Determinants of Willingness to Communicate among Secondary EFL Learners: A Case Study Approach

[1*]**Afifah Marshalina**, [1]**Nunung Suryati**, [1]**Evynurul Laily Zen**

[1]English Language Education, Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang,

Jln. Ambarawa No. 5 Gedung D14-18, Malang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author e-mail: afifah.marshalina.2302218@students.um.ac.id

Abstract

A key component of language learning is increasing learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), which is the main objective of second language (L2) instruction. In this study, students' perceptions of the aspects affecting their desire to communicate in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom were investigated. Four secondary students participated in semi-structured interviews to collect data for a qualitative case study. They were chosen due to their varied backgrounds in English: two students had prior learning experience and received rich exposure to English, and the other two did not. The selection of students was based on the need to obtain more detailed data. Data were examined with thematic analysis. The results of this study indicated that students exposed to English earlier are more willing to communicate. It clarifies the significant impact of early exposure to English has on students' preparedness for a more challenging learning environment. Additionally, personal factors like motivation, linguistic aspects, classroom environment, and task design contributed to students' willingness to communicate in English classrooms. Recognizing these factors is crucial since they influence students' involvement and communicative practice, both of which are vital to language learning. Lastly, these findings suggest the importance of fostering supportive classroom environments and tailoring instructional strategies to diverse learner needs, offering valuable insights for EFL educators.

Keywords: English Instruction; Secondary students; Classroom interaction; Willingness to communicate

INTRODUCTION

Communicative competence has become a fundamental facet of language learning, particularly when studying a foreign language. As modern language pedagogy prioritizes communication and enables language learners to have successful communication in the target language (Riasati, 2012; Unsiah et al., 2024), one factor that plays an important role in the foreign language learning and communication process is the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (Amalia et al., 2023; Thai & Chen, 2023).

This term is seen through the second language (L2) WTC theory. WTC, an L2 learner's readiness to converse with specific people at specific times, is an essential construct affecting L2 communication behavior (MacIntyre et al.,1998; Peng, 2022). WTC seems to be the result of a coordinated interaction of intricate processes that prepare second language learners to choose to use their L2 authentically (MacIntyre & Wang, 2021). Cultivating the willingness of learners to take opportunities to communicate has been stated as the ultimate objective in acquiring a second language (Peng, 2022). The language acquisition objective may therefore be hampered if the

ability to communicate in the target language is not attained.

Students' WTC is defined as their purpose to communicate with others in English when learning English as a foreign language (EFL) (Dewaele, 2019; Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021). Unlike the ESL context, where learners are surrounded by situations that inherently require regular use of English, EFL learners usually only come into contact with English in educational or academic contexts. Yet, in this situation, problems generally emerge when they are discouraged from participating in communication. Though they possess good English language skills, have enough communicative competence, and have several opportunities to interact in class. Hence, having a willingness to communicate is required. Lee (2022) mentioned that students must be highly willing to communicate to develop their language competence. This is also in line with Grant (2018), who revealed that students who are eager to interact are more likely to use English more frequently. It makes sense that the likelihood of pupils communicating in English increases with their L2 WTC level. On the other hand, they become less involved in English communication when they feel less motivated to speak (Al-murtadha & Feryok, 2017).

Earlier investigations have started to explore the WTC in diverse fields, covering environmental and socio-cultural impacts on communication behavior. For instance, Ma et al. (2022) discovered that cultural norms and expectations can potentially shape students' WTC. This suggests that a certain cultural context can either support or hinder students' desire to participate in interactions actively. Meanwhile, with the growth of technology and better affordability nowadays, it may also influence how foreign language learners develop their WTC. The study conducted by Thai and Chen (2023) examined the potential of Google Assistant, an intelligent personal assistant (IPA), to enhance learners' WTC. The results demonstrated that Google Assistant considerably enhanced communicative confidence and WTC in EFL learners. Similarly, the inclusion of AI applications in language learning, like the Speeko application (Rad, 2024), Lora (Zhang et al., 2024), Duolingo, and HelloTalk (Zhao et al., 2024), demonstrates the beneficial impact these aids have on improving EFL students' WTC. According to the studies, educators can use AI-based technology integration, varied language learning chances, and AI features to establish a productive learning atmosphere in the classroom, leading to enhanced language learning outcomes.

Furthermore, WTC has long been acknowledged by researchers as significantly impacting students' communicative competence, which influences both their language competence and overall academic achievement. Zhou et al. (2023) found a strong link between learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) and their L2 competence, including overall language ability as well as specific skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, from the EFL instructors' perspective, Sarwari's (2024) study revealed a noteworthy connection between students' language achievement and their willingness to communicate. Thus, the current body of research has produced strong proof of WTC's pivotal involvement in language learning outcomes.

