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Perceived Communicative Competence and Speaking Self-Efficacy as Predictors of Willingness to Communicate in a Foreign Language among Saudi Female EFL Students

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الملخص

الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو النظر في تأثير كفاءة التواصل المدركة والكفاءة الذاتية للتحدث لدى الطالبات السعوديات في مجال اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على استعدادهن لاستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. شارك في الدراسة 102 طالبة يدرسن اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة الملك خالد. قام المشاركات في الدراسة بملء الاستبيانات التي تقيس كفاءتهم التواصلية المتصورة، والكفاءة الذاتية في التحدث، والاستعداد للتواصل في اللغة الثانية .كما أجريت مقابلات المتابعة من أجل دعم البيانات الإحصائية. أشارت تحليلات الارتباط إلى وجود ارتباطات إيجابية كبيرة بين المتغيرات الثلاثة. علاوة على ذلك، تم دعم النتائج الإحصائية من خلال الإجابات السردية التي تم الحصول عليها من خلال المقابلات. وفي سياق الفصل الدراسي، حدد المشاركات العديد من العناصر التي ساهمت في استعدادهن لاستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية. تتلخص النتيجة التربوية في أن معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية يمكنهم زيادة استعداد الطلبة لاستخدام اللغة الانجليزية من خلال تعزيز بيئة الفصل الدراسي الداعمة والبناءة حيث يمكن للطلبة تطوير ثقتهم عند التحدث باللغة الثانية. علاوة على ذلك، يمكن للمدرسين رفع مستوى استعداد طلبتهم لاستخدام اللغة الانجليزية من خلال تشجيع الاهتمام الصادق بتعلم اللغة وتشجيع الاستخدام المتكرر للغة الانجليزية.

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Abstract

This study aims to look at the impact of Saudi female EFL students' speaking self-efficacy and perceived communicative competence on their willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language. The participants were 102 EFL female students studying at King Khalid University. They filled out questionnaires that measured their perceived communicative competence, speaking self-efficacy, and willingness to communicate in L2. Follow-up interviews were conducted to bring statistical data to life. Correlation analyses indicated significant positive correlations between the three variables. Furthermore, the statistical results are corroborated by the narrative responses obtained through interviews. In the classroom context, participants identified several elements that contributed to their willingness to communicate (WTC). The pedagogical consequence is that L2 teachers can increase students' WTC by fostering a supportive and constructive classroom environment where students can develop their confidence when speaking L2. In addition, teachers can raise their students' WTC by encouraging a sincere interest in the L2 and frequent use of the L2.

Keywords: *perceived communicative competence; Saudi student; speaking self-efficacy; willingness to communicate*

Introduction

Willingness to communicate (WTC) in second language acquisition (SLA) studies has been defined by MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 547) as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2". Recent studies have highlighted a more dynamic understanding of WTC's cyclical and permanent features (MacIntyre, 2007). The growing focus on the dynamic elements of WTC has illuminated some crucial questions regarding its predictors: to what degree is WTC predicted by variables external to the learner, such as the school environment with lecturers and classmates, and by internal variables of the learner, such as perceived communicative competence and speaking self-efficacy?

Learning a foreign language (FL) has been likened to diving into a lake and abandoning the familiarity within the L1: “To know a new language, to immerse yourself, you have to leave the shore. Without a life vest. Without depending on solid ground” (Lahiri, 2016, p. 5). “Not unintentionally, WTC is ranked by FL teachers as the second most significant construct in the FL classroom, behind motivation (Gkonou et al., 2017). As a result, increasing WTC has emerged as a key objective of L2 pedagogy (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010). Student silence in FL classroom settings can be mistaken for learner disengagement, which is fatal for teachers' and students' motivation. Improved comprehension of WTC variation may have significant educational ramifications, enabling L2 users and learners to transcend the boundary of L2 communication (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2022). The idea that WTC is a stable personality feature has changed to recognise its dynamic nature—the interplay between learner-internal and learner-external variables. Research on the impact of learners' internal skills on WTC is also growing. So far, to the best of the author’s knowledge, no study in the Saudi context has examined the combined effects of learners’ speaking self-efficacy and perceived communicative competence and connected these two concepts to WTC. In this study, it is precisely what the author hopes to do.

The present study investigates how learners' perceived communicative skills and speaking self-efficacy affect their willingness to communicate in English. The landmark study by MacIntyre et al. (1998) will be briefly discussed in the literature review before concentrating on a few more recent, primarily quantitative, studies on WTC that looked into the interaction impacts of several variables. The research questions will be presented, followed by an explanation of the study's methodology. In the following discussion, the findings of the statistical analysis and interviews will be explained, interpreted, and connected to earlier studies, along with the pedagogical implications. The conclusion then will focus on some limitations.

