

The Willingness to Communicate in English During Online Learning among Tertiary EFL Learner in Wuyishan City, China

Pingping Shi^{a,b,1}, Xiangjun He^{a,c}, Nurain BT Elias^a

^aUniversiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim, Malaysia, ^bWuyi University, Wuyishan, China, ^cHunan University of Technology and Business, Changsha, China

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i1/15775>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i1/15775

Published Online: 13 January 2023

Abstract

To create willingness to communicate (WTC) is considered as the ultimate goal of second or foreign language education (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Many previous studies explored the relationship between WTC and different variables in physical class. However, scant researches focus on the WTC under online class situation. This research aims to find out the Chinese tertiary learners' WTC during online English class, and predict the influencing factors and correlated variables. This quantitative study mainly uses a quantitative method composed of a survey with questionnaires and a semi-structured interview. The survey involves 104 participants, and of which 13 participants are engaged in the semi-structured interview 13 participants. The results shows that tertiary learners' WTC in English online class is comparatively high, and the WTC of females was slightly higher than that of males while older students had a slightly higher WTC. Furthermore, students of high English proficiency had higher levels of WTC than those of low proficiency. Last, the correlation between Dyad and the willingness to communicate was the strongest. Students tend to communicate more in dyad. Besides, acquaintance had the strongest correlation with WTC. Learners are more willing to talk with acquaintances than with teachers. This study is a preliminary investigation on online class WTC, future research may try qualitative or mixed method to explore WTC in reading, writing, and listening.

Keywords: Willingness to Communicate, Online Class, Context-Type, Receiver-Type, Chinese Tertiary Learners

Introduction

Background

With economic globalization and cultural diversification, English as the universal language of the world plays an irreplaceable role in international communication. The importance of English in international communication is self-evident, for most of international trades, political conferences, and cultural exchanges etc. use English as the language media (Crystal, 2003 as cited in Han, 2021; Sharifian, 2009). In most Chinese primary schools, students are obliged to learn English from the 3th grade (MOE, 2001). However, in primary and secondary school, under the exam-oriented education, students are deeply influenced by the emphasis

on English reading and writing skills, but neglecting listening and speaking. Some students only pay attention to reciting vocabulary and doing grammatical drills (Wen, 2012; Han, 2021). When they come to colleges and universities, it is difficult for them to convert their learning strategies to more practical ones.

How to enhance English communicative competence of Chinese tertiary learners has become one of the top concerns for college English teachers in China. In the *College English Curriculum Requirements*, it emphasizes “the importance of cultivating students’ English comprehensive application skills, especially listening and speaking skills, which will enable them to communicate effectively in English in their future learning, working and social communication” (HED, 2007 as cited in Shi, 2014). However, the traditional education model is based on the core of the teacher’s teaching. It can neither effectively exercise the students’ ability to use English, nor can it cultivate the students’ critical thinking (Zhu & Yan, 2005). Hence, teachers are supposed to change their own roles in the process of English education and teaching, breaking the shackles of traditional education concepts (Adnan et al, 2019), actively innovating teaching methods, and carrying out education and teaching work based on students’ practice and learning, so as to help students learn useful English and improve their English communicative competence (Sun, 2018).

Problem Statement

It has been widely acknowledged that communication is a key function of language, which is even considered as the essential part of learning a second / foreign language (MacIntyre et al., 2001). However, among the environment of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in China, most Chinese learners have fewer opportunities to speak English in their daily life. After years of studying English in school, most of them can read and write well in various tests, but still feel hard to open their mouth to speak English, which is called “dumb English” or “silent English” phenomenon (Zhao & Zhang, 2009; Wang, 2000). The reasons for this phenomenon are included:

First, in traditional Chinese culture, teachers are upheld as the authority, and students should respect them and listen to their instruction (Wang, 2002). Due to the teacher-centered instruction, students are used to listening carefully and answering questions, but not willing to initiate communication. Second, National College Entrance Examination has a high determination status in Chinese learners’ study and career, but in which oral English is not required except for English major. For the exam-oriented education system in China, most students tend to focus on only what will be assessed in examinations but they are not willing to develop actual communicative competence when learning a foreign language (Wen, 2012 as cited in Han, 2021; Huang & Pan, 2011). Last but not least, there are few opportunities for students to apply what they’ve learned in English class in their daily life (Zhao & Zhang, 2009). Though, there are more and more foreigners come to China, learners have few chances to speak English with foreigners in their daily life, especially in most cities and towns (Huang & Pan, 2011). As their oral communicative competence is not well developed, students’ willingness to communicate (WTC) are apparently influenced. Since English class is the most probable occasion where students speak English, it is important to know what factors in class can arouse students’ WTC in a foreign language (L2 WTC).

Nowadays, online classes have been prevailed in particular during the pandemic. Since the end of 2019, a sudden outbreak of Covid-19 has changed the way of life across the country,

and also changed teaching methods of university, middle and primary schools all over the country. Most students' classes had to be conducted online rather than campus. It is a new way to teach and a new challenge to take up for teachers (Liu, 2020). *The Guide to College English Teaching* (2020 edition) points out that in modern society, foreign language education needs the aid of information technology. Especially in the 21st century, multimedia, virtual reality and artificial intelligence etc. have been widely applied in our life, which spread to education field as well (Ruan & Zhan, 2021). It is vital for English teachers to investigate into the students' attitude towards online classes. Some instructors reflect that students are less willing to talk in the online classes and the interactive activities are limited because of the distance (Chen, 2021). While others argue that the less social exposure way could stimulate more introverted learners to open their mouth (Albakri et al., 2021). It is a paradox need to be verified by empirical study.