While research has shown a significant relationship between WTC and language competence, it's critical to acknowledge that WTC is a multifaceted concept impacted by a number of factors. The idea of WTC has previously been thoroughly investigated in different educational settings, especially in tertiary education (Abebe, 2024; Dastgoshadeh & Javanmardi, 2021; Hu & Wang, 2023; Ma et al., 2024). Li et al. (2024) examined the WTC of EFL learners during group work, which found dynamic features of students' WTC, such as interrelatedness, self-organization, and

dependence on context. The study also determined the environmental and individual elements that affected the WTC. Furthermore, in the context of students majoring in English education, Nurfitriana et al.'s (2024) findings demonstrated that the pupils' WTC was high, mainly fueled by self-confidence, low anxiety, and strong motivation. Beyond the face-to-face classroom context, Punyaporn and Soontornwipast (2022) identified environmental and social factors such as classroom atmosphere and peer influence in an online learning environment.

Prior studies have substantially deepened our understanding of the individual, contextual, and social features that contribute to willingness to communicate (WTC) both in-person and virtual university-level learning environments. However, existing research has predominantly centered on adult or higher education contexts, leaving a notable gap in our knowledge of how WTC develops during adolescence. WTC dynamics might shift significantly in secondary education, where students face unique challenges related to adolescence, academic demands, and social development. This study responds to this underexplored area, offering new insights into how WTC is shaped and supported in secondary classrooms. By situating the investigation in this context, the study makes a novel contribution to the literature and helps inform pedagogical practices toward the complex realities of adolescent learners.

At the secondary school level, students have already reached adolescence, the period between childhood and adulthood, with significant social and biological changes including puberty, schooling, and shifting maturity levels happening during this period (Sawyer et al., 2018). In this phase, students experience an essential transition from primary education to a higher academic environment, presenting opportunities and challenges that uniquely influence students' willingness to communicate. Different from primary education, where communication tends to center on essential language use and informal interactions, secondary school students are asked to engage in more rigorous academic involvement, such as expressing opinions, participating in group work, and critical thinking tasks, which require a higher level of language and cognitive engagement. These realities may either encourage or inhibit their WTC, which can also depend on each student's previous learning experiences and exposure to the language. As Muñoz et al. (2021) argue, exposure to learning languages, particularly English, outside of the classroom is made possible by FL through the internet, multimedia, and social media. This learning opportunity has implications for L2 English language learning.

Although prior studies have established a strong basis for comprehending the WTC at the high school level (Andika et al., 2022; Barrios & Napiórkowska, 2024; Soyoof, 2023). Most studies also center on WTC patterns in particular groups of students without considering the diversity of students' backgrounds. Investigating the willingness to communicate factors between students who have English learning experience and rich exposure to it, and those who do not have received little attention in the previous studies. Exploring this area is crucial, affording a richer, in-depth understanding of how WTC may be cultivated in this context. By offering a more detailed account of how these variations affect each aspect of students' WTC, our study seeks to close this knowledge gap.

Two secondary schools in the South Sumatra city of Palembang served as the study's sites, which represent educational settings with diverse student characteristics in terms of motivation and experience of learning English. Some students in these settings have wider access to English language learning, either through additional courses or independent exposure outside the classroom. In contrast, some students only have formal English learning experiences in the classroom. The uniqueness of

this setting lies in the different levels of exposure and motivation of the students. These differences provide an opportunity to explore the elements that affect WTC in different circumstances, as well as understand how individual backgrounds and educational environments can shape students' readiness to communicate using English.

Therefore, the following was the formulation of the research question: "What influences secondary school students' willingness to communicate in English across different learning experiences?". Addressing the study question, this research will contribute to a more in-depth comprehension of WTC in secondary education contexts and provide insights for educators regarding instructional practices and appropriate method selection to suit the unique needs of students with diverse backgrounds in language learning, leading to fostering students' communicative levels.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach focusing on a case study design to answer the research question. Frequently utilizing interviews and observations enables the researcher to pinpoint essential emerging features (Yin, 2009). By applying this method, the researchers obtained detailed insights into students' views on the factors influencing their willingness to communicate.

