

Factors of Students' Willingness and Unwillingness to Speak English in the Classroom

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Abstract

One of the goals of EFL education is to enhance students' willingness to communicate (WTC) and to reduce their unwillingness to communicate (UWTC) so that students can consistently take part in English communication. Accordingly, this study aimed to investigate the factors of English students' WTC and UWTC in the classroom context. This study applied a descriptive qualitative method by involving eighteen students from English department at State Islamic Institute of Curup as the participants. Of those students, nine of them were those of WTC group, and other nine students were those of UWTC group. They were split in such a way according to their values of speaking subjects and resting upon their lecturer's consideration. The data were collected from interviews and analyzed using an interactive model. The findings revealed that the factors of students' WTC covered classroom, teacher's supports, personality, and self-confidence. Subsequently, the factors of students' UWTC consisted of linguistic problems such as lack of English vocabularies, poor grammatical competence, and poor English pronunciation. Besides, there were also some non-linguistic factors such as psychological problems, low self-confidence, and anxiety. Further studies are expected to probe into the factors of WTC and UWTC by adopting both realistic and naturalistic worldviews as well as incorporating more multicultural participants to reveal more comprehensive information as desirable.

Keywords: classroom-oriented factors; English speaking skill; unwillingness to communicate; willingness to communicate

Introduction

Socio-cultural realities that make English the contact language for worldly multicultural people (Fang, 2017; Ishikawa, 2016; Liu & Fang, 2017) implicitly inform that speaking is a crucial skill that must be mastered by every English student. With

this skill, students can cross-culturally transfer and share their ideas, messages, information, and even their feelings (Kim, 2019; Syafryadin et al., 2020). Speaking is an ability to produce an oral language to communicate, and the key to successful communication is associated with the capability of speaking clearly, efficiently, and articulately, as well as using effective voice projection (El-sakka, 2016; Syafryadin et al., 2019; Syafryadin, 2020; Syafryadin, et al. 2020; Syafryadin, et al. 2020; Uztosun, 2017). However, besides the pivotal role of speaking as explained in the foregoing, speaking activities can take place if both communicant and communicator have an adequate degree of willingness to communicate (hereafter as WTC). This is aligned with Lee (2020) who elucidated that students must have a sufficient extent of willingness to communicate for the sake of acquiring an English speaking skill. The foregoing is also confirmed by a study conducted by Grant (2018) revealing that students who have WTC as desirable tend to be engaged more consistently in English communication.

Students' WTC refers to their readiness to communicate with other students in the dimension of spoken mode (Zhou et al., 2020). Within the English classroom context, students' WTC is defined as students' intention to interact with others in the target language, in this sense, English (Dewaele, 2019; Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2019). With the essence of students' English speaking skill mastery as one of the fundamental goals of English education, it is essential to find out what factors affect English students' WTC (Halupka-rešetar et al., 2018; Khatib & Nourzadeh, 2014; Latifah et al., 2013). According to Zeng (2010), there are several factors that influence students to become willing to communicate. Those factors include the classroom, teacher's supports, students' personalities, and their self-confidence. Also, Lee and Hsieh (2019); Peng and Woodrow (2010); and Prasetyo et al. (2019) added that the factors extend to communication confidence, teachers' reinforcement, classroom environment, motivation, learners' beliefs, and higher level of grit.

English students are complex. Some could be willing to communicate, and some could be unwilling. To be defined, students' unwillingness to communicate (hereafter as UWTC) means that the students choose to be silent, or they even avoid the given opportunities to speak English in the classroom (Al-murtadha & Feryok, 2017). The foregoing is supported by Fukuta (2018) who claimed that an individual's choice to avoid communication can be regarded as UWTC. Likewise WTC, there also exist some factors that influence students to become unwilling to communicate.

Those factors cover both linguistic and non-linguistics problems. Appertaining to linguistic problems, the factors can be associated with insufficient numbers of English vocabularies needed to talk, poor grammatical competence, and poor pronunciation ability. In terms of non-linguistic factors, Richards (2008) mentioned that the factors could be corresponding to personality, lack of self-confidence, and anxiety level.

