

## Factors Causing Students' Reticence in EFL Class

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### ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were to find out factors causing the students' reticence, the learning environment that the students need, and the teacher's strategies to minimize the reticent students. This research also applied quantitative-qualitative design in order to get more understanding about the students' reticence. In terms of the participant, the researcher focused on one class at eleventh grade at SMA N 1 Pinrang. The instruments used were questionnaire, and interview. The questionnaires were given to all students to find out the factors causing the students' reticence and it supported by interviewing some students. The interview was also used to find out what the students need in learning English and the teacher's strategies to minimize the reticent students. Then, the quantitative data obtained is analyzed using percentage and the qualitative data is analyzed through four stages, namely data collection, data condensation, data display, and data verifying and conclusions. Based on the results of the data, it was found that there were some factors which influenced students to become reticent in the class such psychological factors, linguistic factor, and socio-cultural factor. All of the factors had a great influence on students' reticence. When in the class, some students need supportive friends when they are learning English, and the way of their teacher teaches the students should be easy to understand. The researcher also found some teacher's ways to minimize the students' reticence namely; 1) question technique, 2) cooperative learning, and 3) giving a game.

*Keywords: students' reticence, learning environments, teacher's strategies, EFL class*

## INTRODUCTION

Oral participation is essentially important in the context of English foreign language classroom, especially in Indonesia. It is because the system of education applying in our country is carried out through communication in which the purpose is to make the students involve actively in the learning process. The teachers transmit instruction, information, and question to the students orally.

In the context of teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesian related to the 2013 curriculum, students' participation in the classroom is needed and very important to achieve the learning goals based on the curriculum. It is believed that, when the students taking a part in the classroom interaction with their teacher or among their peers, they are compelled to be involved in the negotiation of meaning that is to express and clarify their intentions, thoughts and opinions (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). In turn, the students' communicative competence or what they need to know to communicate can be developed in the classrooms.

Since the implementation of 2013 curriculum in recent years, it is commonly found that there are many kinds of the students' characteristics in the classroom, such active and passive learners. One of the characteristics of the students in the class is the students being reticent in the English learning process. It is also becoming a general issue or stereotypes of Asian learners that they are considered as passive learners compared to the western learners. In recent ESL/EFL literature, Asian learners of English as foreign language have been arguably reported as reticent and passive learners (Cheng, 2000). Some students' often avoid oral participation in EFL classrooms. "When people avoid communication, they believe it is better to remain silent than taking a risk appearing foolish", this behavior is called as *reticence* (Keaten & Kelly, 2000). Among all kinds of classroom phenomena, the most frustrating one is that students will not actively participate in classroom discussions (Li &

Liu, 2011). The class will become relative quiet in which it can give a negative impact for the teaching and learning environment.

Reticence and non-participation in language classrooms are problematic because learners should be orally active in the target language in order to progress their foreign language (Jackson, 2002). There some factors that make the students being reticent in the class, especially when they learn English language. Gaudart (1992), for example, claimed that some teachers and the inability to function in oral communication, for instance the students living in a country where English is not their everyday language, they lack the practice for developing their communicative skills have been attributed to students' reticence in a number of studies. For instance, Liu (2005) discovered that the sources of students' reticence were linguistic (limited vocabulary, grammar, bad pronunciation and so on), individual (lack of preparation, poor translation ability, and having no experience), social psychological (concern for test result and attitude to low mark and failure, attitude to making mistakes, being laughed at, being negative evaluated, & being the focus of attention, and level of confidence), affective (attitude toward English, motivation to learn or use spoken English, desire to learn/use English), personality (extroversion, introversion, shyness, class-risk taking and sociability), environment (friendliness of the teacher, partners, task difficulty).

Based on the preliminary classrooms observation in one of senior high schools in Pinrang regency and interviewing two of the English teachers, it is found that two classes had low classroom participation rate and some of the students did not pay attention in the class. They tended to be silent rather than active in the learning process. When their teacher gave some questions, most of them avoid those questions. It was supported by the pre-observation that the researcher observes some classes and interviews the English teacher.

That is why, in this study, the researcher interested to investigate and explore the students' reticence in EFL classroom. By knowing the factors that may cause the students

being reticent in the EFL classroom, the teacher will be able to know their students well and find out the appropriate solutions in overcoming the students' reticence.