Participants in this study were secondary students from two different schools. The two schools have different learning environment characteristics. One of the schools was a private school that implemented the national curriculum with a conventional learning approach and limited access to additional English language programs outside the classroom. While the other school is a public school that implements a bilingual program and encourages the use of English in academic and non-academic activities, as well as providing additional facilities such as language clubs and extracurricular activities. These differences in educational contexts provide diversity in students' experiential settings, which allows for a more in-depth exploration of the factors that influence Willingness to Communicate in English learning environments. Further, according to Gay et al. (2012), qualitative sampling draws on selecting a limited number of persons who can assist the researcher in understanding the phenomenon being investigated. Participants were chosen based on their experiences in learning English, their accessibility, and their agreement to be involved in the study. Four students were included in this study. Two students were highly motivated to learn English, and they had exposure to English with sufficient learning experience, both at school and outside school (P1 and P2). The other two students tended to have less exposure to English learning experience, and they only had English learning at school (P3 and P4). This preferential selection of participants with distinct characteristics is based on the goal of obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing Willingness to Communicate (WTC) across diverse learners' profiles. The participants' demographic information is revealed in Table 1.

Table 1. Demography of Participants

Participants	Gender	Source of Exposure
P1	Female	Family, multimedia, English course, extracurricular activities
P2	Female	Multimedia, English course, extracurricular activities
P3	Male	School only
P4	Female	School only

Furthermore, for collecting the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted

using Bahasa Indonesia to prevent misinterpretations between the researchers and participants. The interview questions were constructed based on Cao and Philip (2006) and Tuyen and Loan (2019), covering the two elements, such as individual and situational variables contributing to communication willingness. The first section of the questions was general questions aimed at discovering students' overall perceptions of English learning, their perceived English proficiency, and their motivation and engagement in the classroom (e.g., "How do you feel about learning English?" and "How would you describe your English skills?"). The second part examined the individual and situational features that affect students' willingness to communicate, with questions such as "What makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable speaking English in class?" and How do your classmates or teacher affect your willingness to speak English?". It was intended to capture personal attributes and contextual variables that may influence students' desire to be involved in English communication.

The researchers asked open-ended questions to the participants, audio-taped their answers, and then transcribed them to analyze the data. Following the steps from Creswell (2012), a thematic analysis was used to examine the data. Concerning this, the analysis began with an initial coding process, in which meaningful units related to students' willingness to communicate were identified line by line from the transcripts. These codes were then categorized into broader patterns, which were continually reviewed, refined, and grouped into emerging themes that reflected factors influencing students' WTC. The themes were not predetermined, but were developed inductively through careful examination of the data, and then the last step was to produce the report. In this step, the researchers explained the results of the factors influencing students' willingness to communicate.

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 researchers used member checking to make sure the data was accurate. In the process of member checking, returning the findings, and asking the participants about the report's accuracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

This section presents the findings of this study in response to the research question regarding the factors influencing secondary students' willingness to communicate. These findings are organized into key themes that reflect patterns in students' experiences. They were greatly impacted by a variety of personal and contextual circumstances. Table 2 details the factors derived from the thematic analysis process.

Table 2. Factors Influencing Willingness to Communicate

Theme	Codes
Personal factors	Motivation; Self-confidence; Anxiety; and fear of mistakes
Linguistic factors	Peer relationship; Teacher support; Supportive atmosphere
Classroom environment	Vocabulary mastery; Pronounciation
Task design	Collaborative task; Creative task

The table above presents the key themes and associated codes that emerged from the data regarding factors influencing students' willingness to communicate. To further illustrate the relationships among these themes, Figure 1 provides a visual diagram that synthesizes how personal, linguistic, environmental, and task-related factors interact to
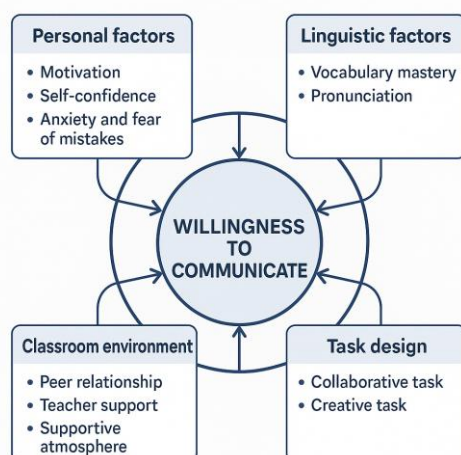
shape students' WTC in the EFL classroom.