Pertinent to the issues related to WTC and UWTC, there was found a phenomenon in the field (in this regard, at English department of State Islamic Institute of Curup) during the preliminary study the researchers conducted. The phenomenon is unique since it demonstrated diverse self-perceptions among tertiary English students in terms of WTC and UWTC. Some students exhibited that they had sufficient WTC and some others revealed that they were identical to UWTC. For instance, during a preliminary interview, one student from those of WTC expressed her perception as the following vignette:

"In English speaking class, I always take the opportunity to speak even though my speaking skill is not good enough. I consider that speaking class is the best place to improve my speaking skill. When i speak English, i feel happy. Besides, I love speaking English" (An interview with a student).

The above vignette depicted that the student had an adequate WTC despite her moderate speaking skill. In a different way, another student from those of UWTC expressed her self-perception as the following transcript:

"I love speaking English but not in the classroom. I have many foreign friends, and I communicate with them using English via an android application. I enjoy speaking English with them. However, in the English speaking classroom, I do not have an interest to take part in English communication because the topic the lecturer brings into the class does not drive my interest. Oftentimes, I choose to be silent and just watch my friends speaking in the classroom. I will communicate using English only if I am asked to do so, but I do not speak voluntarily" (An interview with a student).

The above transcript demonstrates that the student seemed to be identical to UWTC in the classroom although she was actually a competent English user outside the classroom. It seemed that the extent to which a topic could drive the student's interest really determined to what extent she would participate in English communication in the classroom.

Prior studies on English WTC and UWTC have been done in various countries across a variety of variables incorporated. To name a few, such studies addressed

English WTC by involving several variables such as informal digital learning (Lee, 2019; Lee & Drajati, 2019), cognitive and metacognitive strategy training (Farzam, 2018), WTC development (Kruk, 2019a, 2019b), accent varieties (Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2017), an EFL immersion program (Grant, 2018), learning interventions (Jamalifar & Salehi, 2017), communication strategies (Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh, 2014), and the role of affection (Dewaele, 2019). Previous studies also addressed English UWTC by including variables such as situational indicators (Al-murtadha & Feryok, 2017) and psychological indicators (Fukuta, 2018). Those studies have contributed to providing beneficial information regarding the concept, essence, and realities of English WTC and UWTC.

However, prior studies on English WTC and UWTC strictly oriented towards English classroom factors are considered quite few. To the best of our knowledge, previous studies whose contents addressed WTC classroom factors, either strictly or partly, have been undertaken by Lee and Hsieh (2019); Peng and Woodrow (2010); Prasetyo, Wibawani, and Drajati (2019); and Zeng (2010). Subsequently, the discourse of UWTC classroom factors has been addressed by Richards (2008). Those studies were conducted in some countries, and that of Indonesian context seems to be merely identical to the study conducted by Prasetyo, Wibawani, and Drajati (2019). We consider that bringing the Indonesian context into more studies that address English WTC and UWTC classroom-oriented factors as two sets of issues or variables seem to be worth undertaking. Hence, to fulfill this gap and to work on the portrayed phenomenon above, the present study is conducted to probe into plausible factors that affect English students' WTC and UWTC in the classroom context in more detail. Aligned with the field where the phenomenon is encountered, this study is conducted at English department of State Islamic Institute of Curup.

Research Methodology

This study applied a descriptive qualitative method to reveal the factors influencing students' WTC and UWTC in the English classroom context. Drawing upon a constructivist philosophy, this study sought to investigate the data contextually and in detail (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The participants of this study were 18 English students in the seventh semester who had already taken all levels of English speaking subjects. Of the 18 participants, 9 participants were those of WTC group,

and the rest 9 participants were those of UWTC group. They were split into two groups, WTC and UWTC, due to the data of their accumulative values of speaking subjects they already took and on account of the English speaking lecturer's reflection and consideration informing that 9 students were of WTC and 9 others were of UWTC. The participants of this study aged from 21 to 22 years old. They were selected as the participants resting upon on a purposive sampling technique (Ary et al., 2010; Fraenkel et al., 2012; Gall et al., 2003). There were four basic criteria underlying their involvement as the participants. Those criteria subsumed the following: 1) The participants were officially the English students at English department of State Islamic Institut of Curup; 2) the participants had already taken all levels of English speaking subjects at the English department; 3) the participants of WTC group had high scores of English speaking subjects, and those of UWTC group had low scores of English speaking subjects; and 4) the participants were voluntarily willing to take part in the present study.