Literature Review

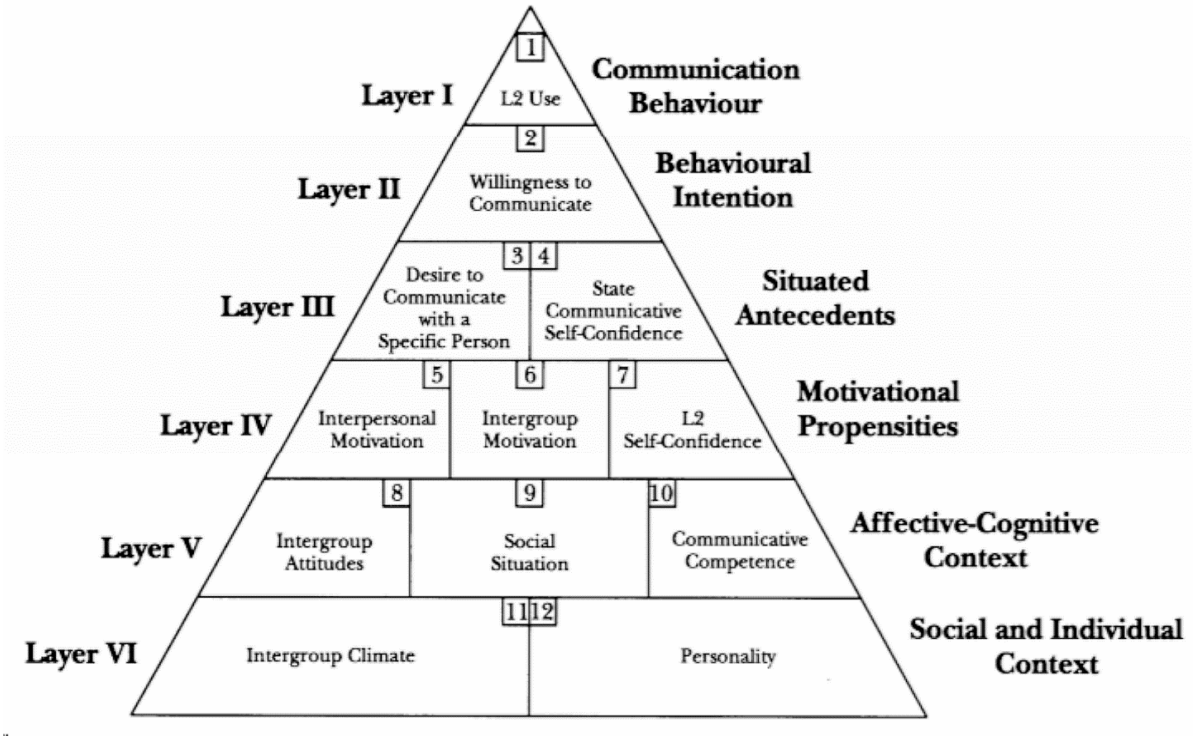
Willingness to Communicate in L2

MacIntyre and colleagues (1998) provided a new wave of WTC research. They “argued that WTC in an L2 involves a great deal of complexity and uncertainty that are not present in WTC in an L1, and they proposed a heuristic model to capture the range of variables that could affect the deliberate process of starting a conversation in an L2 with a specific person at a

particular point in time. The factors influencing WTC consist of linguistic, psychological, and social attributes, organized in a pyramid structure, with L2 usage at the highest level and WTC just below (See Figure 1). Variables located at the lower levels of the pyramid exhibit greater stability and permanence than those situated higher up, which primarily emphasize the present moment. Furthermore, variables positioned on the left side of the lower layers are primarily associated with a macro intergroup perspective. Conversely, variables on the right side are predominantly centred on the psychology of individual L2 learners and users.

Figure 1

The Pyramid model of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547)



The "pyramid's base (Layer VI) represents long-lasting genetic and intergroup influences. These are largely outside of an individual's control and typically indirectly impact linguistic behavior (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 567). The pyramid's next layer (V) corresponds to the person's usual emotional and cognitive environment. MacIntyre explains that this layer establishes "the tone for motivation to learn the L2", specifically "the tension between a desire to approach the target language group and a sense of hesitation or fear of the implications of doing so" (p. 567). It is possible to contend that FL courses shape this context. More changeable and individual qualities give way to more stable contextual ones at the subsequent stage (Layer IV), "Motivational Propensities."

The pyramid's apex represents real L2 contact, while Layer II of the pyramid, the WTC level, "represents the final psychological step in preparation for L2 communication" (p. 568). The model of the pyramid has had a profound impact on the field of applied linguistics. Due to

the reliance on self-report in this field of research, rather than being based on empirical measurements, the WTC values are reflective of L2 users' subjective assessments of their communication skills (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014, p. 214).

The willingness of language learners to communicate is influenced to some extent by their skill levels and linguistic self-confidence. Nevertheless, these elements impact WTC and are subject to change (e.g., effective communication can raise the learner's language competency and boost their confidence) (Dörnyei, 2009). Furthermore, it is evident how the two aspects can mutually influence one another. Increased mastery should result in heightened self-assurance. On the other hand, increased self-assurance might prompt learners to actively engage in circumstances where they utilize and refine their language skills, ultimately resulting in enhanced proficiency.

WTC, Perceived Communicative Competence, and Speaking Self-Efficacy

Perceived communicative competence (PCC) holds a prominent place in WTC research and features in both MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) and Yashima's (2002) models. Perceived communicative competence assesses student beliefs regarding their own ability to communicate in various situations. It denotes:

> A person's evaluation of their ability to communicate with various interlocutors in various settings and situations. Proficiency in grammar, phonology, syntax, lexis, pragmatics, and nonverbal communication will be necessary for this skill among seasoned foreign language (LX) users (Canale 1983). Additionally, it encompasses what is known as "strategic competence," which is the capability to improve communication efficacy and make up for communication faults (Canale 1983: 11). (Dewaele, 2010, p. 115-116).

Perceived communicative competence is a broader approach. This is evaluated using the primary foreign language proficiency criteria (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) Piechurska-Kuciel (2018). For the purpose of this study, the author focused on PCC used by Dewaele (2010).

One of the fundamental concepts of Bandura's (1997) social cognition theory is self-efficacy (SE), "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce effects" (p. 71). In other words, SE is the degree to which people believe they can successfully carry out a specific task or behavior. Higher SE for a given activity increases the likelihood that an individual will undertake the task, rely on constructive coping behaviors, apply more sustained effort, and persevere in the face of setbacks—all characteristics essential for successful language learning (Bandura, 1997). Concerning speaking, sometimes EFL learners are incredibly nervous about speaking English in public; thus, they are tongue-tied or unable to find appropriate words. As a result, their public speaking abilities deteriorate. In other words, a person's conviction in their ability to speak, also known as speaking self-efficacy, may influence speaking performance.

SE is gaining popularity in SLA as an individual difference variable that strongly predicts behaviour (Bandura, 1997). Still, unlike PCC, it has yet to be modelled with WTC despite both variables being included in the model given by MacIntyre et al. (1998).

Peng and Woodrow (2010) used the pyramidal structure as the theoretical foundation for their research on WTC between 579Chinese EFL students. The application of structural equation modeling found the best predictors of WTC. The classroom setting, learner beliefs, perceived communication ability in English, anxiety related to conversing in the English language, as well as both internal and external learning motivation in the language, were all predictor variables. Stated differently, they neglected to incorporate attitudinal variables and concentrated more on the pyramid's right side. And left out characteristics associated with the bottom. The most significant predictor of variance in WTC was communication confidence (54%), which combines anxiety-free life with perceived competence. Learner beliefs (11%), motivation (14%), and the classroom environment (p. 858) were the following best predictors.