Research Purpose

Based on the analysis of the problem above, one of the root causes of "dumb English" is the learners have low willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. There have been abundant studies both domestic and abroad working on the relationship between different variables (motivation, anxiety, confidence etc.) and WTC, but few focuses on the context of online learning. This research aims to find out the Chinese tertiary learners' WTC during online English class, and predict the influencing factors.

Research Objectives

The research objectives in the study are as follows:

- a. To find out the WTC in English of Chinese EFL learners during online class;
- b. To understand how learners' WTC varies with demographic variables;
- c. To figure out how the different contexts and types of receivers correlated with learners' WTC.

Research Questions

According to the objectives, research questions emerge as well:

- a. How is Chinese EFL learners' WTC during online class?
- b. Which demographic variables influence learners' L2WTC ?
- c. How is learners' WTC correlated with different contexts and receiver-types?

Significance

This study has several significance. First of all, it would assist EFL practitioners in language teaching and learning. By knowing what the relationship between the variables and the WTC, EFL teachers will be able to guide their students to enhance their WTC in English, hence to improve their way of teaching. It would provide reference and theoretical help for the design of teachers' teaching process. Second, most of the studies about WTC are conducted theoretically from the perspective of relationship between different variables and WTC in physical class, but fewer focus on the online learning situation. The present study will fill in the gap based on previous research. Third, this study would also benefit the educational policy makers and textbook publishers. It provides a better understanding on the WTC in online language learning.

Literature Review

Online Learning

Khan proposed in 1997 that online learning is an innovative method of delivering teaching to distance learners using the Internet as a medium (Yang, 2021). Carliner in 1999 proposed that online learning is learning materials presented on a computer. The Ministry of Education of the U.S. proposed in the *White Paper on Educational Technology* in 2000 that online learning are described as education and related services through the Internet. It is a crucial way to improve students' critical thinking and analytical skills. It is a kind of educated method which changes teachers' center-status in class (Adnan et al., 2021), and alters the purpose and function of classroom teaching, still it will not replace traditional classroom teaching in school. Based on analyzing the development of online learning in the United States in the past, Yan Kong (2010) proposed that the so-called online learning is a brand-new learning method based on the Internet.

Rong (2019), on the basis of exploring online learning investment promotion strategies, defines online learning as: online learning refers to schools and teachers in an organizational form with clear teaching goals and teaching plans, according to the curriculum syllabus and curriculum standards, organize students to learn online course resources through the Internet platform. Students participate in online course discussions and interactions, and complete assignments and corresponding tests assigned by teachers. Wang et al (2020) pointed out in the study of online learning user behavior that online learning is a teaching information system based on the mobile Internet, in which teachers teach through online classrooms and students learn through terminals. Up to now, online learning has not formed a unified concept in both academia and practice. Generally, it is often alternated with online education, internet learning, mobile learning, internet education, virtual education, distance education, open education and other education-related vocabulary.

Although there is no unified definition, through the understanding of the above vocabulary, the following consensus has been reached on the characteristics of online learning: Compared with traditional classroom education, online learning achieves the separation of time and space between teachers and students; compared with self-study mode, education institutions have a certain impact on learners through the Internet. Students and teachers can communicate in multiple directions based on the Internet.

In summary, combined with the previous views on online learning and the research purpose of this study, this research defines online learning as: online learning means that under the support of modern advanced information technology, students conduct a long-distance learning behavior to complete a series of learning tasks in the learning environment of rich learning resources and an unique interactive experience. It is a new, non-contact learning mode with students-oriented and teachers as the assistance.

Willingness to Communicate

"Willingness to communicate (WTC) has been defined as the intention to initiate communication, given a choice" (MacIntyre et al., 2001). It was firstly proposed by Burgoon (1976) to measure the individual differences in native language (L1) communication as "unwillingness to communicate". McCroskey and Richmond (1982) developed it into "shyness", then McCroskey and Baer (1985) transformed it into positive orientation and

designed a scale to measure WTC in 4 communication contexts and with 3 receiver types. They concluded that “an individual’s WTC in one context or with one receiver type is highly related to her/his WTC in other contexts and with other receiver types”, which was still built on the assumption that WTC is a personality-based and trait-like predisposition.

MacIntyre and Charos (1996) applied the L1 model to the second language (L2) communication. However, MacIntyre et al (1998) considered L2 WTC as not a simple manifestation of L1 WTC and proposed a heuristic model of pyramid-shaped, which contains six layers of different variables. We can see from the figure 1 that layer I, II and III are factors that vary with specific situations, which are more changeable than the rest three layers. Layer IV, V, and VI are more stable and enduring variables referring to motivational propensities, affective-cognitive context, and social and individual context. This research will probe into Layer III of situated antecedents, particularly in the situation of online English class.

