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Factors Affecting Willingness to Communicate in English Among Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Students

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ABSTRACT

The Malaysian education system requires students pursuing tertiary education in public universities to take an English placement test, the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) prior entry. This requirement indicates the importance of using and learning the English language to qualify for admission to the university. Having proficiency in English not only enables students to excel in higher education, but also opens a world of opportunities to them. Thus, this study examined the relationship among the variables believed to affect willingness to communicate in English among Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) students. Results depicted that motivation, attitude, communication apprehension and self-perceived communicative competence contribute to willingness to communicate. Meanwhile, the Multiple Regression analysis indicated that the UKM students' motivation and self-perceived communicative competence had a positive relationship with their willingness to communicate in English. Theoretical and practical implications were discussed to provide insights for future research in this area.

Keywords: Motivation, Attitude, Communication Apprehension, Self-perceived communicative competence, Willingness to Communicate

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC), which was originally developed with respect to first language (L1) communication (Yu, 2009) emerged in the mid-1980s (Nazari & Allahyar, 2012). According to McCroskey and Richmond (1987) WTC is defined as a person's ordinary self-direction to conversing. Likewise, MacIntyre (2001) defined second language (L2) WTC as a readiness to engage in discourse with a specific person or persons at a particular time. It is also defined as "an individual's personality-based predisposition to approaching or avoiding the initiation of communication when free to do so" (McCroskey, 1997). In a similar study, Basöz and Erten (2018) revealed that WTC is therefore understood as a construct reflecting a psychological willingness to engage in communication, precisely speaking. The willingness of the students to communicate in a L2 often followed unrecognizable patterns. As stated by Mohseni and Niknejad (2013), it is hard to understand why some students try while others ignore using L2 to communicate. According to Hesti Wijaya and Rizkina (2016) scholars have carried out several

extensive research on WTC and found a range of antecedents that could explain why people differ in their level of WTC. Additionally, Akbarzadeh and Narafshan 2016) in their study stated that in order to estimate the level of WTC in L2 (L2), it is important to identify the reactions of the people to the situations that require them to speak. When there is an opportunity to utilize their L2, some people choose to speak up when presented while others choose to stay silent. Lee, Lee, Wong and Azizah (2010) stated that talking in English publicly is often perceived negatively as showing off, being proud, reliving colonialism, having superior standards and betraying the Malay identity and language. In fact, Fauzan (2014) indicated that students refuse to talk in English because they are too embarrassed to speak English, they have fear of making mistakes or their peers will laugh at them, and they are also nervous because they did not have a lot of chances to communicate or because the teacher often criticized and corrected their mistakes on the spot. This is also further supported by Leong and Ahmadi (2017), where language learners appear to have inability in communicating smoothly and precisely as they do have insufficient skills in the area. Hence, this research aims to examine the relationship between motivation, attitude, communication apprehension, self-perceived communicative competence and WTC in English among UKM students.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Willingness to communicate
Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) in their study revealed that the way people communicate is not necessarily similar to others. Some speak ceaselessly, some speak when an interlocutor starts a conversation and others stay quiet much more often. A study by Makiabadi, Pishghadam, Meidani and Khajavy (2019) asserted that in recent decades, a great deal of focus has been given to the concept of WTC in L2 education. Since the introduction of the WTC concept, L2 scholars and many other educated people have attempted to understand WTC. Many scholars agree on the existence of WTC multidimensionality. In fact, Khatib and Nourzadeh (2015) found that WTC is proven as a complicated matter whereby a wide range of cognitive, instructive, environmental, cultural and affective factors may impact it. As stated by Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Bielak (2015), WTC's research originated in the field of communication studies and was originally concerning factors that impeded communication.