Based on the previous background, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What factors contribute to the second year students' reticence during the language lesson?
2. What kinds of learning environment do the students need in EFL Classroom?
3. What are the teachers' strategies in overcoming the students' reticence in EFL classroom?

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

*Azizeh Chalak and Firouzeh Baktash (2015)* in their research are about the students' reticence in Iranian students. The results showed that the reticent level was high among the Iranian EFL undergraduate students, and their major problems were feelings of anxiety and delivery skills. Moreover, the results revealed that factors such as low English proficiency, the teaching method, and lack of confidence contributed to the students' reticence in Iranian EFL classrooms. It can be implied that language teachers' awareness of learners' reticence can help them choose more appropriate activities and provide a friendly environment enhancing hopefully more effective participation of EFL learners.

Then, Fang-yu Chang from *Tungnan University, Taiwan (2011)*, This study present the reasons why Taiwanese learners of English language behave passively in the classroom participation. Data were collected from a variety of sources: video-recorded classroom observation, interviewing with teachers and students, and a questionnaire to the students. This study identifies that learners' reticence can be explained by a variety of reasons, including keeping group harmony, the fear of losing face, the fear of showing off, the teachers intolerance of silence, and the insufficient wait-time. Based on these findings, suggestions are

made for language teachers and educators to encourage more verbal contributions from learners.

Both of the previous research findings before have the same purposes, which are to explore the cause of the students' reticence in EFL classroom. The findings also showed that cause or the factors contributing to the students being reticent is broadly the same. However, there are differences between the results of their research. Fang-yu Chang did not reveal in his findings about the teachers' methods in the EFL classes that can make the students become passive. Both of those researchers in their research also suggest to the English teachers to encourage their learners' participation through suitable methodology in teaching English.

The next comes from *Winnie Lee and Sarah Ng (2009)* in this study, teacher interaction strategy was found to be not the only factor determining student reticence in classrooms. The pedagogical goals of the lesson, the task/activities used, and the proficiency level of the students came into play. These factors were found to influence a teacher's decision on the use of interaction strategies, suggesting that teachers' interactional choices are pedagogically related.

Based on the studies above, the researcher wants to explore the causing factors, the students' need in EFL class and the teacher's ways in minimizing the students' reticence.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research is mixed method (quantitative-qualitative) to analyze the data. According to Creswell (2007) stated that as a method, mixed methods focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or studies. The participants of this research were 34 students of the second grade students of SMAN 1 Pinrang and their English teacher. Questionnaire and interview were used as instruments in order to obtain the data in the field. The questionnaire consist of 25 items adopted from

(Chowdhury, 2016) and (Chang, 2011) and then did an interview to clarify again related their reasons why they are reticent in the class.

The research data was analyzed in three phases using analysis model of Miles and Huberman (2014). They are data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The first stage in analyzing the data was data reduction. Data reduction is defined as the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcription. In this case, the researcher reduced, summarized, and coded both of data namely the participants' performance when discussion occurred in that class and the students' answer to interview questions about the reasons why they tend to be reticent. The second stage in analyzing the data was data display. After the researcher transcribed and coded the data, the researcher presented the data in the form of schema. The third stage in analyzing the data was conclusion drawing and verification. After displaying the data, the researcher explained the meaning of the displayed data and gives the conclusion.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the students' responses to the questionnaire, from 25 statements, it found that there were ten most dominating reasons among the students. The researcher described the results of the questionnaire by using frequency and percentage.