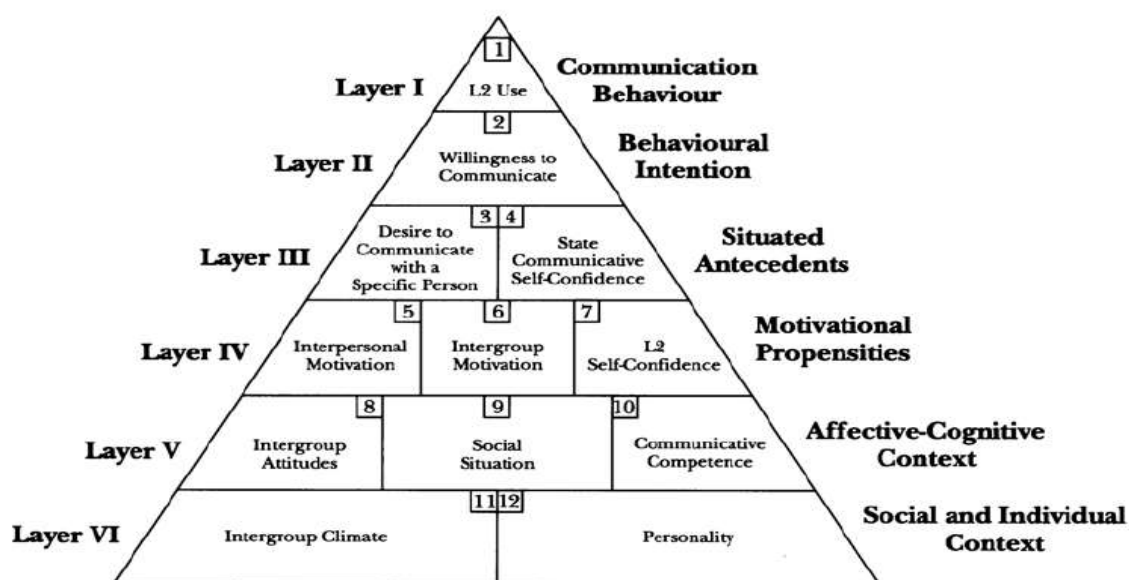


Figure 1 Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998)

Methodology

The present research used quantitative methods to find out the general level of Chinese tertiary students' WTC in English in online class. Questionnaires and interviews were both applied in the survey, which were conducted in the middle of the first semester of 2021-2022 in a local public university in Wuyishan city, Fujian Province, China.

Sampling

Samples were selected by the purposeful method. It involved about 104 participants (25% males, $n=26$; 75% female, $n=78$) of first-year and second-year undergraduates from a public university in Wuyishan city of Fujian province in China. The ages of the respondents ranged from 17 to 24, in which 94.23% ($n=98$) of the learners were 18-20. 77.88% ($n=81$) of them had been learning English as a foreign language for more than 10 years, 20.19% ($n=21$) more than 6 years, only 1.92% ($n=2$) started learning English in college. However, they all have participated in the online English class because of the pandemic. Prior to the survey, the

researchers had got the consent from both the administration department of the university and all participants.

Instrument

To capture China students' WTC, the survey utilized an adapted questionnaire and a semi-structure interview. 30 items from the questionnaire of Hua's (2013) Ph.D thesis -- which was adapted from MacIntyre et al (2003); Xin (2006) -- were modified according to contexts and receivers according to (McCroskey and Baer, 1985). Therefore, the present survey measured learners' WTC in terms of three communication contexts (Dyad, group and public speaking) and three types of receivers (teachers, acquaintances and friends). These items were used to understand respondents' L2 WTC during the online class. A 5-point Likert scale (from 1, "Never willing" to 5, "always willing") was designed as the main instrument. Then, a semi-structure interview with 10 items was conducted after the analysis of questionnaire, focusing on the learners of 3 different levels (low WTC, medium WTC and high WTC).

The researchers used SPSS.26 to test the reliability and validity. The reliability test result shows in Table 1 that the Cronbach Alpha coefficient value is $0.987 > 0.95$, indicating that the reliability of the questionnaire is very good. The KMO value obtained by the validity test result is $0.952 > 0.950$, and the chi-square value obtained by the Bartlett sphericity test is 6500.043, a larger value, with a $P\ 0.000 < 0.01$, which indicates that it has passed the significance test, meaning the data is very credible and highly valid. Moreover, Table 2 & 3 shows the reliability and validity respectively in different contexts and different receivers, which are all in high scale. Therefore, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire are both high enough in different situations and can be used for subsequent analysis.

