

The Significant Relationship between English Language Anxiety and Willingness to Communicate among the Students at Politeknik Hulu Terengganu

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Abstract

The ultimate objective of learning a language is considered to be the ability to communicate with others in English. However, many students find it challenging because of different psychological factors like anxiety and reluctance to communicate in the language. Although these two factors individually contribute to the success or failure of learning the language, it is unclear whether the interplay between anxiety and willingness to communicate is present. Concerning this, the current study aims to identify the levels of foreign language anxiety (FLA), to find out levels of willingness to communicate in English (WTC), and to discover the correlation between language anxiety and the willingness to communicate in English among students. Quantitative approach was employed whereby data were collected using two instruments; the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and the Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTCs). The questionnaires were administered to 123 diploma students at Politeknik Hulu Terengganu. Using SPSS 22.0, data were analysed descriptively, namely minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation. Besides, Pearson Correlation test was run to provide answers to the research questions. The findings revealed that most students experienced a moderate level of English language anxiety. Besides that, students also reported having a very low willingness to communicate in English. The study also showed a significant negative correlation between students' FLCAS and their WTC. The research has numerous teaching implications for both ESL learners and teachers. Educators could potentially be guided to improve their teaching and learning process by creating a stress-free environment that encourages students to communicate in English. This could increase their willingness to participate.

Keywords: English as a second language, language anxiety, willingness to communicate

1. Introduction

Long (1996) and Swain (2000) both agree that competence is enhanced by performance. However, why do some students interact with other students in English, and some avoid it completely? This leads to investigating the reticence that certain English second language (ESL) learners feel when orally producing the targeted language. According to previous studies, it is clear that not all learners are interested in interacting and some have difficulty with their willingness to communicate (WTC).

ESL learners often encounter a range of difficulties when acquiring a new language, with foreign language anxiety (FLA) being one of the most notable barriers they confront (Zhou, Xi & Lochman, 2023). Although there is an increasing interest in FLA and WTC, there is still a lot to be discovered about their impact on EFL learners' language acquisition and overall achievement in acquiring a second language. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to add to the current body of research by examining how FLA affects the willingness to communicate of ESL learners.

1.1 Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

WTC has been defined as the intention to initiate communication when given a choice (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Conrod, 2002b). This research focused on the willingness to communicate in English as a second language. However, pertaining to the particular circumstances of this study, WTC was defined by (Oxford, 1997) as "a student's intention to interact with others in the target language, given a chance to do so."

1.2 Second Language Anxiety (SLA)

Second language anxiety refers to fear or apprehension when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). The researcher focused on the English language as a second language and the anxiety of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation in the language classroom.

The study aimed to achieve its objectives by formulating the following research questions.

- i. What is the second language anxiety level of the students at the polytechnic?
- ii. What is the level of willingness to communicate in English of the polytechnic students?
- iii. Is there any statistically significant relationship between second language anxiety and the willingness to communicate with the students

2. Theoretical Framework

MacIntyre's WTC model served as a basic framework and was adopted for this study. Still, concepts and components of Second Language (L2) learning attitudes are redefined about the Malaysian context and focus on WTC and anxiety in speaking. The MacIntyre (1998) model of WTC associates linguistic, communicative, and social psychological variables that contribute to WTC in a second language.

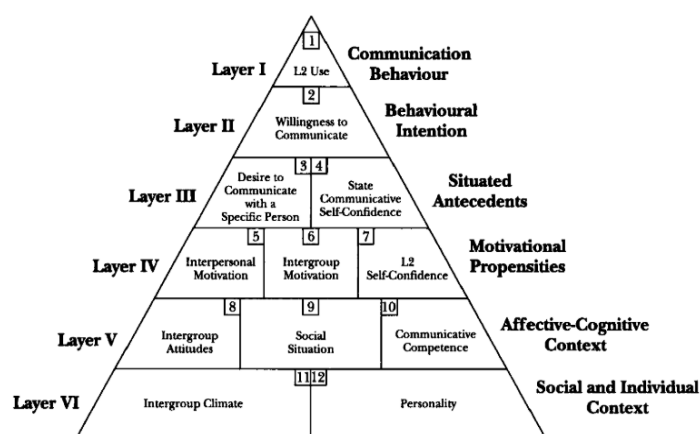


Figure 1: The Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC

Concerning Figure 1, the heuristic model of L2 WTC, twelve variables are explained to affect one's communication level in L2. The uppermost three levels of the pyramid symbolize state variables such as L2 use, L2 WTC, state self-confidence, and the inclination to communicate with a particular individual or group. These relate to differing situation-specific influences on an individual's WTC. From the literature analysis on the relevant issues of L2 WTC, the conceptual framework of the present study is provided in Figure 2.