The data of the present study were gathered from interviews. The researchers already prepared the interview guidelines as the instrument. Interviews were conducted from the 1st to 11th of November 2020. The primary purpose of interviews was to investigate the factors that influenced English students' WTC and UWTC. In order to support the data collecting processes, a recorder was utilized so that all details of statements or utterances of the participants during interviews could be easily retrieved.

To analyze the interview data, this study made use of interactive model as proposed by Miles et al. (2014). Pursuant to this model, the processes of data analysis took four main components, namely data collection, data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusion. Concerning data collection, as elaborated in prior, the data were collected from interviews. Pertinent to data condensation, the raw data of interviews were grouped based upon some emerging themes. Themes as such became the codes to represent the context of data. All data were transcribed in a precise manner. With regard to data display, the data were presented in the form of tables, explanations of data, and discussions. Lastly, as regards drawing conclusion, the data already presented and discussed were further summarized in a concise but representative way.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The factors of students' WTC

The data associated with the factors of students' WTC were collected from interviews. The following tabel 1 displays data concerning the factors of students' WTC along with the properly related explanations provided under the table. These data were obtained from participants grouped as WTC students.

Tabel 1: The factors influencing students' WTC

No	Participants	Factors of students' WTC	Data coded
1	Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9	Classroom	Students will be willing to speak English in a good learning environment.
			Students will be willing to speak English in the classroom with a good response from their interlocutors.
	Participants 2, 3, 5, 8, and 9	Teacher's supports	The lecturer plays an important role to encourage students in English speaking class.
			The lecturer presents the appropriate task in order to enhance students to communicate using English effectively.
			The lecturer brings an interesting topic for the students to be discussed.
	Participants 3, 6, 7, and 8	Personality	Students are influenced by high self-esteem to speak English.
			Students will be confident in speaking English without a high level of anxiety.
			Students are more motivated to communicate using English in order to be successful in language learning.
			The students' willingness to speak English is motivated by their interlocutors' performance in speaking class.
	Participants 1 and 7	Self-confidence	Students are confident in speaking English in a social class situation.
			Students are able to communicate

			using English without shame in the English speaking classroom.
			Students could show their English speaking abilities in the classroom.
			Students believe in their English speaking abilities.

According to table 1, the results of interviews revealed that the domains of classroom, teacher's supports, personality, and self-confidence became the main factors of students' WTC in the classroom context. The first WTC factor was **the classroom**. As expressed by the participants, the classroom became the most influential factor of their WTC. In this case, the interview transcripts of participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 indicated a summary that they would be willing to speak English in a good learning environment. The students were engaged into speaking English because they felt that the situation in speaking class supported them to speak more comfortably. They also emphasized that they were willing to speak English in the classroom if they got good responses from their interlocutors. In other words, positive responses given by their interlocutors led them to being more willing to speak English.

The second WTC factor was **teacher's supports** during instructional interventions. Teacher's supports become a crucial factor for the sake of making students willing to communicate using English. A teacher is a figure or a model for students especially in learning English speaking skill. In this case, participants 2, 3, 5, 8, and 9 shared their self-perceptions during interviews, wherein those perceptions could be summarized that their lecturer provided them with appropriate English speaking tasks in order to drive them to communicate using English effectively. The lecturer also explained the materials attractively and interacted with them kindly. It means that the lecturer's effective way in teaching makes students willing to communicate using English. Participant 2, 3, and 5 added that they were more willing to speak English because the lecturer gave additional scores for anyone of them who were willing to be interactive in the classroom. Moreover, the lecturer announced the students' scores once the class was ended. The foregoing way triggered students to be more willing to speak English in the next meeting.

The third WTC factor was **personality**. Every student indeed has different characters. Several participants mentioned that they were willing to speak English by

virtue of getting motivated by their interlocutors' performance in English speaking class. In this case, participants 3, 6, 7, and 8 said that they were driven to talk in English after watching their interlocutors' speaking performance. Their interlocutors responded to them respectfully. The participants also stated that they believed in their self-esteem after receiving respect from their interlocutors. The aforesaid data demonstrated that students' personality became a factor that influenced their WTC in English.

