Original Article

Effective Factors in Medical Students' Willingness to Communicate in The Course of English for Specific Purposes

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Article Info

Article history:
Received 2 January 2022
Accepted 7 May 2022
Published 2 August 2022
Keywords:
Specific English
Motivation
Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

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Abstract

Background & Objective: It is argued that students have less tendency to communicate in English classes even after several years of attending language courses. The general objective of this research was to find the effective factors for willingness to communicate in English across medical classes.

Materials & Methods: The participants in this study were 252 medical students from Zanjan University of Medical Sciences who were majoring in one of the fields of dentistry, medicine and pharmacy and were taking the course of English for Specific Purposes. Macintyre's Willingness to Communicate questionnaire was used to compile the data. After collecting the data using the questionnaire, they were processed in the statistical package. The collected data were then tabulated and analyzed via SPSS (20) and AMOS.

Results: In the structural model, there were significant pathways between self-confidence and motivation and WTC in ESP classes. Motivation had a positive effect on self-confidence. The teacher's immediacy, with its negative impact on shyness, increased the motivation to communicate in the ESP class. On the other hand, the paths of shyness to motivation and self-confidence were negative. All pathways were significant at 0.05.

Conclusion: The findings of this study showed that, as in the previous studies, the tendency to communicate in language classes depends on several variables. Given that communication and speaking are the most important language skills, language learning planning is recommended to consider the importance of this skill. Language teachers should create conditions with low anxiety to encourage learners to speak and communicate. Shyness was another variable during the study that had a negative effect on the WTC. The results of this study also emphasize that highly motivated learners are more likely to participate in classroom activities and communication due to their self-confidence. Also, in this study, the teacher's intervention had a positive effect on reducing anxiety. Thus, it is recommended that teachers play an important role in motivating students to communicate I ESP classes.

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Introduction

Studies of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) started in the first language (L1) in 1985(1). The concept of willingness to communicate has been similarly used in foreign language communication. In this vein, certain linguistic, social and psychological variables have been introduced. Accordingly, it is alleged (2) that willingness to communicate whether in a foreign language or first language is affected by the following factors:
1) familiarity among communicators, 2) number of the people involved in the communication, 3) the context and circumstances, 4) proficiency level 5) theme and topic of conversation.
Studies indicate that WTC embraces a group of variables affecting a person's eagerness and tendency to communicate such as daring to speak, self- esteem and last but not least being an introvert and extrovert (3). Indeed, studies show that there is a direct path from motivation to willingness to communicate in the second language (4). Generally, it is assumed that learners' characteristics may influence willingness to communicate (5).

Admittedly, WTC construct has received attention of researchers in the field of language teaching over the past three decades. Research on WLC is mainly due to the importance of communication and interaction in the second language learning (5). Hence, parallel to first language, WTC is important in second or foreign language teaching, learning and research. WTC is viewed as a general tendency to approach or avoid communication (6). In view of this point, WTC is a readiness to speak in foreign language at a particular time with a specific person (7). To find out the level of WTC in different situations, it is necessary to identify people's reactions to speaking situations (8). Namely, when

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[DOI: 10.52547/edcj.15.45.34]

people come up in different situations, some learners choose to communicate and some prefer to be silent. In foreign language learning, WTC determines the tendency to use a foreign language when there is an opportunity. When willingness to communicate fades among students, active participation is undesirably affected (9). As a whole, WTC involves the intension to initiate communication when the choice is given (10).

Students normally avoid communication because they feel they have more to gain from remaining silent than from speaking (11). In a study, the students who scored high on WTC were significantly more likely to participate in activities than those who scored low (12). In another study in China, WTC in whole-class interaction did not significantly differ from WTC in group interaction. Teacher interaction strategies, including the use of open or referential questions, manipulation of wait time following prompts, and monitoring private speech and contextual circumstances inspired students' willingness to communicate in classroom settings (13).

Although motivation and proficiency level are crucial to start communication, they are barely enough reasons (11). To this end, lack of communication skills may be due to anxiety. A study in Japanese context, claimed that affective variables such as attitude, motivation and self-confidence have significant effect on WTC (4).

In the context of Iran, previous studies report that although students have perfect linguistic competence, they prefer to be silent. The main reason has been reported a feeling of incompetency to speak. However, lack of teacher's contribution in addition to personality problems tend to impede communication.

