

An in-depth study on students' perceptions of key factors influencing their willingness to communicate in EFL classrooms

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Abstract - Communicative competence has become a primary objective in second and foreign language education. A crucial component of achieving this competence is learners' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in the target language. This study aims to explore the perceptions of students regarding the factors that influence their WTC in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The main objective is to identify and analyze internal and external elements that contribute to students' decisions to engage in classroom communication using English. This research employed a qualitative case study design to gain deep insights into the subject matter. Two secondary school students were purposefully selected as participants based on contrasting backgrounds in English language exposure. One participant had extensive experience and exposure to English since early childhood, while the other had limited exposure and began learning English more recently. This purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to gather diverse and detailed perspectives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to elicit rich, open-ended responses. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to WTC. The analysis revealed several key factors influencing students' WTC, including affective elements (such as confidence and anxiety), the classroom environment, linguistic competence, the nature of classroom tasks, and the teacher's role and encouragement. The findings suggest that WTC in EFL settings is shaped by a combination of personal, social, and instructional dynamics. Students are more inclined to communicate when they feel emotionally secure, supported by their peers and teachers, and when the learning environment promotes engagement. The study concludes that fostering a positive emotional and instructional environment is essential for increasing WTC. The research highlights the importance of teacher sensitivity to student needs and recommends further studies involving more participants to enhance generalizability and explore additional influencing factors.

Keywords: EFL; learning motivation; speaking competence; willingness to communicate

1. Introduction

Everyone communicates on a daily basis. It is very essence of life, and it's a matter of necessity. When it comes to learning a foreign language, it concentrates on developing one's communicative competence. In line with this point, modern language pedagogy prioritizes communication and enables language learners to have successful communication in the target language (Riasati, 2012). Therefore, one of the main objectives of learning a language is to be capable of communicating in the target language.

In EFL contexts, problems generally emerge when learners are discouraging from participating in communication although they possess good English language skills, having enough communicative competence and several chances to communicate in the classroom. Hence, having a willingness to communicate is required. Lee (2020) mentioned that students must have high enough willingness to communicate level in order to develop their language competence. This point is also connected to research done by Grant (2018) who revealed that students having willingness to communicate tend to be more

consistently involved in English communication. Willingness to communicate (WTC) is seen through the L2 WTC theory. MacIntyre et al., (1998) defined willingness to communicate as "the preparedness for entering to discourse with a particular person or persons at a specific time utilizing the L2". In the context of English classroom, students' WTC is understood as their intention to interact with others using the target language, in this case, English (Dewaele, 2019; Dewaele & Pavlescu, 2021). Hence, WTC is seen as being essential to the development of language learners' communicative competence and the process of communication would be insufficient without it.

English is recognized as the most popular foreign language in Indonesia since this subject has been learned from primary to higher education. Unfortunately, the issue of students' unwillingness to communicate is one of the main problems faced by many English learners during the learning process. In this case, the number of the students had difficulty to communicate using spoken English. Several EFL classrooms indicated that when the teachers have facilitated students with the opportunities to communicate in English, some of them were engaged and some of them were just silent. Some students were unable communicating using English, some students were unwilling to begin the communication, and most students avoided communicating in English. This problem is also aligned to Cook (2008) who mentioned that around 70 percent of classroom utterances mainly come from the teacher. Therefore, the classroom conversation usually starts by the teacher. It implies that the teacher has to initiate the conversation in the classroom. Meanwhile, the students have fewer in-class conversations. Prihartanti (2017) also examined the willingness of English language learners in Indonesia to involve in communication and their level of anxiety. The results obtained that learners' WTC was very limited with more than 68% of learners indicating that language anxiety affected on their WTC.

A study on students' willingness to communicate is very beneficial for current education needs. Some researchers had investigated this topic such as students' perceptions of WTC (Bukhari et al. 2015; Rihardini et al., 2021) the relationship between students' beliefs and their WTC (Aini, 2020), teachers' beliefs about the role in maintaining students' WTC (Sari, 2016). In addition, the study of willingness to communicate in the global context have also carried out by the researchers. For instance, research conducted by Peng & Woodrow (2010) in China, Ghonsooly et al., (2012) in Iran, Basöz & Erten (2018) in Turkey and lastly Punyaporn and Soontornwipast (2022) in Thai University which found that students' WTC have positive influence toward the success of learning a language. Although numerous researches have examined the issue of WTC, it is also necessary to investigate the factors which can affect the students' willingness to communicate, especially in English foreign language classroom.