No	Statements	Results			
		SA	A	SD	D
1	Feeling tensed when talking	9%	41%	47%	3%
2	Feeling nervous when talking	12%	53%	26%	9%
3	Stumbling over his/her words	6%	47%	44%	3%
4	Muddling his/her words	12%	41%	44%	3%
5	Forgetting what he/she wants to say when talking	12%	38%	41%	9%
6	His/her thoughts are disorganized	12%	30%	54%	4%
7	Losing sight of what he/she wants to say	15%	47%	35%	3%

	when talking				
8	His/her thoughts are jumbled	12%	29%	47%	12%
9	Waiting and being hesitating too long to say what to say	6%	20%	59%	15%
10	Being unaware & unfamiliar of what to say	15%	32%	47%	6%
11	Willingness to respond in class if she/he prepares in advance	35%	50%	15%	-
12	Willingness to speak if she/he is not the only person who answering questions	12%	62%	23%	3%
13	Not answering questions because he/she may not be correct	12%	32%	38%	18%
14	Preferring being called upon by the teacher rather than volunteering an answer	6%	41%	50%	3%
15	Feeling uncomfortable answering the teacher's questions in front of the whole classmates whom she/he knows very well	20%	65%	9%	6%
16	Preferring not to respond to teacher's questions even she/he knows the answer	6%	38%	44%	12%
17	Volunteering to answer question in the class, his/her classmates may think that she/he is showing off	15%	35%	41%	9%
18	The teacher often encourages the students to speak in class	29%	68%	3%	-
19	The classmates in this class do not respect each other's views	12%	32%	50%	6%
20	When he/she is speaking, the teacher does not interrupt	9%	56%	29%	6%
21	His/her classmates discourage others from appearing too confident	20%	53%	18%	9%
22	His/her classmates do not pay attention when others are speaking	15%	32%	44%	9%
23	The teacher praises students very often	21%	56%	23%	-
24	Feeling more comfortable answering	23%	50%	18%	9%

	teacher's question when he/she does not have to do it in front of the whole class				
25	The English teacher has a good sense of humor	12%	47%	41%	-

Thus, based on the questionnaire above, it may be said that there are ten statements that most of the students agree with the statement related why they are reticent in EFL classroom. It was also supported by some interviews to the students to clarify it again about factors causing of the students' reticence in EFL classroom. Based on the students' responses to the interviewer's questions it was found that some factors that contribute to the students' reticence namely:

#### **A. Psychological Factors**

Psychological factors make students reluctant to speak English is a key constraining factor is the anxiety of losing face in front of classmates and teachers (Farmer and Sweeney, 1997: 295). Students are concerned about their lack of proficiency and are fearful of making mistakes. This leads to a lack of confidence in their ability and discourages them from interacting orally; students who feel inadequate in their language abilities tend to protect their self- image by not participating in class communication.

##### *1. Anxiety*

Reticent individuals understand the need for communication, but they see themselves helplessly incompetent (Keaten cited in Bettayeb, 2017). Anxiety also is a feeling of tension, apprehension, and nervousness associated with the situation of learning a foreign language (Horwitz, Michael, Cope, 1986: 125). Therefore, when they are in situation where they must talk, their expectations of failure make them feel anxious.



Horwitz, Michael, and Cope (1986) based on the findings of their study, found out three main causes of students' anxiety i.e. communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. The communication apprehension refers to the students' ability to communicate in the target language. Their low ability in this aspect causes anxious feeling among many students. The second cause which is test anxiety deals with students' fear of being tested. The last cause has to do with other students' evaluation. In this case, other students' evaluation causes anxiety among students themselves.

In this case, many students still keep silent in the class especially when they are learning English and one of the causes was anxiety and it was one of the greatest contributors to the students' reticence and the impact made the students unwilling and afraid to participate in EFL classroom. It was proved by the result of the questionnaire in the statement "*feeling tensed when talking*" and "*feeling nervous when talking*" most of the students agreed both of the statements. When the students asked whether they were nervous and tensed in learning English, some of them mention that,

*"kadang tertekan, kadang juga merasa nyaman. Tertekan kalau bertanya bapak baru tidak ditau artinya nah itu susah dijawab"* (S1, wawancara personal, Agustus 2019)

*Sometimes I felt tensed, at times I felt comfy. I felt tensed when teacher ask something and we did not know the meaning. Well, that's difficult to answer* (S1, Personal interview, August 2019)

Other students also stated that their mind were completely blank if they did not know the answer when the teacher asks them. S3 felt nervous due to their ignorance of English as described below:

*"nyaman, kebanyakan juga gugup atau merasa blank kalau ditanyaki sama bapak baru tidak ditahu jawabannya"* (S3, wawancara personal, Agustus 2019)