Consequently, in-depth overview of the previous research asserts that in Iranian medical English classes, English teachers frequently come up with the problem of the students who prefer not to be communicative. It is particularly notable that less proficient students tend to communicate in English in contrast to proficient students who are unwilling to initiate communication or involve in communication.

With all the above-mentioned points in mind, this study is an attempt to examine the issues that profoundly affect students' willingness to communicate in English-for Specific purposes (ESP) Classes. To this end and based on Macintyre et al questionnaire (14), a multi-layered questionnaire was used to investigate the complicated factors that play a role in WTC. As a matter of fact, MacIntyre's WTC model was the basis of this study. Gardner's social educational model was another instrument in this study. The students of medical field comprised the participants of this study. Basically, this research made an effort to answer why students of medicine are not willing to communicate in their English classes. This research might be the first of its kind in our particular Iranian medical context. The pedagogical implications of this study will assist to find reasons of reticence in English medical classes toward increasing willingness to communicate in classroom activities; either as a result of a few changes in classroom management or attitudes.

Background and definition of WTC construct

Foreign language pedagogy emphasizes foreign language as an essential component of language learning and teaching with the main goal of developing students' communication. Few researchers, however, pay attention to language production, whether inside or outside the classroom. Systematic approaches to foreign language emphasize consideration of communicative aspect of language learning. Following this perspective, teachers attempt to encourage communication and speaking among their students.

Philip's reticence model(15) has long been the commencing point for WTC studies. The term WTC was coined by McCroskey and his co- researchers (12) raising from Burgoon's notion of unwillingness to communicate (2). Burgoon's self -report measure found two factors of avoidance and reward extremely crucial in WTC. While avoidance is related to communication anxiety, reward deals with satisfaction in communication. Burgoon concluded that anxious people are less likely to be involved in communication. In a study with Japanese students who were speaking both Japanese and English, Communication Apprehension (CA) was found as the main paradigm in WTC. In this study, advanced level of CA was found to similarly affect WTC in both languages. A further research found contradiction between Spanish and English students in this regard (11).

Likewise, qualitative research was implemented in the Iranian context to assess the variables that played a significant role on learners' willingness to communicate (16). Based on this study, reluctance to start communication is due to personality variables. For instance, some learners do not like to be the focus of attention or sometimes the classroom activities mismatch their personality type (17). It is believed that not all foreign language learners enjoy being active in large groups. While some students enjoy higher levels of WTC and even prefer to be leaders of a group activity, some others choose to remain silent. Thus, it is much preferable to bring up situations where such students do tasks in pairs (18).

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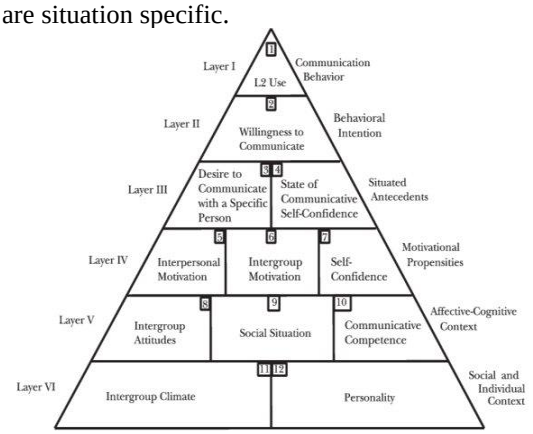
A further study indicates that four variables including linguistic, socio-cultural, self-efficacy and learner beliefs, impact students' WTC (19). This result attained via implementing a number of instruments such as in-depth interviews, observations in classroom settings, and interviews for 18 sessions.

Research on integrative motivation and anxiety has pointed out that integrative motivation positively affects WTC by motivating individuals and anxiety affects WTC in terms of perceived communication competence. In this regard, MacIntyre and colleagues have developed a layered pyramid consisting of 12 variables which affect WTC (2). The topmost include four dependent variables that are situation specific.



Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, Kimberly, & Noels, 1998).

By and large, WTC is considered as an important issue in language teaching (2), which should be dealt with in order to encourage communication in language classroom (2, 20). WTC studies have shown that language learners with high WTC more likely use foreign language in authentic communication (21), and have more potential to speak in foreign language contexts, thereby obtain higher levels of language fluency, and attain greater language proficiency and as a result, show more improvement in their communication skills (22).