In 2015, Denies et al. studied 1117 Dutch 12th graders who were taking French as a second language in Flanders. The researchers compared the factors influencing students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the classroom with those affecting their WTC in society. The writers discovered that WTC in the classroom is a reliable indicator of WTC outside of the classroom using structural equation modeling. Perceived competence, along with integrativeness, was found to be favorable indicators of the WTC classroom, but anxiety has a little detrimental impact (p. 730). WTC outside of the classroom showed similar trends, with integrativeness playing a less significant role. According to the authors' conclusion on page 734, the WTC model developed by MacIntyre et al. (1998) appears to be "generalizable to the specific context of French L2 learning in Flemish secondary schools" (p. 734). Teachers of French should be encouraged to help pupils feel more competent in the language and less nervous when speaking it.

Teimouri (2017) expanded the WTC study's focus by incorporating ideas from studies on emotion and motivation in SLA studies. Factor analysis, multiple regression analysis, and partial correlation analysis were used. he looked at the WTC of 524 EFL high school students in Iran and made connections between it with sentiments of joy, worry, and humiliation as well as L2 self. He saw intentional effort and WTC as two distinct types of motivation (p. 6). According to Ryan and Dörnyei (2015), the analysis showed that WTC was predicted by the Ideal L2 self, which is defined as “the attributes that someone would ideally like to possess” (p. 87). But the “Ought-to-L2 self (the qualities one feels one should have), was not a predictor of Ought-to-L2 self and Ideal L2 self-predicted happiness, while only the Ought-to-L2 self-predicted shame and anxiety. Teimouri posited that learners with a strong ideal L2 self are more prevention-focused, which” serves as a facilitator by keeping them aware of potential adverse outcomes. These same students, though, are highly conscious of favorable results and have a promotional focus. Their motivational orientation is best suited for joy, whereas anxiety is a misfit because it impairs motivation.

In a recent review of WTC, Peng (2022) argued that WTC’s influence on both linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes is unclear due to a scarcity of studies investigating this area. Although they offer insights into WTC, many of the studies above involve small numbers of learners and rely on largely qualitative descriptions of behavior to establish that such a link

exists (Ducker, 2022; Yashima et al., 2018). Studies that have attempted to model the relationship statistically have used self-reported frequency of communication as the outcome variable in the model (Ruane, 2020; Yashima et al., 2004), undermining the reliability of the findings.

Peng and Wang (2022) examined the relationship between foreign language enjoyment, anxiety, WTC, and performance in a public speaking task. The regression model showed that foreign language enjoyment was the only significant predictor of WTC and speaking performance (WTC was not significantly related to performance). The outcome variable was the performance as rated by the teacher (60% of the score) and peers (40% of the score), which may explain the lack of significance for WTC, which predicts behavior (willingness to engage in the communication) rather than performance (how well that communication is conducted).

Finally and more recently, one of the studies that combined the effect of WTC, PCC, and SSE was conducted by Leeming and colleagues (2024). The researchers investigated the impact of these three factors on spoken task production in L2 among 439 Japanese students. Participants completed web-based questionnaires to measure WTC, SSE, and PCC. In addition, they engaged in an 8-minute group discussion task. Findings revealed that SSE had a stronger relationship with WTC than PCC. However, they suggested that even students with high SSE may not speak in class if they have low WTC, indicating that PCC was also a significant predictor of WTC. This result lends empirical support to the strength of WTC in influencing L2 speaking performance.

Willingness to Communicate in L2 in the Saudi Context

The previous few decades have seen significant changes in Saudi Arabian society. English was first taught in Saudi Arabia's primary schools in the early 2000s, marking an enormous change in the country's educational landscape (Khawaji, 2023). The only foreign language taught in Saudi public schools currently is English. In Saudi Arabia, speaking and understanding English is valued as a strong intellectual and economic tool and an asset in the employment market (Khawaji, 2023). Saudi students still have relatively low English competence even though the value of the English language is acknowledged, and substantial investments have been made (Alrabai, 2016). This is among the reasons why, in the Saudi context, it is crucial to examine the determinants of WTC, one of the most significant L2 factors. By doing this, strategies for reform implementation can be informed, assisting Saudi students in becoming more proficient in English overall.

Since private and state schools have different approaches to teaching English, it is expected that this will significantly impact Saudi Arabian students' propensity to converse in English. Turjoman (2016) investigates whether Saudi female English major students' WTC in English is affected by their education in public and private schools. Second, the researcher considered the Saudi female English major students' WTC in English depending on their education from public and private schools. The findings showed that Saudi female English major students' readiness to speak in English varied significantly depending on whether they attended private or public schools. It is recommended to look at why these pupils don't use English and why WTC is inhibited.

The complex relationships between many emotions and personality traits, such as grit, that influence second language learners' (L2) willingness to communicate (WTC) in English are a subject of increasing attention. The Saudi context is not an anomaly. In order to further this line of investigation, Bensalem and colleagues (2023) carried out a cross-cultural study to determine whether or not grit and foreign language pleasure (FLE) among Saudi and Moroccan college-level EFL students are predictive of L2 WTC. Four hundred forty-six people from Morocco and Saudi Arabia were involved in the study. Data was gathered using an online questionnaire that was distributed. The results showed that grit and FLE were significant determinants of L2 WTC among Saudi and Moroccan students. Furthermore, FLE was a more important predictor of L2 WTC among Saudi students than grit, despite grit having a stronger significant correlation with L2 WTC among Moroccan students.

