

EFL Students' Voices of Willingness to Communicate in Learning Interaction at the University Level

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Abstract

One of the affective factors which influences the success of foreign language learning is Willingness to Communicate (WTC). WTC is a student's tendency to involve or not to engage in a communication in a foreign language learning. This study aims to investigate the contributing factors influencing student's willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language (EFL) at the university level. This research adopted a qualitative case study where interviews were conducted with four students of English Language Education Department at AB University in Surabaya and observations were also carried out to get additional information. Personal interviews were utilized to obtain primary data, while observation was used as complementary data focusing only on question-and-answer activities during the learning process. The findings of this study show that having English partner, self-confident, achievement in the study, interesting topic are the clear factors of the EFL student's willing to communicate in learning process. Therefore, it is advised that English teachers focus more on certain factors that affect students' WTC in order to assist the students in raising their WTC, which improves speaking.

Keywords: *EFL learning, willingness to communicate, students' perception*

INTRODUCTION

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is one of the affective elements impacting the success of learning a foreign language and second language. WTC refers to the students' propensity to engage in or not engage in communication when studying a foreign language. 'A person's inclination to initiate communication with others' is the definition of WTC (McCroskey, 1997:77). According to Havwini (2019), WTC is the inclination to engage in communication whether one has the choice to do so or not. In particular, a person's willingness to start a conversation when they don't have to is known as willingness to communicate (WTC) (Lahuerta, 2013). When someone is prepared to utilize the target language (TL), it is also considered that they are willing to communicate (WTC). They pick up the skill of speaking without coercion or burden (Ningsih et al., 2018). In the classroom context, WTC describes the students' readiness to commence communication when they have many choices. (Barjesteh et al., 2012).

One of the frequent issues that many English teachers deal with in EFL student classrooms is students' reluctance to communicate. Therefore, it is important for EFL teachers to motivate their pupils to take part in all speaking exercises in the classroom. Studies have indicated that a learner's WTC affects their level of active participation in L2 communication. For instance, it is likely that EFL students are reluctant to converse in English because they do not often utilize the language outside of the classroom (Subekti, 2019; Yousefi & Kasaian, 2014). Students and teachers have a significant impact to the students' WTC in the

classroom by determining students' willingness to participate in class activities. Students are more likely to give their opinions when they are aware of the background information on the subject they are learning. Furthermore, when a teacher supports their learning and provides clear instructions for the assignment, students will be more eager to engage (Nainggolan & Hanifah, 2021). Some studies have been conducted about how teachers can understand the situational factors in their classrooms to facilitate WTC, including: Class Size (Khazaei et al., 2012), and how teachers can encourage student participation in WTC in the classroom (Nazari & Allahyar, 2012), use of critical thinking because the student enjoy starting the WTC in a group discussion with several critical questions, topic selection (Weda et al., 2021), kind of assignment (Havwini, 2019), a good relationship between teacher and the student, up-to-date materials (Sylvia et al., 2020).

Teachers and students are impacted in a variety of ways by the rapid advancement and increased affordances of digital technology during class activities. Online courses replace in-person classes as one of the effects. A variety of platforms and technologies, including digital systems, group chats, and video calls, are used in the learning process. In this situation, educators have to choose the appropriate media by taking the students' needs and the goal of the lesson into account. In the meantime, the students are compelled to switch from their previous real-world learning activities to virtual ones where they participate in virtual discussions, presentations, and learning. Since the classroom has altered due to the online course, it is expected that students will participate in virtual contact during class activities differently. Numerous investigations looked for the WTC in actual classroom interactions (Nainggolan & Hanifah, 2021).

Said et al. (2021) state that students' perceptions of WTC's online learning are as follows: students are not afraid to voice their feelings, ideas, thoughts, and opinions in online classes; instead, they prefer to listen rather than speak in online discussions; online learning's class discussions are the best opportunity for practicing speaking English; students are constantly motivated to speak in online classrooms; students are always excited to speak; and students do not feel ashamed if they give incorrect answers in online class discussions. Van Le et al. (2018) looked into WTC and connected it to different social presence judgments. Using Facebook and Skype, eighteen Vietnamese high school students completed a six-week online course. The findings indicate that students are more likely to use English in online settings if they believe that their social presence is missing. Consequently, it may be said that kids will have less WTC the more socially present they feel in the virtual world.

