing models involving mediating constructs such as pronunciation anxiety. Studies employing SEM have consistently demonstrated that anxiety negatively predicts perceived competence, which in turn affects learners' WTC (Yashima, 2002; SAKA & Merc, 2021). For instance, Jin and Lee (2022) confirmed that communicative anxiety negatively impacts perceived competence, which subsequently diminishes WTC. These findings suggest that anxiety functions as an important psychological mechanism linking learners' perceptions and communicative behaviours. Furthermore, researchers such as Wang et al. (2025) and Peng and Woodrow (2010) have emphasized the role of the learning environment in shaping motivation and anxiety, thereby indirectly influencing WTC. Together with evidence that pronunciation anxiety is associated with lower self-confidence and oral performance (Baran-Lucarz, 2011), these studies provide a theoretical basis for proposing that pronunciation anxiety may mediate the relationship between reticence and speaking confidence. Examining this mediating pathway may therefore contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how affective factors interact to influence oral communication in EFL contexts.

Despite a growing body of research on psychological variables in L2 speaking, the structural interplay among reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and speaking confidence remains insufficiently explored, particularly within the Indonesian EFL context. Previous studies have shown that affective factors such as anxiety, perceived competence, and willingness to communicate significantly shape learners' oral participation and communicative behaviour (Cen et al., 2024; Cherrez, 2021; Pino & Beh, 2018; Waluyo & Bakoko, 2022; Wei & Xu, 2021). Reticence has been associated with sociocultural inhibition and fear of negative evaluation (Al-Ahmadi & King, 2022; Hosseini, 2024; Kadi & Madini, 2019; Zondag, 2021), while pronunciation anxiety has been linked to reduced oral performance and communicative readiness (Lacabex & Roothoof, 2023; Thaher, 2004; Xue & Noels, 2025). Nevertheless, existing scholarship remains

theoretically fragmented because these constructs are often examined separately rather than integrated within a unified affective framework (Aslan & Şahin, 2020; Chowdhury et al., 2024; Sajjad et al., 2022). Methodologically, many earlier studies rely on correlational or regression-based analyses that are limited in explaining indirect psychological pathways among latent variables (Malik et al., 2021; Tian, 2022; Zare-ee & Shirvanizadeh, 2014). Although Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) has increasingly been used to investigate willingness to communicate and perceived competence in L2 learning (Gao, 2022; Hamamorad, 2020), its application to pronunciation anxiety as a mediating construct remains scarce (Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022; Sardegna et al., 2017). Furthermore, Indonesian EFL learners remain underrepresented in this line of inquiry despite their distinctive sociocultural communication patterns and persistent concerns regarding linguistic judgment in oral interaction (Fadilah, 2022; Kusumaningrum et al., 2020; Rusdin & Purwati, 2023; Susanto et al., 2023). Consequently, an integrated SEM-based investigation is needed to examine how L2 reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and speaking confidence interact within the Indonesian EFL context.

The present study investigates the structural relationships between L2 reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and L2 speaking confidence among Indonesian EFL learners, aiming to assess the direct effects of L2 reticence on both pronunciation anxiety and speaking confidence, as well as to examine the mediating role of pronunciation anxiety in the relationship between L2 reticence and L2 speaking confidence. Grounded in a hypothesized model comprising four pathways, namely (H1) L2 reticence positively predicts pronunciation anxiety, (H2) pronunciation anxiety negatively predicts speaking confidence, (H3) L2 reticence negatively predicts speaking confidence, and (H4) pronunciation anxiety mediates the relationship between L2 reticence and speaking confidence, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on affective factors in second language learning within the Indonesian EFL context. While previous studies have often examined anxiety, confidence, and reticence separately, the present study brings these constructs together within a single analytical framework and explores the potential mediating role of pronunciation anxiety. Focusing on Indonesian university-level EFL learners, the study aims to provide context-specific insights into the interplay among these affective variables and to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of factors associated with learners' oral communication experiences.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the structural relationships among L2 reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and L2 speaking confidence among Indonesian university-level EFL learners. A correlational design was considered appropriate because the study sought to investigate the direction and strength of the relationships among multiple latent psychological constructs without manipulating any variables. To test the proposed conceptual model, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed using SmartPLS 4. PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for prediction-oriented research involving complex structural relationships among latent constructs and has been widely recommended for educational and behavioural research with moderate sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019, 2021). This analytical approach enabled the simultaneous evaluation of the measurement model and the structural model, allowing the study to examine both the direct relationships among the constructs and the hypothesized mediating role of pronunciation anxiety.

