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SITUATIONAL AND MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AFFECTING WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AMONG ESL STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Having a sense of willingness to communicate in the 2nd language (L2) is one of the important factors in improving L2 speaking skills. Willingness to Communicate (WTC) a model proposed by MacIntyre et. al (1998) is considered an indicator for successful English learning outcome. There are several factors that influences students' WTC in English. Hence, the objective of this study is to look into the individual factors that influences pre-university students WTC in English in an ESL digital classroom setting. The result of the study was obtained through the use of qualitative method using a focused group interview of 25 voluntary pre-university students in a public university in Sabah, Malaysia. The data obtained revealed that individual factors which are self-confidence, language anxiety, motivation and grit play a role in influencing pre-university students' WTC in English. This finding would be beneficial to language instructors as well as syllabus makers in providing and designing an English lesson that is geared to encouraging students to communicate in English.

Keywords:

Situational And Individual Factors, Willingness To Communicate, English Language, ESL Students

Introduction

In this contemporary era of globalisation and industrialization, the English language plays an indispensable role (Laghari, Kakepoto & Arshad, 2021). It opens the doors to lucrative employment opportunities in the national and international corporate sector. Language proficiency entails mastering the macro skills of the English language, which are necessary for communication (Laghari, et. al, 2021). Hence, in order for students to be proficient in the language, they need to be willing to communicate in the target language (Abu Bakar, 2022). According to Riasati and Rahimi (2018), in an educational context such as a language classroom environment, little emphasis has been paid to investigating situational and individual factors influencing students' WTC in English. There are two sorts of elements that affect one's WTC in a second or foreign language, according to the WTC model. Individual and situational elements are included in this list. Personality traits, social situations, intergroup attitudes, learner self-confidence and willingness to learn English are all individual elements. Situational elements include one's desire to speak with a specific person as well as one's self-confidence that one feels in a specific situation (Riasati & Rahimi, 2018).

It is also highlighted that perceived opportunity has emerged as one of the strongest predictors of WTC. Cao (2009) defined perceived opportunity as an act of seeking an opportunity for L2 communication because whether the opportunity exists or not depends solely on the learners' perceptions. This is supported by a study conducted by Peng (2016) which showed that lack of opportunities inside and outside a classroom could seriously affect students' WTC. Therefore, it would be interesting to see whether Malaysian pre-university students in a local higher education institution would be willing to communicate in English when the opportunity arises for them to use the target language in an ESL online classroom.

Situational Factors

According to Richard (2015), what happens inside and outside the classroom are two important factors of successful second language learning. Education institutions, on the other hand, are progressively adopting and implementing online learning (Vonderwell & Zachariah, 2005). As a result, in today's digital world, with technological advancements, it might be argued that utilising English in a digital environment gives students more opportunities to practise the language in a more relevant and real-world setting.

Table 1 summarises several research studies on WTC and its relationship to contextual factors. Said et al. (2021) discovered that 71 undergraduate students at Tadulako Universitas Palu, Indonesia, valued group discussions in online classrooms and believed that taking lessons online enabled them to communicate more freely in English. The majority of students, on the other hand, were hesitant to speak English in English classes for a variety of reasons including shyness, fear of ridicule, teaching method and culture (Savasci, 2014). Savasci's findings were corroborated by a recent study conducted by Hanifah and Nainggolan (2021), which discovered that Indonesian students were also hesitant to speak English during oral communication sessions. Zhou (2015) corroborated this by asserting that Asian students exhibited a low level of classroom participation. In contrast to Said et al.'s findings, Savasci (2014) discovered that Turkish undergraduate students prefer to remain silent during oral communication classes. As a result, students' WTC is likely to be influenced by their preferred educational environment.