Furthermore, in Indonesian context, studies conducted by Mulyaningsih and Murtafi'ah (2022); Weda et al., (2020) investigated students' WTC majoring English education department. It was discovered that learning responsibility is the main factor influencing students' willingness to communicate. On the other hand, the kinds of interesting topic and learning activity such as group discussion become the influential factors on students' WTC. The previous studies mentioned earlier mainly employed quantitative research method which focused on university students. Therefore, to fill the gap of the previous research, the current study used qualitative method. This is an attempt to provide a clear description about the findings of the study with a more in-depth understanding of the participants' views regarding the phenomenon. This study aimed at exploring Indonesian secondary students regarding the factors influencing their willingness to communicate in English classroom. It is vitally important that EFL teachers acknowledge the factors that affect their students' WTC. Gaining a deeper comprehension of these factors would enable EFL teachers to more actively support their students' WTC. Hence, the research question was formulated as follows: What are the factors influencing secondary students' willingness to communicate in EFL Classroom?

The study by Sanjaya et al (2023) explores the motivation of Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in acquiring second language pragmatics. It examines factors that drive learners to understand the cultural and contextual nuances of language use, highlighting the importance of motivation in mastering pragmatic competence. The research, published in the Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics, provides valuable insights into how learners navigate the complexities of pragmatic learning, emphasizing the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in language acquisition.

A comprehensive model for researching classroom discourse, emphasizing language interactions within educational settings. The framework focuses on analysing teacher-student communication, instructional strategies, and the dynamics of language use in classrooms. It serves as a methodological guide for both researchers and educators who are interested in exploring discourse patterns and their impact on learning outcomes (Wajdi, 2018; cf. Silma et al; 2024).

Researching students' perceptions of the factors influencing their willingness to communicate (WTC) in an EFL classroom is crucial because communication is a core element of language acquisition. Understanding the specific factors—such as motivation, anxiety, classroom environment, peer interactions,

and teacher support—that affect students' WTC can lead to improved teaching strategies and more supportive learning environments. Since WTC directly impacts students' participation and engagement in language practice, exploring this topic can provide insights into how to better facilitate communication, boost confidence, and promote active language use, ultimately leading to more effective language learning outcomes.

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the importance of willingness to communicate (WTC) in successful language learning. MacIntyre et al. (1998) introduced WTC as a key predictor of communication behaviour in second language acquisition, emphasizing that it is influenced by both situational and individual factors. Peng and Woodrow (2010) further examined WTC in the EFL context and found that variables such as motivation, classroom climate, and learner anxiety significantly influence students' readiness to engage in communication. Additionally, studies by Yashima (2002) revealed that learners with higher international posture and positive attitudes toward the language are more likely to demonstrate WTC, indicating the role of cultural and motivational factors.

Research by Kang (2005) explored the dynamic nature of WTC, showing that it fluctuates depending on immediate situational factors like topic familiarity and relationship with interlocutors. Meanwhile, studies in the Indonesian context by Riasati (2012) and Zarrinabadi (2014) highlighted the role of teacher support and peer relationships in either enhancing or inhibiting students' WTC in the EFL classroom. By drawing from these studies, researching students' perceptions of factors influencing WTC offers a comprehensive understanding of how these elements interact in different cultural and educational settings, making it a relevant and impactful area of study. Exploring students' perceptions of factors influencing their willingness to communicate (WTC) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms is essential for improving language acquisition. Several studies have identified key elements that affect students' WTC.

English teachers view discovery and project-based learning positively, recognizing their benefits for student engagement and critical thinking (Amrullah et al., 2025). Filipino students perceive teachers' vocal quality as influential in classroom atmosphere and learning effectiveness (Calinao et al., 2023). Faculty members note that many accountancy students lack proper email etiquette, highlighting a need for digital communication training (Castillo et al., 2023). First-year English majors in the Philippines experience notable anxiety during oral presentations, affecting their academic performance (Docena et al., 2023). Digital media plays a significant role in helping students master grammar for better TOEFL results (Jasrial et al., 2025). Hospitality student interns report that non-verbal communication is crucial in professional service encounters (Malate et al., 2023). English teachers support supplemental teaching as a necessary adjustment during the pandemic to maintain learning continuity (Corpin, 2024). Children's behaviour, social interaction, and cognitive growth are influenced by TikTok usage, raising concerns about their digital well-being (Maulida et al., 2025).

Individual factors play a significant role in WTC. Self-confidence is crucial, as students with higher self-assurance are more likely to engage in communication (Wahjuningsih, 2020). Additionally, language proficiency has been found to correlate with increased willingness to communicate, as students with higher English proficiency tend to engage more actively in communication (Biria & Jouybar, 2016).