More recently, Almessar (2024) investigated the relationships between WTC in L2 and other L2 notions, including self-perceived L2 competence (which includes the four abilities of the English language) and foreign language anxiety (FLCA). Furthermore, he examines various psychological ideas in the context of Saudi Arabia, including personality qualities like extraversion and openness to new experiences. There were 263 male Saudi university students studying accounting and business who took part in his study. The findings indicated that whereas extraversion is more significant outside of the classroom, openness to experience was relevant in the WTC inside the classroom situation. Furthermore, he discovered that WTC in L2 within the classroom contexts was positively correlated with both FLCA and self-perceived L2. His work, which is the first to investigate these correlations in this particular setting, helps explain why Saudi students' English proficiency is often low by examining the factors that predict L2WTC.

Although most prior research has used self-report data to measure WTC, a few studies have used observational and interview data to study WTC. The current study broadens the investigation of the relationships between WTC in L2 and other concepts that haven't been looked into in the Saudi context by using both forms of data. More specifically, it attempts to discover the impact of perceived communicative competence and speaking self-efficacy among Saudi female EFL students on their willingness to communicate using English.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Do perceived communicative competence and speaking self-efficacy contribute to predicting willingness to communicate in L2 among Saudi female EFL students?
2. What are learners' perceptions of the most important factors contributing to their" WTC?

Methods

In order to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the impact of PCC and SSE variables on WTC of L2 learners, a mixed-methods methodology was selected for this study. Quantitative trends were detected and corroborated by qualitative data (Dörnyei, 2007). Specifically, a sequential explanatory design was used for this investigation. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit the qualitative data after the collection and analysis of the quantitative data.

Participant

One hundred and two Saudi female undergraduate students of English at the College of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University (KKU), agreed to participate. The participants are studying at different levels of the BA degree. All the participants spoke English as a foreign language and Arabic as their first language. The participants are supposed to be proficient in reading and writing in English as one of the admission criteria at KKU in the English department is that the applicant must sit for the English Language Placement Test (ELPT) and obtain at least 60% to be enrolled in the department (KKU, College of Languages and Translation website). The participants had an average age of (M= 20.14) ranging from 17 to 23 years old.

Instruments and Data Collection

Quantitative Data

All constructs in the current study, WTC, PCC, and SSE, were measured with self-report questionnaires. All three measures were prepared and written in English, and participants were informed before participating that the scales were all in English. The questionnaire constructed in this study comprised the following three scales:

Willingness to communicate (WTC): The subsection of Weaver's (2010) 64-item WTC instrument, which measures learners' desire to speak the L2, was utilized. For the current study, the subsection, which is made up of 16 items, was adopted. The 16-item scale estimates learners' readiness to finish a variety of speaking assignments on a four-point Likert scale with success. The scale's points ranged from 1 = Unquestionably unwilling to 4 = Definitely willing.

Perceived communicative competence (PCC): The Perceived Communicative Competence questionnaire was taken from Yashima's (2002) measure. There were 12 items asking students to rate their communicative confidence in various situations, including talking with friends and giving a presentation in front of people they do not know. A 6-point Likert-type category scale, as opposed to the original 0-100 scale, was employed for each item to correspond to the aforementioned methodological design feature of employing fully labelled Likert scales: 1 = Definitely I can not, 2 = I can not, 3 = Maybe I can not, 4 = Maybe I can, 5 = I can, and 6 = Definitely I can.

Speaking self-efficacy (SSE): The speaking self-efficacy instrument used in this study was developed and first utilized by Leeming and colleagues (2024) for Japanese respondents. It was specific to the task, and this decision corresponded to self-efficacy as a task-specific construct focusing on time and space (Bandura, 1997). Because of its specificity, self-efficacy is an influential predictor variable. For this reason, the survey's scale comprises ten "I can" statements related to the discussion task. Participants responded to each statement using a 6-point Likert scale: 1 = Definitely I can not, to 6 = Definitely I can.

Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient was used to assess the dependability of the scales, displaying the WTC, PCC, and SSE variables. The participants demonstrated a clear understanding of the statements that were presented to them, and the scales demonstrated a

satisfactory level of consistency and reliability (WTC α = .778), (PCC α = .868), and (SSE α = .816). All three scales have been validated and utilized in previous studies for validity.

A convenience sampling method was used. First, the measurements were piloted to 8 Saudi EFL female participants who helped improve some questionnaire elements. Then, the author contacted her female colleagues at the Department of English at the College of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia. She asked them to forward the online questionnaire to their EFL students. The link to the questionnaire was shared through Black Board announcements and WhatsApp groups. Participants in the study were informed of the goal of the research and asked for their agreement before they were allowed to fill out the questionnaire. They were told that the data would be collected anonymously and kept confidential. The researcher asked the participants willing to participate in a follow-up interview to contact her via email.

Students participated in this study voluntarily. They were given as much time as required to complete the questionnaire, which was posted online using Google Forms. The survey was open, receiving responses over one month during the second semester of the academic year 2023/24. Some volunteers then contacted the researcher, expressing their desire to be interviewed.

Qualitative Data

Follow-up interviews were conducted with 11 female students who contacted the researcher, expressing their desire to participate in the interview. Every interview was done in English, and each one underwent manual analysis. Every interviewee was questioned one-on-one, and the sessions lasted ten to fifteen minutes. The consent form and confidentiality statement were signed by the participants before the interview began, and they were also informed about the purpose of the interview and its contents. Before the tapes were erased, all participants were told that the interviews would be taped and transcribed. Participants were assured that there were no correct or incorrect answers and could respond to the questions openly based on their own views. They were also informed that the interview was an obligation-free task. In other words, they could end the interview at any point. A digital voice recorder made by Sony was used to capture the interviews.

The open-ended L2 WTC questionnaire developed by Weaver (2010) served as the model for the interview questions in this study. The interviewer acted as a facilitator during the semi-structured interviews and promoting open dialogue and free communication. Though it was limited, guidance on the statistical results of the study's first section was provided to guide the discussion. The debates that arose generally support the statistical results.

The learners' perceptions of factors influencing their willingness to communicate (WTC) in class were obtained through structured interviews of two sections. These factors form the main themes that emerged during the analysis. The first section comprised inquiries on the WTC, including the preferred mode of communication and the correlation between using English and their desire to utilize it. Customized questions were asked in the second part of the interview, which focused on the respondents' WTC behavior and variables that could particularly affect their WTC in English, such as types of speakers. To aid in understanding

and offer a practical human interpretation of the statistical trends found, the qualitative data is presented alongside the quantitative data.