The relationship between Foreign Language Enjoyment, Foreign Language Anxiety and Willingness to Communicate was investigated in Romania. The investigation over a time length revealed that WTC was related to the uniquely constructed emotions of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language (Classroom) Anxiety (FLCA). What's more, learners' personality added to their experiences about English classroom had great effect on WTC. (23)

In short, the variables that were investigated throughout this study included anxiety and WTC, motivation, shyness and WTC, self -perceptions in WTC and last but not least, teacher immediacy. Taking the above-said model and considering the previous studies, the effect of the medical course of English for Specific Purposes.

Anxiety and Willingness to Communicate

A complex issue in speaking in English language class has been attributed to anxiety (24). It is claimed that anxiety affects communication tendency. Anxiety leads to self-focused attention, distraction and self-depreciating beliefs (25,26). Generally speaking, anxiety is considered the chief component in unwillingness to communicate (27). In other words, students who seem more concerned and anxious are under perpetual control and inability to communicate and manipulate the situation. Research asserts that people with high amount of communication anxiety make an attempt to evade or withdraw from communication in foreign language (28). However, for involvement in foreign language communication, anxious students find themselves inadequate (24). As a whole, it has been assumed that less anxious students are more willing and volunteer to communicate while more anxious ones are unwilling to participate in communications.

On the other hand, studies indicate that high anxiety leads to low participation in classroom and thus low motivation (29). In other words, high anxiety level rarely leads to motivation or success in foreign language communication.

Motivation and Willingness to communicate

Research on motivation shows that it has a pronounced effect on language learning (30,31,32.) Accordingly, motivation includes all the external and internal derives leading to positive attitudes. Within the context of foreign language motivation, integrative motivation of Gardner and Lambert has received a considerable attention. Meanwhile, Dorney's notion about motivation and learner's self-concept indicates that what a person expects to be or fears from being are main issues in motivation.

Likewise, in foreign language learning, cultural and educational contexts in sociocultural model play the significant role. However, the study puts equal

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emphasis on integrative motivation. In this perspective, studies reconsider the effect of sociocultural motivation, as well. Accordingly, attitudes refer to reactions of the learners to contexts. Thus, motivation can be branched into three subcategories of desire to learn a language, motivational intensity and attitudes (32).

Research indicates that higher motivation fosters communication among interlocutors (33,34,35). By the same token, motivation is considered as an important unit of self -confidence, perceived communication competence and subsequently WTC (36).

In general, the pyramid model as displayed above includes a range of variables (linguistic, communicative, social and psychological) which relate to foreign language communication willingness (2). It is proposed that foreign language WTC is based on trait and situation. Thus, WTC is defined as a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons. Qualitative research with Chinese students introduced eight factors of communicative competence, language anxiety, risk-taking, learners' beliefs, classroom climate, group cohesiveness, teacher support and classroom organization which affect WTC. However, in Chinese research, motivation was not considered as sharp in effect as other factors in the interview transcriptions and diary entries data. The reason was claimed to be related to the students' external situation rather than issues of motivation (34).

The findings of a study affirm that Iranian EFL learners' attitudes influence motivational priorities (36). Also, studies carried out by previous researchers support this view that more positive attitudes lead to higher motivations in learning English which, in turn, cause increased self-perception of communicative competence, decreased anxiety and increased willingness to communicate (37).

Shyness and Willingness to Communicate

A considerable amount of literature has been published on shyness. Despite extended research on shyness and language learning, there is inconsistency in the results. Some consider shyness as a reflection of social anxiety; others consider it as avoidance and inhibiting behavior.

It is stated that shy people lose opportunities of interaction and they feel anxious to take part in communications (38). These people have almost the same feeling in all settings (39). In a study, it took as long as one year for shy students to engage in social networking communications compared to non-shy students (it took only three months). A related study shows that shy students usually suffer from continuous loneliness (40).

Shyness and willingness to communicate have indirect correlation. Studies show that such correlation in the first language is less complicated than a foreign language or second language due to that first language is related to whole personality traits, but foreign language communication is related to social relationships (29,41). On the other hand, communication apprehension and familiarity with subject can affect shyness and, in turn, willingness to communicate (42).