Because there are many variables that affect students' willingness to speak in English during the learning process, this research paper will examine the variables that affect students' willingness to communicate in English during the learning processes. Assume that there are identifiable factors that influence students' communication readiness and that they actively engage in the learning interactions.

METHOD

This research adopted the qualitative case study to answer the phenomenon of students' willingness to communicate at the university level in which the data used referred to limited students of English Language Education Department of AD

University in Surabaya and this method is in line with what Prabhat & Mishra (2015) conveyed that the data referring to something specific or a group in a phenomenon can be categorized as a case study. There are four students of English Language Education Department of university in Surabaya interviewed with a semi-structured model. The interviews were conducted and adjusted to the participants' free time, and 15 main questions were given to each participant. The interviews were conducted by telephone to adjust with the respondent's free time because the respondents and researchers had different activities. In addition, there were additional questions to explore information in details about respondents' situations and not only follow the interview guide. (Monday, 2020).

Observations and making field notes were also accomplished during the class when the students were joining public speaking classes whether offline or online classes for 40 minutes. This refers to (Helleso *et al.*, 2015) that field notes are helpful as an intermediary tool, namely between what is seen, heard, felt, smelled, and touched with the actual notes in the form of field notes. The data obtained from the interview were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was implemented to interpret patterns method that involves reading through a data set such as transcripts from in-depth interviews. The thematic analysis aims to make the recurring data appear grouped at a theme. The more frequently codes appear in the data set, the more likely the analyst will state that code as the basis of a theme. According to (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS

Having English Partner

The researcher has divided the possible desired person for the students to communicate using English into two: classmates and teacher. Below is the students' response to how the interlocutor affected the students' WTC.

Extract 1

Luna *"I often make an interaction with friends that I consider close to me, because I do not intimate with other friends in the classroom"*

The student explained that she only wanted to talk to his closest friends. The student was not comfortable if he had to speak to everyone in the class.

Extract 2

Hermionie *"In class, I'm usually more often or more actively talk with friends. Because it's comfortable to talk with friends rather than build conversation with lecturers. Especially our closest friends, I feel more secure, because our closest friends can keep our secrets. Because when I talk with friends, I will be free to use the language, however if you build conversation with the lecturer, when I choose the wrong language, I'm afraid it will turn out to be disrespectful."*

Hermionie explained that she does not mind communicating with her classmates because she feels comfortable with her classmates. However, she communicates more with her close friends because her close friends can keep the whole content of

the conversation, from general things to private matters. On the other hand, Hermonie always avoids communicating with lecturers because she feels it cannot be as accessible as when communicating with friends. In addition, she is afraid that she will reflexively use inappropriate language when communicating with lecturers. On the other hand, there are students who want to communicate with a specific person but in a different way.

Extract 3

Harry Potter *"Only to the classmate I need. So, for example, if I want to discuss the topic of writing, I only communicate to a friend who knows the topic"*

He has a desire to communicate only with friends. He needs to be able to ask about assignments, and he communicates with friends who have to expertise or ability to master a particular subject area. Besides they feel comfortable when communicating with close friends, Luna and Hermione also stated that they wanted to communicate with friends who have characteristics such as the statement below:

Extract 4

Hermonie *"I willing to communicate in classroom with a friend who can speak well, because I feel motivated to be like them or even beyond them. Also, it takes more effort to speak in English"*

When she communicates with friends who have abilities above her own, she becomes motivated to become or exceed capabilities like her friends. Hermione, aware of having intermediate-level skills, must practice English more often over a more extended period and with a lot of effort.

Extract 5

Luna *"I really want to be able to communicate with friends who can speak better than mine, because these friends make me excited to more explore my English skills"*

Based on the interview, communicating with friends who have higher skills also makes them more enthusiastic about improving their skills, because when they communicate with these friends, their skills also increase automatically.

Self- Confident

Personality is conceptualized as having an indirect impact on WTC through affective variables such as attitude, self-confident and motivation. Based on students' responses, when it comes to their personality regarding English communication in the blended learning context, they stated that they were cooperative enough to join English offline learning but not in the online classroom discussion and make friends with the students in the offline learning.