Figure 1. Thematic relationship

The figure highlights four interrelated domains—personal factors, linguistic variables, classroom environment, and task design that have a significant impact on secondary students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in an EFL classroom. At the center is the WTC, which is shaped by personal factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety or fear of making mistakes. These internal psychological elements play an important role in determining whether a student feels encouraged or inhibited in their communication. Pronunciation and vocabulary mastery are two linguistic characteristics that influence students' perceived proficiency in the language, which in turn affects their confidence when speaking. The classroom environment also serves an essential role with supportive peer relationships, encouragement from teachers, and a positive, non-threatening atmosphere, all collectively create a secure setting that encourages communication. In addition, task design contributes significantly; collaborative tasks promote peer interaction and reduce speaking anxiety, while creative tasks provide engaging and meaningful opportunities for students to express themselves. The thematic diagram offers a visual depiction of how these factors interrelate in influencing students' willingness to communicate. The next sections provide supporting data from participant responses to further elucidate these themes, showing how each component arose from the experiences and viewpoints of the students.

Firstly, a significant aspect in this study that answers the research question was the personal factors affecting students' WTC in English. These themes were derived from the three codes that determined the degree to which students were willing and unwilling to communicate: motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, and fear of mistakes. Regarding differences in English language learning experiences, the two groups of participants mentioned they are motivated to learn and communicate with it. This motivation arises because there are specific things they want to accomplish. As a result, it makes them want to become more accustomed to using English. Below are some responses taken from the interviews with the students:

P1: *"Participating in English competitions is something I'm very interested in. So, I need to practice more often and develop my skills. When I'm studying in class, I always try to speak in English."*

P4: *"[…] After graduating from this school, I hope to study at a good university. I need to have good English skills. Although I realize that my skills are still lacking and I don't have great self-confidence, I am still trying to learn English."*

The above excerpt also shows that self-confidence affects one's propensity to use English in communication. P3 also experienced this, and he revealed that his self-confidence was not very high, which hampered communication purposes.

> P3: *"[…] Actually, I was not confident when I wanted to start speaking in English, worried that other people would not understand what I said."*

Furthermore, when the researchers asked about feelings such as anxiety or fear, the two participants (P1 and P2) who were accustomed to English exposure, both at home and in social life, did not experience these feelings, and they were very confident in communicating using English. On the other hand, the students with less exposure often feel panic and anxiety. This can hinder them from communicating actively in class.

> P1: *"I feel a sense of excitement and eagerness, probably because learning English is something I enjoy. It's a subject that interests me, and I always look forward to studying it"*

> P2: *"I'm not afraid of making mistakes when conversing in English because I know that's part of learning. I just focus on conveying what's on my mind."*

> P4: *"[…] When in class and the teacher asks me to start communicating in English, I often feel anxious, even though I understand the context of what is being spoken, to respond to this conversation, I was afraid I would say something wrong and others would laugh at me."*

Secondly, the participants in this study reported linguistic factors that influenced their willingness to communicate in English. Both participants (P1 and P2) revealed that the experience of learning English from the past until now has enabled them to master more vocabulary in English, which makes it easier for them to convey a message when they want to communicate using English. This can undoubtedly be an inhibiting factor for the other two participants (P3 and P4), who explained that if they knew more vocabulary, it would make it easier for them to use English. However, the lack of knowledge on this matter makes them slightly hinders communication in the classroom. This was revealed when they said:

> P3: *"I often don't know English vocabulary. Sometimes, there are also situations where I know the words, but when I want to say them, I often forget suddenly, which makes it difficult for me to speak. So, I usually just keep quiet."*

> P4: *"I often feel unsure when it comes to pronouncing English words. I'm afraid of making mistakes, which makes me feel embarrassed and hesitant to speak."*

The classroom environment was further identified as influencing students' WTC in English. The participants responded that their WTC in this category is influenced by three things: peer relationships, teacher support, and a supportive learning atmosphere. Regarding their desire to communicate in English classes, all participants from each characteristic with different learning experiences highlighted the influence of peer relationships. Positive peer interactions can lead to a supportive classroom environment where students feel more comfortable expressing and engaging in classroom communication. Below are a few responses taken from the students' interviews:

> P1: *"When I'm around friends who also enjoy learning English, I tend to feel more motivated to speak. On some occasions, we engage in simple English conversations even beyond the classroom."*

> P3: *"My friends whose English is much better than mine would help me by explaining words that I didn't know. Sometimes, if there are texts or sentences in the book that I can't understand, I ask*

them for help. I can learn from them and be motivated."