The last WTC factor was **self-confidence**. This factor was represented by four sets of information. First, the participants felt more confident in speaking English in a social class situation. As interviewed, participants 1 and 7 said that they always used English to communicate with their interlocutors during English speaking activities in the classroom. Second, the participants confirmed that they were able to communicate using English in the classroom without shame and doubt. With their confidence, the participants demonstrated that they could speak English without stutter when they were explaining some materials, or even when they were making a conversation with their interlocutors or lecturer. In addition, the participants also elucidated that English speaking class became a good environment to improve their English speaking skill. Third, the participants stated that they were well-convinced to show their English speaking ability in the classroom. One reason beyond the foregoing statement was that the participants were willing to start speaking English in the classroom because they had a sort of motivation to improve more their English speaking skill. Fourth, the participants also elucidated that they believed in their English speaking abilities. This really helped encourage them to speak English often in the classroom.

The factors of students' UWTC

Tabel 2 below displays data concerning the factors of students' UWTC alongside the related elaborations provided under the table. These data were obtained from participants grouped as UWTC students.

Tabel 2: The factors influencing students' UWTC

Table 2: The factors influencing students' WTC				
No	Participants	Factors of students' WTC		Data coded
		Factors		
1.	Participants 2,3,5,6,8, and 9	Linguistic problems	Lack of English vocabularies	Students are unwilling to speak English because they lack English vocabularies.

			Poor grammatical competence	Students become unwilling to speak English due to fear of grammatical errors.
				Students are preoccupied with the grammar they need use so that their communication breakdown tend to occur.
			Poor English pronunciation	Students are unwilling to communicate using English because of fear of making English pronunciation errors.
				Students become unwilling to speak English due to the influence of their mother tongues in English pronunciation.
2.	Participants 1, 2, 4, 7, and 9	Non-linguistic problems	Psychological problems	Students become unwilling to communicate using English on account of improper emotional control.
				Students are unwilling to speak English in light of lack of self-esteem.
			Self-confidence	Students become unwilling to speak English due to low linguistic abilities leading to low self-confidence.
			Anxiety	Students are unwilling to communicate using English because of a high anxiety level.
				Students fear of making mistakes while speaking English in front of the class.

According to table 2, some main domains extending to lack of English vocabularies, poor grammatical competence, poor English pronunciation, psychological problems, self-confidence, and a high anxiety level represented the factors of UWTC in the classroom context. With respect to **lack of English vocabularies** as a factor of UWTC, participants 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9 expressed that they became unwilling to speak English due to having very few English vocabularies so

that this condition made them stuck in making their English communication on-going. Concerning **poor grammatical competence**, they explained that their UWTC was caused by their fear of making grammatical errors. This condition made them preoccupied with the grammar they used until they felt doubtful about how to utter their ideas in English. Some of them told that they had to repeat some English utterances during speaking just to make their own correction of grammatical errors. In a similar vain to grammar, they also explained that **English pronunciation** also became part of the contributing factor of UWTC. They found out that they feared of making pronunciation mistakes, and they were also afraid of using their mother tongue accents during English speaking. The foregoing condition led them to the inclination of being silent.

Associated with **psychological problems**, participants 1, 2, 4, 7, and 9 told that they become unwilling to communicate using English in light of poor emotional control. In so doing, they could not take control of their on-going English communication. Some of them expressed that they acted out nervously when speaking in front of the class or lecturer. Some participants also demonstrated that their psychological problems were connected to low self-esteem leading to their UWTC in English communication. Parts of the foregoing case were related to less preparation and low speaking abilities. The participants subsequently informed that they had low **self-confidence** in English speaking. In this case, it was imperative that the lecturer had to encourage students to become willing to speak English. When students got stuck, their WTC would naturally decrease. Thus, they would be silent. The other critical factor of UWTC was **anxiety**. It seemed to be the most challenging factor contributing to UWTC. The participants said that they feared of making mistakes while speaking English in front of the class. This condition lowered their speaking performance. They likely ended up with avoiding any staging of English communication.