Moreover, a positive relationship has been found between shyness and anxiety in foreign language. Also, in terms of gender and the construct of WTC, results of studies pointed out that boys were less shy than girls (43).

Self -perceptions and Willingness to Communicate

Learners' self-perceptions are considered as a crucial factor in WTC. According to this viewpoint, learners who are more confident, have better chances of being the initiators of communication (26).

Research explains a positive relationship between perceived communication competence and WTC (27). Indeed, learners with more sense of competency, more likely start to communicate in a foreign language or second language settings. By the same token, a little anxiety and sufficient communication competence are assumed as predictors of WTC in second language or foreign language (44,45).

Consequently, self -perception in foreign language learning marks identity of individuals. How the students react in the process of second language learning arises from how they perceive themselves or their self-image (46). Self-perception plays a practical role in the future development of the learners in the language they are learning (17).

Studies point out that achievement indirectly influences WTC in learning language (2). In particular, students with a higher level of second language or foreign language achievement have more confidence and less anxiety and take part in classroom activities. However, learners' self-perceptions and their communication enthusiasm influence their WTC. It is suggested that first language and second language self-confidence are correlated and learners use their first language self-confidence to support their WTC in the second or foreign language (14).

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Irrespective of whether reticence as an opposite for willingness to communicate is the consequence of second/ foreign language learning context, or a personality trait, it is assumed as a burden since it eliminates learners' interaction. Lack of or low self-perception cause the learners lose the opportunity of interaction and remain outsiders. This rotation and less turn-taking leads to being passive member with higher anxiety, low self-perception and minor second language / foreign language communication (14).

Teacher immediacy and Willingness to Communicate .Immediacy is defined as physical or psychological intimacy among individuals. Smiling, peaceful position, speaking to the students and not the whiteboard and using humor are among the approaches suggested for being an intimate teacher (47). The term sometimes is reversible with social presence (48), which indicates how much a person finds a real position in communication. Indeed, immediacy plays a critical role to increase social presence.

It is reported that the way teachers help students, peer interaction and the tasks have effect on second language/foreign language WTC (36). Also, among variables affecting WTC, teacher's attitude, style of teaching along with teachers' involvement are particularly important in WTC (16,20,49). Teacher's involvement is composed of teacher-learner relationship and immediacy contains all the factors that facilitate intimacy such as nonverbal interactions with others.Teacher's social support eliminates anxiety and increases WTC(50). Students take more active roles in class when they find their teacher immediate and appealing. Evidence shows that teachers have deep effect upon increasing or decreasing learners' WTC (49).

In a study carried out with 256 university students on the relationship of WTC and teacher immediacy, it was found that instructor's verbal immediacy was positively related to willingness to communicate in learners. In this study, gender did not elicit any effect. Also, teacher's immediacy had a significant relationship with students' perceived learning (51). In another study, in which 252 Iranian English major university students took part, the results indicated that teacher immediacy had a positive effect on WTC via the mediation of self-confidence and motivation (52).

What is more, nonverbal immediacy contributes to optimal relationships between teachers and students. Teacher's immediacy has significant effect on motivation of the learners (53). The study also asserts that when English teachers act with a smile or relaxed body position or use gestures or vocal expressions while teaching, they stimulate higher motivation in distinct ways. Thus, a teacher who has a smiling face when teaching is more likable and immediate which supports the general perspective that positive facial gestures improve the type of the relationship between two sides of communication.

Previous research demonstrates that when students feel more accepted and supported, are less anxious and thus more self-initiative in the process of learning (54,55). As a whole, there is a direct relationship between teacher immediacy, success and increased willingness to communicate.

Material & Methods

This descriptive study included all available students of medicine, pharmacy and dentistry. The participants were 252 (151 females and 101 male) medical students from Zanjan University of Medical Sciences with the mean age range of 20.7 (SD = 2.67). They were majoring in one of the fields of dentistry, medicine and pharmacy and were taking ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course which was held twice a week for 16 sessions. This course included reading comprehension, listening, speaking and grammar along with watching short videos for 5-10 minutes as well as free discussions to improve students' communication skills. The objective of the course was improving students' English language competence and facilitating the use of medical English textbooks. The prerequisite for this course was pre-university and general English courses. The learners required to take active roles in the classroom discussions. These students had all passed English language courses for 6- 7 years prior to their entrance to university. The students were informed about the objective of the study.