Extract 6

Hermonie *"I usually just talk without paying attention to grammar when I use English, the important thing is that the interlocutor understands what I mean"*

Although a lot of their grammar is wrong, it does not reduce their willingness to communicate in class, the most important thing for her is that someone she is talking to understands what she means. However, some students have confidence in their soul.

Extract 7

Luna *“Even though I am not fluent in English, I still have high desire to be able to speak English, it is very important for our lives in the future”*

Although Luna is not fluent in communicating using English, she still has a high desire to be able to speak English. Because she realized that in this global era, there would be more evolution happening in her country, it has become a must to be able to master English to follow current development in this globalization era.

Extract 8

Hermonie *“Because I'm personally very confident, even I was wrong, I still dare to express it in the class. Moreover, if I understand the learning materials, I am very confident to convey it in front of the class.”*

Hermione also added that they were more willing to communicate in class. Even if they did not understand the material presented and what was conveyed was not necessarily true, they still felt confident to express it in front of the class because self-confidence is already naturally in themselves. Another friend's statement also supports this, and they said the same thing as Hermonie:

Extract 9

Draco *“I'm just confident with my abilities, does not matter it is wrong or right, because I am here to learn”*

Because Draco's intention here is to study, so he does not worry about being right or wrong when he answers the questions the lecturer asks. The most important thing for him is, that he will still answer whether the answer is right or wrong.

Extract 10

Draco *“If I feel lazy inside myself, I try to encourage external influences, for example listening to western music (can add new vocabulary) to push internal influences”*

Feeling lazy sometimes comes suddenly inside. When that feeling of laziness comes to Draco, he forces laziness not to dominate him, and he is the one who has to take control of that feeling of laziness. What Draco did to control the consistency of inactivity that came over him, he looked for activities to keep growing a sense of enthusiasm for learning English, namely with outside help, one of which was listening to western music. Although their low English ability is not affected by their willingness to communicate in English, most of them agree that they prefer to speak English as much as possible than nothing.

Achievement in the study

Achievement in this context is how students want to be active in communicating in class learning.

Extract 11

Harry Potter *“Because the score that makes me active in class. If there is no score, I will not speak at all”.*

The lecturer will give scores to students who are active in class. That's why Harry tries to be active in class. Sometimes, the lecturers do not take the score in-class activities, when this happens, Harry does not communicate at all.

Extract 12

Luna *“I am active in class so that I can get good points so that I can pass the course.”*

Another student also said the same thing, that she also wanted to get points in order to pass the course.

Extract 13

Draco *“I really wanted to graduate on time, and didn't want a recourse, so I was active so that I could maintain my grades in order to pass”*

Draco has a target to graduate on time. To make this happen, Draco chooses to try to maintain his grades, one of which is by being an active student in the class. It can be concluded that they do not want to take all the English class activities, but they are forced to take part because they do not want to have bad grades, which affect course graduation.

Interesting topic

Some topics can help students to engage in discussion. They will communicate when the subject is of interest for them.

Extract 14

Hermione *“I'm active when I interest with the material who discussed by my lecturer. The interesting topic for me is material that worthy to be discussed, such as the education system in Indonesia”*

Hermione only said she was active in class if the topic was interesting. The interested topic for Hermione is topics that make her feel sad when she knows about them, such as the problem of the education system in Indonesia. This must be seriously discussed in class, especially since she is a teacher candidate. If this topic is discussed by her lecturer and her classmate in class, she hopes to find a solution together. Hermione likes to discuss simple things with her friends. But for discussion time in class, which involves a professional in the scope of her education, she is more interested in discussing something seriously.

Extract 15

Draco *“The second motivation is when the lecturer gives me material which make me interest to join in discussion. I interest with the topic when I ever heard or little bit know about that topic, so I feel curious about the topic's detail was deliver by my lecturer.”*

In addition, Draco stated that the material was interesting and easy to understand. When he knows a little or has ever heard of the topics, he will easy to understand them because he already knows the basics of the theory that the lecturer will deliver, so he will be excited to know the topic in depth. Furthermore, it makes him willing to join the discussion and convey their ideas. Other students also have almost the same opinion as Draco:

Extract 16

Harry Potter *“If the topic is interesting and conveys it well, because an interesting topic provides a stimulus for me to study harder and find out about the material and when I convey it well, I understand better.”*

In more detail, Harry said that if the topic presented by the lecturer is interesting, he will find out more deeply and in detail about the topic being discussed. In addition, when the lecturer conveys the topic well, it will be easier for him to absorb the course when he is involved in studying.