2.2 Participants

The study involved 141 undergraduate students enrolled in English Language Education programmes at three higher education institutions in Palopo City, South Sulawesi, Indonesia: Cokroaminoto Palopo University (n = 51), Muhammadiyah University of Palopo (n = 30), and the State Islamic University of Palopo (n = 60). A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants who met three inclusion criteria: (1) they were active undergraduate EFL students, (2) they were enrolled in an English Language Education programme, and (3) they had prior experience participating in English-speaking activities as part

of their academic coursework. These criteria were established to ensure that all participants possessed sufficient experience with classroom oral communication, making them appropriate respondents for investigating the relationships among L2 reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and L2 speaking confidence (Kock & Hadaya, 2016). The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1

Students' demographic information

Category	Sub-category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Institution	Cokroaminoto Palopo University	51	36.2
	Muhammadiyah University of Palopo	30	21.3
	State Islamic University of Palopo	60	42.6
	Total	141	100
Gender	Female	92	65.2
	Male	49	34.8
	Total	141	100
Age Range	18–19 years	35	24.8
	20–21 years	68	48.2
	22–23 years	38	27
	Total	141	100
Level of Study	Undergraduate Students	141	100
Field of Study	English Language Education	141	100

Table 1 shows that participants were drawn from three universities, with the largest proportion coming from the State Islamic University of Palopo (42.6%), followed by Cokroaminoto Palopo University (36.2%) and Muhammadiyah University of Palopo (21.3%). Female students constituted the majority of the sample (65.2%), while male students accounted for 34.8%. Most participants were between 20 and 21 years old (48.2%), followed by those aged 22–23 years (27.0%) and 18–19 years (24.8%). All participants were undergraduate students majoring in English Language Education. This relatively homogeneous academic background reduced potential variation associated with disciplinary differences and ensured that the participants shared comparable experiences in learning and using English within university EFL classrooms, thereby strengthening the suitability of the sample for examining the proposed structural relationships among the study variables.

2.3 Instruments

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire comprising three adapted scales that measured the study constructs: L2 Reticence (15 items), Pronunciation Anxiety (15 items), and L2 Speaking Confidence (15 items). All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), allowing participants to indicate the extent to which each statement reflected their own learning experiences. The questionnaire was administered electronically via Google Forms to facilitate efficient data collection and ensure consistency in participants' responses. The three measurement scales were adapted from previously validated instruments developed by Liu and Jackson (2008b), Baran-Łucarz (2014), and Fernando and Subekti (2025), as these instruments closely aligned with the conceptual definitions of the constructs investigated in the present study.

Before administration, the questionnaire underwent a process of linguistic and contextual adaptation to improve its clarity and relevance for Indonesian university-level EFL learners while preserving the original conceptual meaning of each construct. For example, the original L2 reticence statement, “*I’m afraid to speak up in conversations*,” was adapted to “*I feel hesitant to speak English during classroom discussions*” to better reflect authentic classroom communication in the Indonesian EFL context. The adapted instrument was subsequently reviewed by experts in English language education to evaluate its content appropriateness and contextual suitability before being distributed to participants. Throughout the data collection process, ethical principles were maintained by ensuring voluntary participation, obtaining informed consent, and protecting participants’ anonymity and confidentiality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2023).

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using SmartPLS 4 following the recommended procedures for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), which is appropriate for examining complex relationships among latent constructs in prediction-oriented research (Hair et al., 2019, 2021). Prior to model estimation, the data were screened for missing values and common method bias using Harman’s single-factor test, where a single factor explaining less than 50% of the total variance indicated that common method bias was unlikely to affect the results (Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, the measurement model was assessed by examining indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha and Composite Reliability), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted), and discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (Hair et al., 2019, 2021). Second, the structural model was evaluated by estimating path coefficients, testing the mediating effect of pronunciation anxiety through bootstrapping with 2,000 resamples, and assessing model fit using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Schuberth et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2024). Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level.

