Investigating willingness to communicate (WTC) among polytechnic students

Maizan Binti Mohamad[*)]
Politeknik Hulu Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia, General Studies Department, Politeknik Hulu Terengganu, Malaysia

Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Learning a second language such as English is a challenging task for many language learners due to various psychological factors such as unwillingness to communicate in the language. Thus, the current study primarily aims to find out levels of willingness to communicate in English (WTC). A quantitative approach was employed whereby data were collected using an instrument which is Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTCS). The questionnaires were administered to 123 diploma students at Politeknik Hulu Terengganu. Using SPSS 22.0, data were analyzed descriptively, namely minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation. The findings revealed that students reported having a very low willingness to communicate in the English language. The study provides several pedagogical implications for both ESL students and practitioners. They could potentially guide educators in improving their teaching and learning process by creating a more conducive and stress-free environment to encourage students to communicate willingly. This new environment will hopefully enhance students' performance, especially in using the English language to communicate.

Corresponding Author:

Maizan Binti Mohamad,
Politeknik Hulu Terengganu
Email: maizanmohamad@pht.edu.my

Introduction

Being able to communicate in English language is crucial for Malaysian polytechnic students, especially in preparing the students to work in industries. Even though Malaysian polytechnic focuses on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), English is not neglected. However, it has been identified that students face obstacles and challenges to communicate in English. Some of the students refused to speak and communicate in English even when they got the chance to do so. Polytechnic students, who speak different mother tongues and come from different socio-economic backgrounds have different levels of exposure to the English language. Due to these differences, some of the students might not have the willingness to communicate in English.

So, this paper focused on willingness to communicate (WTC) since communication skills are most frequently being assessed in formal as well as informal settings. Specific to this study context, WTC was defined by Oxford (1997) as "a student's intention to interact with others in the targeted language, given a chance to do so." It is suggested to discover and understand issues related to willingness to communicate among the students since some students refused to speak in English and remained silent even were asked and encouraged to do so. This paper also focused on English as a second language (ESL) not as English as a foreign language.

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This study was motivated to find out the level of willingness to communicate in English of polytechnic students. However, the specific objectives of this study were: to investigate the wtc levels in english based on receiver subscore, to find out the levels in english based on context type subscore, to identify the descriptive statistics of wtc levels among the students.

This study needs to be conducted since the problem of being unwilling to communicate in English as a Second Language does not just exist among polytechnic students, but also among undergraduates in public universities in Malaysia. This was supported by a research finding conducted by Razak et al., (2018). It was found that the level of WTC in English among the undergraduates in a public university in Malaysia the study showed that the low levels of WTC. Another study to support this issue was revealed by Bahirah & Saidi (2018) that Malaysian undergraduates were unwilling to communicate with or in the presence of particular interlocutors or audiences, regardless of the location or the types of activities. The participants in the survey had low WTC levels.

MacIntyre's WTC model served as a basic framework and was adopted for this study.
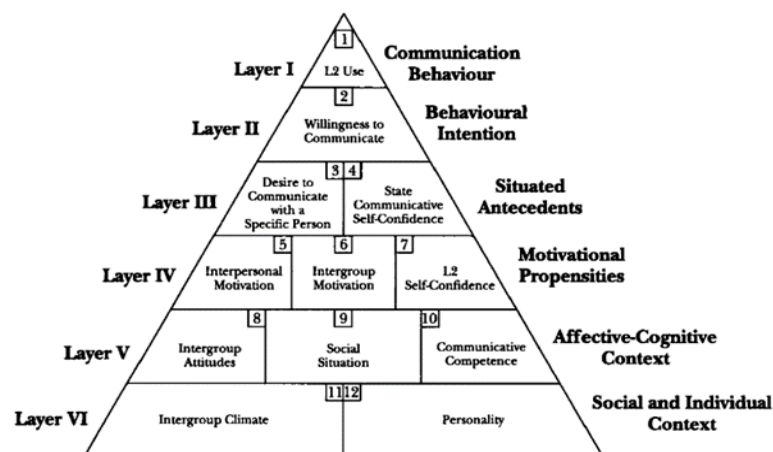

Figure 1 <The Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC>

Concerning Figure 1, The Heuristic Model of Second Language (L2) WTC, twelve variables are explained to affect one's communication level in L2. The top three layers of the pyramid represent state variables, including L2 use, L2 WTC, state self-confidence, and desire to talk to a specific person or group. These relate to differing situation-specific influences on an individual's WTC.

Therefore, the findings of this study could provide some worthwhile information to the institutions, polytechnic English lecturers, and language learners themselves. So, the hope is that this research can help improve pedagogical methods and students' learning styles.

Method

The sampling technique that was used was the stratified random sampling technique. In this technique, each member of the population had equal opportunities of being selected as a subject. The technique was started by dividing the respondents into the same programs and semesters of study. Then random samples were taken from each group. 123 students from the Department of Accountancy and the Department of Tourism and Hospitality of Politeknik Hulu Terengganu were involved in this study. Table of Determination of Sample Size of a Known Population by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) was used to determine the sample size.