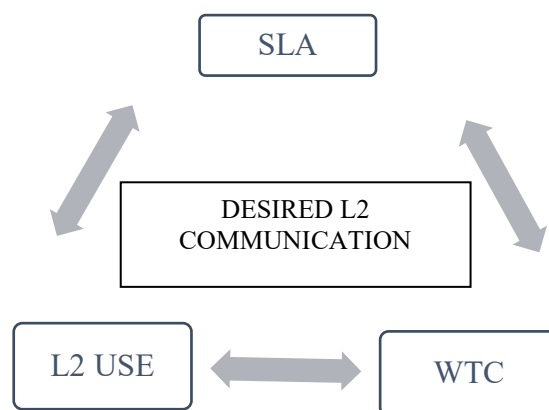


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of L2 WTC for EFL Learners Employed in this Study.

Figure 2 represents the conceptualisation of how WTC in L2 for ESL learners is affected by second-language anxiety based on the review of related research. Based on the conceptual framework, SLA, WTC, and L2 use are interrelated, affecting the desired L2 communication. States of communicative competence are controlled by perceived communication competence and communication anxiety. Hence, to acknowledge students' WTC in L2, it is necessary to understand second language anxiety. Once the WTC of the students is understood, English language usage as a second language can be explained.

3. Research Methodology

A quantitative descriptive approach was employed in this study.

3.1 Population

The population involved students from diploma programmes which were Diploma in Tourism Management and Diploma in Accountancy, studying at Politeknik Hulu Terengganu.

3.2 Survey Sampling

The sampling technique that was used was the stratified random sampling technique. In this technique, each member of the population had equal opportunity of being selected as a subject. The technique was started by dividing the respondents into the same programmes and semester of study. Then random samples were taken from each group.

3.3 Sampling of sample size

The researcher used the Table of Determination of Sample Size of a Known Population by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) to determine the sample size. Based on the table, the sample size (S) required for the study is 123 since the population (N) is 181.

3.4 Measuring Instrument

This study employed two instruments, which are the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and the Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTC). All statements in the questionnaires were translated into Bahasa Melayu to prevent misinterpretation by students since all participants were Malay native speakers.

The first instrument adopted was Foreign Language Learning Anxiety Scale by Horwitz (1986), which was the most familiar tool employed for determining foreign language anxiety in the classroom setting. Rastegar & Karami (2015) explained that FLCAS is a self-

report measure that assesses the second language anxiety level, as revealed by negative performance expectancies and social comparisons, psychophysiological symptoms, and avoidance behaviour. Thirty-three items were created and designed for this instrument. Each item must be answered based on the five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) assigned to them. The higher the score, the more anxiety level experienced by the students. Since some of the items were negatively worded, the score for these items was reversely coded. The 33 items of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) have been used widely in research projects (Horwitz, 2001), and it was reliable and valid (Aida, 1994).

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Scale by McCroskey (1992) was the second instrument employed in this study. This instrument was used to measure a person's willingness to initiate communication when given a chance to speak as stated by McCroskey (1992), "the scale was designed as a direct measure of the respondent's predisposition toward approaching or avoiding the initiation of communication". For the WTC construct, choosing the proper percentage would demonstrate the degree of confirmation mean in each item.

4. Pilot Test

Before the survey was distributed to respondents, it was piloted on thirty (30) students to see how well the statements in the questionnaire worked and to check for stability and internal consistency. Table 1 shows the result for Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient for FLCAS.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient for FLCAS

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.938	.934	33

For high internal consistency, the score should be over .7. In this case, the alpha value (α) = .94, which showed the reliable questionnaire based on Pallant (2007). Internal consistency reliability of the 33 items in the FLCAS as measured by Cronbach's alpha value (α) was 0.94. This indicated that FLCAS had high internal consistency that is considered a reliable instrument to measure foreign language anxiety.

Table 2 shows the result of Cronbach's alpha coefficient for WTC. In this case, value (α) = .97, which shows the questionnaire had high internal consistency, and it was reliable to employ this instrument in this study.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient for WTC

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

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 English language anxiety level of the students

The first research question concerns investigating the foreign language anxiety level of students. By referring to Hortwiz et al. (1986) as cited in Foreign (1986), the scoring was classified into three categories based on the score of the FLCA scale: low, medium, and high. Students reported higher levels of anxiety as their scores increased. Table 3 shows the range of the FLCAS score categories to determine the level of anxiety.