3. Findings

3.1 Preliminary Data Assessment

Before evaluating the measurement and structural models, preliminary data screening was conducted to examine the overall characteristics of the dataset and determine whether common method bias posed a potential threat to the validity of the results. Descriptive statistics were first calculated to summarize the distribution of the three study variables, including their mean scores, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values, as well as skewness and kurtosis. These statistics provide an overview of participants’ responses and indicate whether the data satisfy the assumptions required for subsequent PLS-SEM analysis. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Preliminary Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
L2 Reticence	2.9720	1.1201	1.00	5.00	−0.089	−0.543
Pronunciation Anxiety	2.9987	1.1337	1.00	5.00	−0.071	−0.617
L2 Speaking Confidence	3.0573	1.0405	1.00	5.00	0.072	−0.315

As shown in Table 2, the three constructs demonstrated relatively comparable mean scores, ranging from 2.97 to 3.06, indicating that participants generally reported moderate levels of L2 reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and speaking confidence. Among the constructs, L2 Speaking Confidence recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.0573$, $SD = 1.0405$), suggesting that despite experiencing moderate reticence and pronunciation anxiety, participants maintained a relatively balanced level of confidence in speaking English. In contrast, Pronunciation Anxiety exhibited the largest standard deviation ($SD = 1.1337$), indicating greater

variability in learners' perceptions of pronunciation-related concerns. Furthermore, the skewness values ranged from -0.089 to 0.072 , while kurtosis values ranged from -0.617 to -0.315 , both of which fall within acceptable limits for multivariate analysis. These findings suggest that the distributions of the three latent constructs were approximately symmetrical and did not exhibit substantial departures from normality, thereby providing an appropriate basis for subsequent PLS-SEM analysis.

Given that all constructs were measured using a single self-report questionnaire, the potential influence of common method bias (CMB) was subsequently examined using Harman's single-factor test. This procedure assesses whether a single latent factor accounts for the majority of the covariance among the measurement items. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Common Method Bias Assessment Using Harman's Single-Factor Test

First Factor Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)	Threshold (%)	Conclusion
18.082	40.183	50.000	No serious common method bias

As presented in Table 3, the first unrotated factor accounted for 40.183% of the total variance, which is below the commonly accepted threshold of 50%. This result indicates that no single factor dominated the covariance among the measurement items, suggesting that common method bias is unlikely to have substantially influenced the observed relationships among L2 reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and L2 speaking confidence. Consequently, the dataset was considered suitable for further evaluation of the measurement model and hypothesis testing using PLS-SEM.

3.2 Measurement Model Assessment

Before testing the hypothesised structural relationships, the adequacy of the measurement model was evaluated to ensure that the latent constructs were measured with sufficient validity and reliability. Following the recommended PLS-SEM procedures, the assessment focused on discriminant validity, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity. Discriminant validity was examined first to determine whether the three latent constructs represented conceptually distinct dimensions, followed by the evaluation of reliability and convergent validity to verify the consistency and explanatory power of the measurement items. The results of these assessments are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

Discriminant Validity Assessment Using the HTMT Criterion

Constructs	1	2	3
1. L2 Reticence	–		
2. Pronunciation Anxiety	0.840	–	
3. L2 Speaking Confidence	0.505	0.513	–

As presented in Table 4, all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity among the three latent constructs. The strongest association was observed between L2 Reticence and Pronunciation Anxiety (HTMT = 0.840), suggesting that although these constructs are theoretically related, they remain empirically distinguishable. In contrast, L2 Speaking Confidence demonstrated considerably lower HTMT values with both L2 Reticence (0.505) and Pronunciation Anxiety (0.513), indicating that it represents a separate psychological construct. Collectively, these findings confirm that the three latent variables captured distinct aspects of learners' affective experiences in English speaking, thereby satisfying the discriminant validity requirement of the measurement model.

Having established that the constructs were empirically distinct, the next step was to evaluate whether each construct was measured consistently and explained an adequate proportion of variance through its observed indicators. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability (rho_C), whereas convergent validity was examined using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Reliability and Convergent Validity of the Measurement Model

Construct	Cronbach's α	rho_A	Composite Reliability (rho_C)	AVE
L2 Reticence	0.930	0.938	0.940	0.516
Pronunciation Anxiety	0.942	0.948	0.949	0.553
L2 Speaking Confidence	0.950	0.955	0.956	0.593

The results presented in Table 5 demonstrate that all three constructs achieved satisfactory levels of reliability and convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.930 to 0.950, indicating excellent internal consistency across the measurement scales. Similar evidence was obtained from rho_A (0.938–0.955) and Composite Reliability (0.940–0.956), with all values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Furthermore, the AVE values ranged from 0.516 to 0.593, surpassing the minimum criterion of 0.50, which indicates that each construct explained more than half of the variance of its corresponding indicators. Among the three constructs, L2 Speaking Confidence demonstrated the strongest convergent validity (AVE = 0.593), whereas L2 Reticence recorded the lowest AVE (0.516), although it still satisfied the recommended criterion. Overall, these findings provide strong evidence that the measurement model possesses adequate internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Consequently, the latent constructs were considered psychometrically sound and appropriate for subsequent evaluation of the structural model and hypothesis testing.