Data Analysis and Results

The first step in the quantitative data analysis was to assess the data for normality and outliers. The descriptive statistics and normality were then calculated and presented in Table 1. Then, all statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 25 and were presented in more detail in the results below.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients of WTC, PCC, and SEE.

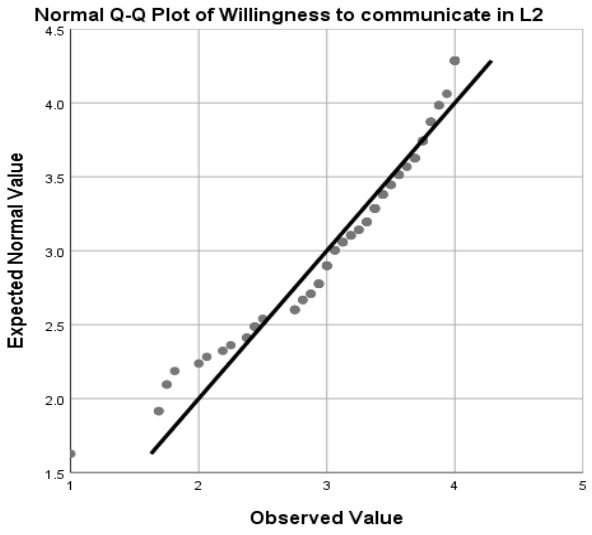
Variables	Mean	SD	Skewness	PCC	SEE
Willingness to communicate	3.17	.617	-1.026	.67**	.58**
Perceived communicative competence	4.44	1.094	-.637	1.00	.76**
Speaking self-efficacy	4.34	1.051	-.827	.76**	1.00

** p < .01 (2-tailed)

A Q-Q "plot (quantile-quantile plot) showed a distribution that closely resembled a normal distribution (see Figure 2). Therefore, the statistical data was examined using parametric tests. A Pearson correlation coefficient was employed to determine the associations between self-report WTC, PCC, and SSE. An in-depth" review of the individual data from eleven volunteers was incorporated into the quantitative analysis.

Figure 2

Typical Q-Q Plot of WTC



The present study seeks to investigate the relationship between all three factors. Thus, the correlations will be made between the WTC and the two independent factors, and then the inter-correlation between them, i.e. PCC and SSE, will be made to have a clear picture of the three variables.

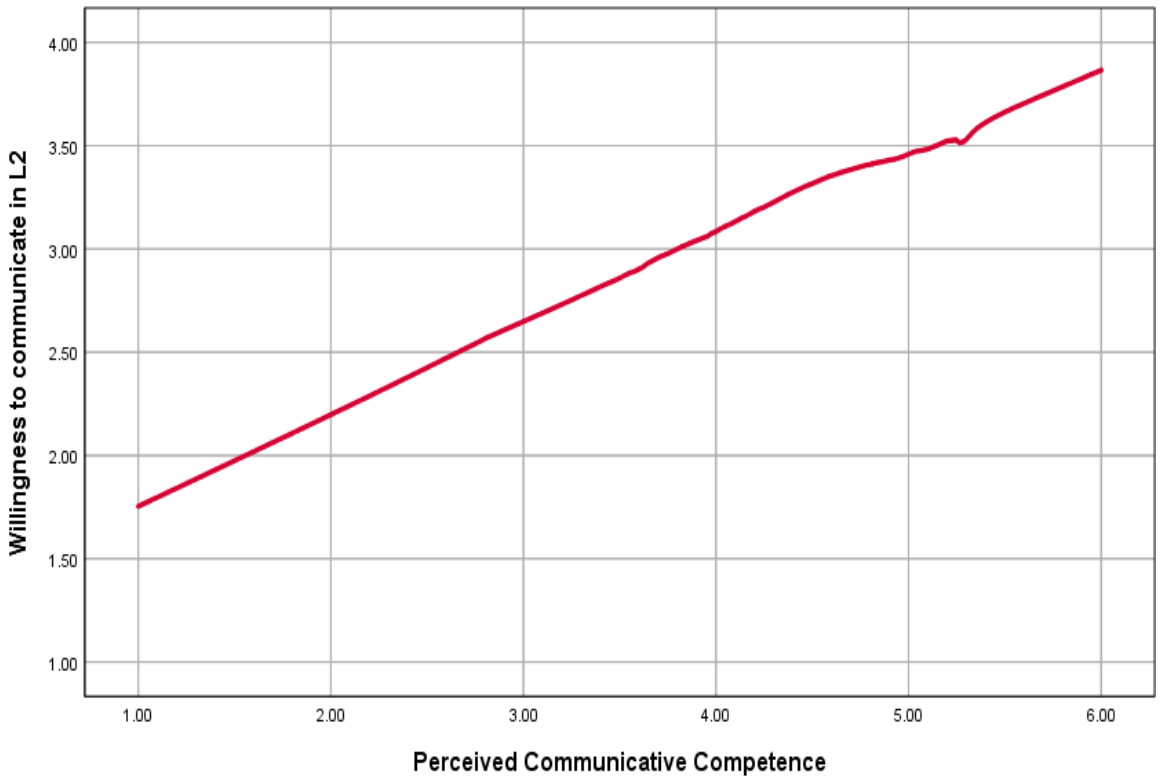
Quantitative Results

WTC and PCC

The Pearson correlation coefficient measured the linear link between perceived communication skills and readiness to speak in L2 (see Figure 3). The two variables have a statistically significant link, according to the results. More precisely, it was discovered that WTC and PCC had a positive correlation (r (100) =.67, p <.001; see Table 1).