It is understood that peers contribute to influencing students' willingness to learn and use the language to communicate. When people with similar interests surround students, they tend to be more active in communication. Additionally, the findings show that students feel pleased when they receive support in the learning process from their teacher. Where teachers play an active role in students' developmental progress, providing feedback in the learning process, leads to a supportive classroom environment. This kind of environment results in students' willingness to engage in communication. Participants' thoughts on this can be better understood from the following sentences:

P2: *"In class, I was always encouraged to speak, the teacher often asked questions, invited communication, asked students to make presentations, and so on. Although in this process students make mistakes such as improper grammar or incorrect pronunciation, my teacher never gets angry. This makes me feel fearless and always brave to participate in classroom communication."*

P4: *"My teacher always gives positive encouragement, saying that it's okay to make mistakes because we can learn from them. This makes me feel more relaxed and willing to try speaking in English. On the other hand, if I have an unfriendly teacher and the class atmosphere is full of tension, I will be more silent."*

Lastly, the findings from the participants' interviews revealed that the design of the tasks given by the teacher also affected their involvement in communicating in class. In this case, students will be more motivated when teachers provide interesting tasks. These tasks require students to actively communicate, share ideas, and work together, thus encouraging cognitive and social interaction. The students expressed this clearly when they said:

P1: *"Many times in English class, we are given tasks that allow us to practice our communication skills. We were asked to role-play either in pairs or in groups, for example, as customers and waiters, and then have a conversation in front of the class. This is much more interesting than just learning from a book."*

P2: *"I prefer group tasks where we can learn from each other, and communication can also be more intense. This is very different if in class the teacher only explains the material and asks students to do the exercises on their own."*

P3: *"Although my English skills are still not that good, I like it when teachers give assignments such as describing something or creating a short story, which can increase my desire to speak. But the teacher should give me time to prepare, if it is spontaneous, I don't think I can do it."*

Discussion

The findings of this study significantly extend the scope of previous research that has primarily focused on willingness to communicate (WTC) in higher education contexts by presenting a nuanced perspective derived from secondary school students with differing levels of language exposure and learning experiences. While earlier studies have explored how university-level students engage in second language communication, this study contributes uniquely by examining how younger learners, particularly those at the secondary level, develop WTC under varying educational and linguistic conditions. By analyzing two distinct groups of students—those with substantial early exposure to English and those with minimal experience—the study offers critical insights into how foundational language experiences shape learners' communicative dispositions.

One of the key revelations is the substantial impact of prior learning experiences and early exposure to English on a student's readiness to communicate. Students who had engaged with English in formal or informal settings prior to entering secondary school displayed noticeably higher levels of confidence and willingness to speak in class. This finding supports Newport's (1990) theory that early language exposure is a pivotal factor in later language mastery. Early engagement with the language appears to foster a smoother transition into more academically demanding environments, thereby equipping learners with the necessary tools—both cognitive and affective—to participate in communicative tasks. Reinforcing this, recent studies by Sadoughi and Hejazi (2023) and Xiao and Qiu (2022) also emphasize that previous learning experiences serve as a catalyst in building positive attitudes, motivation, and lower anxiety levels, which together contribute to stronger WTC among learners.

Additionally, the present study shows that early and consistent language use contributes to the development of learner characteristics that support successful communication, such as motivation, self-confidence, and reduced anxiety—an assertion echoed in the works of Rafiee and Abbasian-Naghneh (2019), Dong et al. (2023), and Tuyen and Loan (2019). These personality traits, cultivated through prior language exposure, enhance students' willingness to engage in classroom discourse. A novel contribution of this study is its emphasis on the formative role of early language exposure in shaping communicative self-confidence among secondary school students, a factor that has often been overlooked in previous studies focusing on older learners. The study thus advocates for the incorporation of sustainable and comprehensive English language programs from early stages of education to lay a solid foundation for communicative competence in later academic settings.

The study also underscores the significant influence of linguistic competence on students' WTC. This aspect addresses one of the core research questions regarding how students' language knowledge—particularly vocabulary range and pronunciation skills—affects their willingness to engage in English communication. Students who possess a broader vocabulary and a clearer understanding of correct pronunciation tend to demonstrate more confidence and are less apprehensive about participating in speaking activities. The lack of these skills, however, frequently results in anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and eventual classroom silence. Students with limited prior experience often hesitate to speak due to the fear of making grammatical or pronunciation errors. As highlighted by Widiati et al. (2023), many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners avoid speaking because they are afraid of producing incorrect utterances, which may lead to embarrassment or criticism. This observation aligns with Syed and Kuzborska's (2020) findings that linguistic limitations—such as low vocabulary knowledge and weak pronunciation—are dynamic barriers that complicate students' WTC.