3.3 Structural Model Assessment

Following the establishment of a satisfactory measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to examine the proposed relationships among L2 Reticence, Pronunciation Anxiety, and L2 Speaking Confidence. The assessment focused on the direction and significance of the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships using the bootstrapping procedure with 2,000 resamples. Figure 1 illustrates the final structural model with standardized path coefficients, while the statistical results of hypothesis testing are summarized in Table 6.

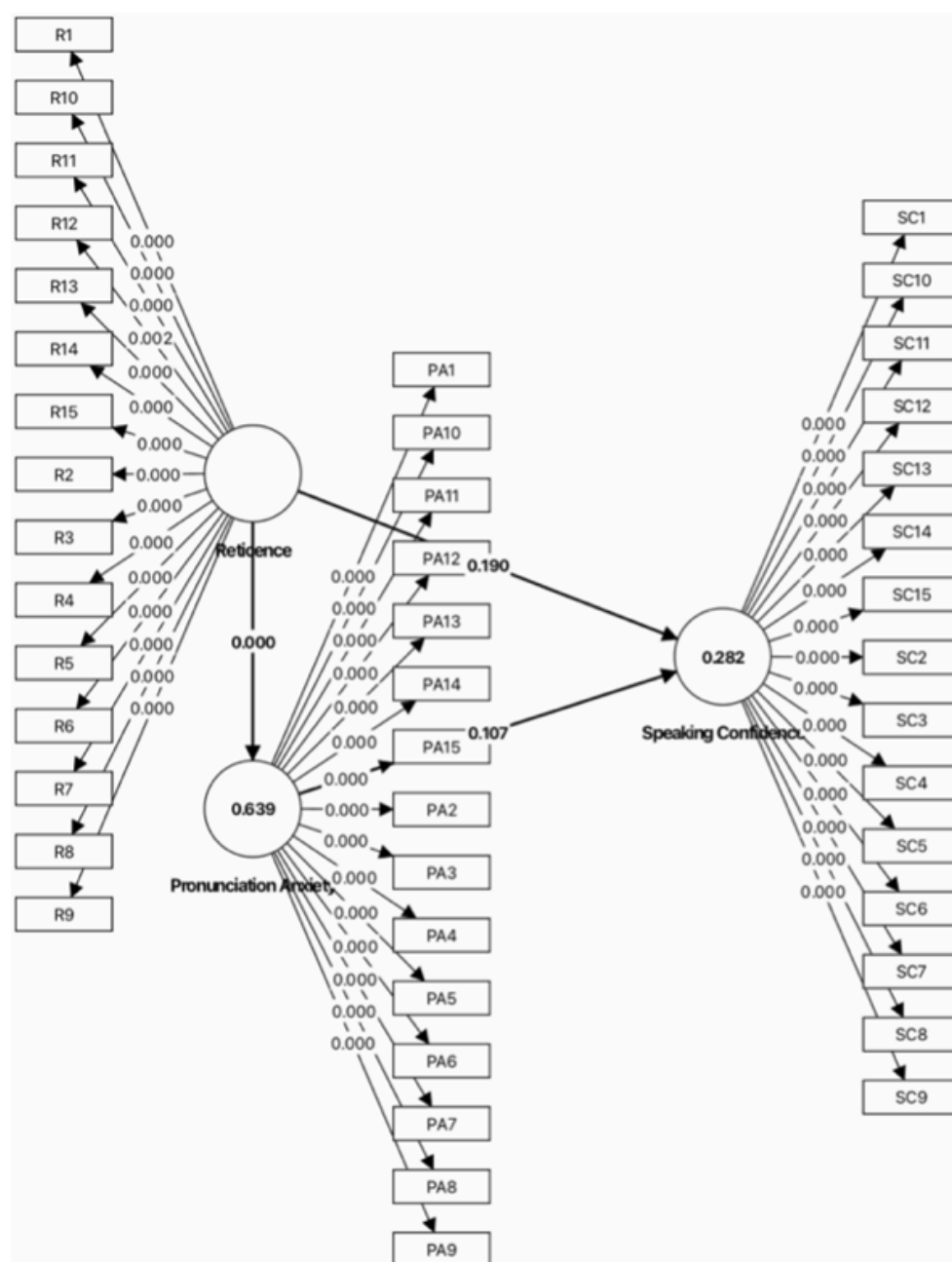


Figure 1. Coefficient path-Graphic

Figure 1 illustrates the overall pattern of relationships among the three latent constructs. The standardized path coefficients indicate that L2 Reticence demonstrated the strongest positive relationship with Pronunciation Anxiety ($\beta = 0.799$), whereas both L2 Reticence and Pronunciation Anxiety showed negative relationships with L2 Speaking Confidence ($\beta = -0.239$ and $\beta = -0.320$, respectively). These coefficients suggest that greater reticence is associated with higher pronunciation anxiety and that both affective variables tend to relate negatively to learners' speaking confidence. However, the significance of these relationships was determined through the bootstrapping procedure, as presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Results of Structural Model Assessment and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Structural Relationship	β	t	p	Decision
H1	L2 Reticence → Pronunciation Anxiety	0.799	15.919	<.001	Supported
H2	Pronunciation Anxiety → L2 Speaking Confidence	-0.320	1.610	.107	Not Supported
H3	L2 Reticence → L2 Speaking Confidence	-0.239	1.310	.190	Not Supported
H4	L2 Reticence → Pronunciation Anxiety → L2 Speaking Confidence	-0.256	1.636	.102	Not Supported

As presented in Table 6, the structural model provided partial support for the proposed hypotheses. Among the four hypothesized relationships, only H1 was statistically significant. Specifically, L2 Reticence exerted a strong positive effect on Pronunciation Anxiety ($\beta = 0.799$, $t = 15.919$, $p < .001$), indicating that learners who were more reluctant to participate in English communication tended to experience substantially higher levels of pronunciation anxiety. The magnitude and significance of this relationship identify reticence as a prominent antecedent of pronunciation-related anxiety within the present sample.

