FACTORS AFFECTING ENGLISH-MAJOR STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE: A CASE STUDY

Phuong Hoang Yen[*], Vo Nguyen Thu Uyen and Le Thanh Thao

School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University

Abstract. English is essential to students in the Vietnamese context, and using English in real-world communication situations is even more demanding for them. Therefore, many studies have been conducted to research issues related to students' using English in their communication. This study contributes to the literature of this field. Mainly, this study was conducted quantitatively to measure the factors affecting English-major students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the case of Vietnam. A 30-item questionnaire was used to collect data. The study revealed that students' WTC was significantly affected by their nervousness, pressure on social comparison, tension, speaking partners, classroom atmosphere, and lecturers' characteristics. Based on the findings, this current study encourages English instructors to improve their teaching performances by participating in professional development training and cultivating noble qualities of teaching profession to help gain their students' trust and respect. As a result, students' WTC is expected to be higher while working with high-quality teachers with sufficient professional knowledge and ethics.

Keywords: A case study, English-major students, factors, willingness to communicate.

1. Introduction

Communication skills significantly contribute to developing the lifestyle and future career orientation of all citizens, especially the young generation. Communication skills help people express their thoughts and opinions to others, achieving the desired goals or aspirations in work or life (Burleson & Samter, 1990) [1]. More importantly, communicating in a foreign language such as English helps people increase their opportunities to work and study and promotes a particular culture to the world. Currently, most students have misconceptions about learning and stick around old-fashioned learning methods, mainly learning English passively through books and taking grammar as the sole base, leading to not paying much attention to speaking skills (Alzahrani, 2018) [2]. This phenomenon is such an alarming issue. Indeed, although students could do well with grammar exercises, write long essays in English, or achieve high scores in class, they still find it hard to communicate with foreigners in English (Rozkwitalska, 2010) [3]. For example, when meeting a foreigner asking for help, students are usually embarrassed or confused because they do not know how to explain things in English thoroughly. It is a common situation among Vietnamese students (Vo et al., 2018) [4]. Studying well in class does not mean that students are always willing to speak English to foreigners or even their teachers and friends. It is noticeable that the primary purpose of learning a foreign language is to communicate with others, so the lack of speaking skills is such a regrettable flaw.

Many students at universities share their situations that they do know English words and structures, but when it comes to speaking to a foreigner, they can stand still and do not know what to say. Others share that if they tried to speak, they would make the conversations awkward due to poor speaking skills. In this digital age, thousands of learning methods are on the internet, such as improving communication skills through watching British and American movies or listening and imitating how movie characters speak (Albiladi et al., 2018) [5]. Moreover, entertainment-based learning methods are prevailing, namely downloading English songs for regular listening and singing along to practice pronunciation (Chou, 2014) [6]. Even if students apply the above methods in English learning, few students persevere in the long term. Most students assume they feel discouraged because they do not make any apparent change compared to the expected improvement. Among other things, learners' perception of learning a language is one of the main elements for target language acquisition. Most students consider English a normal subject with no advantages for their future careers (Clement & Murugavel, 2018) [7]. When learning languages or doing something, people should know why they have to do this or learn this language. Therefore, they will have a clear plan and specific goal, bringing the best results.

Another significant issue in English classes is that, apart from the period learning English lessons, classmates and teachers will tend to speak mother tongue when having communication issues, so it is pretty weird for students to be the only one in class speaking English, and they are afraid of being considered the one who is trying to show off (Travers, 1992) [8]. Learning theory without practice puts students in a tricky situation that they cannot improve. It is expected that lecturers often want to direct students to self-study and self-practice methods at foreign language universities, but it has not worked well yet (Yunusov, 2021) [9]. A great deal of students still applies rote learning excessively. In fact, before each speaking exam, there are usually 10-15 given topics; students have to memorize the prepared texts to pass the exam easily (Khamees, 2016) [10]. Most English-major students in non-English-speaking countries, such as Vietnam or China, are good at writing because they have written numerous essays in class. However, when it comes to communication skills, they ward off (Nguyen et al., 2015) [11]. Besides, the teaching method is also one of the critical factors affecting the quality of foreign language teaching and learning (Türkben, 2019) [12].

Many studies on willingness to communicate (WTC) have been conducted to understand the challenges and importance of speaking skills (e.g., Burgoon, 1976; McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991) [13] [14] [15]. The studies mainly focus on factors affecting students' WTC, leading to feasible suggestions. Although the WTC topic has been carried out by many researchers worldwide, in the Mekong Delta, the research is still limited. Conspicuously, there is not much research on English-major. For such reasons and current situations, this study is conducted to thoroughly explore the factors influencing English-major students' WTC in the Vietnamese context. The study seeks to answer the following research question: "What factors affect English-major students' willingness to communicate in English classrooms?"

2. Content

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Willingness to Communicate in an L2

Producing the target language is an essential factor contributing to effectiveness in language acquisition (Swain & Lapkin, 1995) [16]. However, many language teachers from different countries have been struggling with the same challenge: encouraging learners to speak the target language, not to be anxious about making mistakes, and to feel free to talk. As a result, students do not have enough chances to communicate in practice.

