

The Learners' Perception on Factors Affecting Learners' Willingness to Communicate in Language Learning

Myra Desmayenni

Master of English Education, University of Lampung, Indonesia

myradmaster@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

A common EFL classrooms' issue in language learning is the students' unwillingness to speak. Thus, the essential concept in teaching target language is to make learners actively use the target language, namely learners have willingness to communicate (WTC). This research investigates students' perceptions on how the learners' own perception affecting their willingness of communicate in learning a language. Twenty-seven undergraduate EFL students of 1 semester in the University of Lampung (Unila) majoring in English Education involved in this research. The research data were, then, analyzed in qualitative descriptive. This study employed questionnaires as the instrument for the data collection technique. The results elucidated the learners' positive perception of the learners' WTC in language learning is influenced by the task type and the topic given. They are mostly drawn to speaking in group discussions when the topic is intriguing. Overall, this finding concludes that the EFL learners' positive perception on WTC in learning a language in class discussions.

Keywords: willingness to communicate; students' perception; EFL learners.

INTRODUCTION

Language pedagogy has much intention on the significance of the use of target language (TL) in effective communication by language learners. A common EFL classrooms' problem in language learning is the learners' unwillingness to speak. However, the current instruction of communicative approaches to the foreign language (FL) or second language (L2) demands the essential of learners using FL/ L2 in all productive skills, both in speaking and writing skills. These approaches are predicated on the idea in learners' competence in the target language through performance and are supported by certain relevant theories of second language acquisition (SLA) such as Long (1996) and Swain (2000). An essential concept in FL/ L2 instruction has emphasized on the active use of the TL during the learning process, and the concept is called willingness to communicate (WTC).

The learners' readiness to communicate by actively using the language inside the classroom has become the foremost notion in second and foreign language studies. Learners' readiness to engage in a discourse with a specific interlocutor at a particular time in the target language is defined as their willingness to communicate (Macintyre et al., 1998). Nevertheless, L2 competence might not be sufficient (Dörnyei, 2003) since learners are required to able to communicate and be motivated to do so in the target language. Many studies have demonstrated that a learners' WTC affects how frequent the learner actively participates in the communication using the target language (Clément et al., 2003; Yashima et al., 2018). As a result, WTC in L2 may be conceived as the main objective of language education and as a thorough conceptual framework to construct, justify, and project the L2 communication behavior (Macintyre et al., 1998). The duration of a EFL spend in communicating using the target language is affected by their WTC (Clément et al., 2003; Yashima et al., 2018).

Learners with WTC will actively seek out opportunities to speak in the target language (Kang, 2005), and spend more time practicing it than learners with low WTC (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001). In fact, learners with high WTC make greater progress in improving their communication skills and eventually speak more fluently. However, among all language skills, speaking in the target language is regarded as the most challenging (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000).

Meanwhile learners may feel that they only have limited linguistic knowledge, low speaking confidence, and little or no desire to speak or low willingness to communicate (Gan, 2013). This demotivating cycle may drive the learners to do effortless in speaking.

According to House (2004), factors affecting WTC by learners' perception are as follows; perceived politeness, the significance of physical locality, sex, discussion topic and the learners' mood also influenced their WTC in EFL classrooms. Similar research conducted by (Cao & Philp, 2006) highlighted four key factors that learners saw as influence on their WTC, such as the group size, interlocutor engagement, familiarity with the topic and the interlocutor, self-confidence, and cultural factor. Moreover, Cao (2009) also discovered the factors influencing the learners' WTC, including the chosen topic, the type of task, the interlocutor, and the teacher. The recent research, Zeng (2010) also finds the factors affecting learners' willingness to speak his interview respondents are the familiarity with the learning environment, the effect of a relaxing classroom, teacher support, personality, self-confidence, afraid of making mistakes and getting embarrassed, fear of making a worst impression as a result of making mistakes, losing face, learner's own perception of his speaking skills and performance, familiarity of the chosen topic, as well as the degree of familiarity interlocutor.