In contrast, the remaining hypotheses were not supported. Although Pronunciation Anxiety was negatively associated with L2 Speaking Confidence ($\beta = -0.320$), the relationship was not statistically significant ($p = .107$). Likewise, the direct effect of L2 Reticence on L2 Speaking Confidence was negative ($\beta = -0.239$) but failed to reach statistical significance ($p = .190$). These findings indicate that neither reticence nor pronunciation anxiety independently explained significant variation in learners' speaking confidence, despite the negative direction of the observed relationships.

The mediation analysis also failed to support H4. The indirect effect of L2 Reticence on L2 Speaking Confidence through Pronunciation Anxiety was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.256$, $t = 1.636$, $p = .102$). This result suggests that pronunciation anxiety did not function as a significant mediating mechanism linking reticence to speaking confidence in the proposed model. Taken together, the findings indicate that while reticence strongly predicts pronunciation anxiety, the hypothesized pathways leading to speaking confidence were not empirically supported among the participating Indonesian university EFL learners.

4. Discussion

This study examined the structural relationships among L2 reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and speaking confidence among Indonesian university-level EFL learners, with particular attention to the mediating role of pronunciation anxiety. The findings revealed that L2 reticence significantly and positively predicted pronunciation anxiety, confirming that learners who are more hesitant to engage in spoken interaction are also more likely to experience greater anxiety about their pronunciation. However, the hypothesized direct effects of pronunciation anxiety on speaking confidence and of L2 reticence on speaking confidence were not statistically significant, and the mediating role of pronunciation anxiety was likewise unsupported. These results suggest that although reticence is a salient antecedent of pronunciation-related anxiety, the pathways linking these affective factors to speaking confidence may be more complex than initially assumed (Hõ et al., 2020; Trejos et al., 2018). The main contribution of the present study lies in showing that the psychological dynamics associated with L2 speaking confidence cannot be fully explained by a simple linear relationship among reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and confidence. Rather, the non-significant direct and indirect effects observed in this study suggest that additional psychological or contextual factors, not included in the present model, may contribute to explaining variations in learners' speaking confidence (Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020).