McCroskey and his associates are those who originally introduced the concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987, 1990) [14], [17], [18] based on Burgoon's (1976) [13] study on the unwillingness to communicate. Many researchers have defined the concept of WTC, yet there has obviously been no unanimous concept. According to Chotipaktanasook and Reinders (2016) [19], WTC is a concept that has recently received remarkable attention in research about second-language acquisition and language teaching practice because WTC rallies different factors elucidating why learners do or do not engage in producing the target language. Moreover, mastering WTC meaning is for understanding classroom processes, assessing levels of WTC in learners, figuring out ways of encouraging WTC in classrooms, and leading to success in second language acquisition.

Being derived from the field of oral communication, WTC is related to an aspect of individual differences in second language (L2) acquisition. In the literature field, WTC has been devised with three major features, namely a situation-based variable (Kang, 2005; Cao & Philip, 2006; MacIntyre, 2007) [20], [21], [22], a personality-based variable, and trait-like orientation (Burgoon, 1976; McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991; McCroskey, 1992; MacIntyre et al., 1998) [13], [14], [15], [23], [24]. The former argument focused on the observed regularity of WTC level and individuals' predisposition over verbal communication, but the latter contention indicates that relations among interlocutors and potential situational variations in language use should be the priority.

Furthermore, language learners who display enthusiasm and willingness to engage in the second language (L2) actively endeavor to identify communication opportunities. Instead of assuming a passive stance and awaiting fortuitous interactions, these learners proactively seek out contexts conducive to employing the target language. Additionally, these individuals actively engage in communicative acts employing the L2. They not only actively pursue situations enabling communication, but also participate dynamically in conversations, dialogues, or any form of interactive discourse utilizing the L2. Consequently, they transcend the boundaries of solitary linguistic study or practice, actively integrating their linguistic competencies by means of interpersonal communication. Hence, for language education students, the willingness to communicate should be the final goal of the learning process (MacIntyre et al., 1998) [24]. WTC is also defined as "an individual's personality-based predisposition to approaching or avoiding the initiation of communication when free to do so" (McCroskey, 1977, p.77) [25]. According to McCroskey and Richmond (1990) [18], WTC is considered a personality orientation, explaining why some people seem more willing to communicate than others under similar situations. MacIntyre et al. (1998) [24] defined L2 WTC as one's readiness to use L2 to enter into discourse at a certain time with another person or people. For this study, willingness to communicate (WTC) is viewed as a concept in L2 acquisition that states that language students who are willing to communicate in L2 ardently find opportunities to communicate.

2.1.2. Factors Affecting Students' Willingness to Communicate in an L2

With the following pyramid-shaped model (Figure 1), MacIntyre et al. (1998) [24] showed influences on WTC, such as psychological-affective antecedents, communication contexts of individuals and society, motivational tendencies, and communication behaviors.

Furthermore, many researchers have indicated that two types of variables influence students' WTC, namely psychological and contextual variables.

Psychological variables

Psychological variables include self-confidence, perceived communicative competence, anxiety in learning, L2 learning motivation, and personality.

- *Self-confidence*

Self-confidence has a variety of influences on students' WTC as it will decide whether learners,

have enough courage or not to practice or produce the target language. Among individual variables, self-confidence is considered the strongest predictor of WTC (Clément et al., 2003) [26]. Most students find it hard to speak in front of others. They feel insecure and fear making mistakes, leading to fewer communication opportunities.
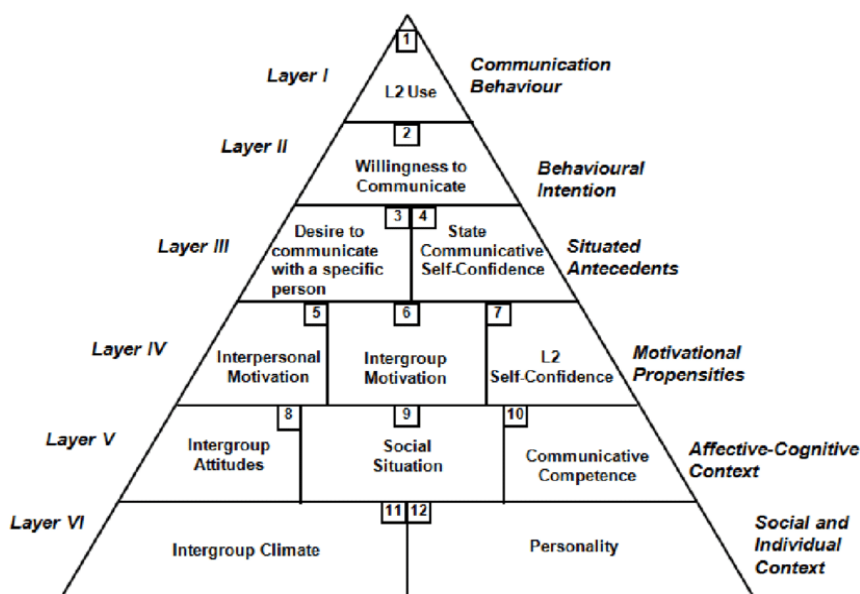
Figure 1. Heuristic model of variables influencing WTC (Macintyre et al., 1998) [24]

- *Perceived communicative competence*

Concerning perceived communication competence, MacIntyre et al. (1998) [24] stated that learners' perceived communicative competence could be considered as their orientation towards the ability to speak L2 with other people using L2. L2 students who recognize themselves as excellent or poor at communicating are disposed towards having more or less WTC. Therefore, students' perceived communicative competence is related to WTC. According to Baker and MacIntyre (2000) [27], the actual ability of an individual does not matter, but how they consider or perceive their communication competence is the key to determining WTC. Perceived communicative competence is somehow related to self-confidence since both decide the level of learners' confidence to communicate.