Table 1: Willingness to Communicate in Previous Studies related to Situational Factor

Researcher	Researcher Site & Year	Research area	Participant
Hanifah & Nainggolan	Indonesia, 2021	Problems in ESL speaking class	University students
Said et al.	Indonesia, 2020	Online classroom	University students
Richard	2015	Language learning outside the classroom	
Zhou	2015	Inside classroom	University students
Savarsci	Turkey, 2014	Problems in ESL speaking class in online learning	University students
Vonderwell & Zachariah	2005, Midwestern University	Online learning	University students

Apart from that, the interactional setting, cultural orientations, interlocutor, topic, and task type have all been identified as contextual factors influencing WTC (Kang, 2005Cao, 2009; Pattapong,; 2010; MacIntyre et al., 2011; Peng, 2014). The interactional setting is shown to have a significant effect on learners' WTC. For instance, students are willing to communicate only when the interactional situation is deemed safe and acceptable for them to communicate in English. The interaction can take place in the classroom, outside of it, or even in an online classroom.

In relation to the study, the current needs of today's young generation have resulted in the use of technology as "essential tools" in the methods used by teachers in their instructional delivery, taking into account the importance of the English language to integrate digital literacy into the classroom. The implementation of 21st century learning in each classroom has been a contributing factor, as well as ensuring that the youths are well prepared to contribute to the economy's development, become socially advanced, and innovative while demonstrating the ability to speak fluently in both national languages, Bahasa Malaysia and English (Krishnan & Melor, 2019). This could be connected to students WTC in English when classes are conducted online.

Based on the previous studies conducted on students' WTC, it can be noticed that there is a conflict in the data where some students found learning online to be pleasant and pleasurable while others were apprehensive to communicate during an online classroom. As a result, the

current investigation, which is more localised, may offer additional findings that are unique to the environment of this current study.

Social Presence Theory

Presence contributes greatly to creating meaningful and impactful learning experiences. Online social presence is defined as a degree of feeling connected to, observing, and reacting to another person without being physically present in the same area when it comes to online learning (Kim, Song & Luo, 2016; Tu & McIsaac, 2002). In online education, social presence is especially important since it helps to build a learning environment (Caspi & Blau, 2008). This is supported by Le, Cunningham and Watson (2018), who discovered that social presence has been investigated in the context of online learning. There is also a correlation between students' ideas of social presence and their perceptions of learning and learner satisfaction (Richardson & Swan, 2003; So & Brush, 2008). This is significant since students' social presence affects their participation in class (Le. et al., 2018), which might also apply to students' WTC in an online classroom.

Social presence was first conceptualized by Short, Williams and Christie (1976) and defined as the importance of the interaction partners and their interpersonal relationship during a mediated conversation. According to Short et al. (1976), intimacy and immediacy are the two core components of social presence. These two concepts are closely related. Intimacy refers to the sense of connectedness felt by interlocutors during an interaction, while immediacy refers to the psychological distance between interlocutors. Both intimacy and immediacy are determined by verbal and nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, voice, gestures, and physical appearance (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997).

Short et al. (1976) claimed that some media are better at conveying these cues than others. They underlined the importance of social presence as a "*feature of the medium itself*" (Short et al., 1976: 65). A videoconference, for example, has the ability to provide more social presence than a discussion forum because participants can hear and see each other. These visual and audible clues are referred to as communication cues. This emphasis on the medium of communication is consistent with Daft and Lengel's (1986) concept of media richness, which takes into account the possible consequences of the various communication channels that a medium affords. As a result, language instructors and social media designers must evaluate how students might be assisted in building and feeling social presence while learning and communicating online.

Social presence can be broken down into three primary elements: emotive expression, open communication, and group cohesion (Yoon & Leem,2021). The ability of online learners to project themselves through text-based verbal activities such as the use of para-language, self-disclosure, comedy, and other expressions of emotion and values is referred to as affective expression. Open communication refers to a risk-free learning environment in which students have sufficient trust in one another to reveal themselves. Meanwhile, group cohesion, relates to the formation of group identity and the capacity to learn meaningfully through collaboration.

In regards to research on social presence, Yoon and Leem (2021) conducted an experiment including 35 virtual learning groups and 121 participants. The findings of the study depict a sense of social presence that has a beneficial influence on group efficacy, and also the adjustment effect of social presence has considerable positive effects on group cohesion and

group efficacy. This finding also corroborates Nasir (2020) study at Univeristi Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), that discovered that students with high social presence tend to contribute more during class which ensures an effective online learning.