Affective factors also impact WTC. Anxiety is a significant barrier, with language learning anxiety hindering communication (Alenezi, 2020). Motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, encourages students to actively participate in communication, enhancing their WTC (Alenezi, 2020).

Situational factors are also influential in shaping WTC. A supportive and interactive classroom environment fosters a willingness to communicate, as students are more likely to participate in settings where they feel comfortable and engaged (Alenezi, 2020). Furthermore, task types play a role in boosting WTC, with engaging and relevant tasks motivating students to communicate more (Wahjuningsih, 2020).

Sociocultural factors, such as peer influence, can either encourage or discourage communication. Peer interactions have been shown to influence students' willingness to participate in discussions (Wahjuningsih, 2020). Additionally, cultural norms regarding language use also impact WTC, with cultural attitudes affecting students' in-class willingness to communicate (Alenezi, 2020).

2. Method

This research employed a qualitative case study. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the study attempted to fill the gap of the prior research in this field, which primarily used quantitative methods. Furthermore, Gay et al (2012) mentioned that case study is an approach used in qualitative research that involves the researcher focusing on a study unit that is identifiable as a boundary system (for example, a classroom, a school, or a teacher). Therefore, a case study suited to this research because it examined a case by obtaining

a deep and detailed understanding of the case to determine the factors contributing students' WTC in EFL classroom context.

The research participants were secondary students. Since the previous research mostly investigated students' WTC in the university context. According to Gay et al., (2012) qualitative sampling draws on the process of selecting a limited number of selected persons who can assist the researcher in understanding the phenomenon being investigated. In this regard, two secondary students were involved in this study. One student who highly motivated in learning English, and she has had a sufficiently long experience of learning English, both at school and joining English courses since childhood. On the other hand, a passive student who tended to have no exposure in English also involved in this research. Therefore, two students with those different characteristics became the participants. The preference for students chosen was based on the need to obtain the variety of data in depth regarding the factors influencing students' WTC. As mentioned by Creswell (2012) the purpose of qualitative research is to present the complex information provided by individuals. In accordance with research ethics, the researcher replaced their names by pseudonyms of Daisy and Aruni.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted using Bahasa Indonesia to prevent misinterpretations between the researcher and participants. The questions of interview were adapted from Basöz and Erten (2019); Tuyen and Loan (2019). Participants were asked about two elements, such as individual and situational variables which contribute to communication willingness. In addition, the researcher asked open-ended questions to the participants, audio-taped their answers, then transcribed to analyse the data. Thematic analysis by following the steps from Creswell (2012) was used to examined the data. In relation to this, from the transcriptions of interviews, the researcher started to code the data and presented the theme then the last step was produced the report. In this step, the researcher made the explanations of the results about the factors determining the willingness to communicate of the students in English classroom. In order to ensure the results of qualitative data analysis were accurate, trustworthiness was measured. Creswell (2012) explained that validating findings entails the researcher checking the accuracy or credibility of the findings. The researcher used member checking to make sure the data. In the process of member checking, the researcher asked participants to verify the accuracy of the reports. Returning the findings and asking them on the report's accuracy.

3. Results and Discussion

The researcher obtained the data from interview. In this case, student who highly motivated and has had exposure to English was identified as Daisy, and student who was passive in learning English and tended not to have exposure to English was named as Aruni. After the data have been transcribed, the researcher read, coded, and analysed the data repeatedly to come up with insightful interpretations. In this section, it addressed the research question on what influences the willingness to communicate in EFL classroom. The factors were presented in table 1. the transcribed data also revealed sub-themes, which were displayed below.

Table 1 Factors influencing willingness to communicate

Theme	Code
Affective factors	Self-motivation
	Self confidence
	L2 anxiety
	Excitement in learning English
Classroom environment	Classmates
	Positive classroom atmosphere
Linguistic factors	Vocabulary mastery
	Pronunciation
Type of task	Interesting topic
	Spoken activity
Teacher's role	Teacher attitude in the class
	Teacher's encouragement

A significant aspect that the participants reported influencing their WTC in English was an affective factor. Based on the findings, four important sub-factors determined the degree to which students



were willing and unwilling to communicate; self-motivation, self-confidence, L2 anxiety, and excitement in learning English. Both participants explained that motivation arises because there are particular things they want to achieve. As a result, it makes them increasingly want to be more accustomed in using the target language in the classroom, in this case, English. Below are a few responses taken from the students' interviews:

Engaging in English competitions is something I absolutely love doing. So, I have to practice and develop my skills more often. When studying in the classroom, I always try to speak English (Daisy)

I want to study in one of the top universities. Having the English skills are necessary. Although I do not have enough confidence when learning English, I still try to practice communicating using English (Aruni)

The above explanation also showed that confidence affects one's propensity to use English for communication. When researcher asked about feelings such as nervousness, fear, or anxiety during the English-speaking process, a student, Daisy, who was accustomed to and exposed to English did not experience those things and she was very confident in communicating using English. On the other hand, passive student had low self-confidence. Even when she has the opportunity to speak, she often feels panic and anxious. This can prevent her from communicating actively in class.