DISCUSSION

The first finding is that when they have an English-speaking partner, students want to talk. According to the majority of responses, the students prefer to chat with their close friends who are proficient speakers. The explanation for this is because they are uncomfortable interacting with other students that they do not know well because they do not know their buddies. Additionally, if they must interact with the lecturer, they fear making mistakes in their English. Consequently, when the students initiate contact, their desire to speak with a specific individual plays a significant role. In his research, Khatibi & Zakeri, (2014) also suggests that Iranian EFL students are open to interacting with their peers. They lack the confidence to strike up a conversation with teachers or in new settings like public speaking. They feel insecure because they avoid conversing in English with others who are not proficient in the language. For this reason, students are reluctant to initiate conversations with strangers or those who are not their friends.

According to the observations, the students who sit next to their best friends have a tendency to talk nonstop. This is not the case when the lecturer begins to ask questions or requests that students share their thoughts in front of the class; instead, the participant remains mute and does not respond until the lecturer calls on him to do so. Their desire to speak may be impacted by their increased comfort, sense of connection, and camaraderie in peer-to-peer activities (Shaffer, 2021). According to another remark, they prefer to talk with friends who are proficient speakers because they encourage pupils to strive to match their friends' abilities and because they can master new skills without feeling pressured. According to study (Chivers, 2016), students' English competence might be indirectly enhanced by the opportunity they have to learn and use the language more fluently.

The subsequent study shows that self-confidence plays an important role in students' WTC. Many students are aware of their ability to communicate using English. Many of them have low English skills, including not being fluent in communicating in English, but this does not make them feel anxious. Even though their skills are low, it does not decrease their self-confidence. This can be seen from the results of interviews, which show that students with a high level of self-

confidence also have a high level of WTC even though they have low skills. They are willing to speak voluntarily because they see it as a challenge to improve their skills. This is in line with the research (Ghanbarpour, 2016) that stated confidence contributes to the willingness to communicate, while fear of communication does not contribute to willingness to communicate in L2.

Furthermore, the following finding is an achievement in the study. Similarly, a study by (Mahmoodi & Moazam, 2014) shows that students who are more willing to communicate were relatively high in L2 achievement. Furthermore, those who are high in L2 achievement are more willing to communicate in the classroom. It is relevant, too, based on observation results. Lecturers do not explicitly give any information that there are plus points for active students in their class. The students already knew that the lecturer gave a score when someone answered. Students in the class understand that there will be an added score because, in the middle of the question-and-answer session, the lecturer will sit in his chair and ask all students in the class the names of students actively answering the questions given. Their movements write something which is an indication of adding a score.

The last one is an interesting topic given by their lecturer. Students have their views on topics that interest them. For Hermonie, the interesting topics are complicated, such as the problem of the education system in Indonesia. This makes her interested because she can discuss with many people in the class (lecturers and friends), so she has many points of view on the problem. On the other hand, Draco stated that the topics that interest him are topics that when the topic is delivered, he already knows first or ever heard a little explanation about the topic, so he is excited to join the lessons to know in detail the topics presented. Unlike the two previous participants, Harry Potter did not explain specifically what topics were of interest to him, he only stated that when the topic was presented well by the lecturer, he already felt interested and would be willing to take his class. This result is relevant to (Zarrinabadi et al., 2014) stated that students become more willing to communicate and participate more in classroom activities when the topic is familiar or interesting. The findings showed that if the topics are chosen based on the learners' interests, they can help create more responsible, excited, and secure students who communicate more in the classroom context.

CONCLUSION

This study achieves the conclusion that there are four factors in EFL students' willingness to communicate in blended learning at the university level. They are having English partner, self-confident, achievement in the study, and interesting topics. In having an English partner, students are willing to communicate with their close friends and friend with higher skills. While in the self-confident factors, students have high self-confidence, even though they have low skills, they still have a high willingness to communicate. Achievement in the study when they active in class because to get a good point. Moreover, the last, student more willing to communicate when the lecturer discusses an interesting topic in class. An interesting topic can also be defined as one that is easy to understand. This information can be a basis for the teacher to make every topic discussed in blended learning delivered clearly to make the students more interested while participating in blended learning communication.

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