Further support comes from Auliyah and Sujannah (2023), as well as Rihardini et al. (2021), who demonstrate that these linguistic weaknesses directly contribute to students' reluctance to communicate in classroom settings. Consequently, the study stresses the importance of overcoming these constraints through strategic teaching approaches. Vocabulary and pronunciation instruction should be embedded in meaningful, real-life contexts to improve retention and applicability. For example, using role plays, interactive reading tasks, and contextualized vocabulary building exercises can help bridge the gap between passive knowledge and active usage. The more relevant and engaging the learning context, the more likely students are to internalize new language forms and feel empowered to use them communicatively.

Another critical dimension revealed by the study is the influence of the classroom environment on students' WTC. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of

peer relationships, teacher support, and the overall learning atmosphere in fostering their desire to communicate in English. These findings resonate with existing literature, particularly the studies by Dong et al. (2023), Nurfitriana et al. (2024), and Syed and Kuzborska (2020), which all identify the learning environment as a pivotal factor in shaping students' communicative behaviors. A supportive classroom climate—where students feel safe, encouraged, and respected—helps reduce the affective filters that inhibit language production.

Notably, the findings reveal that secondary students highly value structured classroom settings where teachers provide clear instructions, positive reinforcement, and meaningful feedback. This preference contrasts with students at higher levels of education, such as university learners, who often thrive in more autonomous learning environments. For secondary learners, especially those with limited experience, structure and emotional support are essential for developing communicative confidence. In this study, students expressed a desire for collaborative learning opportunities where they could interact with peers who shared similar enthusiasm for English. Such environments enabled them to pursue their communication goals more freely and with less apprehension.

Moreover, the participants noted that learning was more effective when the classroom environment was non-judgmental and inclusive, allowing room for trial and error without the fear of ridicule. This insight aligns with the affective filter hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982), which posits that learners are more likely to acquire a second language in low-anxiety, supportive contexts. Therefore, cultivating a classroom culture that values participation over perfection can significantly increase WTC among students.

To implement this in practice, the study suggests incorporating interactive learning methods such as pair work, group projects, creative storytelling, and gamified speaking activities. These strategies not only make learning more enjoyable but also lower students' inhibitions, encouraging them to take communicative risks. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a facilitator role, offering guidance and feedback while allowing students to explore and express their ideas in English. Through this balanced approach, students can develop autonomy, competence, and a sense of belonging—three psychological needs that underpin intrinsic motivation, according to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

This study provides valuable evidence that willingness to communicate among secondary students is shaped by a confluence of factors, including early language exposure, linguistic competence, and classroom environment. While previous research has concentrated on university students, this study highlights the pressing need to support younger learners by offering early and consistent English learning experiences, building linguistic skills in meaningful contexts, and fostering a positive and supportive classroom culture. By addressing these elements, educators can significantly enhance students' confidence, engagement, and overall success in communicating in English. Ultimately, the findings call for a more holistic and long-term approach to language education, one that begins in early schooling and evolves through sustained support and responsive pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated students' perceptions of the factors that influence their willingness to communicate among students in the context of secondary school with two different characteristics: those who already have a learning experience and rich exposure to the English language, and those who do not, offering meaningful insights into

WTC in this context. By concentrating on the diversity of students' backgrounds, this study highlights that prior learning experiences contribute to students' willingness to communicate, leading to higher WTC, as these experienced students tend to be more confident and not scared to initiate communication in class. Furthermore, the findings gave insight into individual and situational factors contributing to their WTC. Specifically, personal factors like motivation and self-confidence, linguistic factors, classroom environment, and task design were highly influential in students' willingness to communicate in English classrooms.

Additionally, this present research can be a valuable insight, especially for EFL teachers, as the influencing factors found in this study, they are expected to adjust and develop the necessities that must be addressed to keep students' willingness to communicate at a higher level and can transform students with a limited degree of desire to communicate into high levels of willingness to communicate. To achieve higher WTC, it is advised that teachers strongly emphasize developing their students' communicative competence. Moreover, creating a less threatening classroom environment to decrease students' anxiety and boost their motivation with a range of interesting language learning tasks and activities is essential to consider. EFL teachers could optimize their support and help students overcome their language anxiety to cultivate confidence in communication. Lastly, the results of this study highlight the necessity for the teacher training program to integrate content focused on fostering communicative confidence, managing classroom anxiety, and implementing differentiated instruction tailored to diverse learner backgrounds.

Nevertheless, this research has some limitations that must be acknowledged. Considering the small number of participants, this may restrict the generalizability of the findings. The increased number of participants might have produced more comprehensive data on WTC among the students. Furthermore, the data-gathering procedure was limited to interviews. Therefore, to see the actual conditions of students' WTC, future research may incorporate additional data collection, such as observation during the English class.