The significant positive relationship between L2 reticence and pronunciation anxiety observed in this study confirms that reticence functions as a powerful antecedent of affective tension in oral language use. Learners who exhibit higher levels of reticence, characterized by hesitation, withdrawal, and avoidance of participation, are more likely to experience heightened anxiety when required to produce spoken English, particularly in relation to pronunciation (Weerakoon et al., 2023). This finding can be understood through

the lens of the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional barriers such as fear and self-consciousness can obstruct language acquisition by limiting learners' willingness to engage in meaningful communication. In this context, reticence may act as an initial psychological filter that predisposes learners to anxiety, especially when they anticipate negative evaluation from peers or instructors (Murad & Jalambo, 2019). The strong path coefficient identified in the model suggests that reticence is not merely a passive behavioural tendency, but a deeply rooted affective condition that amplifies learners' sensitivity to linguistic performance, particularly in phonological aspects that are often publicly scrutinized (Li & Liu, 2011).

This result is also consistent with prior empirical studies in Second Language Acquisition, which have highlighted the close association between communicative inhibition and language-related anxiety. For instance, Sambath and Sethuraman (2017) found that students who were reluctant to speak in the classroom tended to report higher levels of anxiety due to fear of making mistakes and being negatively judged. Similarly, Hidayat (2021) demonstrated that pronunciation anxiety is closely linked to learners' willingness to communicate, with more reticent learners experiencing greater apprehension about their phonetic accuracy. More recent work by Alaqeel and Altalhab (2024) further supports the notion that self-perceived communicative inadequacy and limited participation opportunities reinforce anxiety in speaking contexts. The present finding extends this body of literature by empirically confirming, through a structural model, that reticence serves as a significant predictor of pronunciation anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners. This underscores the importance of addressing reticence not only as a behavioural issue but as a key psychological driver of anxiety that can hinder learners' engagement in spoken communication.

Contrary to theoretical expectations, the present study found that pronunciation anxiety did not exert a statistically significant effect on L2 speaking confidence. Likewise, the bootstrapped indirect effect of reticence on speaking confidence through pronunciation anxiety was not statistically significant, indicating that pronunciation anxiety did not mediate the proposed relationship. While prior studies have frequently reported negative associations between language anxiety and communicative outcomes, the present findings suggest that this relationship may be more complex and context-dependent than previously assumed. For example, Luu and Truong (2024) and Ma (2022) reported that affective variables can be associated with learners' perceptions of communicative competence, whereas the current study did not find a significant relationship between pronunciation anxiety and speaking confidence. Similarly, Huang (2023) and Wei (2019) highlighted the complexity of affective influences on communication-related outcomes, suggesting that anxiety may not always translate directly into reduced communicative performance or self-perceptions. These findings suggest that pronunciation anxiety alone may not be sufficient to explain variations in L2 speaking confidence among Indonesian university EFL learners.

A similar pattern is observed in the non-significant direct effect of L2 reticence on speaking confidence. Although reticence is often conceptualized as a barrier to active participation, it does not necessarily translate into a diminished sense of self-confidence. This finding indicates that learners may consciously or unconsciously separate their internal self-perception from their observable classroom behaviour. In other words, a student may appear reticent in interactional settings yet still perceive themselves as capable of speaking English when required. This distinction has been noted in the literature, where behavioural inhibition does not always correspond with low self-belief (MacIntyre et al., 1998). For example, Moazzam (2014) emphasized that willingness to communicate, anxiety, and perceived competence are related but distinct constructs within the L2 communication framework. Likewise, Alqahtani (2023) demonstrated through meta-analytic structural modelling that the pathways linking affective variables to communicative outcomes are often indirect and mediated by intervening psychological factors. The absence of a significant direct effect in this study therefore suggests that reticence may influence speaking confidence through more complex or latent mechanisms not captured in the current model, such as self-efficacy, identity negotiation, or task familiarity (Mulyono & Saskia, 2021).