Table 1

Validity & Reliability of All Items

Reliability	Validity	Bartlett sphericity test	
		Chi-square value	P
0.987	0.952	6500.043	0.000

Table 2

Validity & Reliability of Different Contexts

No.	Communicative contexts	No. Item	Total Item	Cronbach's α	KMO
P	Public speaking	10.1-10.11	11	0.954	0.858
G	Group discussion	11.1-11.8	8	0.976	0.716
D	Dyad	12.1-12.11	11	0.968	0.848
Total		30	30	0.987	0.952

Table 3

Validity & Reliability of Different Receivers

No.	Different receivers	No. Item	Total Item	Cronbach's α	KMO
T	Teacher	10.5, 10.8, 10.9, 10.10, 10.11, 12.1, 12.2, 12.3	8	0.945	0.850
F	Friend	10.6, 11.1, 11.3, 11.5, 11.7, 12.4, 12.6, 12.8, 12.10	9	0.970	0.919
A	Acquaintance	10.7, 11.2, 11.4, 11.6, 11.8, 12.5, 12.7, 12.9, 12.11	9	0.968	0.880
Total		26	26	0.839	0.984

Research Procedure

This research mainly includes 4 procedures. The first step is to introduce the research background, put forward research questions, and point out the significance of the research. The second step is to define the concept, literature review and theoretical basis. The third step is to collect a large amount of data by compiling, improving and administering questionnaires, using SPSS to organize and analyze, assisting the interview method.

Specifically, after getting the consent from both the administration department of the university and all participants, the questionnaire was distributed through internet. English teachers shared the link of online questionnaire and announced the purpose as well as the requirements. Notifications were clarified to the participants that all responds were anonymous and would not influence their assessments at the university. Afterwards, the researchers used SPSS 26.0 to make a descriptive analysis of the current situation of tertiary learners' WTC in online learning. Correlation analysis were carried out from 2 aspects from communication contexts to receivers. After analyzing result of statistics, the first author conducted a semi-structure interview with participants of highest, medium and low scores in the questionnaire.

In the fourth step, according to the investigation and analysis of the current situation and influencing factors of undergraduate students' WTC in online class, further targeted improvement suggestions are put forward. The fifth step is to draw conclusions and put forward research prospects.

Data Collection and Analysis

The first author reported to the administrator of the department and got approval to conduct the research before collecting the data. The questionnaire was distributed through internet. The first author shared the link of the questionnaire with her colleagues (College English teachers) and asked them to share the link with their students while clarifying the purpose of the research in Chinese (national language). Students were allowed to ask questions by emailing to the first author. The questionnaire took almost 15 minutes to finish. All participants were required to complete the questionnaire within 3 days. 1 week after collecting data of questionnaire, the semi-structural interview was conducted with the 13

participants, including 3 of the highest score, 5 of the medium score, and 5 of the lowest score.

The researchers used SPSS 26. to analyze the statistics of the questionnaire, and cross-analysis was adopted to describe how the demographic elements reflect in different contexts and different receivers. Then, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between L2WTC and 3 contexts, as well as the correlation between L2WTC and 3 receivers. The summary of the interview was stated to confirm the previous analysis.

Result

Cross-analysis of gender, age, and different contexts

Through the cross-analysis of gender and age with the three contexts of Public speaking, Group discussion, and Dyad, the results are as follows in Table 4. Generally speaking, most students chose “willing half of the time” in all the three contexts of Public speaking, Group discussion, and Dyad. In the aspect of gender, the WTC of females was slightly higher than that of males. Moreover, in this survey, there were no students aged 25 and above, and most of them in different age groups chose “willing half of the time” in the three contexts. Older students had a slightly higher willingness to communicate. To sum up, students had the highest willingness in group discussion, followed by Dyad, and finally Public speaking.

Table 4

Cross-analysis of gender, age, and different contexts

Contexts/Rate & Mean		Gender				Age					
		male		female		17 and younger		18-20		21-24	
		Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean
Public speaking	Never willing	0.0%	3.19	1.3%	3.26	0.0%	3.00	1.0%	3.23	0.0%	3.40
	Sometimes willing	19.2%		12.8%		0.0%		15.3%		0.0%	
	Willing half of the time	53.8%		56.4%		100.0%		54.1%		80.0%	
	Usually willing	15.4%		17.9%		0.0%		18.4%		0.0%	
	Always willing	11.5%		11.5%		0.0%		11.2%		20.0%	
Group discussion	Never willing	3.8%	3.15	2.6%	3.44	0.0%	3.00	3.1%	3.37	0.0%	3.40
	Sometimes willing	23.1%		6.4%		0.0%		11.2%		0.0%	
	Willing half of the time	38.5%		51.3%		100.0%		46.9%		60.0%	
	Usually willing	23.1%		24.4%		0.0%		23.5%		40.0%	
	Always willing	11.5%		15.4%		0.0%		15.3%		0.0%	
Dyad	Never willing	0.0%	3.15	2.6%	3.35	0.0%	3.00	2.0%	3.30	0.0%	3.40
	Sometimes willing	19.2%		3.8%		0.0%		8.2%		0.0%	
	Willing half of the time	50.0%		60.3%		100.0%		57.1%		60.0%	
	Usually willing	26.9%		23.1%		0.0%		23.5%		40.0%	
	Always willing	3.8%		10.3%		0.0%		9.2%		0.0%	

Cross analysis of major, grade, English level, and different contexts

Through the cross-analysis of major, grade, and English level with the three contexts of Public speaking, Group discussion, and Dyad, the results are as follows in Table 5. Most students of different majors chose “willing half of the time” in the three contexts of Public speaking, Group discussion, and Dyad, and engineering students had a slightly higher WTC than liberal arts and science students. However, engineering majors only took up 10.58% (11 students) of the participants, which may not be representative enough. More than half of students in different grades had a neutral attitude (chose “willing half of the time”) toward the three contexts of Public speaking, Group discussion, and Dyad, and sophomores were comparative more willing than freshmen.