The required data were collected through the following scales: Willingness to Communicate, Teacher Immediacy, Self-Perceived Communicative Competence, Communication Anxiety, Motivation and Shyness. The scales had been utilized previously in EFL context. In the Iranian context, Persian versions of the scales were developed by translation and back translation throughout a former study by Fallah (52). Then, the

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questionnaire was distributed at the end of the semester. The students were informed that data will remain private and without any effect on their final assessment. The students were from different parts of the country and were appropriate representative of Iranian learners. The main instrument in this research was reproduced by Fallah (52) that comprised a seven- layer questionnaire. Accordingly, the first layer had 12 items in order to find out the extent to which the students indicated willingness to communicate. The second part had 12 questions in order to assess the students' anxiety level in different situations/with different people on a scale from zero to hundred ranging from minus stressful to stressful. The third part related to the teacher's immediacy with 34 items ranging from never to very often. Self-confidence with 12 items was the next category in terms of the place and the interlocutor on a scale of seldom to very often. Also, motivation with 30 items asked about the setting and assignments. The last part comprised shyness with 13 items focusing on the effect of psychological factors inhibiting involvement in conversations ranging from agree and disagree.

Results

Using SPSS (20), the mean, standard deviation and correlation within the items were calculated. To this end, analysis of moment structure (AMOS) was used to find out the correlations between items. Thus, using AMOS model based on previous studies, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were found. Then, maximum likelihood estimation for probability of correlations were calculated. The mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's α and correlation matrix were also calculated (following table):

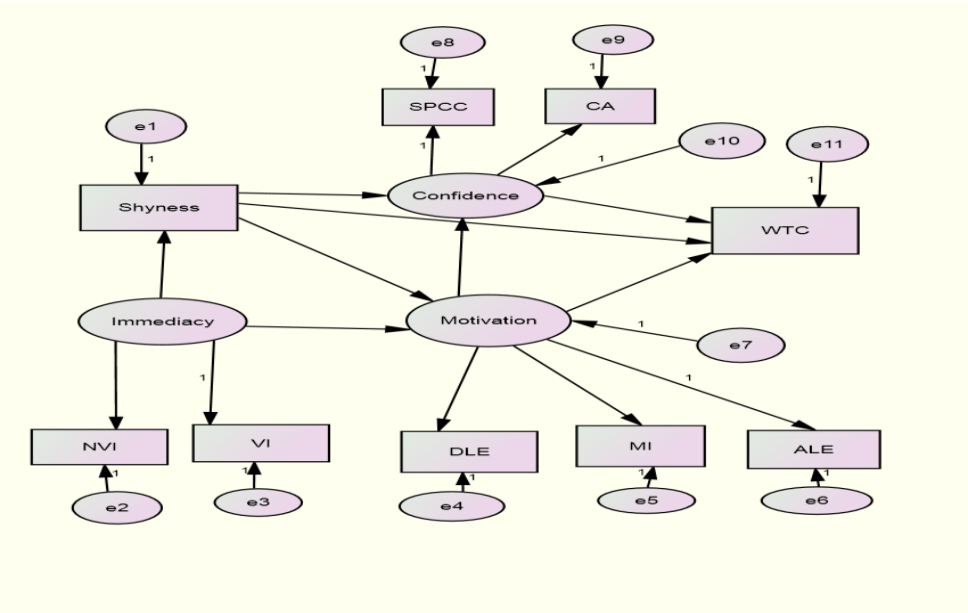

Fig 1. The hypostatized model:

Note: L2WTC = willingness to communicate in L2; SPCC = self-perceived communicative competence; CA = communication anxiety; ALE: attitude toward learning English; MI: motivation intensity; DLE: desire to learn English; VI: verbal immediacy; NVI: non-verbal immediacy

Based on our results the Chi-square was 58.2 and df was 21. The values of related model fit indexes were goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.947, AGFI=adjusted goodness-of-fit index=.887, comparative fit index (CFI) =0.915, (AGFI) = .92, comparative fit index (CFI) = .96, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.091 (0.90%CI=0.063-0.119), p-value=0.009. in revised

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model, the related findings were (RMSEA) = .087 (0.90%CI=0.060-0.115), and p-value=0.013. Table 1 shows the results of correlation matrix in which the coefficients correlations ranged from -0.540 (SPCC and CA) to 0.598 (between the SPCC and WTC). The related model fit indexes were obtained in table 2.