Al-Dheleai, Tasir, and Jumaat (2020) conducted a study in one of the Malaysian universities on students' social presence with a total of 11 students and one instructor in a 7-week multimedia learning course. The findings of the study revealed that students focus more on delivering more interactive throughout the learning topics. However, it was interesting to note that even though, the social networking sites were social in nature, the students' use of social presence expression on social networking sites has improve their discussion interactivity instead of just for socializing purposes. Hence from these 3 researches conducted, it could be generally deducted that social presence could be related to students' WTC in an online classroom.

Individual Factors

Individual factors influencing WTC that has been identified by scholars in the literature are self-confidence, perceived communicative competence, anxiety, motivation, perceived opportunity, and personality(MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2001; Yashima, 2002; Clement et al., 2003; Kim, 2004; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide & Shimizu, 2004;Cetinkaya, 2005;).

Motivation

Motivation is one of the variables that is included in the WTC model. There is a plethora of studies on L2 motivation which goes way back to almost 60 years ago (Lee & Hsieh, 2019). Researches such as Dornyei and Al-Hoorie (2017), Ryan and Deci (2000), and Ushioda (2005) to name a few, have identified motivation as an important element in initiating and sustaining students' learning.

Table 2: Willingness to Communicate in Previous Studies Related to Motivation

Researcher	Researcher Site & Year	Research area	Participant
Wong	Hong Kong, 2021	Motivation	Secondary Students
Lee & Hsieh	Taiwan, 2019	Motivation	University Students
Oz & Bursali	Turkey, 2018	Motivation	University Students
Dorney & Al-Hoorie	2017	Motivation	
Cha & Kim	Korean, 2013	Motivation	University Students
Ushioda	San Diego, 2005	Motivation online class	University Students

Ryan & Deci	2000	Self-Determination Theory

Table 2 above summarises several research studies on motivation in language learning. For example, Ushioda's (2005) study on the role of motivation and attitudes on L2 in a French or Spanish language online classes of 30 students revealed that students' motivation and attitude towards L2 were relatively positive and stable throughout the course. This was achieved through the idiosyncratic method of teaching by the language instructor that created a unique class culture that influenced students' motivation and attitude in L2.

Another study conducted in Hong Kong (Wong, 2021) among Chinese upper secondary students (Form 4 and Form 6) discovered that these students were more motivated to learn English by extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation. The study's extrinsic motivation was prompted by public examinations that students were required to take in order to advance their studies, as well as teachers' encouragement to study harder for the exams. Wong's (2010) findings corroborated Dornyei and Al-Hoorie's (2017) assertion that one of the primary sources of motivation for learning a foreign or second language is social pressure to succeed in L2.

L2 motivation, according to Cha and Kim (2013), had a direct effect on L2 WTC, which in turn affected the frequency with which L2 was used in a Korean EFL classroom as well as on L2 speaking proficiency. This finding supported Lee and Hsieh's (2019) finding that Taiwanese students who were motivated to learn English outperform those who are not motivated to learn English. Oz and Bursali (2018) discovered that students' L2 WTC in relation to their motivation was low in a research study involving 105 university students in Turkey. This is due to the fact that the participants in the study were students in a preparatory class.

The studies reviewed were conducted in international settings and the geographical locations could play a role in looking at motivation as the factor affecting WTC. Thus, a study which is more localized in the context of multi-ethnic communities might yield additional findings that may be exclusive only to the context of this current study. As a result, it would be worthwhile to investigate pre-university students' motivation in L2 learning in relation to their WTC in English in an online classroom in a higher education institution in Sabah, Malaysia.

Speaking Anxiety
L2 anxiety is defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" by Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128). Anxiety, according to Alrabai (2014), is a state characterised by feelings of vague fear, nervousness, discomfort and apprehension. In general, this means that learning and speaking English, whether as a second language (ESL) or as a foreign language (EFL), can be a stressful experience for students, influencing their willingness to communicate in the language. According to Weda et al. (2020), students found it difficult to use English in everyday conversation because they were hesitant and afraid to express themselves.