*“Comfortable, but mostly, I was so nervous or my thought was suddenly blank if the teacher ask and the we did not know the answer” (S3, personal interview, August 2019)*

S4 also mentioned that, he felt nervous and scared pointed by the teacher to answer the teacher’s question or read the reading passage among their friends, as described below:

*“biasa juga kalau ditunjuk sama guru kaya' gugup gugup kalau ada disuruhki bacai sama takut juga sama gurunya kalau menjawab baru salah ki nanti” (S4, wawancara personal, Agustus 2019)*

*“Tacher asked me to read, I felt so nervous and scared to my teacher if my answer was wrong eventually (S4, Personal interview, August 2019)*

When interviewing the students, most of them have similar reason why they are being reticent in the class.

## *2. Lacking Confidence in Oneself*

Another reason of students’ reticence in English classroom was the lack of confidence in using English as a means of communication. Nunan (199) says that students who lack of confidence about themselves and their English necessarily suffer from communication apprehension. The main cause of students’ confidence is their low ability in speaking English. In this case, many students think that their English is bad and feel that they cannot speak English well. the other cause of students’ lack of confidence also deals with the lack of encouragement from the teacher (Brown, 2001)

Many students do not feel confident speaking and participate in every activity in EFL classroom. As S5 stated that why she was silent in the class:

*“kadang tidak saya tahu kak makanya saya diam atau tidak PD ka juga, biasanya juga saya tahu, tapi tidak PD ka karea maluka” (Wawaancara personal S5, August 2019)*

*“Sometimes, I did not know the answer so that’s why I still keep silent or I am lack of confidence and also, sometimes I know the answer but I am not confidence because I feel shy” (Personal Interview of S5, August 2019)*

Some students also said that another reason why they are reluctant to speak is fear of making mistake or fear of losing face. As argued by many theorists, fear of mistake becomes one of the main factors of students’ reluctance to speak in English in the classroom Aftat (2008) adds that this fear is linked to the issue of correction and negative evaluation. In addition, this is also much influenced by the students’ fear of being laughed by other students or being criticized by the teacher. As a result, students commonly stop participating in the speaking activity (Hieu, 2011)

## **B. Linguistic Factor**

Linguistic factors causing reluctance to speak L2. Cover learners’ difficulties with the transfer of information from the mother tongue to the target language, with the native-speaker teachers’ pronunciation, and a lack of knowledge of grammatical patterns in English as well as cultural and social knowledge (Caletcova in Nunan, 1999)

### *1. Low English Proficiency*

Low English proficiency was one of the main reasons that lead reticence to EFL classroom. Most of the students had the same problems in English language. They tended to be silent and did not partake in language learning process because they felt worried about their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Some of students mentioned below:

*“mungkin takut dikasi pertanyaan karena tidak tau, kurang sekali kosakataku bahasa inggris, tidak lancarpa juga berbahasa inggris.*

*(Perhaps, we felt scared if we were given a question because I did not know it, I lacked of English vocabulary, and also I was not fluent in English)*

Another student mentioned that:

*“kosakatanya juga susah disebut. Kalau ditunjuk ki sama guru baru tidak ditahu jawabannya disitumi merasa tegangka kak. Kalau kosatakata tidak terlalu banyak saya tahu” (S3, Wawancara personal, August 2019)*

*“English vocabulary is difficult to pronounce. If I pointed by the teacher and I did not know the answer at that time I feel tensed. My vocabulary also is lack” (S3, personal Interview, August 2019)*

### **C. Socio Cultural Factor**

Cultural factors that might cause learners' reluctance to communicate in a language classroom related to learners' prior learning experiences and expectations (Nunan, 1999). Environment have important role to motivate the students to speak English. In environment, the people may think that the students just want to show off when they speak English for daily conversation. Thus, environment and previous learning that could influence the students' speaking ability.