- *Learning Anxiety*

In terms of learning anxiety, certain types are identified, such as situation-specific anxiety, state anxiety, and trait anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) [28]. Anxiety among students can be triggered in L2 classes through speaking activities, preventing them from enhancing and mastering their speaking skills. Unfortunately, oral communication anxiety has been studied to influence students' perception of their communicative competence, leading to their WTC weakening (McCroskey & Baer, 1985) [14]; excessive anxiety affects students' L2 presentation and acquisition negatively (Liu & Jackson, 2009) [29]. According to Horwitz and Young (1991, p.56) [30], "Anxiety about speaking a language can affect the quality of oral language production, making individuals appear less fluent than they are," meaning that the level of communication apprehension is related to weak communication. Besides, Baker and MacIntyre (2000) [27] also stated that positive or negative communication experiences in the past or anxiety when using languages are critical factors determining students' WTC level.

- *L2 learning motivation*

With regards to L2 learning motivation, teaching strategies and methods could usually decide whether students are motivated or not. For example, a language class with tedious teaching methods will not provide students with enthusiasm or eagerness to engage in the practice activities. Teachers are also considered as factors in creating and maintaining students' motivation. A conscientious teacher will have a variety of ways to motivate and trigger students' curiosity in learning. Unwillingness to communicate is often generated by low motivation. Gardner (1985) [31] defined L2 learning motivation as the extent to which students endeavor to acquire the language because of their desire to do so as well as the satisfaction from that.

- *Personality*

As for personality, McCroskey and Richmond (1990) [18] stated that introverted and extroverted people have different levels of WTC, meaning that introversion and extroversion personality features can be considered clear indicators of WTC. Personality refers to individual factors related to students' WTC. Liu (2005) [32] said that personality is a significant reason causing students' unwillingness to communicate and that some students are introverted and diffident, tending to be quiet in classes. Generally, there are some reasons why students avoid communicating with others. They are not sociable, for example, introspective, do not have topics to discuss, or feel disturbed to be involved in any conversation. Conversely, students with personality traits such as adaptability, sociability, and confidence tend to have a higher L2 WTC (Elwood, 2011) [33]. They enjoy being involved in communication as they are willing to do so.

Contextual variables

In terms of contextual variables, when communicating, students often want to speak with a specific person on a particular occasion. It contributes to the idea that contextual variables do affect students' WTC. Contextual variables could be a variety of aspects, such as the effect of task types, topics, interlocutor, and teacher's role (Kang, 2005; Peng, 2014) [20] [34]. Syed and Kuzborska's (2020) [35] study on postgraduate students' WTC stated that factors influencing learners' WTC could be classified into three main aspects: psychological, contextual, and linguistic. Simić (2014, p.21) [36] said that the most widely recognized factors affecting the EFL learners' WTC are "preparedness, topic, speaking self-confidence, speaker's personality, relationship with the interlocutor, perceived speaking skills of the speaker, task type, correction and grading, class atmosphere and embarrassment."

2.1.3. Related Studies on Students' Willingness to Communicate in an L2

Remarkable research on WTC over the last decades has helped people have a more transparent review of WTC. MacIntyre et al. (1998) [24] conceptualized with a theoretical model, L2 WTC is said to be affected by social and individual context, affective-cognitive context, motivational propensities, situated antecedents, and behavioral intention, which are interrelated in influencing WTC in L2 acquisition. Some researchers argued that a fundamental aim of L2 education should be the formation of WTC in the language learning process. Another argument conceived that the higher level of WTC among learners increases the opportunity for authentic L2 practice and usage (MacIntyre et al., 2003) [37].

The lack of willingness will inhibit effective interaction and language production. Technological advances have been creating a new means for the classroom so that interaction among students or teachers can interact with both spoken and electronic interaction. Using classroom context and both outside and inside observation, MacIntyre et al. (1998) [24] measured L2 WTC through the four skills, namely speaking, reading, writing, and listening. It is suggested that the student's ability to feel secure in relationships with others when communicating is a crucial concern and a key influence on WTC.

Learners will experience two types of study periods in the foreign language learning process. Learners first use language to learn and then learn how to use it, and the gap between these two parts is not easy to overcome. L2 WTC serves as both a means and a conclusion in the learning language process (MacIntyre et al., 1998) [24]. L2 WTC needs interaction in L2, leading to language proficiency. According to the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985) [38], language production is a must to examine learners' language knowledge and the transformation from the level of semantic understanding to the level of syntactic production. Moreover, Kang (2005, p.278) [20] proposed that "given that language development can occur through interaction, it can be assumed that more interaction leads to more language development and learning". From that point, educators are to create more ways to improve learners' L2 WTC to help learners use L2 both inside and outside the classroom and be confident in seeking real communication opportunities. On the other hand, since the ultimate goal when learning a language is using the language proficiently, L2 WTC could also be defined as a learning outcome.