The willingness to Communicate (WTC) Scale by McCroskey (1992) was the instrument employed in this study. All statements in the questionnaires were translated into Malay Language to prevent misinterpretation by students since all participants were Malay native speakers. Adjustments were made to the questionnaire based on the reviewer's recommendations. All respondents were given 30 to 40 minutes to answer. First, the researcher read statement by statement and explained to help the respondents to understand all the items. Then, they were asked to put the appropriate percentage for the WTC construct. For the WTC construct, choosing the proper percentage would demonstrate the degree of confirmation mean in each item.

Before the survey was distributed to respondents, it was piloted on thirty (30) students who were not included as respondents of this study. The questionnaire was trailed before being distributed to respondents to see how well the statements in the questionnaires worked and to check for stability and internal consistency.

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Table 1 shows the result of Cronbach's alpha coefficient for WTC. In this case, value (α) = .97, which showed the questionnaire had high internal consistency, and it was reliable to employ this instrument in this study.

Table 1 <Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient for WTC>

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.961	.965	20

There were three research questions formulated in this study based on the objectives. Therefore, to answer all the research questions, the procedures for data analysis of statistical tests in SPSS 2.2 were determined. Table 2 shows the procedures for data analysis according to research questions.

Table 2 <The Procedures for Data Analysis According to Research Questions>

RQ	RQ	Statistical Test
RQ 1	What are the WTC levels in English based on receiver subscores?	Descriptive (mean and Std. Deviation)
RQ 2	What are the WTC levels in English based on context type subscores?	Descriptive (mean and Std. Deviation)
RQ 3	What are the descriptive statistics of WTC levels among the students?	Descriptive (minimum, maximum, mean, and Std. Deviation)

The items in the instruments were categorized into the receiver type subscores and the context type subscores. According to McCroskey and Richmond (2013), the norms for WTC scores depend on the total score. The calculation of each of the subscores is different. These are the categories and the calculation of the subscores. These are the receiver-type subscores: 1) Stranger: Add scores for items 3, 8, 12, 17; then divide by 4; 2) Acquaintance: Add scores for items 4, 11, 15, 20; then divide by 4; 3) Friend: Add scores for items 6, 9, 14, 19; then divide by 4.

The context type subscores are: 1) Group Discussion: Add scores for items 8, 15, & 19; then divide by 3; 1) Meetings: Add scores for items 6, 11, 17; then divide by 3; 2) Interpersonal: Add scores for items 4, 9, 12; then divide by 3; 3) Public Speaking: Add scores for items 3, 14, 20; then divide by 3. Since this study only employed a quantitative method, the limitation of this study was not optimal for answering why and how questions.

Results and Discussion

To answer the three research questions, the data was analysed and discussed based on the types of receivers, context types subscores and the total willingness to communicate score. Table 3 shows the norms for WTC scores based on three levels which are high, medium, and low. Therefore, the data were analysed according to this table.

Table 3 <Norms for WTC Scores>

	High	Medium	Low
Group discussion	>89	58-88	<57
Meetings	>80	40-79	<39
Interpersonal conversations	>94	65-93	<64
Public Speaking	>78	34-77	<33
Stranger	>63	19-62	<18
Acquaintance	>92	58-91	<57
Friend	>99	72-98	<71
Total WTC	>82	53-81	<52

Types of receivers mean that a person has the willingness to communicate to speak with, which consists of friends, acquaintances, and strangers. Table 4 displays the findings of students' WTC level based on receiver type subscores.

According to table 4, polytechnic students were at the lowest level in initiating communication with acquaintances (M = 27.64, SD = 25.45). Therefore, twenty-nine points more reach the moderate level as the suggested norm for acquaintances is (>92 for high and <57 for low). On the other hand, the respondents were more willing to communicate with friends (M = 44.04, SD = 27.85). Therefore, twenty-seven points were more to reach a moderate level by referring to the range given (>99 for high and <71 for low).

Table 4 <Descriptive Statistics for Receiver Types Subscores>

	N	Mean	SD	Level
Stranger	123	21.84	17.977	Moderate
Acquaintance	123	27.64	25.471	Low
Friend	123	44.04	27.884	Low

Students preferred most to communicate with strangers (M = 21.84, SD = 17.78), reflecting a moderate level rather than with friends and acquaintances. Noticeably, four points higher than the low level as a suggested norm (>63 for high and <18 for low).

There were also four communication context types. The types were speaking in public, talking in meetings, communicate in small groups, and having interpersonal conversations. Table 5 illustrates the descriptive statistics for context types sub scores.