Motivation
Dornyei and Skehan (2003) explained that motivation is the drive behind the reason people decide to do something, how long they are likely to continue performing the activity and how much effort they will put to pursue it. Watters and Ginns (2000) further added that motivation involves complex psychological patterns used to describe the efforts and behavior shown in the course of distinct activities. Meanwhile in another study, Cladella and Herlin (2002) elaborated that motivation is the desire to excel in a goal that is aimed by an individual. In another study by Boo, Dornyei and Ryan (2015) the authors found that motivation was found to contribute to different behaviors of language learning in many different contexts. Gardner (1985) stated that motivation is related positively to L2 learning and acquisition. According to Lee and Hsieh (2019) researchers have recognized motivation as an important element to initiate and maintain L2 learning for students, other than to help them achieve their linguistic goals. Generally, motivation has been demonstrated as a positive influence to the L2 communicative behavior of the students and potentially able in developing their L2 communication skills. Similarly, Lee and Drajati (2019) explained that in the learning of L2, affective variables such as motivation, self-confidence, and speaking apprehension in L2 play a

critical role in affecting the performance of the learners. For instance, motivation has been recognized as an important source for starting and sustaining L2 learning.

Attitude

Hashwani (2008) indicated that attitude defines the level of learners' motivation to learn the language. She further explained that attitude can rightly be called a strong predictor of achievement and can assess the learner's negative or positive action. Likewise, Peker and Mirasyedioğlu (2008) pointed out that learners' attitude exerts a great impact on learning as well as styles of learning. In addition, Abu-Melhim (2009) noted that even though teacher and teaching methods are vital to learning, however if the learner's willingness and positive attitudes are not present, all efforts are pointless. As stated by Finn, Lee, Kraus and Kam (2014), effort would allow a learner to hold in their minds some of the input in which they were exposed and formed explicit hypotheses about the relationship between items. Thus, people with more effort in L2 learning tend to have a better comprehension and understanding of the lesson just as Fenner (2011) who discovered that that some people were not just "good at language" but actually defined by the effort they put into the learning process and also how effective the learner could learn from the effort.

Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension (CA) is defined as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons'' (McCroskey, 1977). In another, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) explained communication apprehension as a form of shyness due to fear or feeling anxious to communicate with others. In simpler words, communication apprehension is a learner's failure to understand others' communication and make them unable to comprehend what he or she is saying, because of his bad self-perceptions (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Likewise, Desy, Usman and Siti Sarah (2020) in their study explained that in general, communication apprehension stems either from the inability to express or understand each other or from the lack of confidence in general knowledge of linguistics.

Self-Perceived Communicative Competence

Communicative competence is defined as the ability to "pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing". According to Lockley (2013) self-perceived communication competence is a key component in assessing the WTC in L1 and L2 contexts and thus has many implications for learning foreign or L2. Furthermore, a study by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) pointed out that the WTC is more closely linked to the self-perceived communication competence more than to the actual competence. Self-perceived communication competence is a cognitive construct which implies a person's own assessment of the L2 skills.

The relationship between motivation and WTC

Hashimoto (2002) examined Japanese ESL students to investigate the effects of WTC and motivation on practical use of L2. His structural equation model, which was hypothesized based on the socio-educational and WTC models, suggested that motivation and WTC could predict the communication frequency in the classroom. In addition, parallel to previous research, language anxiety and perceived competence are shown to be strongly associated with WTC. This finding is parallel to another study that found out motivation appeared to affect self-confidence in L2 communication, which led to L2 WTC (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide & Shimizu, 2004). The authors

further noted that the higher motivation level is correlated to self-confidence, which resulted in WTC in the L2. A more recent study by Yashima (2019) revealed that learners with motivation to learn a L2 are less anxious and those who perceive their competence are higher happened to be more willing to communicate in the L2. Furthermore, Yashima et. al (2004) indicated that people who are aware of how they relate to the world appear to be motivated to learn English, in which they are likely able to clearly imagine "English-using selves.

H1: There is a positive relationship between motivation and WTC.

The relationship between attitude and WTC
Onur, Brinberg and Coupey (2000) in their study asserted that attitudes towards the behavior and social standards directly influence human intentions to behave in a particular behavior. The authors believe that because individuals are more likely to perform a behavior accepted by others (MacIntyre et al., 2001), the idea that significant others support in L2 communication may be sufficiently motivating to do so. Therefore, the WTC in the L2 would be strengthened to the degree that one perceives normative pressure for communicating in the L2. Parallel to the previous study, Peng (2007) indicated that attitudes towards the learning situation are influenced by attitudes towards the teacher of language as well as the L2 course. Motivation, which is the aspect of integrative motivation, represents the desire and attitude of L2 learners to learn the L2 and how much effort he/she puts into it.