Figure 3

Correlation between WTC and PCC

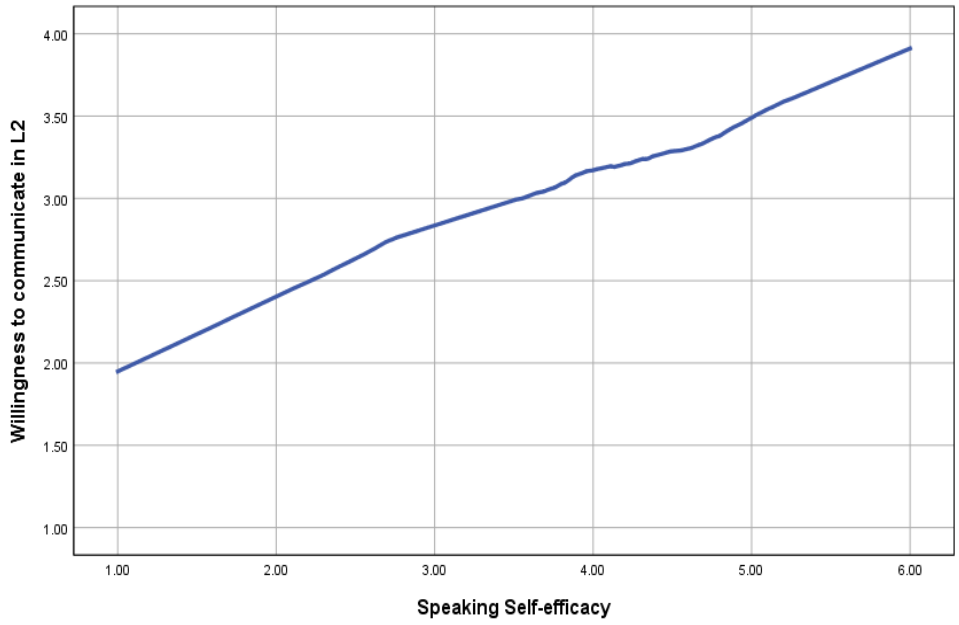


WTC and SSE

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to evaluate the linear link between speaking self-efficacy and willingness to communicate in L2 (see Figure 4). There was a positive correlation between the two variables, $r(100) = .58$, $p < .001$(see Table 1 above).

Figure 4

Correlation between WTC and SSE

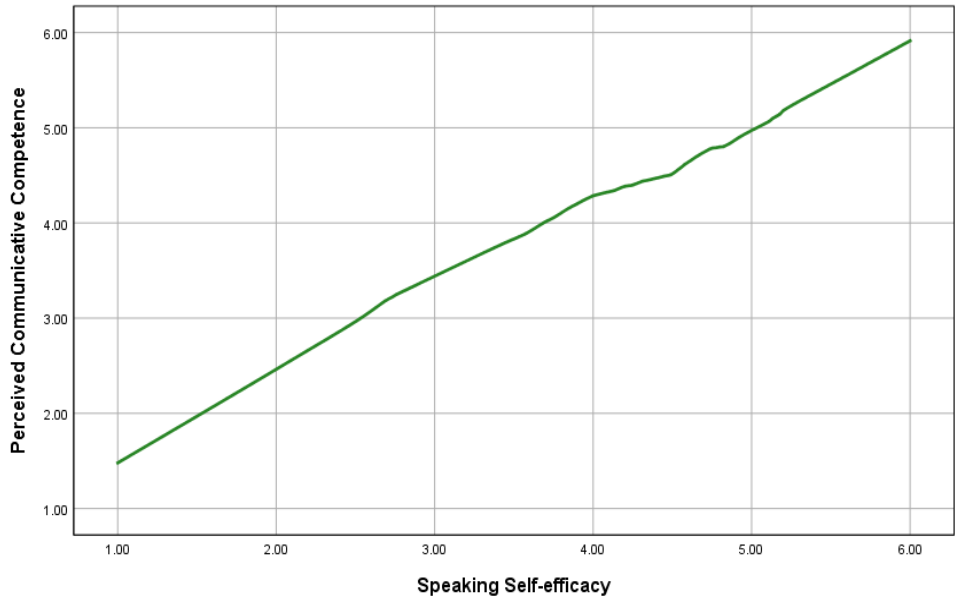


PCC and SSE

The inter-correlation between the two independent variables—spoken self-efficacy and perceived communicative competence—was evaluated using a Pearson correlation coefficient (see Figure 5). The two variables had a substantial positive association, as indicated by the results (see Table 1), with r(100) =.76 and p <.001.

Figure 5

Correlation between PCC and SSE



Qualitative Results

Interviews with specific students exposed actual behavior and the impact of the environment on the choice to socialize with other students. Every interviewee was a female student who volunteered to participate and answered the online survey.

The five characteristics that learners most frequently believed to influence WTC behavior "were self-confidence, familiarity with the interlocutor(s), peer influence, degree of topic preparation, communication medium (speaking or writing), and classroom atmosphere, according to interview data from eleven learners. Table 2 lists every element along with the number of interviewees that noted it.

Table 2

Factors Affecting WTC

Factors Affecting WTC	Frequencies (N/ 11)
Self-confidence	6
Familiarity with interlocutor	5
Peers influence	4
Degree of topic preparation	4
Medium of communication (speaking or writing)	3
Classroom environment	3

Students' desire to utilize English with other interlocutors also varied significantly depending on the communication style. Because they felt that oral contact did not need a high degree of English proficiency as written English did, most students were more inclined to speak the language. Students could communicate more effectively by using gestures or, depending on the L2 proficiency of their interlocutor if they were having trouble speaking. Many students' concerns about grammatical precision were also lessened by the temporal and dynamic aspect of spoken exchanges, which consequently increased their desire to speak English with international and Saudi English teachers. On the other hand, several female Saudi students found freedom from the performance expectations of verbal conversations when they wrote in English. The ensuing sections will showcase a selection of the learners' perspectives.

Self-confidence

Six out of the eleven learners felt that a lack of confidence reduced WTC, specifically in the context of the entire class. Participant 8, for instance, said, "*Maybe stress can decrease my ability to speak freely".* Their claimed lack of confidence when speaking in front of the class was reflected in their relatively low engagement in entire class interactions.

> *Wherever and even in the classroom, I would rather speak & write in English. I want that, but I feel hesitant when I try wherever I go, so I keep quiet and just listen to them (P3)*

Conversely, Learners 8 and 10, whose involvement in the entire session made up almost half of it, stated that they felt generally comfortable speaking in front of the class.