The hypothesized mediating role of pronunciation anxiety in the relationship between L2 reticence and speaking confidence was not supported, primarily because the pathway from pronunciation anxiety to speaking confidence did not reach statistical significance, thereby violating a key requirement for establishing mediation. In models based on Structural Equation Modelling, a mediator must significantly

predict the outcome variable for an indirect effect to emerge (Lin et al., 2025); thus, the absence of this link suggests that pronunciation anxiety does not function as an effective explanatory mechanism through which reticence influences confidence in this context. This finding indicates that although reticence strongly contributes to increased pronunciation anxiety, such anxiety may not be sufficiently impactful to alter learners' self-perceived speaking confidence, pointing to a more complex interplay of affective variables than originally hypothesized. As noted by MacKinnon and Luecken (2011), non-significant mediation effects often reflect incomplete model specification rather than a failure of the underlying theory, highlighting the possibility that additional mediating or moderating variables may be involved. An alternative interpretation is that constructs such as self-efficacy, perceived communicative competence, or learning motivation may play a more central mediating role in shaping speaking confidence, as suggested in prior research within Second Language Acquisition (Yashima, 2002; Peng & Woodrow, 2010), where learners' confidence is influenced by a broader network of psychological and contextual factors rather than by anxiety alone.

The findings of this study offer important theoretical implications by challenging the linear assumptions commonly associated with the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that heightened anxiety should directly impede language performance and confidence (Alrabai, 2022). While the present results partially align with this framework, particularly in confirming that reticence significantly elevates pronunciation anxiety, the hypothesized negative relationship between pronunciation anxiety and speaking confidence was not statistically supported in the present sample. Rather than indicating the absence of a relationship, this finding suggests that the effect of pronunciation anxiety on speaking confidence may be more nuanced than originally assumed and may not be adequately captured by the current model. This perspective is consistent with Gregersen (2020), who distinguishes between temporary emotional states such as anxiety and more stable self-perceptions such as confidence. In this regard, the study extends existing theoretical discussions in Second Language Acquisition by suggesting that the relationship between anxiety and confidence may not always operate in a straightforward manner. This perspective is supported by Liao (2024) and Ding (2023), who argue that positive and negative emotions in second language learning can coexist and should be treated as distinct dimensions rather than opposite ends of a single continuum. Furthermore, research by Moreno-Jiménez et al. (2022) and Khajavy et al. (2017) emphasize that communicative outcomes are often influenced by multiple interacting factors, reinforcing the need for more integrative and multi-layered theoretical models. Therefore, the present study contributes to the refinement of affective theories in second language learning by highlighting the complexity of the relationship between reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and speaking confidence among Indonesian EFL learners.

Building on the theoretical insights discussed above, several pedagogical implications can be drawn for EFL classroom practice, particularly in addressing learners' reticence and pronunciation anxiety as key affective barriers. Since reticence significantly predicts pronunciation anxiety, teachers should create a supportive and low-pressure learning environment that encourages gradual participation and reduces fear of negative evaluation. This can be implemented through collaborative tasks, small-group discussions, and scaffolded speaking activities that help learners build confidence before engaging in whole-class interaction. In addition, pronunciation instruction should be integrated as a confidence-building practice rather than merely corrective, allowing learners to view errors as a natural part of the learning process. The absence of a significant relationship between anxiety and speaking confidence suggests that anxious learners may still maintain a stable sense of self-belief. Therefore, teachers should focus on strengthening learners' self-efficacy and perceived competence through constructive feedback and meaningful communicative success.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the structural relationships among L2 reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and speaking confidence among Indonesian EFL learners using Structural Equation Modelling. The findings revealed a significant positive association between L2 reticence and pronunciation anxiety within the proposed model, indicating that learners who reported higher levels of reticence also tended to report greater pronunciation anxiety. However, the hypothesized direct effects of pronunciation anxiety and reticence on speaking confidence were not statistically supported, and the indirect effect through

pronunciation anxiety was likewise non-significant. These findings suggest that, although reticence and pronunciation anxiety are closely related, the proposed pathways linking these constructs to speaking confidence were not empirically supported in the present sample. The study contributes to the growing body of Second Language Acquisition research by providing evidence that the relationships among reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and speaking confidence may be more complex than suggested by simplified linear models and warrant further investigation in diverse learning contexts.

From a practical and theoretical perspective, the findings underscore the importance of addressing reticence as a primary source of pronunciation anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners. EFL instruction may therefore benefit from supportive teaching practices that encourage gradual participation, constructive feedback, and meaningful communicative experiences. At the same time, the study acknowledges several limitations, including its reliance on self-reported data and its focus on a specific regional context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Given that the hypothesized direct and indirect effects on speaking confidence were not statistically supported, future research should further investigate the factors and conditions that may influence the development of speaking confidence in EFL settings. Longitudinal and mixed-method approaches may also provide deeper insights into how reticence, pronunciation anxiety, and speaking confidence interact over time and across different learning contexts.

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