Table 1. correlation matrix

Variables	Shyness	ALE	MI	DLE	VI	NVI	WTC	CA	SPCC
Shyness	1.000								
ALE	.256	1.000							
MI	.263	-.042	1.000						
DLE	.203	-.008	.587	1.000					
VI	-.058	.148	-.354	-.191	1.000				
NVI	.006	.212	-.069	.054	.373	1.000			
WTC	-.218	-.065	-.446	-.500	.254	-.026	1.000		
CA	.286	.000	.205	.189	-.035	.054	-.308	1.000	
SPCC	-.197	-.035	-.336	-.380	.125	-.054	.598	-.540	1.000

Table 2. related model fit indexes

Model fit indices	χ^2	df	χ^2 / df	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
Base model	58.2	21	2.77	0.945	0.915	0.091
Revised model	58.2	22	2.64	0.947	0.917	0.087

Table 3. regression weights

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Shyness	<---	**Immediacy**	-.008	.082	-.099	.921	par_9
Motivation	<---	**Shyness**	.004	.013	.306	.759	par_6
Motivation	<---	**Immediacy**	-.001	.006	-.095	.924	par_7
Confidence	<---	**Motivation**	-108.503	353.814	-.307	.759	par_4
Confidence	<---	**Shyness**	-.194	.213	-.915	.360	par_5
WTC	<---	**Confidence**	.373	.087	4.296	***	par_1
WTC	<---	**Shyness**	-.009	.161	-.055	.956	par_2
WTC	<---	**Motivation**	-100.653	328.238	-.307	.759	par_3
NVI	<---	**Immediacy**	.018	.179	.100	.920	par_8
VI	<---	**Immediacy**	1.000				
DLE	<---	**Motivation**	30.542	99.486	.307	.759	par_10
MI	<---	**Motivation**	25.734	83.823	.307	.759	par_11
ALE	<---	**Motivation**	1.000				
SPCC	<---	**Confidence**	1.000				
CA	<---	**Confidence**	-.470	.081	-5.787	***	par_12

The results and findings of the statistical analysis in table 3 are discussed in detail the following section.

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Anxiety and WTC

In this study, there was not any relationship between anxiety and willingness to communicate. This finding could be related to the setting and to the field of medical students, since the students of medicine in our country are considered as the elite and less anxious students. Whatever the reason, the researcher deleted the item to simplify AMOS. In contrast to the findings of this study, some studies have mentioned anxiety as the most cited concern of the students in a foreign language class. Previous studies found an inverse relationship between willingness to communicate and anxiety. As anxiety increased, the students were less willing to communicate. High levels of fear and anxiety repressed communication (31). In the meantime, self-concentration and distracted attention prevented effective communication (14).

Motivation and WTC

As is displayed in the figures, significant paths were found from self- confidence and motivation to English language WTC. Motivation had a positive effect on self-confidence, and teacher immediacy had a positive effect on motivation and a relative effect on shyness. Self-confidence and motivation directly had positive effect on WTC.

Strikingly speaking, there was a relative path between shyness to motivation. A negative path was found out between shyness and self–confidenceand teacher immediacy. With a view on the relative effect of shyness on self- confidence and motivation in this study, the obtained results confirm that shyness affects language learning motivation. Besides, shyness had a direct relationship with willingness to communicate.

In a study about shyness and EFL learning in Taiwan and comparison of shy and non-shy college students' use of strategies, foreign language anxiety, motivation, and willingness to communicate, it was concluded that non-shy students used communication strategies more than shy peers. The results also pointed out that shyness, foreign language anxiety, and WTC had significant correlation. That is why anxious students in English class were less willing to communicate (41).

The study on the relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate as predictors of foreign language use in the Japanese ESL context, reported that motivation and WTC are related and motivation affects the number of times the students participated in the classroom activities (56).

Similar to our study, in research on the effect of attitudes on willingness to communicate a relation was found between self-confidence and perceived communication competence and low anxiety as important factors for WTC. Motivation was found to be related to self-confidence, which, in turn, led to more willingness to communicate in a foreign language context.