Learning a foreign language, most people set the goal of using the language whenever authentic communication opportunities come. Language teachers often want to develop learners with L2 proficiency levels, allowing them to interact with people from other countries with different accents. If competent language learners' WTC is restricted inside the narrow boundaries- a classroom, the social and political goals of language education bringing cultures together will not occur (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2013) [39].

Most researchers point out that being willing and able to communicate is very different. Hence, the fundamental goal of language education should not only be the acquisition of communicative competency. In the pyramid-shaped model (MacIntyre et al., 1998) [24], communicative competency is not the final goal but L2 use. According to Gregersen and MacIntyre (2013) [39], being proficient in L2 does not mean that a learner can use L2 to communicate when the chance arises. As such, in language instruction, the development of students, and the willingness to use L2 for authentic purposes, should prioritize. L2 WTC is defined as a behavioral intention that is too difficult to implement, meaning learners may fail to act like their intentions (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010) [40]. Indeed, although learners have good language ability that allows them to communicate fluently, they cannot also use the language if they are not active. By understanding the facilitating and affecting factors impacting L2 WTC, educators can help their students achieve the language use goal.

From these mentioned studies and researchers' arguments, it seems reasonable to assume that WTC is a vital factor in language acquisition. By mastering its concept and importance, learners could turn the language learning process that is inherently difficult and full of challenges into a less-complicated process. More importantly, educators can create new effective teaching methods enhancing learners' ability based on WTC's features.

2.2. Method

2.2.1. Research Design

A quantitative research design was used in this study. There are a variety of reasons for the use of the quantitative method in this study. Regarding its definition, quantitative methods mainly focus on the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data obtained by polls, questionnaires, and surveys, as well as manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques. Additionally, quantitative research emphasizes collecting numerical data and generalizing it over groups of people or explaining a specific phenomenon (Babbie, 2020; Muijs, 2004) [41], [42]. More importantly, numbers or close-ended questions used in this study are vital elements in the quantitative approach. In terms of quantitative methods' characteristics, typically, the data will be gathered by structured analysis instruments. Moreover, the findings focus on significant sample sizes that are representative of the population; researchers

use questionnaires or computer software to collect numerical data. From these properties mentioned above, the quantitative approach could be considered the most suitable method for conducting this study.

While there are many different quantitative approaches, surveys were used in this research. In a survey study, questionnaires or organized interviews are utilized to gather data, providing a quantitative or numeric overview of perceptions or trends within a population. It is easier for students to show their perceptions using a questionnaire with pre-written statements instead of spending a long time considering, thinking about, writing down, or discussing the research topic, as this study focuses on factors affecting English-major students' WTC.

Reflecting all feasible factors related to the research topic and the given research question, the research team developed a thirty-item questionnaire to measure the level of influence of factors on students' WTC. With this design, the study appears to be a quantitative analysis rather than a qualitative one. Specifically, the 5-point Likert scale was used to survey and collect the data for closed-ended questions. This study mainly focuses on students' experiences and opinions, so the data provided through the designed survey were more reliable and easier for statistical analysis.

2.2.2. Participants

The convenience sampling method was used to recruit the participants. The research team sent a letter of consent to a list of email addresses of English-major students learning in a tertiary institution in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. In the letter, the research team provided general information about the team, the purpose of the study, its significance, and a Google Form link to the questionnaire. The students were kindly invited to be volunteer participants. They, therefore, had the right to join the project as the research participants or ignore the email. A total of 200 English-major students (38 males and 162 females, ages 18 to 28) filled out the questionnaire. Besides the personal information, such as gender and age, as mentioned above, others would be kept confidential to ensure the ethical issues in research having the participation of humans.

2.2.3. Instrument

The quantitative data was obtained by designing a questionnaire to learn the opinions of English-major students regarding the factors affecting their WTC. The questionnaire was created using the adaptation of specific questionnaires from previous studies and distilled ideas from various related studies. The questionnaire included 30 close-ended questions adapted from the study by Macintyre et al. (1998) [24]. As regards the 5-point Likert scale, it was used to investigate and gather quantitative data from the questionnaire. Specifically, the scale presented five levels, namely "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Neutral", "Agree", and "Strongly agree". With that scale, it is easy for participants to complete the questionnaire by checking the appropriate number from 1-5 describing accurately their answers. Apart from that, the IBM SPSS Statistics 26 software was used to analyze the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was piloted with 32 English-major students to ensure its reliability. A Scale test was used to test the reliability coefficient of the data. In particular, the standard values of Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are as follows:

- - 0.20: less reliable
- >0.20 - 0.40: rather reliable
- >0.40 - 0.60: quite reliable
- >0.60 - 0.80: reliable
- >0.80 - 1.00: very reliable

The scale test revealed that, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 30 items in the pilot questionnaire was α = .84, the questionnaire employed in this study is "very reliable" for

conducting research. As so, the research team was confident in the reliability of the instrument used in this current study.