In the survey, only freshmen and sophomore were involved, among whom only 5.77% (6 students) have passed the CET-4 and no one has passed the CET-6, because freshmen were not admitted to register CET-4 unless they had got high score more than 85 on College English Course in the first semester. Additionally, the survey was conducted in the middle of the first semester, when the freshman hadn't started the final exam, and the sophomore hadn't started taking CET-4. Roughly, students who had not passed the CET Band 4 & Band 6 had a neutral attitude towards the three contexts, while 65% of the students who had passed the CET-4 had a higher WTC in the three contexts. That is, students of high English proficiency had higher levels of WTC than those of low proficiency. In general, students had the highest willingness in group discussion, followed by Dyad, and finally Public speaking.

Table 5

Cross analysis of major, grade, English level, and different contexts

Contexts/Rate & Mean		Major						Grade				English Level			
		liberal arts		science		Engineering		first		second		not pass CET-4&6		pass CET-4	
		Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean
Public speaking	Never willing	2.0%	3.10	0.0%	3.27	0.0%	3.73	2.1%	3.17	0.0%	3.30	1.0%	3.18	0.0%	4.17
	Sometimes willing	20.4%		11.4%		0.0%		14.6%		14.3%		15.3%		0.0%	
	Willing half of the time	55.1%		59.1%		45.5%		56.3%		55.4%		57.1%		33.3%	
	Usually willing	10.2%		20.5%		36.4%		18.8%		16.1%		17.3%		16.7%	
	Always willing	12.2%		9.1%		18.2%		8.3%		14.3%		9.2%		50.0%	
Group discussion	Never willing	4.1%	3.20	2.3%	3.45	0.0%	3.73	4.2%	3.31	1.8%	3.41	3.1%	3.31	0.0%	4.33
	Sometimes willing	18.4%		4.5%		0.0%		8.3%		12.5%		11.2%		0.0%	
	Willing half of the time	44.9%		52.3%		45.5%		52.1%		44.6%		50.0%		16.7%	
	Usually willing	18.4%		27.3%		36.4%		22.9%		25.0%		23.5%		33.3%	
	Always willing	14.3%		13.6%		18.2%		12.5%		16.1%		12.2%		50.0%	
Dyad	Never willing	4.1%	3.24	0.0%	3.27	0.0%	3.64	4.2%	3.23	0.0%	3.36	2.0%	3.24	0.0%	4.17
	Sometimes willing	8.2%		9.1%		0.0%		4.2%		10.7%		8.2%		0.0%	
	Willing half of the time	57.1%		61.4%		45.5%		64.6%		51.8%		60.2%		16.7%	
	Usually willing	20.4%		22.7%		45.5%		18.8%		28.6%		22.4%		50.0%	
	Always willing	10.2%		6.8%		9.1%		8.3%		8.9%		7.1%		33.3%	

Cross analysis of gender, age, and different receivers

Through the cross analysis of gender and age with the three receivers of Teacher, Friend and Acquaintance, the results are as follows in Table 6. Among them, most of the students of

different genders and age groups had a neutral attitude towards the three receivers, and the willingness of females was higher than that of males. Both men and women were more willing to communicate with good friends in English, and older people were more willing to communicate with teachers. In general, students have the highest willingness with Friend, followed by Acquaintance, and Teacher.

Table 6

Cross analysis of gender, age and different receivers

Receivers/Rate & Mean		Gender				Age					
		male		female		17 and younger		18-20		21-24	
		Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean
Teacher	Never willing	0.0%	3.19	2.6%	3.28	0.0%	3.00	2.0%	3.24	0.0%	3.60
	Sometimes willing	19.2%		7.7%		0.0%		11.2%		0.0%	
	Willing half of the time	53.8%		59.0%		100.0%		57.1%		60.0%	
	Usually willing	15.4%		20.5%		0.0%		19.4%		20.0%	
	Always willing	11.5%		10.3%		0.0%		10.2%		20.0%	
Friend	Never willing	0.0%	3.31	2.6%	3.38	0.0%	3.00	2.0%	3.38	20.0%	3.20
	Sometimes willing	15.4%		5.1%		0.0%		8.2%		0.0%	
	Willing half of the time	50.0%		59.0%		100.0%		55.1%		80.0%	
	Usually willing	23.1%		17.9%		0.0%		19.4%		20.0%	
	Always willing	11.5%		15.4%		0.0%		15.3%		0.0%	
Acquaintance	Never willing	0.0%	3.15	2.6%	3.29	0.0%	3.00	2.0%	3.27	0.0%	3.20
	Sometimes willing	23.1%		6.4%		0.0%		11.2%		0.0%	
	Willing half of the time	46.2%		61.5%		100.0%		56.1%		80.0%	
	Usually willing	23.1%		17.9%		0.0%		19.4%		20.0%	
	Always willing	7.7%		11.5%		0.0%		11.2%		0.0%	