The fundamental goal of language learning is to encourage the learners' WTC. Thus, it is crucial to investigate the factors affecting the language learners' WTC and what factors can rise the learners WTC in order to close the communication gap, especially to EFL learners who do not receive enough English exposure outside the classroom. Another similar research conducted regarding the variables affecting learners' readiness to speak in Iranian environment. There is similar study in Indonesia towards the factors influencing the students' WTC in EFL classrooms in University of Makassar. However, there has been no study that discovered students' perception in factors influencing students' WTC in language learning in the University of Lampung (Unila). Therefore, this study is a new attempt in Unila.

METHODS

The objective of this study is to obtain the learners' perception on factors affecting the learners WTC in EFL at the varsity level. Twenty-seven students of basic speaking class in the University of Lampung majoring in English Education are the participants of this research. Meanwhile, the data were, then, collected through questionnaires and were analyzed in qualitative descriptive form. The use of questionnaires suits the purpose of the research. Moreover, believe that the qualitative methods have an advantage to examine the students' perception on the influencing factors in WTC in language learning due to the rich descriptions of the dynamic process experienced by participants (Macintyre et al., 2003). Meanwhile, this study's research question is written as follows:

What are the factors affecting the learners' WTC pertains to language learning in Unila undergraduate students of English Education?

Further, the questionnaire adopted by (Weda et al., 2019). The instrument of this study on learners' perception on WTC pertains to SLA and language performance measured by Likert-scale in which 1 = agree, 2 = uncertain, and 3 = disagree.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the percentage result of the learners' perception on willingness to communicate pertains to language learning were presented and followed by a detailed discussion. The following table displays the percentage in responding to the questionnaire regarding the perception of Undergraduate English Education Students on WTC pertaining to language learning.

Table 1. Percentage of learners' perception on WTC pertaining to language learning

Item	Learners' Perception	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	Speaking English in front of the class excites me.	51,9	29,6	18,5
2	My favorite class activities in English are group discussions.	77,8	11,1	11,1
3	I like beginning the group discussion with a number of critical questions.	48,1	18,5	33,3
4	I'm not afraid to express my ideas during class discussions.	44,4	37,0	18,5
5	I prefer speaking during class discussions to listening.	48,1	29,6	22,2
6	I always speak in front of the class confidently.	40,7	25,9	33,3
7	The best way in practicing speaking English is a classroom discussion.	74,1	7,4	18,5
8	I find no trouble striking up conversations in class discussions.	70,4	18,5	11,1
9	I have trouble following other people's talks in classroom discussions.	14,8	33,3	51,9
10	I always eager to speak with classmates and teachers when lessons take place.	66,7	18,5	14,8
11	I am eager to speak and join a group discussion if the topic is interesting.	81,5	11,1	7,4
12	I am still eager to participate in a group discussion even though the topic is less interesting.	22,2	25,9	51,9
13	I dislike speaking out in group discussions.	18,5	25,9	55,6
14	I was nervous to start conversation in class discussions.	29,6	33,3	37,0
15	I don't feel ashamed to start a classroom discussion by asking questions.	55,6	14,8	29,6
16	I feel embarrassed if I make mistakes in classroom discussions.	59,3	11,1	29,6
17	I prefer taking English conversation classes than others.	51,9	40,7	7,4
18	I am always constantly eager to speak in class discussions.	66,7	14,8	18,5
19	I am always constantly eager to speak to practice my speaking skills.	63,0	22,2	14,8
20	I feel hesitate to express my ideas in group discussion.	22,2	29,6	48,1