2.2.4. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using the SPSS Statistics 26 program (also known as SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The researchers imported the data into the program to interpret the data. Additionally, all of the literal data were recoded into numbers to make data entry faster. After inserting 30 items and variables such as gender, age, and major into SPSS, the researchers adjusted the suitable properties for each variable, such as labels, values, or decimals. The researchers then sorted the data to ensure the most accurate results. Later, the researchers implemented analyzing the collected data using the SPSS software, evaluated the findings, and made a discussion of the study.

2.3. Results and Discussion

The questionnaire was divided into two different clusters, namely psychological factors and contextual factors in English classrooms. A frequency test was also performed for analyzing the data.

Table 1. Psychological Factors Affecting Students' WTC in English classrooms

Statements	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
I do not have confidence to talk in English classes.	38.5	30	31.5
I am nervous when asked for speaking in English.	26.5	31.5	42
I do not have confidence in speaking English even when I prepared.	54.5	27	18.5
I think my pronunciation is not good.	33.5	34	32.5
I think my accent is weird.	39.5	33	27.5
I think my English is not as good as my friends.	21.5	28.5	50
I am afraid of being judged by teachers when I speak English.	45	25.5	29.5
I am afraid of being judged by friends when I speak English.	48.5	24.5	27
I am tense when speaking English without preparation.	26	23	51
I do not have motivation to speak English.	58.5	26	15.5
I think English speaking skills are not important, so I rarely speak English in classes.	88.5	6	5.5
My English is not good, so I am afraid that my friends with better skills will laugh at me.	57.5	25	17.5
I am very sociable in English classes.	19	47	34
I am very active in English classes.	26.5	51	22.5
I am very talkative in English classes.	39.5	44	16.5
I am kind of spontaneous in English classes.	27.5	54.5	18
I am an extrovert in English classes.	37.5	41	21.5

Regarding the psychological factors, the three items gaining the highest percentage of agreements included "I am nervous when asked to speak in English" (42%), "I think my English is not as good as my friends" (50%), and "I am tense when speaking English without preparation" (51%). In other words, nervousness, pressure on peer comparison, and tension were the three most

influential factors affecting the students' WTC. On the other hand, the items with the highest percentage of disagreements were "I think English speaking skills are not important, so I rarely speak English in classes" (88.5%), "I do not have the motivation to speak English" (58.5%), "My English is not good, so I am afraid that my friends with better skills will laugh at me" (57.5%), and "I do not have confidence in speaking English even when I prepared" (54.5%). The stated results mean that the students were well-aware of the vital role of English in their context, they were more confident in their English speaking when they had sufficient preparation, and they were not afraid of being laughed at by their peers.

Based on the findings, it is easy to say that the students' WTC was significantly affected by their psychological issues, such as nervousness and tension. The results align with previous studies (e.g., McCroskey & Baer, 1985; Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Liu & Jackson, 2009; Horwitz & Young, 1991) [14], [27], [28], [29], [30]. EFL students' anxiety is no longer a new factor preventing them from speaking English. Therefore, the results were somehow predicted. Creating a supportive and comfortable classroom atmosphere would help reduce EFL students' anxiety in speaking (Meinawati et al., 2020) [43]. Notably, using YouTube videos or playing games has been proven to improve the classroom atmosphere (Meinawati et al., 2020; Dehghanzadeh et al., 2021) [43], [44]. Therefore, it is recommended that English instructors in Vietnam use these techniques or others useful for the classroom atmosphere.

The results showed that the students were aware of the importance of English in their future jobs. Compared to the study by Vu and Shah (2016) [45], the students of this current study better perceived the importance of English in their future. It can be said that English-major students will have a different view of the importance of English for their future from those of other majors. While other major students can use their professional skills to serve their work, and English is just an additional tool, the language is an essential weapon for English-major students to achieve their dream jobs. Consequently, according to the test results, the students also greatly desired to learn English.

Interestingly, the study found that the students did not worry much about being laughed at by their peers when speaking English. In the study by Dang et al. (2021) [46], most Vietnamese students prefer a supportive classroom atmosphere because they are kind and friendly. A good atmosphere will help increase their learning motivation. As so, they support each other to learn instead of pointing out the mistakes others make and laughing at these mistakes. Accordingly, they have no reason to fear being laughed at by their friends. However, peer comparison, according to the test results, significantly hindered students' WTC in this study. The students perceived their English proficiency as not as good as their friends to be a remarkable factor hindering their WTC. The results were in line with Hoang and de Nooy's (2020) [47] study, which found that Vietnamese students often compare themselves with others' abilities and lose self-confidence in their skills. It is essential to help students recognize their own values since it will help them gain more motivation to learn and contribute to the class activities (Van Dinther et al., 2011) [48]. Therefore, EFL teachers must have good strategies to help their students differ from others but correctly value themselves.

Moreover, with sufficient preparation for speaking, the students would be more willing to communicate with others in English. Khamkhien (2010) [49] highlighted the positive impact of students' preparation on their WTC. More specifically, EFL students will have a better desire to share their ideas with others if they have sufficient time to prepare their thoughts. Consequently, EFL instructors must provide their students enough time to prepare their answers to the discussion questions.