Discussion

This study revealed some factors affecting English students' WTC and UWTC in the English classroom context. Concerning WTC factors, the coded data demonstrated some factors such as the classroom, teacher's supports, personality, and self-confidence. As a whole, such coded data are aligned with the factorial domains of WTC as proposed by Zeng (2010). With respect to the classroom factor,

this study depicted that a good learning environment and positive responses from interlocutors made students willing to communicate using English. This finding is confirmed by Elahi et al. (2016) pointing out that the extent to which interesting classroom environments are created determines the degree to which students are driven to willingly communicate. In terms of teacher's supports, the data demonstrated that qualified tasks, lecturer's interesting topics, and lecturer's facilitating role supported students' WTC. Addressing the teacher's role, Lee (2020) suggested that the English teacher should make efforts to provide English instructions that take account of conceivable domains contributing to students' interest in getting engaged into speaking activities. As regards personality, this study highlighted that students' WTC could be linked to high self-esteem, high confidence, internal motivation, and external motivation driven by peers. Personality to some extent relates to trait. This domain has been discussed by MacIntyre et al. (1998), one of the pioneers of WTC-related discourse. They explained that linguistic issues are not the only domain that determines one's WTC, but psychological issues such as the level of state and personal trait even likely become a more substantial determinant of WTC. In respect of self-confidence, the present study informed that students' self-confidence enhanced their speaking performances, leading to a good level of English WTC in the classroom. This set of finding is supported by Yashima, (2002) elucidating that self-confidence is of critical determinant of WTC.

The present study also uncovered some factors influencing students' UWTC. Those factors subsumed linguistic problems such as lack of English vocabularies, poor grammatical competence, and poor English pronunciation. Besides, there were also a number of non-linguistic factors such as psychological problems, low self-confidence, and anxiety. As a whole, the main factors of UWTC found in this study are aligned with the factorial domains of UWTC as explained by Richards (2008). Learning from Al-murtadha & Feryok's (2017) study, the case of UWTC should immediately be resolved since a high degree of students' UWTC consistently makes students silent. It is a teacher's or lecturer's roles to provide interesting English learning processes that could reduce the factors of UWTC. As to provide more information concerning the factors of UWTC, besides the factors revealed in the present study, Fukuta's (2018) study also informed other factors of UWTC such as uncooperative engagement into interactions and low social abilities.

The present study is limited to the use of a qualitative research method so that the data of the present study represent a set of contextual data which are affiliated with the participants' contexts as English students from the English department of State Islamic Institute of Curup. As the main principle of a qualitative study which is anchored in constructivist and naturalistic worldviews (Gall et al., 2003), the data of the present study could not be generalized to other contexts as realism-governed studies or quantitative studies commonly do. However, the researchers of the present study have strived to pursue the data's credibility as properly as possible by doing some techniques such as theoretical triangulation, prolonged and continuous interviews to reach consistent data, and member checking wherein the data of the present study have been confirmed and agreed upon by the participants. In so doing, the data of this study are considered ideally credible and sufficiently trustworthy.

Conclusion and Suggestion

The present study uncovers some factors influencing English students' WTC and UWTC in the classroom context. WTC factors subsume the classroom, teacher's supports, personality, and self-confidence. With respect to the classroom factor, students' WTC is supported by a good learning environment and positive responses from students' interlocutors. In terms of teacher's supports, Students' WTC is supported by lecturer's qualified tasks, lecturer's interesting topics, and lecturer's facilitating role. As regards personality, Students' WTC is linked to high self-esteem, high confidence, internal motivation, and external motivation driven by peers. In respect of self-confidence, students' WTC is supported by students' high self-confidence that contributes to the enhancement of their speaking performances, leading to a good level of English WTC in the classroom. Subsequently, the factors of students' UWTC comprise linguistic problems such as lack of English vocabularies, poor grammatical competence, and poor English pronunciation. Besides, there also some non-linguistic factors such as psychological problems, low self-confidence, and anxiety.

It is recommended that further studies be undertaken to probe into the factors of English students' WTC and UWTC in the classroom context by applying mixed method designs. By so doing, such studies can provide richer data which share both generalizable information and contextually in-depth information. Further

studies are also expected to involve more participants affiliated with their multiculturalism so that a range of cultural related factors of English WTC and UWTC can be uncovered in detail. Such studies will be of ideal references for Indonesian English educators in dealing with the issues related to the factors of WTC and UWTC in English within the context of Indonesian multicultural students.

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