Shyness and WTC

The results of the present study indicated correlation between shyness and WTC; although the relationship was negative (-0.12). Such relationship has similarly been reported in previous studies. Based on the findings, shyness is not a favorable trait and interferes with the whole life of people. Strikingly, this research asserts Chu's study48 in terms of a negative relationship between shyness and WTC.

Discussion

In the structural model, there were meaningful paths between self-confidence and motivation and WTC in ESP classes. Motivation had positive effect on self-confidence. Teacher immediacy with a negative effect on shyness increased motivation to communicate in ESP class. On the other hand, the paths from shyness to motivation and self-confidence were negative. All the paths were significant at .05.

Concerning the effective path from foreign language self -confidence to WTC, the findings were in line with a similar study which indicated that perceived competence and anxiety affect WTC and that high level of confidence led to more willingness to communicate, in contrast to anxiety which negatively influenced WTC. The results of our study also support Macintyre and Charos' study (35). Similarly, in Peng and Woodraw's study (57) the results showed that motivation has an indirect effect on WTC due to creating a sense of self- confidence. Also, in their study, the direct effect of learner attitudes on motivation and confidence is confirmed. In this regard, Yashima (4) asserts that there is a positive relationship between self-confidence and WTC in a foreign language.

In this study, the path from motivation to foreign language WTC is similar to Macintyre and Clement (37) and Peng's research (27). Accordingly, motivation has positive effect on foreign language WTC. Similarly, Hye- Kyoung Joe et al (58) found that motivation had a positive effect on WTC and success in foreign language classes.

Lee and Drajati (59) examined the correlation between informal digital learning of English (IDLE) activities (receptive IDLE activities and productive IDLE activities), affective variables (courage, motivation, self-confidence and second language speaking anxiety) and willingness to communicate. The results that were collected from 183 learners of English, displayed that students' willingness to communicate correlated significantly with courage,

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self-confidence, and motivation (50). Such findings advocate that students' engagement and affective factors play a significant role in a second language communication. Based on the mentioned studies, pedagogical paybacks of affective variables should be emphasized to facilitate students' willingness to communicate in a second language.

Parallel to findings of our study, a study showed that motivation had a positive impact on foreign language WTC due to self-perceived communicative competence (60). However, other studies could not find any significant relationship (61).

In our study, motivation had both direct and indirect effect on WTC through increasing self-confidence. This finding emphasizes that in ESP classes, motivation has positive effect on self- confidence and results in higher willingness to communicate.

Also, the positive effect of motivation on self-confidence was consistent with the study of Ghanbarpour according to which self- confidence in the first language can assist self-confidence in foreign language. Meanwhile, another study in the EFL context found that self- confidence directly influenced WTC and indirectly had effect on motivation. (36).

Based on a study with 711 preparatory school students at a state university in Turkey, the learners of the study were moderately willing to communicate in English in controlled situations more than meaning focused situations. Also, female EFL learners were more willing to communicate in English in the classroom compared to male EFL students. Lastly, learners who have higher language proficiency levels were found to have higher WTC level compared to those with lower language proficiency levels (34).

In a study (62) entitled "To talk or not to talk", a review of situational antecedents of willingness to communicate in the second language classroom showed that lack of confidence or fear of making errors in a foreign language setting can have a negative effect on WTC which goes with Philips study (15).

In our study there was a significant path from teacher immediacy to motivation. This finding is in line with Fallah's study (52) who found that teachers make the classroom more positive and interesting by physical and psychological proximity to the learners; hence motivating students to learn a foreign language better. Meanwhile, the results of our study confirm similar findings (53, 57) emphasizing that classroom setting whether directly or indirectly, affect "willingness to communicate" confidence, learner opinions, and motivation. In previous studies, motivation was claimed to affect WTC indirectly via creating self-confidence and stressing that learner attitudes were related to motivation and confidence. In the meantime, teacher immediacy showed a negative and significant effect on the learner's shyness which means that both constructs are associated. Teacher's proximity decreases students' feeling of shyness and thus their extent of tendency to communicate. The findings in our study go with Ballester's study (63) who found that teacher immediacy reduced anxiety. Also, research indicates that verbal and nonverbal teacher immediacy while seemingly are independent, indicate feeling of inclusiveness, personal knowledge and willingness of the students to be involved in communication. Also, in case of teacher's immediacy, learners tend to remember more of what the teacher had taught.