Cross analysis of major, grade, English level, and different receivers

Cross-analyzing the three receivers through major, grade, and English level, the results are shown in the Table 7 below. Firstly, most students of different majors and grades chose “willing half of the time” with the three receivers of Teacher, Friend, and Acquaintance. Students of liberal arts and sciences were more willing to communicate with good friends, and students of engineering were more willing to communicate with classmates. Secondly,

freshmen and sophomores both preferred to communicate with good friends, and sophomores' WTC with the three receivers were all much higher than that of freshmen. Thirdly, students with different English levels had very different WTC. Approximately 60% of the students who had not passed the CET Band 4 & 6 chose "willing half of the time". 65% of students who had passed the fourth level had higher WTC with all the three receivers, and they were also comparatively willing to talk with friends. That is, the higher English level they had, the more willing to talk with their teachers. In general, students had the highest willingness to communicate with Friends, followed by Acquaintances, and Teachers.

Table 7

Cross analysis of major, grade, English level, and different receivers

Receivers/Rate & Mean		Major						Grade				English Level			
		liberal arts		science		Engineering		first		second		not pass CET-4&6		pass CET-4	
		Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean	Rate	Mean
Teacher	Never willing	4.1 %	3.16	0.0 %	3.27	0.0 %	3.64	4.2 %	3.15	0.0 %	3.36	2.0 %	3.19	0.0 %	4.33
	Sometimes willing	14.3 %		9.1 %		0.0 %		8.3 %		12.5 %		11.2 %		0.0 %	
	Willing half of the time	53.1 %		63.6 %		54.5 %		62.5 %		53.6 %		60.2 %		16.7 %	
	Usually willing	18.4 %		18.2 %		27.3 %		18.8 %		19.6 %		18.4 %		33.3 %	
	Always willing	10.2 %		9.1 %		18.2 %		6.3 %		14.3 %		8.2 %		50.0 %	
Friend	Never willing	4.1 %	3.27	0.0 %	3.41	0.0 %	3.64	4.2 %	3.27	0.0 %	3.45	2.0 %	3.31	0.0 %	4.33
	Sometimes willing	12.2 %		4.5 %		0.0 %		4.2 %		10.7 %		8.2 %		0.0 %	
	Willing half of the time	51.0 %		63.6 %		54.5 %		64.6 %		50.0 %		59.2 %		16.7 %	
	Usually willing	18.4 %		18.2 %		27.3 %		14.6 %		23.2 %		18.4 %		33.3 %	
	Always willing	14.3 %		13.6 %		18.2 %		12.5 %		16.1 %		12.2 %		50.0 %	
Acquaintance	Never willing	4.1 %	3.16	0.0 %	3.27	0.0 %	3.64	4.2 %	3.21	0.0 %	3.30	2.0 %	3.21	0.0 %	4.00
	Sometimes willing	14.3 %		9.1 %		0.0 %		6.3 %		14.3 %		11.2 %		0.0 %	
	Willing half of the time	55.1 %		63.6 %		45.5 %		64.6 %		51.8 %		59.2 %		33.3 %	
	Usually willing	14.3 %		18.2 %		45.5 %		14.6 %		23.2 %		18.4 %		33.3 %	
	Always willing	12.2 %		9.1 %		9.1 %		10.4 %		10.7 %		9.2 %		33.3 %	

Correlated Analysis

The correlation analysis between the three contexts and the three receivers was carried out through SPSS, and the analysis results are shown in the following Table 8 & 9.

(1) Correlation analysis between willingness to communicate and different contexts

Through the correlation analysis of the willingness to communicate with different contexts, it was found that the positive correlation between the three was strong. The correlation between Dyad and the willingness to communicate was the strongest, with a correlation coefficient of 0.937, which was much higher than the willingness to communicate and Public speaking, Group discussion on the relevance of these two contexts.

Table 8

Pearson's correlation coefficient between willingness to communicate and different dimensions

Variable/correlation coefficient	Public speaking	Group discussion	Dyad
WTC	0.848**	0.847**	0.937**

(2) Correlation analysis between willingness to communicate and different receivers

Through the correlation analysis of the willingness to communicate with different receivers, it was found that the positive correlation between the three was strong. Among them, Acquaintance had the strongest correlation with WTC, and its correlation coefficient was 0.926, which was slightly higher than that of Friend & Teacher.

Table 9

Pearson's correlation coefficient between WTC and different receivers

Variable/correlation coefficient	Teacher	Friend	Acquaintance
WTC	0.872**	0.881**	0.926**

Summary of Interview Result

For the interview participants, they were 13 students from different classes of four majors of Tourism Management, Mathematics and Applied Mathematics, Network of Things Engineering, and International Trade. Most of the students started learning English since grade three in primary school. From the interview, English learning in China was exam-oriented in which vocabulary mattered a lot. The students spent more time in practicing written English instead spoken English. They cared about examination, because the result of exams was related to their English level and it could even affect their motivation and confidence in speaking English.

Although students felt difficult in speaking English, they still had confidence if they have more practice and training, interactive communication, and better environment. Some activities including watching English movies as well as participating in English plays, dramas, English corner activities could help them to improve English speaking. The students were more willing to group work and pair work than public speaking in English. The easy atmosphere helped them psychologically relaxed without anxiety and worry.