H2: There is a positive relationship between attitude and WTC

The relationship between communication apprehension and WTC
Khajavy, Ghonsooly, Hosseini Fatemi, and Choi (2016) in their study found that students with confidence are willing to communicate and are highly motivated, and they practice more often the language in the classroom. Additionally, in a study done by Cristobal and Lasaten (2018), the authors pointed out that if students have a significant level of apprehension for oral communication, they are more likely to have lower academic performance. On the other hand, they are more likely to achieve higher academic performance if they experience a lower level of oral communication apprehension. Arquero, Fernández-Polvillo and Valladares-García (2017) revealed that when pursuing higher education, students who chose more empirical, technical studies showed a higher level of communication apprehension than those who opted for social sciences. The authors further indicated that these results suggest that there is a process of self-selection in which students with high communication level avoid certain paths perceived as requiring good communication skills in order to excel.

***H3: There is a positive relationship between* communication apprehension and WTC**

The relationship between self perceived communicative competence and WTC
Albooni and Ishag (2018) in their study pointed out that self-perceived communicative competence that refers to the self-assessment of an individual's ability to communicate effectively in any given

situation have been regarded as one of the possible predictors of the learners' WTC. To support, Liu (2013) indicated that the perceived competence of the students exerts a larger effect than actual competence on the WTC. The author further elaborated that those having only average language skills but perceive themselves to be more competent may be much willing to initiate conversations than those who have better skills but tend to underestimate themselves.

H4: There is a positive relationship between **self-perceived communicative competence and WTC**

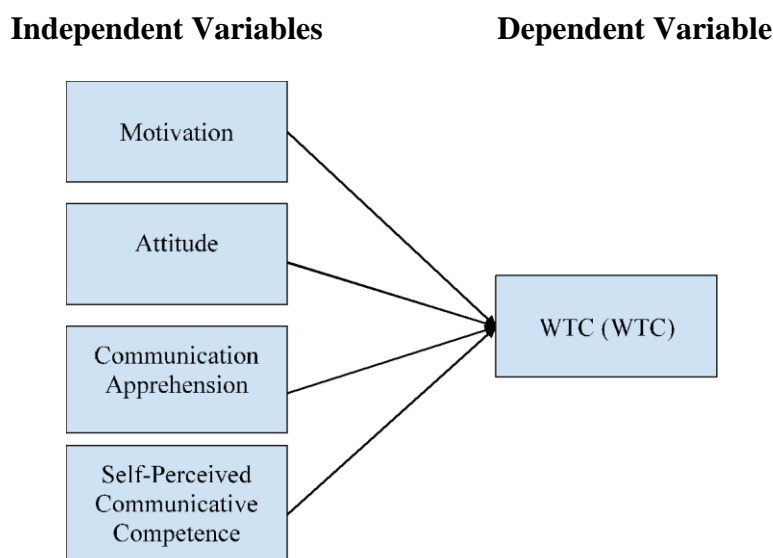**Independent Variables**   **Dependent Variable**

Figure 1: Conceptual framework adapted from Khajavy, Ghonsooly, Hosseini Fatemi, & Choi (2016), Cristobal & Lasaten (2018), Albooni & Ishag, (2018), Khajavy et al., (2016) and Peng & Woodrow, (2010)

Research Methodology

This section is divided into three (3) sub-topics. The topics covered are research design, research instruments and population.

Research Design

This research adopted the quantitative method to address the research problem as it is proven to be mostpractical and cost-effective in any situations. This type of research method allows verifications to be conducted scientifically and statistically

Research Instruments

A set of questionnaire was used to complete this study. In place of ensuring that all of the data collected from the participants are strictly kept confidential, a cover letter illustrating the approval from the lecturer and advisor and an explanation of the aim of this study was attached.

Section A of the questionnaire focuses on the backgrounds of the respondent, such as age, gender and faculty. The purpose of this section is to gather the data about the respondents.