In this case, peers is also becomes one of the reasons why students reticence in EFL class. There should be some students who were active and who try more active rather than passive. In this case, peers can be a support and can make the students lose their confidence. As stated S5 and S6, their friends were not supportive. They tend to discourage others from being confident in the class. They described below:

*“pernah kak, tapi tidak berpengaruh ji sama saya, karena kita juga belajar dari kesalahan ji juga” (Wawancara Personal S5, Agustus 2019)*

*“Ever., but it does not eaffect to me because we learnt from the mistakes” (Personal interview of S5, August 2019)*

*“biasa ada yang mengejek” (Wawancara personal S6, Agustus 2019)*

*“also there are my friends always mock” (Personal Interview of S6, August 2019)*

In this case, students should make a friendly atmosphere because being friendly will create positive environment. Friends should be supportive by giving advice to each other. Friendly atmosphere makes students willing to participate actively, answer the questions, and express their ideas freely in class because they will not be afraid of making mistakes (Riasati, 2014). This situation will eventually make them more enthusiastic to learn English

### **1. Learning Environments/atmospheres that the Students Need in EFL Classroom.**

Besides discussing internal and external factors, there were Learning Environments/atmospheres that students need to have to improve their learning process in class. The first learning environment/atmosphere is *friends*. Most students wanted to get support from their friends and could become confident in the learning. One of student stated that:

*“salah satunya itu teman yang mendukung kita saat belajar, contohnya kan banyak teman yang pintar bahasa Inggris jadi kalau kita tidak tahu kosakata bahasa Inggris yang nakasiki bapak bisaki bertanya sama temanta” (Wawancara personal S1, Agustus 2019)*

*“one of them is a friend that support us while studying, for example; there are some of my friends who are smart in English, so if we do not know the English vocabulary that teacher gave us, we can ask to my friends” (Personal interview of S1, August 2019)*

The next learning environment that students need is *teacher*. Teacher also had an important role in students' participation in the classroom. One of the students mentioned about the teacher's method should be easy to understand to all students as one of students mentioned below;

*“Selanjutnya itu guru, yang ramah jika ada yang ditanyakan bilang apa bahasa Inggrisnya ini bisa juga na tanyaki artinya sekaligus na bantuki supaya ditaumi juga” (Wawancara Personal S1, Agustus 2019)*

*“The next is teacher who is pleasant if asked related to English vocabulary then help us to know the meaning of the English” (Personal interview S1, August 2019)*

Other things that the students need as a support when they are learning are *classroom*. They need classroom with adequate facilities. Not only the classroom has adequate facilities but also the classroom should be clean and not be fray. One of student commented when asked the learning environment that he need:

*“biasa ribut juga teman teman kalau belajar, suasana kelasku juga itu kak kadang kurang bersih ee karena bagus juga kalau bersih” (Wawancara personal S6, Agustus 2019)*

*“Sometimes my friends are always noise when we studying in the class, and my classroom occasionally is less clean” (Personal Interview S6, August 2019)*

## **2. Teacher’s Ways in Minimizing Students’ Reticence in EFL Classroom**

Due to the importance of the topic of the students’ reticence, the teachers have to prepare some strategies to avoid it. The strategies are needed for the teachers, especially for those who believe reticent or silent students are an obstacle in teaching learning process. From the interviews that the researcher did, the teacher mentioned that most of their students always silent in his classroom teaching process:

*“yah 40 persen yang aktif , 60 persen yang pasif itu disebabkan karena itu dalam apa namanya dalam komunikasi bahasa inggris”(Extract I, Wawancara guru, Agustus, 2019)*

*“yah, 40 percent are active, 60 percent are passive, the cause lies on English communication” (Extract 1, Interview with teacher, September 2019)*

From the extract above, it is clear that more than a half of students indicated as reticent students and it is really affect to the teaching learning process. The teachers’ ways or strategies here play an important role in order to make the learning process proceed as expected.

Reducing their shame also can be grouping them or work in a pair. By asking them to have a small group or work in a pair, the students could speak more comfortably with their friends, especially friends who sat next to them. The teacher comment:

*“Selain itu, dalam pembelajaran biasanya saya pasang dengan temannya jikalau ada diskusi dan kegiatan lainnya untuk membuat siswa yang kurang dapat aktif dikarenakan ada teman yang bantu. Kadang juga saya pasang untuk bermain peran” (Wawancara Guru, September 2019)*

*“besides that, in teaching learning process usually I grouping them to discuss the material in order to encourage the other students more participate because their friends will help him/her. Sometimes I also give them a role play” (Interview with teacher, September 2019)*

From the extract above, the teacher also used a cooperative learning by working in group or pair. The aim of this activity is to create student-students interaction. The teacher's role here is as facilitator. Work in group will make them feel more comfortable to say their ideas in using the foreign language because they have known the quality of their friends. Jones (2008) maintained that working in the groups will make the students tolerate each other toward their strength and weakness to achieve one purpose.