Most interviewees argued that the age was not only the decisive elements to influence the willingness to speak English while demand and interest were crucial. And they thought the communication receivers depended on their learning goal, whether they could get external help or improve their English level. They may choose different objects due to familiarity. Interestingly, if they had problems, students usually chose not to ask teachers. This could be related to teachers' authority in China. But students nowadays preferred to do the self-study using the internet before they seeking help from teachers. Teachers still played an important role in the class, and what teachers said or did would influence students' willingness and motivation to speak English. Students trusted teachers in terms of their experience, knowledge, and pronunciation.

To infer from the above, students hoped that firstly, teachers had to be the facilitator and design in-class and after-class activities to make students practice speaking English. Secondly,

teachers should understand students' English level, pointing out their mistakes with feedback and assistance. Thirdly, good learning atmosphere was important, the psychological distance between teachers and students needed to be eliminated to draw their relationship closer.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

WTC fluctuates a lot over time and in different contexts (MacIntyre et al., 1998). This study aimed to look at the WTC of tertiary EFL learners in Wuyishan City during online learning in certain contexts and with different receivers. Cross-analysis and correlation were used to examine the results of the survey. WTC correlation study in various contexts yielded a high correlation coefficient for dyad conversation (0.937), public speaking (0.848), and group discussion (0.847). Furthermore, the strong positive correlation coefficient between acquaintance (0.926), Teacher (0.872), and Friend (0.881) was calculated using WTC correlation analysis with different receivers. Gender and age with three contexts; major, grade, and English level with three contexts; gender and age with three types of receiver; and major, grade, and English level with three types of receiver are the four cross-analyses conducted in the study. In both contexts and receivers, the WTC of older individuals and females is higher. To summarize, students are most willing to participate in group discussions, followed by Dyad discussions, and finally public speaking. In general, pupils are most eager to communicate with a friend, next acquaintance, and finally teacher.

Despite of their L2WTC, the interview results suggested that students spent more time studying writing English than spoken English as a result of the examination, which was affecting their motivation to speak English. Similarly, if they had more practise and training, interactive communication, and a better setting, they would still have confidence, and they would prefer group and pair work to public speaking in English.

In the current study, there was comparatively difference in the receiver-type ground among the majority of China students. According to a research by MacIntyre et al (1998), the topic spoken, the amount of acquaintance among communicators, the situation related, the person presented in the communication, and the speaker's evaluation point could all influence one's WTC. Moreover, McCroskey and Bear (1985) argued that a person's WTC can be influenced by a variety of circumstances, including the recognition of audiences. Additionally, MacIntyre et al (2001) claimed that the audience had a significant impact on the individual's performance. This research proved that Chinese tertiary students demonstrated speaking in front of a familiar audience could help them improve their WTC in English, which supported Mari's (2011) findings that familiarity with receiver-type influences learners' propensity to communicate.

Pedagogical Implication

The anonymous outcome of this study focuses on students' desire to communicate in three contexts (group discussion, public speaking dyad interaction) and receivers (teacher, friends, acquaintance). In general, students who wanted to speak followed the teacher's activities in three scenarios, although spontaneous communication is difficult in China since English is taught as a foreign language. Students are demotivated since they must concentrate more on writing than speaking in order to earn a decent English grade. Because the respondents are tertiary students from a single university in Wuyishan, China, the results cannot be applied to

all colleges of China. EFL teachers can help students enhance their WTC in English and thus innovate online education as long as they master the relationship between WTC and context, receiver type. It would serve as a source of information and theoretical support for teachers as they build their teaching methods. The majority of WTC research is theoretical, however this study focuses on student responses in an online learning environment.

Conclusion

It should be noted that the current study used a quantitative research design to describe the WTC of Chinese students in Wuyishan. Data was collected using a online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to have an insight of WTC among Chinese learners. The data suggests that the WTC of Chinese tertiary students is comparatively high, and that comfort in context-type and familiarity with receiver-type influences their WTC. These findings indicate that language teachers use a variety of instructional methods could improve WTC in English among tertiary students. English should be taught as a language rather than a subject in China. Teachers should aim to enhance Chinese students' WTC, given that more facilitating variables can lead to a higher degree of WTC. Future research ideas include using qualitative or mixed method research designs are expected in China context, as well as investigating WTC in reading, writing, and listening abilities.