The results of a survey assert that Chinese shy students achieved less in conversations pointing out that shy students had less self- confidence (64). Also, the interesting argument was that parents' strictness accounted for their shyness and consequent nervousness. This argument has already been stated which affirms a meaningful path from shyness to foreign language communication, self - confidence and motivation (65).

Research illuminates that there was a circular relationship among the variables in that attitudes influenced motivation; motivation influenced proficiency and self-confidence; and self-confidence had effect on WTC (4).

Also, research indicates that students who found their tutors more supportive were more likely to improve in their language skills and thereby felt more competent and more willing to communicate in English (65).

Meanwhile, the proficiency level, living abroad for a period of time, and communication with foreign people elicited their effect on EFL learners' WTC. However, variables such as gender and personality type, were not influential on the learners' WTC (57).

On the other hand, willingness to communicate in a foreign language is related to a scope of interacting internal and external learner-centered variables. This result was reached with 210 English language learners from Spain. The researchers did multiple regression analyses which exhibited that the strongest and negative predictor of WTC was foreign language classroom anxiety; while foreign language enjoyment and frequency of foreign

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[DOI: 10.52547/edcj.15.45.34]

language use by the teacher were positive predictors (66, 67).

Furthermore, fairly similar to our study, a research with 1528 subjects showed the relations between emotions, classroom environment, and willingness to communicate (WTC) using the advanced quantitative methodological procedure of doubly latent multilevel analysis. They found that a positive classroom environment is related to fostering WTC and enjoyment, while it reduces anxiety among students. Moreover, enjoyment was found as an important factor in increasing WTC at both student and classroom level, while anxiety reduced WTC only at the student level. In our study, the positive effect of shyness on communication, self-confidence and thereby on foreign language displayed an indirect effect on WTC. However, shy students due to their low self-confidence rarely made an endeavor to be active participants and thereby, had less tendency to communicate.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this study consistently demonstrated that foreign language willingness to communicate is hooked on other major variables. Regarding the notion that communication and speaking are the most critical language skills28, language programs have to specify much importance on this skill. All the examined variables throughout this study were related to willingness to communicate. In other words, the findings indicate that affective factors are extremely influential on WTC. The teachers and instructors should create a situation with low anxiety to encourage the learners to talk and communicate. Shyness was another variable throughout this study that has a negative effect on WTC. The teachers are recommended to get on with the tasks and assignments that are not hard or discouraging.

Results also indicated that WTC is a multifaceted concept. Determining the factors intervening WTC can lead to better language learning settings at university level. Thus, creative strategies must be set for immersion of more students in speaking classes. The results also emphasize that highly motivated students are more willing to get involved in classroom activities and communication due to their self-confidence. In fact, learners with high self-confidence and feeling less shy use the opportunities to start communication in foreign language class or even indirectly in sending emails or being active in the virtual world. In the meantime, teachers' respect and also their immediacy enhance willingness to communicate among students which can per se be reinforced through teachers' positive reaction to learners while they make their effort to communicate. In this regard, learners will feel less anxiety and will be confident enough to take part in the classroom activities. Teachers can use some strategies for example smile or nod in agreement while the students speak. It came out that if teachers correct their students' errors with a bit of delay whenever possible, this reaction will have a positive effect on reducing anxiety level and will lead to a sense of warm environment (56).

As a whole, teachers' reaction in ESP classes similar to previous studies in variety of settings can significantly affect learners' willingness or unwillingness to communicate. This study suggests that teachers by considering interest and personal characteristics of the learners, encourage them to empower their WTC. This research can be reiterated in settings where there is the perceived problem of unwillingness to communicate.

The subjects of this study were selected from only one university due to different constraints, so it may not be appropriate to generalize the findings of the study to all university level students. Thus, more research is recommended to extend the present understanding of the EFL learners' WTC in English. Furthermore, this study dealt with only WTC as far as speaking skill is concerned. Future studies are suggested to explore learners' WTC in terms of writing, reading, listening via different instruments.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

We are extremely thankful for the enthusiastic participation of the students in this research.

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Giti Karimkhanlooei, Nima Motamed , Hamid Gharebaghi. Effective Factors in Medical Students' willingness to communicate in the course of English for Specific Purposes. J Med Educ Dev. 2022; 15 (45): 34-46

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