Another teacher's way is by asking the students. The teacher mentioned that if we always ask them bit by bit and be accompanied by encouragement. The students will speak gradually.

*“Dengan cara kasi beberapa pertanyaan, yaitu dengan Tanya, Tanya, dan Tanya. Yah, bagaimana caranya supaya bisa berbicara sedikit demi sedikit” (Wawancara guru, September 2019)*

*“Giving them some questions, by asking, asking, and asking in order to make them speak gradually” (Interview with teacher, September 2019)*

The extract above also becomes the teacher's ways by using question technique to minimize of the reticent students. It is an important part in creating classroom interaction because the teacher's questions have strong effect to them to participate in every activity in

EFL class. As discussed in chapter two, David (2007) stated that the question will attract the students' attention. Because it will create classroom interaction between the teacher and the students

When the students lose their enthusiasm, they will be lazy and saturated to participate in every activity. In this case, the teacher should seek the way how to reduce this situation. One of the ways as mentioned by the teacher when asked about his ways to reduce the students' reticence is by giving *a game or an ice breaker*. The teacher mentioned below:

*“kalau masih punya waktu kemudian kalau kita lihat situasi kelas yah tidak mendukung atau tidak kondusif yah kita kasi cara-cara lain agar bagaimana caranya perhatiannya itu kembali ke materi” (Wawancara guru, September 2109)*

*“If there's enough time and the classroom is not conducive. I give another way to attract their attention back to the material again” (Interview with the teacher, September 2019)*

From the extract above, the teacher will give their students a game when the condition of the classroom is not conducive. Van Worde, as cited in Donald (2010), argues that fun learning will make the students more motivated. Fun learning can be done when the teacher creates a game. Game also will boost the students' enthusiasm, reduce their fear and boredom and they will understand the material better because the students interest on what they are doing. Although the game seems to make the students burdensome, this activity is also beneficial to other students who do not answer the question.

In conclusion, a number of factors contributed to the students' reticence and anxiety in the EFL class. However, such commonly identified reasons as cultural beliefs and educational habit (Cortazzi and Jin, 1995, Jackson, 2002) were not mentioned by the participants in the present research. This might be because the interviewees, having a similar cultural and educational background, neglected these two factors and focused on the specific context in which why many students remained reticent and became anxious when using the



foreign language. In this present study also revealed some strategies used by the teacher in minimizing the students' reticence which is not discussed by some previous research in the same topic.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

Referring to the results and discussion of this research, the researcher concluded that many students appeared to be reticent in EFL class because of various factors such as anxiety, low English proficiency, lack of confidence and their peers.

Furthermore, there are also learning environments that the students need in order to make the participate more in the class. The first is friends, the teacher and the classroom condition.

The last about how does the teacher reduce the students' reticence in EFL classroom? The results found that there are some teacher's ways to reduce it. The first way is question technique. The purpose is to create classroom interaction between teacher and students. The second way is cooperative learning by grouping them or works in a pair. The purpose is to make the students feel more comfortable to say their ideas. And the last is giving them a game or an ice breaking when the classroom situation is not conducive.

Based on the conclusion described above, the researcher gave some suggestion, they are: (1) for students to overcome reticence, first of all they have to be aware of the existence of this phenomenon of reticence in EFL classes. Also, they should practice the language in every chance possible, improve their self-confidence, and expand their vocabulary. In addition to that, they have to support each other while speaking in English. (2) For the teacher to address reticence she/he can monitor learners during the lesson to find out the reasons that prevent them from speaking and participating and also teachers should prepare some ways or strategies, not only interesting, but also related to students' life, so that learners can have the ability to talk about them in English. (3) For future researcher, the result of this research can

be a reference for other researchers who do advanced research about students' reticence in EFL classroom. It also provides an alternative source and guidance for the next study to obtain better and more accurate result.

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