Table 3: Categories of FLCAS Scoring

Range	Level
Score from 33 to 75	Low level of anxiety
From 76 to 119	Medium
From 120 to 165	High intensity anxiety

Table 4 shows the students' anxiety levels reported by the students. Based on the result, the average score of anxiety reported by the individuals was 52, which was a low anxiety level, while the maximum score was 153, high-intensity anxiety.

Table 4: Minimum and Total Maximum Score of Foreign Language Anxiety

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Total score FLCAS	123	52.00	153.00	97.88	19.20

Table 4 presents the results of the descriptive analysis performed on FLCAS. Based on the table, it was found that the scores range from 52 to 153. In addition, it shows that the mean score ($M=97.88$, $SD=19.20$) indicated that students experience moderately high anxiety levels in learning English in the classroom. However, according to each level of anxiety, when the analysis was conducted, the details of the descriptive analysis are shown in table 5.

Table 5: Level of Anxiety in Three Categories

Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
Low	13	10.6	10.6
Medium	95	77.2	87.8
High	15	12.2	100.0
Total	123	100.0	

It can be seen in Table 5, majority of the respondents (77.2%) reported that they experienced a medium level of anxiety in their current situation as ESL learners. However, 12.2% of the respondents showed that they pointed out themselves as having a high level of anxiety. In contrast, only 10.6% of respondents reported a low level of classroom anxiety as English language learners.

This current study found that students experience a medium level of English language anxiety in the classroom. This indicated that the majority of the respondents, who were teenagers, do perceive themselves as having a moderate level of foreign language anxiety, as reported by similar studies which investigated the level of anxiety among adolescent English language learners in Malaysia (Alias & Rashid, 2018; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018; Vicky Chin, Ting Hie Ling, & Yeo Jiin Yih, 2016).

5.2 Level of willingness to communicate among the students.

The second research question dealt with the WTC level of students. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics by calculating the mean and standard deviation of receiver types sub scores and context types sub scores.

McCroskey (1992) presents sub scores that pertain to the willingness to communicate in four prevalent communication situations and with three different types of audiences. All scores, total and sub-scores, fall in the range of 0 to 100. Table 6 shows the categories of WTC scoring as suggested by McCroskey & Richmond (2013). There are three categories which are low, medium, and high.

Table 6: Categories of WTC Scoring

Category	Range	Level
1	Score from 0 to 52	low
2	From 53 to 81	medium
3	From 82 to 100	high

To find out the overall WTC among the students, the descriptive statistic was carried out. In order to find the total WTC score, you should sum up the individual scores for the stranger, acquaintance, and friend, and then divide the total by 3. The finding was reported in Table 7.

Table 7: 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 categorised as moderate level ($M = 31.18$) by referring to the scale of total WTC >82 high overall WTC and <52 low overall WTC.

However, to see the level of students' willingness to communicate in a clearer dimension, the WTC score was analysed based on categories displayed in Table 8.

Table 8: 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 8, the majority (86.2%) of the participants showed low willingness to communicate in English. Only 11.4% of the students reported having a moderate level of willingness to communicate. Only 2.4% of the students reported that they had WTC in the English language. It was found that polytechnic students reported having a very low level of willingness to communicate in English.

5.3 The significant relationship between English Language Anxiety (FLA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among the students

The result for the last research question was based on Pearson's correlation, which is a statistical measurement for the strength of a linear relationship between paired data. The Pearson's correlation was used to test the following null hypothesis (Ho2) which was:

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between the learners' language anxiety and the willingness to communicate.

In Pearson's correlation, positive values indicate positive linear correlation, and negative values indicate negative linear correlation. The stronger the linear correlation is when the closer the value is to 1 or -1. 0 means there is no linear correlation at all. Table 9 shows the result of Pearson's correlation for this study.

Table 9: Correlations between FLCAS and WTC

		FLA level	WTC level
FLA level	Pearson Correlation	1	-.318**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	123	123
WTC level	Pearson Correlation	-.318**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	123	123

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to Evans (1996) cited in (Shanti Manipuspika, 2018, p.213), correlation is a measure of effect size and can be described verbally in terms of its strength by using the guide for the absolute value of r .

- .00 – .19 = very weak
- .20 – .39 = weak
- .40 – .59 = moderate
- .60 – .79 = strong
- .80 – 1.0 = very strong

Table 9 shows that the result $r = -.318$ indicates a weak negative correlation relationship. This means that as one variable increases in value, the second variable decreases in value. It demonstrates that when anxiety increases, the WTC decreases. In this study, the higher the anxiety level, the lower the willingness to communicate.