Section B is the independent variable of this study where it focuses on the factors affecting WTC. The factors include motivation, attitude, communication apprehension and self-perceived communicative competence. There are eight questions altogether in each of the factors. The five-point Likert scale will be used to measure UKM student's WTC. Wood (2016) suggested that interval scale is the most accurate because they use standardized units where data point intervals are always exactly the same. The scale for this study started from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. The questionnaires are adopted from Oubeidi and Boukli (2016), Fulmer (2010) and Aflak (2017) respectively.

Section C is the dependent variable of this study where it focuses on WTC. The questions are adapted from Pattapong (2010). A Likert scale used in this section is similar to section B which are 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree.

Population

The population of this study consist of all students from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia from various faculties.

Result and Discussion

Variable	Descriptive	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	29	29.0%
	Female	71	71.0%
Age	18 – 19 years old	1	1.0%
	20 – 21 years old	15	15.0%
	22 – 23 years old	47	47.0%
	24 – 25 years old	14	14.0%
	26 years old and above	23	23.0%
Faculty	Social Sciences	21	21.0%
	Islamic studies	19	19.0%
	Health Sciences	5	5.0%
	Science and Technology	3	3.0%
	Law	4	4.0%

Dentistry		*1*	*1.0%*
Economics & Mgmt		*8*	*8.0%*
Education		*7*	*7.0%*
Medicine		*1*	*1.0%*
Information, Science & Technology		*4*	*4.0%*
Engineering and Built Environment		*25*	*25.0%*
Others		*2*	*2.0%*

Table 1 : Demographic profile of the respondents

As portrayed in Table 1, Table 4.2 indicates the gender of respondents. Based on the findings above, 71 respondents (71.0%) are female and the remaining 29 (29.0%) are male. Most of the customers are dominated by females as the percentage is higher than male. From the result, 47 respondents (47.0%) aged 22 to 23 years old, 23 of them (23.0%) were 26 years old and above, 15 of the respondents (15.0%) aged between 20-21years old, 14 of them (14.0%) were between 24-25 years old and lastly one of the respondents (1.00%) were 18-19 years old. As for the faculty, 25 (25.0%) of the respondents were students from Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment followed by 21(21.0%) students from Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, 19 (19.0%) students from Faculty of Islamic Studies, 8 (8.0%) students from Faculty of Economics and Management, 7 (7.0%) students from Faculty of Education, 5 (5%) students from Faculty of Health Sciences, 4 (4.0%) students both from Faculty of Laws and Faculty of Information Science and Technology, 3 (3.0%) students from Faculty of Science and Technology, 2 (2.0%) students from others and lastly 1 student each from Faculty of Dentistry and Faculty of Medicine.

No	Variables	SD	Mean	1	2	3	4	5
1	Motivation	0.55640	3.9867					
2	Attitude	0.53640	3.5800	0.714**				
3	Communication Apprehension	0.51250	3.0900	0.346**	0.595**			
4	Self-Perceived Communicative Competence	0.62727	3.3763	0.492**	0.617**	0.440**		
5	WTC	0.64844	3.3400	0.505**	0.537**	0.411**	0.564**	

Table 2: Correlation between contextual factors and taboo words

Table 2 indicates the outcome from from the relationship between motivation and WTC. From the finding, motivation has moderate correlation with WTC (r=0.505, p<0.01) which is similar to attitude (r=0.537, p<0.01) which has moderate correlation with WTC. The findings also showed that communication apprehension (r=0.411, p<0.01) as well as self-perceived communicative competence (r=0.564, p<0.01) has moderate correlation with WTC.

Model	Standardized Coefficient Beta
Motivation	.234**
Attitude	.081
Communication Apprehension	.132
Self-perceived communicative competence	.341**
R	.639
R2	.408
Adjusted R2	.383
F Change	16.372
Significance F Change	.000
Durbin Watson	2.080

Table 3: Regression analysis of the study

Table 3 shows the findings of multiple regressions between motivation, attitude, communication apprehension, self-perceived communicative competence and WTC. As illustrated in the table, the F value was 16.372 and this indicated significance (P< 0.05). The F value helps to show the details of the relationship between the regression and the residuals. The R2 of 40.8% was the variance in the WTC which could be predicted from the motivation, attitude, communication apprehension and self-perceived communicative competence elements. Based on the results, only motivation and self-perceived communicative competence have positive relationships with WTC while attitude and communication apprehension do not. This is because, in order for variables to be significant, it must be (p<0.05). Therefore, only hypothesis one and hypothesis four are accepted whereas hypothesis two and hypothesis three are rejected.