In the matter of contextual factors, the data was analyzed by SPSS in the same way as the above-mentioned factors. The findings are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Contextual factors affecting students' WTC in English classrooms

Statements	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
I only would like to talk to my close friends.	30	23	47
I only would like to talk to friends that have better English skills than mine.	43.5	36	20.5
I only would like to talk to friends that do not have good English skills.	62.5	27.5	10
I only would like to talk to sociable friends.	34.5	36.5	29
I only would like to talk to enthusiastic friends.	28	37	35
I just speak English when having a test.	53	20.5	26.5
I just speak English when required.	42.5	21.5	36
I just speak English with simple topics.	39	26	35
I just speak English with my favorite topics.	43	20	37
I will give a speech in English if I feel comfortable.	21.5	34.5	44
I will not give a speech in English if the class has an intense atmosphere.	22.5	50	27.5
I would like to speak English when I am in the class with sincere teachers.	16.5	39.5	44
I will not speak English when studying with strict teachers.	50	33.5	16.5

According to the results, the three items related to contextual factors affecting students' WTC included "I only would like to talk to my close friends" (40%), "I will give a speech in English if I feel comfortable" (44%), and "I would like to speak English when I am in the class with sincere teachers" (44%). The results showed that students' WTC is significantly influenced by their communication partner, English-speaking environment, and the sincerity of lecturers. On the contrary, students think they are not affected too much by their partner's English level, the use of English for assessment, or the fastidiousness of lecturers. The above results are inferred from the percentage of disagreement received by the following items, including "I only would like to talk to friends that do not have good English skills" (62.5%), "I just speak English when having a test" (53%), and "I will not speak English when studying with strict teachers" (50%).

Undoubtedly, one's peer plays an essential role in their success in English learning. According to Kobayashi (2003) [50], sufficient support from peers would help students accomplish academic tasks at a high-quality level. Especially speaking and listening skills are even more encouraged to develop. Also, like the study by Berndt et al. (2003) [51], working with close friends would enhance students' WTC because they trust and are more comfortable being with their close friends than with others. It encourages English teachers to give more pair work, allowing students to work with their close friends. It is expected to enhance their WTC and foster their speaking skills.

In this study, speaking comfort was also one of the major influencing factors for students' WTC. In other words, whether or not they feel comfortable speaking determines whether or not students want to speak. It is similar to Lin and Betz (2009) [52], who found students' comfort

level determines their WTC. So, how to help students stay in the most comfortable state in the classroom will help them be more motivated to communicate. Many proven methods will make the classroom atmosphere more relaxed, and students feel happier while learning English, especially gamification (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2021) [44]. Therefore, using some games before the speaking tasks is strongly recommended to help students feel more comfortable. As a result, students' WTC will be higher.

Undoubtedly, teachers play a vital role in student learning, particularly WTC. Teachers with noble qualities such as sincerity, care, and sympathy will give students more motivation to learn (Jan 2017) [53]. And most of all, sincerely treating students in their learning will significantly contribute to their development. Typically in this study, students felt more motivated to communicate when they studied with sincere instructors. Sometimes strict teachers are not an obstacle to students' communication in English class if that difficulty comes from the sincerity teachers have for their students. It is similar to the study by Poplin et al. (2011) [54], which stated that effective teachers are usually strict, but the strictness is for good reasons. Since the role of the teacher is always considered a significant factor in student learning, teachers need to constantly improve their strengths in teaching. In addition, they need to develop the noble qualities of a teacher. From there, it sets an excellent example for students and brings a lot of learning motivation.

In addition, mixed-level pairing was not considered a significant factor affecting students' WTC. Usually, many lecturers pair up with the criteria of good and weak students to help weak ones learn from their more dominant partner. Therefore, the level difference has little effect on the students' WTC. However, to keep good students from getting bored and weak students from giving up, teachers need to have sufficient activities (Willis, 1981) [55]. Specifically, for weak students, the exercises need to fit them. On the contrary, the instructor needs to assign extra assignments to strong ones. This also requires lecturers to have good competence in assessing the qualifications and skills of each student in the class because misjudging the student's ability will cause many consequences for the quality of students' learning (Téllez & Mosqueda, 2015) [56].

An interesting result of this study is that exams do not affect students' WTC too much. This result is interesting because exams and scores are always a pain point in the Vietnamese context (Ngo, 2018) [57]. However, it did not affect the students' WTC in this study. This shows that students in this study were not under too much pressure because of their grades. This is a good sign for Vietnamese educators because, according to Garrett and Shortall (2002) [58], when students are less affected by achievement forces, they learn more meaningfully and effectively. Therefore, the role of the teachers is once again emphasized because they will be the ones to directly advise students so that they understand that grades only act as a measure for students to know what they are missing.

2.4. Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Since this research was conducted only with English-major students at a case in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, the findings of this study are likely to limit to other majors as well as other universities. In other words, the generalizability of the study's findings could only apply to participants with similar background information.

As this is just a general study of factors affecting English-major students' WTC, more detailed studies and in-depth analysis of the elements are needed through empirical studies, for example, investigating several particular factors between different groups of students, then comparing effects of these factors towards students' WTC for more diverse and explicit findings. Besides, using more instruments, such as pre-test and post-test, for conducting a study is also recommended. In addition, the scope of further research should be expanding with the tremendous number of participants from non- and English-major students.