There are three components of language anxiety in the context of learning English as a foreign language, identified by Horwitz et al. (1986) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1989). However,

these components of language anxiety could also be applied to students who learn and communicate in English as their second language. One of the components deals with communication apprehension which refers to a type of anxiety experienced in interpersonal communicative settings where the person is too shy to speak in front of other people due to a lack of self-confidence. The second component of language anxiety is fear of being judged where students are more anxious about how they will be corrected by their teacher which will create more tension on their part. The last component of language anxiety is test anxiety which refers to the anxiety that they encounter when sitting for a test due to the fear of not performing well in the test. Table 3 below summarises several research studies on language anxiety.

Table 3: Previous Research Studies on Language Anxiety

Researcher	Researcher Site & Year	Research area	Participant
Lee & Hsieh	Taiwan, 2019	Language anxiety in L2	University Students
Al-Ghali	Saudi Arabia, 2016	Language anxiety in L2	University Students
Luo	2015	Foreign language anxiety	
Lu & Liu	China, 2011	Language anxiety in L2	University Students
Liu	Taiwan,2011	Language anxiety in L2	High school students
Hsu	Taiwan, 2009	Language anxiety in L2	Technical college students

For example, Al-Ghali's (2016) study which employed the mix method approach, discovered that students in Saudi Arabia enjoy learning and communicating in English and that their language anxiety was significantly influenced by their teachers' verbal behaviour in class and their comfort level communicating in English with other people. This supported Luo's (2015) statement that students' language anxiety was influenced by the classroom environment which included the teacher's role, classroom practice as well as students' relationships with their peers. Al-Ghali's (2016) findings contrast with those of Lu and Liu (2011) which employed a quantitative approach discovered that one-third of Chinese undergraduate students experience anxiety in English classes, particularly when required to speak in English and take tests.

Hsu's (2009) Taiwan-based research examined 82 EFL technical college students' language anxiety using a quantitative approach. Male students experienced significantly more test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation than female students, whereas female students experienced significantly more communication apprehension anxiety. When communicating with native speakers, participants expressed the most anxiety. Unlike Liu's (2011) research, it was discovered that Taiwan junior high school students with more English learning experience felt less anxious when learning the target language.

With relation to the three components mentioned by Howitz et. al., (1986), it could be seen that the findings of language anxiety among students from previous researches (Hsu, 2009; Liu, 2011; ; Lu, 2015;Al-Ghali's, 2016) are more coherent with the environment that the students are in as compared to fear of being judged or having test anxiety. Thus, considering the current study, it would be worthwhile to investigate ESL pre-university students' language anxiety in relation to their WTC in English in an ESL online classroom in a local context which might yield additional findings to the context of the current study.

Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is one of the strongest predictors that influences students' WTC (Noriko, 2014). This is also supported by MacIntyre et al. (1998) that L2 communication confidence is the most important psychological factor that determines one's success in an L2. It is posited to consist of two components, namely communication apprehension (CA) and perceived communication competence (PCC). CA is a state of anxiety held by many individuals. It is defined as an "individual level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78). PCC is defined as the self-perception of "adequate ability to pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing" (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, p. 109).

Table 4: Previous Research Studies on Self-Confidence

Researcher	Researcher Site & Year	Research area	Participant
Hashimoto	Hawaii, 2020	Self-confidence	University Students
Lee & Lee	Korea, 2020	Self-confidence	Undergraduate students
Lee & Hsieh	Taiwan, 2019	Self-confidence	University Students
Leger & Storch	France, 2009	Self-confidence	Undergraduate students
Kim	Korea, 2004	Self-confidence	University Students

Table 2.6 summarises prior research on students' self-confidence in language acquisition. These studies were carried out in a physical classroom and focused on students' self-confidence in relation to WTC. For example, Kim (2004) looked into the issue of self-confidence of students in Korea. The study found that confidence in communicating in English is directly related to WTC. The result of the study is similar to another study conducted in Hawaii (Hashimoto, 2020) among Japanese students in an ESL context. In this study, it was discovered that perceived competence and L2 anxiety are causes affecting students' WTC. In addition, perceived competence was found to have a strong and direct influence on students' motivation. Therefore, motivation and self-confidence are among the important variables which influence students' WTC. Similarly, Lee and Hsieh (2019) discovered that students' self-confidence has a direct influence on their effort in learning the language which in turn would affect their performance in learning English.