References

- Adnan, A. H. M., Karim, R. A., Shah, D. S. M., Tahir, M. H. M., & Ya Shak, M. S. (2021) Higher Education 4.0 Technologies: Survey of Immersive, Interactive Content Development and Materials Deployment Within A Developing Nation Journal of Physics: Conference Series. 1793 012002
- Adnan, A. H. M., Karim, R. A., Tahir, M. H. M., Kamal, N. N. M., Yusof, A. M. (2019). Education 4.0 Technologies, Industry 4.0 Skills and the Teaching of English in Malaysian Tertiary Education. Arab World English Journal, 10 (4), 330-343.
- Albakri, I. S. M. A., Ismail, N., Hartono, R., Tahir, M. H. M., Abdullah, M. S. H. B., Sarudin, A., & Zulkepli, N. (2021). Mentoring practise during practicum: The perspectives of Malaysian pre-service English language teachers. Studies in English Language and Education, 8(2), 642-655.
- Burgoon, J. K. (1976). The unwillingness-to-communicate scales: Development and validation. Communication Monographs (43): 60-69.
- Chen, H. J. (2021) A Study of Teachers' Online Classroom Management for Students of Different Ages -- The Case of "51kid" Teaching Platform. Master Thesis from Beijing Foreign Studies University
- Crystal, D. (2003). English as a global language (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Fan, R. (2019). zaixian xuexi touru tisheng celue yanjiu [Research on strategies for improving online learning engagement] Master Thesis from Northwest Normal University
- Han, F. (2021). The Relations Between Motivation, Strategy Use, Frequency, and Proficiency in Foreign Language Reading: An Investigation With University English Language Learners in China. SAGE Open. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211008423>
- Han, F. (2021). The Relations Between Motivation, Strategy Use, Frequency, and Proficiency in Foreign Language Reading: An Investigation With University English Language Learners in China. SAGE Open. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211008423>
- Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education. (2007). College English Curriculum Requirements. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

- Huang, Z. C., & Pan, J. P. (2011). Zhong Ri Han sanguo “yaba yingyu” jiaoyu zhuangkuang de yinsu fenxi [The Factor Analysis on the “Dumb English” Education Problem in China, Japan and Korea]. *Studies in Foreign Education* (08),5-8. doi:CNKI:SUN:WGJY.0.2011-08-003.
- Kong, Y. (2010). meiguo K12 zaixian xuexi fazhan yanjiu [Research on U.S. K12 Online Learning Development] Master Thesis from Qufu Normal University
- Liu, L. (2020). “xinguan yiqing” beijingxia daxue yingyu kecheng xianshang jiaoxue xuexi celue diaocha [The Investigation on Learning Strategies of College English under the Background of “Novel Coronavirus Epidemic”]. *Journal of Tonghua Normal University* 41(4): 93-99
- MacIntyre, P. D., Baker, S. C., Clement, R., & Conrod, S. (2001). Willingness To Communicate, Social Support, and Language Learning Orientations of Immersion Students. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 23(3), 369–388.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Dornyei, Z., Clément, R., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal* 82(4), 545-562.
- McCroskey, J. C., & Baer, J. E. (1985). Willingness to Communicate The Construct and Its Measurement.
- Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China. (2001). Guiding Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Actively Promoting the Opening of English Courses in Primary Schools.
- Ruan, X. L., & Zhan, Q. W. (2021). hunheshi xuexi shiyuxia de daxue yingyu “xianshang + xianxia” kecheng jiangou xingdong yanjiu [An Action Research on the Blended Teaching Model for College English Course]. *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education* 201(5): 15, 101-106.
- Sharifian, F. (2009). English As an International Language: Perspectives and Pedagogical Issues. *Multilingual Matters*.
- Shi, W. (2014). Jiaoji yiyuan qifaxia de daxue yingyu kouyu jiaoxue tanjiu [The Study on Teaching of College Oral English Inspired by Willingness to Communicate]. *Overseas English* 258(1): 62-63.
- Sun, X. D. (2018). Yingyu kecheng de jiazhi tixi yu yingyu jiaoxue fazhan -- ping “daxue yingyu kecheng jiaoxue yaoqiu” [Value System of English Course And Development of English Education -- Review of College English Curriculum Requirements]. *Journalism Lover* (02):112.
- Wang, D. W. (2000). Guanyu “yaba yingyu” de wujie qiyin ji duice [The Misunderstanding, Causes and Solutions of “Silent English”]. *Journal of Tianjin Foreign Studies University*. (01),10-16. doi:CNKI:SUN:TJWG.0.2000-01-003.
- Wang, J. Y., Niu, X. R., Wan, L. (2020). jiyu yuanfenxi de zaixian xuexi yonghu shiyong xingwei yanjiu [Research on User Behavior of Online Learning Based on Meta-analysis] *Journal of Modern Information* 40(1):58~68.
- Wang, S. R. (2002). Guanyu quanmian jiaqiang zhongguo yingyu jiaoyu de sikao [Views and Thoughts on Comprehensive Methods of Strengthening China’s English Education]. *Foreign Language Education* (02),89-92. doi:CNKI:SUN:TEAC.0.2002-02-018.
- Wen, Q. (2012). Teaching English as an international language in Mainland China. In Sussex, A. K. R. (Ed.), *English as an international language in Asia: Implications for language education* (pp. 79–93). Springer.

- Yang, C. (2021) daxuesheng zaixian xuexi tourudu yanjiu [Research on College Students' online Learning Engagement -- Taking H Province as an Example] Master Thesis from Harbin Normal University
- Zhao, B., & Zhang, Q. F. (2009). "Yaba yingyu"de chengyin ji duice yanjiu [Analysis of the Causes of "Dumb English"and Its Solutions]. Journal of Statistics (03),63-66. doi:CNKI:SUN:SCGD.0.2009-03-016.
- Zhu, L. Y., & Yan, Y. (2005). Tongban jiaoxue fangfa yu woguo daxue yingyu jingdu jiaoxue gaige [Peer Instruction and the Teaching Reform of College English Intensive Reading]. Meitan Higher Education (4): 101-103.