Phuong Hoang Yen[*], Vo Nguyen Thu Uyen and Le Thanh Thao

3. Conclusion

With the participation of 200 English-major students, this study was conducted quantitatively to determine the factors affecting their WTC at a university in Vietnam. Specifically, the study investigates students' perceptions of two main types of factors, including psychological and contextual factors. Regarding psychological factors, the students perceived their WTC was significantly affected by their nervousness, pressure on social comparison, and tension. Furthermore, a good awareness of the importance of English for their future plays a vital role in the students' WTC. In terms of contextual factors, communication partners, the English-speaking environment, and the sincerity of lecturers notably affected the students' WTC. The study results, in addition to clarifying the factors affecting students' WTC, also show what educators need to do to maintain students' WTC at a high level. Specifically, teachers need to develop their teaching ability. At the same time, the good qualities of a teacher, such as sincerity and caring, need to be promoted to help students trust and grow under their teacher's supervision.

REFERENCES

[1] Burleson, B. R., & Samter, W., 1990. Effects of cognitive complexity on the perceived importance of communication skills in friends. *Communication Research*, 17(2), 165-182.

[2] Alzahrani, M. A., 2018. The Learning Experience of International Students in Canada: Progressive Educational Theory and Passive Learning Styles. *English Language Teaching*, 11(7), 76-85.

[3] Rozkwitalska, M., 2010. Barriers of cross-cultural interactions according to the research findings. *Journal of Intercultural Management*, 2(2), 37-52.

[4] Vo, P. Q., Pham, T. M. N., & Ho, T. N., 2018. Challenges to speaking skills encountered by English-majored students: A story of one Vietnamese university in the Mekong Delta. *Can Tho University Journal of Science,* 54(5), 38-44.

[5] Albiladi, W. S., Abdeen, F. H., & Lincoln, F., 2018. Learning English through Movies: Adult English Language Learners' Perceptions. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 8(12), 1567-1574.

[6] Chou, M. H., 2014. Assessing English vocabulary and enhancing young English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' motivation through games, songs, and stories. *Education* 3-13, 42(3), 284-297.

[7] Clement, A., & Murugavel, T., 2018. English for the workplace: The importance of English language skills for effective performance. *The English Classroom*, 20(1), 1-15.

[8] Travers, M. M., 1992. Gender differences: adolescent girls' and boys' fear of speaking in class-an Australian American comparison. *English in Australia*, 102, 20-36.

[9] Yunusov, Z., 2021. Is it possible to learn English by self-study? *Asian Journal of Multidimensional Research,* 10(11), 16-21.

[10] Khamees, K. S., 2016. An evaluative study of memorization as a strategy for learning English. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 6(4), 248-259.

[11] Nguyen, H. T., Fehring, H., & Warren, W., 2015. EFL Teaching and Learning at a Vietnamese University: What Do Teachers Say?. *English language teaching*, 8(1), 31-43.

[12] Türkben, T., 2019. The effects of interactive teaching strategies on speaking skills of students learning Turkish as a second language. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies,* 15(3), 1011-1031.

[13] Burgoon, J. K., 1976. The unwillingness-to-communicate scale: Development and validation. *Communication Monographs,* 43(1), 60-69.

[14] McCroskey, J. C., & Baer, J. E., 1985, November. *Willingness to communicate: The construct and its measurement.* Paper presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association, Denver, CO.

[15] McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond, V. P., 1991. Willingness to communicate: differing cultural perspectives. *The Southern Communication Journal*, 56, 72-77.

[16] Swain, M., & Lapkin, S., 1995. Problems in output and the cognitive processes they generate: A step to- wards second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 16, 371-391.

[17] McCroskey, J., & Richmond, V., 1987. *Willingness to communicate*. In J. C. McCroskey, & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *Personality and interpersonal communication* (pp. 189-196). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

[18] McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond. V. P., 1990. Willingness to communicate: A cognitive view. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 5(2), 19-37.

[19] Chotipaktanasook, N., & Reinders, H., 2016. Willingness to communicate in social media: An investigation of the long-term effects. *Asian EFL Journal*, 18(4), 6-25.

[20] Kang, S. J., 2005. Dynamic emergence of situational willingness to communicate in a second language. *System,* 33(2), 277-292.

[21] Cao, Y., & Philip, J., 2006. Interactional context and willingness to communicate: a comparison of behavior in whole class, group, and dyadic interaction. *System*, 34, 480-493.

[22] MacIntyre, P. D., 2007. Willingness to communicate in the second language: Understanding the decision to speak as a volitional process. *Modern Language Journal*, 91, 564-576.

[23] McCroskey, J. C., 1992. Reliability and validity of the willingness to communicate scale. *Communication Quarterly*, 40, 25-26.

[24] MacIntyre, P. D., Dörnyei, Z., Clément, R., &Noels, K. A., 1998. Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82(4), 545-562.

[25] McCroskey, J. C., 1977. Oral communication apprehension: A summary of recent theory and research. *Human Communication Research*, 4, 78–96.