Another example is a study conducted by Leger and Storch (2009). They investigated the perceptions and attitudes of 32 French undergraduate students toward oral class activities in order to determine how these two variables influenced their WTC in L2. The findings show that learners desired to speak based on interlocutors and affiliation motivations. In other words, some students felt more at ease in a small group discussion, whereas others believed that speaking French with their English-speaking friends was phony because they had to use their affiliation motives to establish rapport.

Lee & Lee's (2020) research examined students' self-confidence in an educational setting, with 176 Korean undergraduate students participating. It was discovered that students who have a higher sense of self-worth have a higher L2 WTC outside of the classroom than inside, which is influenced by demographic and virtual intercultural activities. This study's findings will serve as a foundation for the current study, which will examine pre-university students' self-confidence in an ESL online classroom in a higher education institution in Sabah, Malaysia.

Grit

Grit is a concept introduced by Duckworth and her colleagues (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), which consists of perseverance of effort and consistency of interest. Perseverance of effort refers to the tendency to work hard and maintain the effort even though it is challenging. Consistency of interest means maintaining interest over time despite facing setbacks and failures. Duckworth et al. (2007: 1087) defined grit clearly as:

'A perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity and plateau in progress.'

In relation to WTC, grit is among the critical factors for students to succeed in long-term and higher-order goals. As stated by Gass and Selinker (1994), it takes a long time in order to be proficient in the second language since it is a long-term project. Therefore, it is safe to say that students with a higher sense of grit would probably be more successful in learning the second language compared to those who are not, as illustrated by Duckworth et al. as they said, *"The gritty individuals approach achievement as a marathon: his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course"* (2007: 1087).

Table. 5: Previous Research Studies on Grit

Researcher	Researcher Site & Year	Research area	Participant
Lee & Lee	Korea, 2020	Grit in language learning	Undergraduate students
Lee & Hsieh	Taiwan, 2019	Grit in language learning	University Students
Lee & Lee	Korea, 2019	Grit in language learning	University Students

Keegan	2017	Grit in language learning	University students
Tough	2012	Grit in children	Children
Duckworth et al.	2007	Grit in language learning	University Students

The table above summarises some of the prior research studies on the relationship between grit and language learning, as well as the effect of grit on students' WTC. Lee and Lee (2020) discovered that grit (defined as the consistency of one's interests) was not associated with L2 WTC in 647 Korean EFL students from three distinct educational contexts (middle school, high school, and university students). Tough (2012) added to this by stating that grit is a component of an individual's characteristic performance, which can result in enhanced performance and thus the achievement of goals. Lee and Hsieh (2019) discovered that grit is a significant predictor of L2 WTC in Korean EFL students. Additionally, they stated that the relationship between grit and L2 WTC has not been empirically validated in other EFL contexts.

Similarly, to Lee and Hsieh (2019) finding with 261 Taiwanese undergraduate students where it was discovered that grit was one of the significant predictors of students L2 WTC in three educational settings which are inside the classroom, outside the classroom and in an ESL online classroom. Lee and Hsieh (2019) findings corroborated with Keegan's (2017) claim that grit has a positive relationship with L2 learning.

In terms of grit and students' WTC in an ESL online classroom, it would be fascinating to investigate the relationship between these two variables, with a focus on pre-university students at a local university in Sabah, Malaysia. This is because educators would benefit greatly from an understanding of the critical role of grit in the overall success of language learning.

Conclusion

Students' willingness to communicate may be affected by individual and situational factors. However, it cannot be denied that other factors influence students' willingness to communicate, regardless of whether the class is held in the classroom, outside the classroom, or online.

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