> *Sometimes, if it was a group project, I feel more confident to talk about it if my group needs someone who can communicate with the teacher (P8)*

> *My confidence in English affects how much I'm willing to use it in class. For example, if I'm really good at English, I'll likely speak up more and feel comfortable writing essays. But if I'm not as good, I might be quieter in discussions and hesitant to write longer pieces. (P10)*

Familiarity with Interlocutor

The degree of familiarity with the interlocutor affected the willingness to communicate using English. For example, participants (1) and (8) reported that they prefer speaking and using English with their family and friends. For participant 9, however, she likes to use English with her teachers:

> *The factors that can affect my ability are people and their level of English. If I have a question about the English language, I will discuss it with my teacher. I want to talk to her because she is more competent and accurate than me in English (P9).*

Participant 11 expressed her WTC with anyone in particular with her mother:

> *There is no special person I can use English with, but my mother is an English teacher so sometimes we have some conversations in English. There is no one I wouldn't say I like to use English with, as I can use English with everyone if I have to or want to. (P11)*

The interlocutor proficiency, rather than familiarity, was found to influence WTC, as participant 4 stated:

> *When I am talking to someone who speaks English very well, I will be conscientious that I don't make any mistakes, but when I'm talking to someone who is average in English, I am not that careful. (P4)*

Peers Influence

Peers were also noted by four of the participants as an affecting factor on their WTC. Participant 2, for instance, testimonies that competitiveness among classmates in their proficiency in English caused her embarrassment:

It influences me a lot. I feel embarrassed when I see other students making greater progress in English than me, and we are at the same level. But that's fine on my part because I know that in their free time, they are trying to learn well and advance in the language. There is a difference in each person's effort in learning English. But the issue will not affect me when I am with people who are native speakers of the language because they know that it is not my mother tongue, and they will try to teach me without making me feel that there is something wrong with me. (P2)

On the other hand, participants 6 preferred to use English with her peers for common features they have:

If I'm speaking with a Saudi student, I might feel more at ease because we share a common language and culture. But if I'm speaking with an overseas English learner or instructor, I might feel a bit more nervous because they might expect higher proficiency. (P6)

Peers can have a positive impact on using English, according to participant 7:

If I am surrounded by classmates who are also learning English can create a supportive environment where I feel more comfortable practicing speaking English because we are all learning English. Also, we can learn from each other and increase confidence. (P7)

Degree of Topic Preparation

Preparation of the topic was also perceived as a factor affecting WTC. Participant 11 reported that her willingness to use English is dependent on the preparation of speaking tasks:

I prefer to write in English. I usually use English at college. I like to be prepared when I have to speak in English or when I have to write in English. When I am willing to use English, it is mostly when I know that I can express my ideas right. For example, when there is a task, I have to check if I can answer it right away, or I have to take time to think about it (P 11)

Similarly, preparation was crucial for WTC, as participant 2 commented:

I spend more time preparing for speaking classes because I want to be confident and use the language correctly. If I prepare well for my English classes, my ability will improve in writing and speaking and other skills. For example, if I have a presentation, I will prepare my speech and ensure it's grammatically correct. As I said, I will spend more time practicing my speech in the presentation because I want the listeners to understand what I am saying, believe that I am a good speaker, and get my points. (P2)

Medium of Communication (Speaking or Writing)

Three participants reported that they prefer speaking rather than writing in English, e.g. participant 8 said: *"I personally prefer to speak my mind more than writing"*. Likewise, participant 5 stated her preference for speaking too:

> *Well, I'm a fan of speaking more than writing to express myself and my ability, almost all the time, as much as I can. I think they are equally the same, and I have passion and willingness for the ability. I mean to learn in and out of the class, e.g. I ask the professor to translate a new word for me, then try to use it in my daily talk (outside the class). (P5)*

Classroom Environment

Three participants noted the atmosphere inside the classroom as a factor contributing to WTC. For example,

> *Yes, I always participate more in my English classes and feel comfortable speaking English with active teachers. My English ability improves if I'm in English classes because the teacher encourages and helps me much more. (P1)*

Participant 3 appreciated the positive environment inside the classroom as it helped in practicing the language, providing more activities, and affording discussions with teachers and peers.

> *Also, the classroom environment is positive, so there will be more practice; if there is good practice at my level, the practice in the class will improve in English. I usually talk to the professors in the college if I have a question about English because they have more information and good knowledge so that I can ask them about anything about English. They, of course, will be glad to answer my question, whether it is a question regarding the lectures or a general question about English. (P3)*

Discussion

This research had two objectives. First, it attempts to find correlations between speaking self-efficacy, perceived communicative competence and self-report willingness to communicate in L2. Second, it looks into factors influencing WTC behavior according to the learners' views. The statistical analyses of the L2 WTC questionnaire revealed relationships between the willingness of Saudi female university students to communicate and write in English to a variety of interlocutors in an EFL classroom and their self-perceived level of L2 proficiency in communication.

The research's first question addressed the potential contribution of perceived communicative competence and speaking self-efficacy to willingness to communicate among Saudi EFL female students. The data analysis revealed exciting findings. It has been confirmed

that students' readiness to speak and write in English is significantly influenced by their perception of their own communicative competence (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). This study found that, compared to how well the students thought they could speak and write in English, there was a noteworthy and statistically significant variation in their L2 WTC. Put differently, learners with strong English communication skills have demonstrated a greater inclination to utilize the language. These results are consistent with the conclusion of Denies, Yashima, and Janssen (2015), who found that classroom WTC was positively correlated with perceived communicative competence.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the most significant predictor of WTC in L2 was self-perceived L2 competence (Almesaar, 2024). One could argue that FL communicative competence is a linguistic variable with subjectivity in assessment rather than a psychological one. According to Dewaele and Dewaele (2018), there is a strong correlation between stronger self-confidence and FL communication skills. In Cao (2011), Peng and Wang (2022), and Joe et al. (2017), students' beliefs of their own abilities had an impact on WTC.