Due to the P value being 0.00, it indicates a significant correlation between these two variables. The correlation is highly significant as indicated by the standard alpha value of .05. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and the Willingness to Communicate (WTC), $r(123) = -.318$, $p = 0.00$.

In other words, H02 was rejected, and there was a significant relationship between the learners' language anxiety and the willingness to communicate. However, the significant relationship was weak because the r value was 0.318, reflecting a weak correlation. This current result was in line with a study conducted by Lee and Drajiati (2019). The findings indicated that there was a significant correlation between students' inclination to communicate and affective factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety when speaking a second language. Moreover, Ali and Abdalla (2016) confirmed these findings.

As reported in their study, willingness to communicate (WTC) and language communication anxiety were significantly correlated.

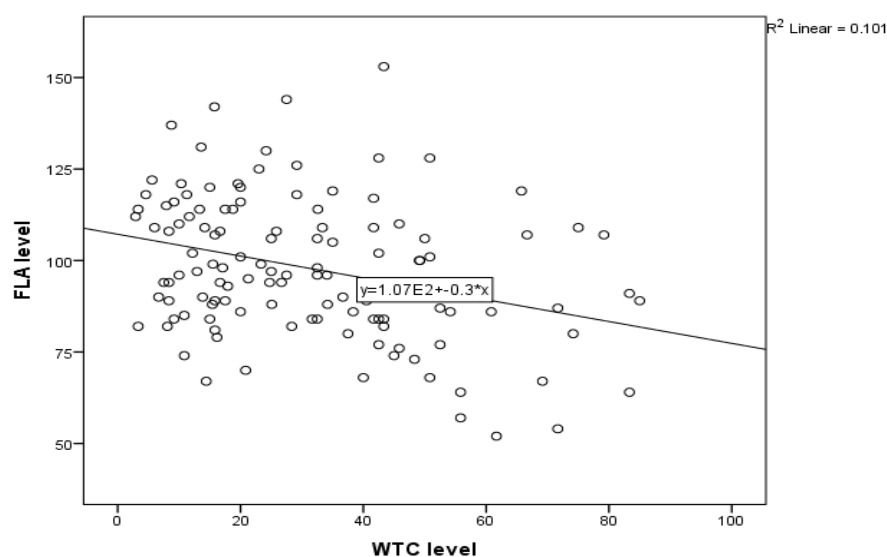


Figure 3: Correlation between FLCAS and Anxiety

Base on figure 3, It can be inferred that there were significant negative correlations between students' anxiety in the foreign language classroom and their willingness to communicate in the English language. Khajavy, MacIntyre, Taherian, T and Ross (2021) also found that correlations between WTC and anxiety were inconsistent, most of which were negative. Thus, based on the present research results, learners who had high language classroom anxiety were less willing to communicate in English. On the other hand, those who experienced low anxiety and their willingness to communicate in English were high.

6. Limitations of the Study

Although the study has several implications, there are limitations associated with the study. One of the limitations of this study is that the respondents were from one polytechnic only. Therefore, the findings obtained from this study cannot be generalized as this group cannot represent the whole population.

Second, this study only examines second language in the classroom but does not investigate the second language outside the classroom. Thus, the level of SLA and WTC in the classroom might differ with anxiety out of the classroom.

7. Recommendations for Future Research

In light of the constraints mentioned, future research should enhance reliability by adopting a mixed-methods study approach. 'This would be very helpful.' (32 characters) An example would be to conduct interviews with a diverse group of participants in order to take a more in-depth look at the relationship between FLA and WTC.

Another intriguing aspect worthy of investigation is the comparison of how cross-cultural studies would have been conducted in relation to this particular study. Malaysia is a diverse country with a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, particularly when it comes to its education system. An example of this is that some learners have diverse educational backgrounds, which influences how they approach various classroom settings. An intriguing starting point for discussion could be to investigate the cultural variations among ESL learners in Malaysia and uncover how these variations impact their attitudes and beliefs about WTC.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, as English lecturers at Malaysian polytechnics, it is important to always consider the influence that SLA can have on learners' willingness to communicate. As a result, it is important to implement measures that foster a positive and motivating atmosphere in the classroom. In addition, teachers should offer chances for students to participate in low-stress communication tasks, like working in pairs or groups. In doing this, they can slowly help learners gain confidence and enhance their willingness to communicate. Ultimately, educators should be mindful of the unique needs of each learner and offer personalized assistance and feedback to assist them in addressing their second language acquisition challenges and boosting their willingness to communicate. Thus, this can improve students' performance in the English language.

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