As presented in Table 1 above, the highest response for statement 1 (Speaking English in front of the class excites me) was agree (51.9%). 77.8% of the students agreed with statement 2 (My favorite class activities in English are group discussions). Meanwhile, 48.1% of students agreed with

statement 3 (I like beginning the group discussion with a number of critical questions), 44.4% of the students agreed with statement 4 (I'm not afraid to express my ideas during class discussions). The highest response for statement 5 (I prefer speaking during class discussions to listening) was agree (48.1%). Further, 40.7% of the students agreed with statement 6 (I always speak in front of the class confidently). 74.1% of the students agreed with statement 7 (The best way in practicing speaking English is a classroom discussion). Besides, 70.4% of the students agreed with statement 8 (I find no trouble striking up conversations in class discussions). However, 51.9% of the students disagreed with statement 9 (I have trouble following other people's talks in classroom discussions). 66.7% of the students agreed with statement 10 (I always eager to speak with classmates and teachers when lessons take place). Moreover, the highest "Agree" response fell to statement 11 (I am eager to speak and join a group discussion if the topic is interesting) with 81.5%. Meanwhile, 51.9% of the students disagreed with statement 12 (I am still eager to participate in a group discussion even though the topic is less interesting). Also, 55.6% of the students disagreed with statement 13 (I dislike speaking out in group discussions), followed by statement 14 (I was nervous to start conversation in class discussion) with the disagree response was 37%. Yet, 55.6% of the students agreed with statement 15 (I don't feel ashamed to start a classroom discussion by asking questions). In line with it, 59.3% of the students agreed with statement 16 (I feel embarrassed if I make mistakes in classroom discussions). 51.9% of the students agreed with statement 17 (I prefer taking English conversation classes than others). Then, 66.7% of the students agreed with statement 18 (I am always constantly eager to speak in class discussions). Meanwhile, 66.3% of the students agreed with statement 19 (I am always constantly eager to speak to practice my speaking). Finally, 48.1% of the students disagreed with statement 20 (I feel hesitate to express my ideas in group discussion).

Discussion

The majority of the participants responded that their WTC on statement 11, "I am eager to speak and join a group discussion if the topic is interesting" (81.5%), followed by statement 2, "My favorite class activities in English are group discussions" (77.8%), and statement 7, "The best way in practicing speaking English is a classroom discussion" (74.1%). Then, statement 8 "I find no trouble striking up conversations in class discussions" got 70.4%. Besides, statement 10 "I always eager to speak with classmates and teachers when lessons take place" and statement 18, "I am always constantly eager to speak in class discussions" got the same responses, 66.73%. These findings elucidated the EFL students' positive perception on WTC in language learning in the context of classroom discussions setting at Unila undergraduate students of basic speaking class majoring in English Education. The percentages of learners' perception on factors affecting learners' willingness to communicate in the basic speaking class of English Education are displayed in table above.

Furthermore, the findings of this study showed that the majority of participants agree that group discussions are the most favorite of the students as was shown by the highest responses from learners' perception on factors influencing EFL learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in language learning especially at the tertiary level in the setting of the University of Lampung. In the findings, the majority of students in the study revealed that the students are interested in speaking in group discussion if the topic is interesting. Meanwhile, discussion can stimulate situational interest, particularly when relevant topics are addressed (Del Favero et al., 2007). Nazari and Allahyar (2012) also find that classroom discussions support students' participation and increase the learners' WTC to be more student's centered. Similar to Barjesteh, et al. (2012) argues that group discussion with the classmate is favorable for Iranian EFL students. They are more willing to initiate communication in that situation. Another study supports the findings of this research in which the students are more interested in group discussions to individual performance (Weda et al., 2021). Also, to be more active in speaking, students are likely to choose group discussions as the best way in practicing speaking in which small group discussions give the students' more opportunities to interact in communication (Léger & Storch, 2009). Another evidence shown in the percentage result, only 18.5% of the students agreed to the statement 13, "I dislike speaking out in group discussions".

Therefore, it is recommended for EFL teachers and lecturers to employ more student-centered methods or approaches which can promote the students' engagement in discussion and interaction in order to foster their activeness in learning, speaking, language acquisition, as well as their understanding.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study discovered the learners' perception on the factors influencing learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in language learning as follows; 1) the students will be more willing to speak in group discussion if the topics discussed are intriguing, 2) the students are agree that group discussions are their most favorite activity which they enjoy the most, 3) the classroom discussions are the best way in facilitating students' speaking practice, 4) the students find no trouble to have conversations in class discussions, 5) I always eager to speak with classmates and teachers when lessons take place, 6) I am always constantly eager to speak in class discussions. These findings elucidated the EFL learners' positive perception on WTC in language learning in the context of classroom discussions setting at Unila undergraduate students of basic speaking class majoring in English Education.