REFERENCES

Abebe, D. T. (2024). EFL students' WTC across communicative situations in an instructional context: a quantitative study with focus on a public university in Ethiopia. *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, *12*(1), 33–44. https://doi.org/10.2478/jolace-2024-0004

Aberdeen, T. (2013). Yin, R. K. (2009). Case study research: Design and methods (4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. *The Canadian Journal of Action Research*, *14*(1), 69–71. https://doi.org/10.33524/cjar.v14i1.73

Al-Murtadha, M., & Feryok, A. (2017). Studying English in Yemen: situated unwillingness to communicate in sociohistorical time. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, *11*(3), 230–240. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2017.1317258

Amalia, S. N., Asib, A., & Marmanto, S. (2019). Indonesian EFL learners' willingness to communicate in the instructional context. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, *4*(2), 215. https://doi.org/10.21462/ijefl.v4i2.167

Amalia, S. N., Nurisma, R. A., Widiati, U., & Prihandoko, L. A. (2023). Learners' agency, beliefs, mindsets and teacher autonomy as predictors of willingness to communicate in online learning. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language--TESL-EJ*, *27*(3). https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.27107a3

Andika, E. C. H., Fardhani, A. E., & Wahjuningsih, E. (2022). Factors affecting senior

high school students' willingness to communicate in English in the EFL classroom. *EFL Education Journal*, *9*(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.19184/eej.v9i1.30717

Auliyah, Z., & Sujannah, W. D. (2023). Factors Contributing to Students' Willingness to Communicate during English Day Program. *SALEE Study of Applied Linguistics and English Education*, *4*(2), 393–408. https://doi.org/10.35961/salee.v4i2.845

Barrios, E., & Napiórkowska, M. (2024). Affective factors, intercultural sensitivity, and willingness to communicate orally outside class: A study with EFL secondary school learners in Poland and Spain. *Language Teaching Research*. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688241234225

Cao, Y., & Philp, J. (2006). Interactional context and willingness to communicate: A comparison of behavior in whole class, group and dyadic interaction. *System*, *34*(4), 480–493. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2006.05.002

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Pearson Education.

Dastgoshadeh, A., & Javanmardi, P. (2021). Emotional intelligence as a predictor of EFL learners' willingness to communicate. *Mextesol Journal*, *45*(3), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.61871/mj.v45n3-4

Dewaele, J. (2019). The effect of classroom emotions, attitudes toward English, and teacher behavior on willingness to communicate among English foreign language learners. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *38*(4), 523–535. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927x19864996

Dewaele, J., & Pavelescu, L. M. (2021). The relationship between incommensurable emotions and willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language: a multiple case study. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, *15*(1), 66–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2019.1675667

Dong, Y., Ahmad, N. K., & Nawi, N. R. C. (2023). Influencing factors of students' willingness to communicate in English in the EFL classroom: a systematic review. *Sains Humanika*, *16*(1), 9–18. https://doi.org/10.11113/sh.v16n1.2068

Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., & Airasian, P. W. (2012). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications*. Pearson

Grant, S. (2018). Effects of intensive EFL immersion programmes on willingness to communicate. *Language Learning Journal*, *48*(4), 442–453. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2017.1422274

Havwini, T. (2019). Indonesian EFL students' willingness to communicate in the 2013 curriculum implementation: A case study. *TEFLIN Journal - a Publication on the Teaching and Learning of English*, *30*(1), 105. https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v30i1/105-120

Hu, L., & Wang, Y. (2023). The predicting role of EFL teachers' immediacy behaviors in students' willingness to communicate and academic engagement. *BMC Psychology*, *11*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01378-x

Lee, J. S. (2022). The role of grit and classroom enjoyment in EFL learners' willingness to communicate. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *43*(5), 452–468. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1746319

Ma, H., Ismail, L., Noordin, N., & Razali, A. B. (2024). From EFL to ESL: unveiling willingness to communicate (WTC) in English among Chinese international students in a multilingual context. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2024.2425980

Ma, Y., Yu, S., Reynolds, B. L., & Jiang, L. (2021). A qualitative investigation of Chinese students' willingness to communicate in English in the graduate school EMI

classroom. *English Teaching & Learning*, *46*(1), 77–98. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42321-021-00087-1

Macintyre, P. D., Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: a situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *Modern Language Journal*, *82*(4), 545–562. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb05543.x