The statistical results also indicated a positive significant connection between speaking self-efficacy and L2 willingness to communicate. Stated differently, the students exhibited a marginally more substantial inclination towards speaking English than writing it. The narrated comments from the participants confirmed this fact. This discrepancy could be explained, in part, by the fact that writing is a more durable indicator of pupils' L2 language proficiency. Because of this, students' motivation to write may be significantly decreased by the idea that an English writing blunder can be viewed and reread.

Conversely, speaking English has the potential to be more fluid. Therefore, a spoke mistake could be missed during the conversation. Writing can also be a challenging endeavor requiring a variety of language skills (Lee et al., 2019). Students must include the context of their work, for instance. To fill in the gaps in their current level of L2 competency, they are unable to rely on spoken interaction methods such as gestures or situational signals (Leeming et al., 2024). Because they may believe that speaking English is a simpler way to effectively communicate with someone than writing in English, Saudi female university students learning the language may be more inclined to speak it than write it.

The second research question focused on how students perceived the elements that most influenced their WTC behavior in the classroom. According to the interview results, WTC was thought to be significantly influenced by self-confidence. Previous research (e.g., Cao, 2011; MacIntyre, 2007) has characterized self-confidence as a combination of perceived competence and absence of worry. Six out of the eleven respondents believed their low participation in class was due to a lack of confidence. This validates research by Almesaar (2024) that suggests reticence in the classroom may be caused by a lack of confidence in spoken English. It has been observed that students who lack self-assurance and confidence in their English communication skills would have communication difficulties. Low expectations are more common in students who lack confidence, resulting in decreased proficiency in spoken English (Elsayed, 2023). A few individuals conveyed their wish to remain silent throughout class debates to avoid being embarrassed or discouraged by their classmates. When speaking in English, they seemed to experience feelings of offense or ridicule.

Learners' WTC behavior in each of the classroom scenarios was found to be influenced by topic knowledge and preparedness. According to MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 554), language use ease is highly influenced by topic knowledge. One's linguistic self-confidence will increase with content knowledge and experience with a particular register, but a lack of topic knowledge and familiarity with the register may hamper communication. For instance, Joe and colleagues (2017) found that students frequently experienced anxiety while speaking with others about a subject they knew little about. The effect of the topic seems to be important in this study. The participants thought their capacity to participate in English language talk activities, such as individual presentations, was significantly impacted by both topic knowledge and interest. As a result, if a learner is uninterested in or lacks understanding about a particular issue, her rate of speaking engagement may drop.

Due to their familiarity with the interlocutor, students in this study reported being more ready to interact in English in an EFL course with more skilled L2 interlocutors than with more familiar ones. To improve their level of English proficiency, they indicated a wish to practice L2, especially with their knowledgeable teachers. Because of this, many students thought that while their peers gave them practice, they didn't improve their L2 proficiency. This result is consistent with Leeming et al. (2024), who discovered that this notion could substantially impair the successful implementation of communicative-based language approaches in an EFL setting. Designing and executing speaking exercises that optimize chances for students to sense growth as a result of using the L2 with their interlocutor(s) becomes the problem. Instructors can further facilitate these kinds of exchanges by providing students with constructive criticism and support in a way that increases their openness to communication.

The last factor that has an impact on learners WTC is the classroom environment. It is being observed that the "classroom environment" and how teachers act and behave have an integrated impact on WTC. This aligns with the results of Peng and Woodrow (2010) and Joe et al. (2017), who found that the effect's power changed depending on the setting. Still, WTC was enhanced by the teacher's skill. Teachers who utilize their students' first language (L1) with the mistaken notion that it will improve the classroom environment may be restricting their WTC in L2.

For language teachers, studying English in an EFL context—that is, in Saudi Arabia—presents some unique pedagogical problems. In this study, for instance, many students reported being more open to speaking with English-fluent teachers because they believed they provided an example of pronouncing the language correctly in a second language. This perception may result from Saudi students' very rare interactions with fluent English speakers. EFL students may now converse and listen to fluent English speakers from around the globe thanks to developments in instructional materials and auxiliary tools like computer-assisted language learning. However, educators need to ensure that students recognize the benefits of utilizing these tools in their language learning. Remembering that students are active learners who evaluate the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom is crucial. Students' opinions about the possibility of language acquisition, as well as the outcomes of this assessment, then impact their preparedness to use English in an EFL classroom.

All of these pedagogical implications have one thing in common. Students should be placed in communicative situations where they can practice their current level of L2 competence according to their emphasis. Additionally, by taking part in carefully thought-out speaking

exercises that help them reinforce one another's shortcomings and build on each other's strengths, they can improve their L2.

In sum, the three constructs interact in different ways depending on the learner's readiness and other contextual factors (Li et al., 2022). In other words, replicating the same study involving participants from different countries or educational settings might yield different outcomes. The combination of learner variables as well as other contextual factors seem to contribute to WTC in L2.

Conclusion

The findings of this study support the notion that speaking self-efficacy and self-perceived communicative competence are important mediators of students' WTC in L2. Nevertheless, there are certain limitations to this study. Using self-reports from the WTC questionnaire is one of the study's biggest drawbacks. Because self-report data is retroactive, there is a chance that students will overreport or underreport their conduct, leading to inaccurate results (MacIntyre & Ayers-Glassey, 2020). In addition, it's likely that students responded in a way that was deemed socially acceptable (i.e., they were equally willing to use English with any kind of interlocutor) or that they believed the researcher, in this case, a foreign English teacher, would expect them to. Additionally, since convenience sampling was used in this study, the sample collected is not typical of Saudi Arabia's university student population as a whole. Future research that gathers a more representative sample should test the trends identified in this study.

Despite these limitations, the study has generally helped to advance the objective of connecting L2-specific concepts to more generic "bottom" variables like communicative skills. In addition, this study contributes specifically to the state of L2 research in Saudi Arabia (Almesaar, 2024; Alrabai, 2016; Bensalem, 2023) and to recognizing and resolving issues (such as the positive relationships this study found between speaking self-efficacy, perceived communicative competence, and WTC) related to the application of L2 concepts in Saudi Arabia. In conclusion, this method can help guide future efforts to enhance Saudi students' English language competency by assisting in identifying pertinent variables that may influence WTC and other significant L2 phenomena.

Bio

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