However, there are also several limitations in this study. First, the subject of this research merely focused on a single campus, particularly in the University of Lampung. Second, the researcher only used a single instrument in this study. Thus, to gain more comprehensive data, the future research is required to complete the study. Besides, the researcher also suggests teachers and lecturers to facilitate EFL students in any kind of classroom discussions to promote students WTC. As (Jost 2018, n.d.) proposes that there are various types of classroom discussion in order to support the student-centered approach such as group discussions, small group projects, large-group discussions, class presentations, and even debates. A debate also can be more effective in stimulating the learners' WTC and self-communicative competence (Shamsudin et al., 2017). Therefore, it is recommended for EFL teachers and lecturers to employ more student-centered methods or approaches which can promote the students' engagement in discussion and interaction in order to foster their activeness in learning, speaking, language acquisition, as well as their understanding.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher would like to acknowledge a colleague, Novita, who helped the researcher to conduct the research in her class., gave researcher insights and guidance in shaping this project. Also, deeply grateful for the researcher's support system, husband and son, who always motivates the researcher to conduct a project.

REFERENCES

- 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>
- Cao, Y., 2009. Temporal fluctuation in situational willingness to communicate in a second language classroom. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics*, 12(2): 1-6.
- Clément, R., Baker, S. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2003). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The Effects of Context, Norms, and Vitality. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 22(2), 190–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X03022002003>
- Del Favero, L., Boscolo, P., Vidotto, G., & Vicentini, M. (2007). Classroom discussion and individual problem-solving in the teaching of history: Do different instructional approaches affect interest in different ways? *Learning and Instruction*, 17(6), 635–657.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2007.09.012>
- Dörnyei, Z. (n.d.). *Attitudes, Orientations, and Motivations in Language Learning: Advances in Theory, Research, and Applications*.

- Gan, Z. (2013). Understanding English speaking difficulties: an investigation of two Chinese populations. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 34(3), 231–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2013.768622>
- Jost, Neal. (2018). Facilitating Discussion in the Japanese University EFL Classroom. *Encounters*, 6, 51–74
- Kang, S. J. (2005). Dynamic emergence of situational willingness to communicate in a second language. *System*, 33(2), 277–292. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2004.10.004>
- Léger, D. de Saint, & Storch, N. (2009). Learners' perceptions and attitudes: Implications for willingness to communicate in an L2 classroom. *System*, 37(2), 269–285. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2009.01.001>
- Long, M.H., 1996. The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In: Ritchie, W.C., Bhatia, T.K. (Eds.), *Handbook of Language Acquisition*. Vol. 2: Second Language Acquisition. Academic Press, New York, pp. 413–468
- Macintyre, P. D., Baker, S. C., Clément, R., & Donovan, L. A. (2003). *Talking in Order to Learn: Willingness to Communicate and Intensive Language Programs*.
- Macintyre, P. D., Dornyei, Z., Clément, R., & 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>
- Shamsudin, M., Othman, M., Jahedi, M., & Aralas, D. (2017). Enhancing English Learners' Willingness to Communicate through Debate and Philosophy Inquiry Discussion. *English Language Teaching*, 10(8), 145. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n8p145>
- Weda, S., Atmowardoyo, H., Rahman, F., Said, M. M., & Sakti, A. E. F. (2021). Factors affecting students' willingness to communicate in EFL classroom at higher institution in indonesia. *International Journal of Instruction*, 14(2), 719–734. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2021.14240a>
- Yashima, T., MacIntyre, P. D., & Ikeda, M. (2018). Situated willingness to communicate in an L2: Interplay of individual characteristics and context. *Language Teaching Research*, 22(1), 115–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168816657851>