When I want to start talking, I often feel panicked and uncomfortable. I don't have a high self confidence (Aruni)

It is obvious that L2 anxiety can hinder student in the communication process. When student feel the excitement during the learning process, she will typically be more involved and proactive in English-language communication.

I feel excited. Umm, because I really like english (Daisy)

The L2 classroom environment was further identified as having an impact on students' level of WTC in English. The participants responded that their WTC in English in this category is influenced by two sub-factors; classmates, and positive classroom atmosphere. Regarding their desire to communicate in English classroom, both participants highlighted the impact of their classmates. Several representative statements are:

When I'm with friends who also like English, I usually have more enthusiasm to communicate. Sometimes, outside of class hours, we enjoy studying together (Daisy)

If there are friends to chat with, using English, I become more interested. Although the English is still combined with Indonesian (Aruni)

It can be understood that peers also have a contribution in influencing students' willingness to communicate. When students gather with others who have the same interests, they will tend to be more active in the communication process. Furthermore, students feel more pleasurable and have less anxiety when they are in a pleasant classroom. The participant's opinion of this matter may be better understood from the sentence that follows:

Actually, if the class is not too serious and not too stressful, I would still be involved in speaking English. On the contrary, when the class situation is unpleasant I would rather stay quiet (Aruni)

Linguistic factors were also reported by Aruni that might affect WTC in English, as she was not as really active in learning English, and did not get the exposure to English as the first student, Daisy. In this case, Daisy did not experience those problems. For Aruni, the mastery of vocabulary and pronunciation were the two key linguistic factors that influenced her WTC in English during the class. This was clearly revealed when she said:

My problem is that I often find myself forgetting the vocabulary of English right before I want to speak, which makes it hard for me to compose the sentences. What is in my head suddenly disappears, even though I have previously memorized it (Aruni)

I also often feel scared when pronouncing words in English, afraid of being wrong and feeling embarrassed (Aruni)

From those statements stated above, the two reasons that prevented her from communicating in English were because of the limited vocabulary and the ability to pronounce the words accurately. Furthermore, another important consideration that was brought up by both participants was the type of task. The importance of task type in motivating students to communicate in class was underlined. In this instance, when the teacher assigns an engaging task, the students will be more motivated. To make assignments interesting, teachers can assign a variety of tasks. The students expressed this clearly when they said:

Teacher often gives assignments that make us able to practice speaking skills. We were once asked to find something related to narrative text, then in the next meeting we were asked to do storytelling, besides that the teacher often divides us into several groups for discussion. Therefore, the class is more interesting, not just answering questions from the textbook. With these types of tasks, I feel motivated to speak and communicate in English (Daisy)

Some tasks, such as describing something, making a story, and presenting, can increase my willingness to speak. But the teacher must give time to prepare, if it's spontaneous I don't think that I can do it (Aruni)

Lastly, a student reported the role of a teacher contributes to her willingness to communicate in English classroom. When the teacher is a pleasant figure and always provides support for students' development, she will be more motivated to improve the English language skills. The following was an extract from the participant's interview:

Actually, teachers has a big role in increasing students' willingness to communicate. For me personally, if the teacher is nice, humble, and if I make mistakes in grammar or pronunciation she doesn't get angry, I will be more willing to practice my speaking skills. On the other hand, if the teacher is not nice, I tend to stay quiet and not engage in communication (Aruni)

The present study revealed some factors influencing the willingness to communicate in English classroom. Different English language competence levels among students result in differing perspectives about what can motivate them to communicate in English classrooms. The majority of research participants reported experiencing both individual and situational factors that may influence their willingness to communicate. In relation to this, Tuyen and Loan (2019) indicated that two categories of attributes have been recognized as potentially influencing students' WTC. These include psychological or individual factors, such as personality, perceived communication skill, L2 learning anxiety, L2 learning motivation, and self-confidence combined with situational or contextual factors, such as the roles and attitudes of the teachers, the kinds of tasks assigned, the topics addressed, the environment in the classroom, and the interlocutors. In terms of individual factors which lead to affective domain, the major result of this study indicated that the two participants showed a great desire to learn English, even though a student who was not frequently exposed to the English language encountered several barriers during the learning process.