MacIntyre, P. D., & Wang, L. (2021). Willingness to communicate in the L2 about meaningful photos: Application of the pyramid model of WTC. *Language Teaching Research*, *25*(6), 878–898. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211004645

Muñoz, C., & Cadierno, T. (2021). How do differences in exposure affect English language learning? A comparison of teenagers in two learning environments. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, *11*(2), 185–212. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2021.11.2.2

Newport, E. L. (1990). Maturational constraints on language learning. *Cognitive Science*, *14*(1), 11–28. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog1401_2

Nurfitriana, L., Basthomi, Y., & El Khoiri, N. (2024). Exploring Willingness to Communicate among Master's Students Majoring in English Education: What Makes It Different?. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics,* 9(2), 407-424. http://dx.doi.org/10.210 93/ijeltal.v9i2.1817

Peng, J. E. (2022). Willingness to communicate. In *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition and individual differences* (pp. 159-172). Routledge.

Punyaporn, P., & Soontornwipast, K. (2022). An exploration of students' willingness to communicate in Thai EFL online classroom. *Arab World English Journal*, *8*, 70–87. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/call8.5

Rad, H. S. (2024). Revolutionizing L2 speaking proficiency, willingness to communicate, and perceptions through artificial intelligence: a case of Speeko application. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, *18*(4), 364–379. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2024.2309539

Rafiee, M., & Abbasian-Naghneh, S. (2019). Prioritization of critical individual factors influencing willingness to communicate: AHP method. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *40*(6), 461–474. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2018.1521814

Rihardini, A. A., Yaniafari, R. P., & Mukminatien, N. (2021). Students willingness to communicate using English: A survey study. *Paramasastra*, *8*(1), 75–94. https://doi.org/10.26740/paramasastra.v8n1.p75-94

Sadoughi, M., & Hejazi, S. Y. (2023). How can L2 motivational self system enhance willingness to communicate? The contribution of foreign language enjoyment and anxiety. *Current Psychology*, *43*(3), 2173–2185. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04479-3

Sarwari, K. (2024). Examining the role of L2 willingness to communicate in English language achievements: perspectives from Afghan university instructors. *Cogent Education*, *11*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2024.2400428

Sawyer, S. M., Azzopardi, P. S., Wickremarathne, D., & Patton, G. C. (2018). The age of adolescence. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, *2*(3), 223–228. https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642(18)30022-1

Soyoof, A. (2023). Iranian EFL students' perception of willingness to communicate in an extramural digital context. *Interactive Learning Environments*, *31*(9), 5922– 5939. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2021.2024579

Syed, H., & Kuzborska, I. (2018). Dynamics of factors underlying willingness to

communicate in a second language. *Language Learning Journal*, *48*(4), 481–500. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2018.1435709

Tai, T., & Chen, H. H. (2023). The impact of Google Assistant on adolescent EFL learners' willingness to communicate. *Interactive Learning Environments*, *31*(3), 1485–1502. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2020.1841801

Tuyen, L., & Loan, T. T. T. (2019). Factors affecting EFL students' willingness to communicate in speaking classes at the Vietnamese tertiary level. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, *4*(2), 252–262. https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.4.2.10

Unsiah, F., Mukminatien, N., Anugerahwati, M., Astuti, U. P., & Megawati, F. (2024). Students' Voices in English Medium Instruction Based on Lengths of English Exposure. *MEXTESOL Journal*, *48*(2).

Widiati, U., Khoiri, N. E., Nindya, M. A., & Sharif, T. I. S. T. (2023). Exploring Strategies of Teaching Speaking among Indonesian and Malaysian Secondary English Teachers. *Register Journal*, *16*(2), 286–300 https://doi.org/10.18326/register.v16i2.286-300

Xiao, Y., & Qiu, X. (2022). A study of the relationship between students' global perspective and willingness to communicate in English at an English medium instruction university in China. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.873766

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and Methods*. SAGE.

Zhang, C., Meng, Y., & Ma, X. (2024). Artificial intelligence in EFL speaking: Impact on enjoyment, anxiety, and willingness to communicate. *System*, *121*, 103259. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103259

Zhao, D., Jablonkai, R. R., & Sandoval-Hernandez, A. (2024). Enhancing willingness to communicate in English among Chinese students in the UK: the impact of MALL with Duolingo and HelloTalk. *Journal of China Computer-Assisted Language Learning*, *4*(1), 42–73. https://doi.org/10.1515/jccall-2023-0027

Zhou, L., Xi, Y., & Lochtman, K. (2023). The relationship between second language competence and willingness to communicate: the moderating effect of foreign language anxiety. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *44*(2), 129–143. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1801697