Based on the findings, it was found that motivation affects WTC. This statement is parallel to previous research by Yashima (2019) who explained that learners with motivation to learn a L2 are less anxious and have more self-confidence thus happens to be much willing to communicate in the L2. Similarly, Noels, Pelletier, Clement and Vallerand (2000) suggested that when students find the task of learning as interesting and challenging, they are intrinsically motivated to learn for their own good instead of some other reasons.

Other than that, it was evident that attitude did not affect WTC. In contrast, Munezane (2013) revealed that attitude affects the concept of recognizing English as a global language. To support, Al-Mamun, Rahman, Rahman and Hossaim (2012) in their study found that students have positive attitudes towards English which indicates that they like English as well as those who speak English. They believe that those who speak English create a good impression of themselves.

Additionally, communication apprehension was also found did not affect WTC. Nevertheless, Arquero, Fernández-Polvillo, and Valladares-García (2017) in their study indicated that communication apprehension affects the students' educational choices. The authors further elaborated that students opting for more specialized, vocational education pathways had

substantially higher rates of communication apprehension than their peers who prefer to pursue university studies that would require a higher level of communication skills.

Besides that, this study found out that self-perceived communicative competence significantly affects WTC. This is supported by Liu (2013) in his study that people with just average language skills but perceive themselves as more confident may be much more likely to initiate discussions than those with better skills but appear to underestimate themselves. In another study by MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Donovan (2002), the authors suggested that the impact of an individual's perceived competence may override his or her actual competence in communication situations, especially in relation to the initiation of communication, which was conceptualized as WTC.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the result, only motivation and self-perceived communicative competence have significant relationship with WTC while attitude and communication apprehension do not. Students with motivation to learn a L2 have minimal anxiety level but more self-confidence thus they are much more willing to communicate in the L2. Self-perceived communicative competence was found to have significant relationship with WTC whereby previous studies revealed that a person's perceived competence may go beyond his actual communication competence during a communication situation because they are more confident despite having average language skills.

Although attitude does not illustrate any relationship with WTC, it was evident in past studies that attitude has a positive relationship with the concept of recognizing English as a global language. Students who have a positive attitude towards English believe that people who speak in English form a good impression of themselves. Last but not least, communication apprehension also was found to have no relationship with WTC in this study. Nonetheless, researchers asserted that communication apprehension has a positive relationship with students' educational choices in which students with high level of communication apprehension much prefer technical and vocational education rather than other university courses that would require them to have high communication skills.

Future research can opt to carry out studies for different groups of people such as the working adults in other sectors such as textile industry, banking industry, corporate organization, hospitality industry, and others to observe if there is any resemblance in the results. Secondly, as this research utilizes only questionnaires as the instrument, future studies can employ other data collection methods to develop a better understanding of WTC construct. For instance; future researchers may explore the variables using qualitative or mixed method approaches such as conducting interview sessions as well as observation methods other than questionnaires. These methods will enable the researchers to obtain a more extensive and realistic data. Furthermore, these methods can aid in producing more valuable insights that can be discussed in future studies. Thirdly, future studies should investigate the impact of motivation, attitude, communication apprehension and communicative competence in professional settings which would be an intriguing field for extensive research. This is because some people in the professional industries may have similar factors that prompt them to initiate a conversation, but some may not. Thus, the findings would be useful and advantageous for the people in said industries. Future studies could also examine other components that could be significant factors that affect WTC such as the degree of acquaintance, formality context and constructs of communication. The components are one of the reasons that may affect WTC. For instance, the degree of acquaintance. When communicating

in a group context with friends and acquaintance receivers, some people perceive themselves as more competent than communicating with strangers or in meetings and in public settings.

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