[26] 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.

[27] Baker, S. C., & MacIntyre, P. D., 2000. The role of gender and immersion in communication and second language orientations. *Language Learning*, 50(2), 311-341.

[28] MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C., 1991. Language anxiety: Its relationship to other anxieties and to processing in native and second languages. *Language Learning*, 41(4), 513-534.

[29] Liu, M., & Jackson, J., 2009. Reticence in Chinese EFL students at varied proficiency levels. *TESL Canada Journal,* 26(2), 65-81.

[30] Horwitz, E. K., & Young, D. J., 1991. *Language anxiety: From theory and research to classroom implications*. Prentice Hall.

[31] Gardner, R. C., 1985. Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation. *Second Language Research*, 3(2), 180-182.

[32] Liu, M. H., 2005. Reticence in oral English language classrooms: A case study in China. *TESL Reporter*, 38(1), 1-16.

[33] Elwood, J. A., 2011. *Enriching structural models of L2 willingness to communicate: The role of personality, ego permeability, and perceived distance*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). Temple University, Philadelphia. Retrieved from https://digital.library. temple.edu/digital/collection/p245801coll10.

[34] Peng, J., 2014. *Willingness to communicate in Chinese EFL university classroom: An ecological perspective.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

[35] Syed, H., & Kuzborska, I., 2020. Dynamics of factors underlying willingness to communicate in a second language. *The Language Learning Journal*, 48(4), 481-500.

[36] Simić, I., 2014. *Willingness to Communicate: A comparison Between Austrian and Serbian Students (Unpublished master's thesis)*. Karl-Franzens Universität Graz.

[37] MacIntyre, P. D., Baker, S. C., Clement, R., & Donovan, L. A., 2003. Talking in order to learn: Willingness to communicate and intensive language programs. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 59, 589-607.*

[38] Swain, M., 1985. Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. *Input in second language acquisition*, 15, 165-179.

[39] Gregersen, T., & MacIntyre, P. D., 2013. *Capitalizing on language learners' individuality: From premise to practice* (Vol. 72). Multilingual Matters.

[40] MacIntyre, P. D., & Doucette, J., 2010. Willingness to communicate and action control. *System*, 38(2), 161-171.

[41] Babbie, E. R., 2020. *The practice of social research*. Cengage learning.

[42] Muijs, D., 2004. *Doing quantitative research in education: With SPSS*. Sage.

[43] Meinawati, E., Rahmah, N. A., Harmoko, D. D., & Dewi, N., 2020. Increasing English Speaking Skill through YouTube. *Polyglot: Journal Ilmiah*, 16(1), 1-13.

[44] Dehghanzadeh, H., Fardanesh, H., Hatami, J., Talaee, E., & Noroozi, O., 2021. Using gamification to support learning English as a second language: a systematic review. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 34(7), 934-957.

[45] Vu, H. Y., & Shah, M., 2016. Vietnamese students' self-direction in learning English listening skills. *Asian Englishes*, 18(1), 53-66.

[46] Dang, T. B. D., & Ha, T. V., 2021. Factors Affecting Motivation of English-Majored Students Towards Learning English At a University in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(6), 95-115.

[47] Hoang, T. H., & de Nooy, J., 2020. The effects of Vietnamese students' perception of hierarchy on group work interaction and satisfaction. Learning, *Culture and Social Interaction*, 25, 100389.

[48] Van Dinther, M., Dochy, F., & Segers, M., 2011. Factors affecting students' self-efficacy in higher education. *Educational research review*, 6(2), 95-108.

[49] Khamkhien, A., 2010. Teaching English Speaking and English Speaking Tests in the Thai Context: A Reflection from Thai Perspective. English Language Teaching, 3(1), 184-190.

[50] Kobayashi, M., 2003. The role of peer support in ESL students' accomplishment of oral academic tasks. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 59(3), 337-369.

[51] Berndt, T. J., Laychak, A. E., & Park, K., 1990. Friends' influence on adolescents' academic achievement motivation: An experimental study. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82(4), 664-670.

[52] Lin, S. P., & Betz, N. E., 2009. Factors related to the social self-efficacy of Chinese international students. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 37(3), 451-471.

[53] Jan, H., 2017. Teacher of 21st century: Characteristics and development. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7(9), 50-54.

[54] Poplin, M., Rivera, J., Durish, D., Hoff, L., Kawell, S., Pawlak, P.,,... & Veney, C., 2011. She's strict for a good reason: Highly effective teachers in low-performing urban schools. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 92(5), 39-43.

[55] Willis, J., 1981. *Teaching English through English* (Vol. 8). Harlow: Longman.

[56] Téllez, K., & Mosqueda, E., 2015. Developing teachers' knowledge and skills at the intersection of English language learners and language assessment. *Review of Research in Education,* 39(1), 87-121.

[57] Ngo, X. M., 2018. *Sociopolitical contexts of EFL writing assessment in Vietnam: Impact of a national project.* In *The politics of English second language writing assessment in global contexts* (pp. 47-59). Routledge.

[58] Garrett, P., & Shortall, T., 2002. Learners' evaluations of teacher-fronted and student-centred classroom activities. *Language Teaching Research*, 6(1), 25-57.