Motivation among learners was shown through both internal and external goals, such as learning a new language and obtaining more prestigious opportunities in the future comparable to the discoveries made by Yashima (2002); Peng and Woodrow (2010). This was consistent with Munezane (2016)'s explanation of the ideal L2 paradigm. Learners who are highly motivated and have high expectations for their language acquisition will perceive themselves becoming proficient in the language and capable of

making connections between their classroom experiences and their future goals. In this regard, students who find fulfilment and enjoyment in their L2 acquisition tend to be more motivated to acquire knowledge and bring in a greater effort. Nevertheless, throughout the interview, even though they perceived a positive attitude towards learning English, student also inclined to have anxious feelings when learning English which may hinder from participating in communicative activities. Student who struggles with anxiety often find it difficult to cope with the language learning process and have low enthusiasm to communicate (Manipuspika, 2018; Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2019). In addition, a study conducted by Rastegar and Karami (2015) discovered that a significant negative relationship exists between anxiety in foreign language classes and willingness to communicate. As a result, it may affect students' scholastic success.

Other evidence also indicated that situational factors played a major role in enhancing the willingness to communicate in an English classroom especially if it is considered as foreign language. In this case, when the classroom is supported with a great opportunity to talk, it may develop students' language competence. From the findings, L2 classroom environment, the type of task, and the role of teacher were stated as the major influence of students' WTC. Furthermore, in the classroom process, teachers who have an attractive teaching style will find it easier to interact with students. The study's two participants expressed interest in teachers who are creative and energetic while teaching. On the other hand, monotonous teaching and learning activities might cause students to become demotivated.

Wen and Clément (2003) also addressed teachers' influence, including their attitude, participation, immediacy, and teaching techniques, as a source of motivation and demotivation for WTC. A number of studies (Wen & Clément, 2003; MacIntyre et al., 2011; Zarrinabadi, 2014) revealed that teachers' involvement, attitude, and style of instruction might have a major impact on students' participation, engagement, and WTC in the classroom. In the classroom, students expected that their teachers would enthusiastically encourage the development of language competence by providing interesting activities and tasks. Additionally, it is also necessary to build a joyful classroom atmosphere.

Apart from individual and situational factors, the prior knowledge of English was also influential in students' engagement in classroom communication. In this case, the aspects such as vocabulary mastery and pronunciation played an important role. Student who had no experience of learning English apart from school faced the problem of low language proficiency which sometimes leads to avoidance in communication. The results of this present study suggested that student's ability to concentrate when speaking a foreign language is influenced by their pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge. When a student is conversing with others and she doesn't know the vocabulary or how to pronounce it correctly, there may be a moment of silence as she struggles to find the right word. Concentrating too much on finding the word, she sometimes forgets what wanted to say when the word is unknown. Auliyah and Sujannah (2019); Basöz and Erten (2019), They discovered in their study that participants' reports of linguistic elements influencing their WTC in English. From the findings of the previous studies, the WTC of students in English in class was caused by a number of significant linguistic elements; practice, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, those linguistic aspects hold an important role in communication practices that can affect students' willingness to communicate.

4. Conclusion

The present study has investigated the students' perception on the factors influencing their willingness to communicate in EFL classroom. The findings pointed to an insight of individual and situational factors that contribute to their communicative competence. Specifically, affective factors, classroom environment, linguistic competence, type of task, and the role of teacher were reported as highly influential factors of students' willingness to communicate in English classroom.

Furthermore, this present research can be a reflection for many schools in Indonesia, especially English teacher as the one who takes an important role in carrying out the language program in the classroom. This research proposed a number of implications for language teachers. Accordingly, from the influencing factors found in this study, teachers can adjust and develop the essential necessities that must be addressed to keep students' willingness to communicate at a higher level, and can transform students with a limited degree of willingness to communicate into high levels of willingness to communicate. To achieve higher WTC, it is advised that teachers place a strong emphasis on developing their students' communicative competence. In this regard, creating a less threatening classroom environment to decrease students' anxiety and boosting their motivation with a range of interesting language learning tasks and activities are important to consider. Lastly, building interpersonal relationships with students and reducing teacher's authority need to be done as well. To sum up, language learning has to be made equivalent by not merely focusing on a particular aspect of the language skill.

The limitations of the current investigation are also apparent. Considering the small number of participants, the study might not be representative of all English foreign language learners in Indonesia. The increased number of participants might have produced more comprehensive data on WTC among the students. Furthermore, the data gathering procedure was restricted to interviews. Therefore, in order to see the actual conditions, future research may incorporate additional data collection, such as observation during the English class.

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