Table 5 <Descriptive Statistics for Context Types Subscores>

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Group discussion	123	71.01	54.06	Moderate
Meeting	123	78.20	72.76	Moderate
Interpersonal	123	71.64	56.01	Moderate
Public speaking	123	79.41	62.92	High

Based on Table 5, the score for students' willingness to communicate in group discussion was moderate. Noticeably fourteen points higher than the average (<57) set by McCroskey (M = 71.01, SD = 54.06). The norm for group discussion is (>89 for high and <57 for low).

This current study also showed that polytechnic students were moderately high in their scores when asked if they were competent and comfortable speaking English in meeting (M = 78.20, SD = 72.76). The suggested norm for interpersonal was (>80 =High WTC, <39= Low WTC). So, it is thirty-nine points higher than the norm.

The score for students' interpersonal willingness to communicate was also moderately preferred by the students. Noticeably seven points lower than (<64) the average set by McCroskey (M = 71.64, SD = 56.01). The suggested norm for interpersonal was (>94 = high, <64 = low).

However, the students reported that they were in high willingness to communicate in English in public speaking (M = 79.41, SD = 62.92). This means that the students preferred to communicate English most in public speaking rather than group discussions, meetings, and interpersonal communication. Therefore, the findings showed that students were highly willing to communicate in public speaking but moderately in meetings and group discussions. Furthermore, students were very least willing to communicate in an interpersonal context.

To find out the overall WTC among the students, the descriptive statistic was carried out. To compute the total WTC score, add the sub-scores for the stranger, acquaintance, and friend, then divide by 3. The finding was reported in Table 6.

Table 6 <Total Willingness to Communicate Score>

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
WTC level	123	3	85	31.18	20.481

Overall, polytechnic students had a very low willingness to communicate, with a minimum score of 3 out of 100, and the maximum score was 85. Generally, the score of willingness to communicate was categorized as low level (M= 31.18) by referring to the scale of total WTC >82 high overall WTC and <52 low overall WTC. However, to see students' willingness to communicate in a clearer dimension, the WTC score was analysed based on categories displayed in Table 7.

Table 7 <Willingness to Communicate Score in Categories>

Category	Frequency	Percent
Low	106	86.2
Medium	14	11.4
High	3	2.4
Total	123	100.0

By referring to Table 7, the majority (86.2%) of the participants showed a low willingness to communicate in English. Only 11.4% of the students reported having a moderate level of willingness to communicate.

It was found that polytechnic students reported having a very low level of willingness to communicate in English. Only 2.4% of the participants showed a high level of willingness to communicate. This finding was supported by previous studies conducted by Bahirah & Saidi (2018) the participants in the study had low willingness to communicate in English, in and outside the language class.

Willingness to communicate is seen as an important element in polytechnic learning outcomes for English courses. These are the outcomes for the English courses. Students must be able to participate in a discussion effectively by using communication and social skills to accommodate differing views and opinions for Communicative English 1, demonstrate effective communication and social skills in handling inquiries and complaints amicably and professionally for Communicative English 2 and Demonstrate effective communication and social skills in handling job interviews confidently for Communicative English 3. If students are willing to communicate, it means that they have achieved the objectives of the lesson. Since this study was concerned with students unwilling to speak and communicate in English as a second language, this situation was critical.

Willingness to communicate is seen as an English learning outcome. If students are willing to communicate, it means that they have achieved the objectives of the lesson. The findings of this study showed that students had a higher willingness to communicate in English in public speaking rather than in group discussions, meetings, and interpersonal. This means that students preferred to present rather than to talk. Students did not desire to get involved in active conversations like in group discussions and meetings. In which they need to make and respond to inquiries many times in two ways of communication. Compared to present a talk in public speaking, which is commonly formal and speaking of a single person to a group of listeners, students reported more willingness to communicate in English.

As this present study was limited geographically to the state of Terengganu specifically at Politeknik Hulu Terengganu in which the majority of the students were from Kelantan and Terengganu, future studies could be conducted in other conservative states of Malaysia. This could provide valuable comparative data if built on the methodology of this study, rather than being done through a study designed anew. Besides that, it would be meaningful for researchers to re-examine the relationship between willingness to communicate, and cultural context in Malaysia. In addition, it would be interesting to find the differences of states with different cultures and lifestyles that may affect willingness to communicate.

Conclusions

The study has discussed an essential aspect of teaching and learning English as a second language which is a willingness to initiate conversations when speaking English. Learning English needs all efforts to achieve the teaching and learning objectives. The implications of this paper to English language lecturers, they must remember the aim of teaching the English language at the polytechnic is to encourage the students to use and communicate in English language. If the students are unwilling to communicate in the language, the course learning outcomes will not be achieved. As for students, they should have positive attitudes towards learning the language. They must avoid feeling that English is a complex language to be mastered and they should never forget the importance of the English language to hunt jobs and to secure jobs. Thus, research on willingness to communicate in English as a second language among polytechnic students must be paid attention from time to time to assess the achievements of the teaching and learning process.

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