

The Literature Review on Facilitating L2 WTC From Teaching Perspective in Asian Countries

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Abstract:- The importance of communication in second language acquisition (SLA) has led to significant interest in the concept of willingness to communicate among researchers. However, existing literature on this topic has been largely theoretical, with limited focus on practical solutions that could benefit ESL teachers in their daily work. This article reviews past research on strategies to promote willingness to communicate, highlighting insights from studies on fostering second language communication. Nearly half of the studies reviewed emphasize the importance of the classroom environment in enhancing willingness to communicate. The findings suggest that teachers can encourage students to communicate by employing specific techniques and strategies, such as considering students' interests, error correction methods, group dynamics, and motivation levels in learning the target language.

Keywords: L2 WTC; Asian students; facilitating; English learning.

1. Introduction

When acquiring a new language, many learners struggle with actively participating in spoken conversations, regardless of their skill level. Some less skilled individuals may speak the language more freely, whereas those who are more proficient may be hesitant to do so (Zulkepli, Madzlan, Kesevan, Tajuddin, & Zulkepi, 2020). MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) hypothesize that the most important factor that predicts frequency of using L2 is willingness to communicate (WTC) which is the probability of engaging in communication when free to choose to do so. Students who have a strong WTC will actively seek out and participate in spoken conversations, both inside and outside of the classroom (Kang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 1998). Having a positive mindset will help them learn the target language more effectively, as research in the field of SLA has consistently shown a strong connection between verbal communication and successful learning (Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

WTC was first introduced in the communication field where the concern was on one's WTC in the first language (Zarrinabadi & Tanbakooei, 2016). Due to the complexity in L2 learning that involves multiple factors that can affect one's WTC; MacIntyre et al. (1998) propose a heuristic model aimed at explaining the reasons behind a L2 learner's decision to participate in a spoken conversation in a given context with specific individuals. The model, depicted as a pyramid with six layers, integrates linguistic, communicative, and social psychological viewpoints to analyze the factors influencing a learner's L2 WTC. The first three layers consist of temporary variables, while the remaining three layers encompass more lasting elements that impact a learner's L2 WTC.

The L2 WTC model has garnered significant interest from researchers in SLA, leading to many empirical studies aimed at collecting data to examine the connections between different variables (Elahi Shirvan, Khajavy, MacIntyre, & Taherian, 2019; Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak, & Bielak, 2016). This has contributed fruitful insights into how the various antecedents influence L2 WTC. Nevertheless, despite a plethora of such studies, Asian students' L2 WTC is different. Such like Shao and Gao (2016) claimed that Asian students are not highly

WTC in EFL classes, and that attitude was not inborn, but it was a result of growing up in a cultural and educational environment in which a teacher was not considered as a facilitator of the learning process but as an authority. In relation to the above, the current article reviews the trend in WTC research that investigates studies of facilitating L2 WTC with Asian students. And this article ends with some reflections on the current trend and some suggestions for classroom practice.

2. Selection criteria

The review was done by locating studies in four main databases: EBSCOhost, Elsevier, Science Direct and Google Scholar. Regarding temporal parameters, studies published between 2000 and 2024 were considered for inclusion. This specific time frame was chosen because it aligns with the publication of the WTC pyramid paper by MacIntyre et al. (1998) and around the year 2000 marks the beginning of research on WTC in L2 contexts. With 24 years of research available, there is ample data to analyze the evolving patterns and studies of facilitating L2 WTC up to the end of 2024, which is when the data for this study was collected. Published material was located via the use of different wording patterns of the following key terms: WTC, facilitating, foster, English learning, teaching method, teaching strategy. The studies were reviewed using the following inclusion criteria:

- a. The study was published in a peer reviewed journal between 2000 and 2024.
- b. The study was a dissertation completed between 2000 and 2024.
- c. The study examined English language that was either a second or foreign language for the participants.
- d. The studies were published in peer-reviewed journals and proceedings published in Scopus and World of Science. The final sample included 29 studies, covering both in-class and out-of-class learning. The full articles were read and were thematically categorized; altogether five major themes were identified.

Out of the 29 studies identified, 20 focus on fostering WTC via in-class learning. The research focuses on using specific teaching methods to reduce students' anxiety or fear of communication (Farahani & Abdollahi, 2018; Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019; Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh, 2014; Montazeri & Salimi, 2019; Tavakoli & Zarrinabadi, 2018), encouraging use of the target language (Lin, 2017; Shamsudin, Othman, Jahedi, & Aralas, 2017), promoting autonomy among learners (Matsuoka, Matsumoto, Poole, & Matsuoka, 2014) and rising learners' awareness about their future goals (Al - Murtadha, 2019; Munezane, 2015).

2.1 Theme 1: Motivational Strategies

Considering past studies on how motivation impacts L2 WTC and the significance of motivation in learners' success, this research focused on examining the effectiveness of motivational tactics in enhancing L2 WTC. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) recommendations for motivating language learners were implemented. These included encouraging learners' independence, fostering a positive and calm classroom environment, building strong relationships with learners, boosting their confidence in using the language, enhancing their focus on goals, and ensuring that language classes are engaging. Such like some studies suggest that anxiety negatively affects learners' L2 WTC (J. E. Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Zarrinabadi, 2014) and it is one of the strongest predictors of WTC (Zarrinabadi, 2014). Assisting L2 learners in decreasing their anxiety may be beneficial in encouraging them to feel more willingness to speak in the target language. In a study conducted by Mesgarshahr and Abdollahzadeh (2014), the effects of teaching communication strategies (CS) on a group of 120 EFL learners ranging from 15 to 40 years old in an Iranian language institute were examined. Through the use of quantitative research methods, the experimental group engaged in various tasks that required them to utilize CS like circumlocution, formulaic sequences, and seeking help to address communication challenges. The data analysis revealed that participants who underwent CS training demonstrated an enhancement in their L2 WTC. The researchers concluded that the CS instruction boosted the learners' confidence in communication, enabling them to better handle future communication obstacles and reducing their communication apprehension, which refers to feeling uncomfortable when facing difficulties in interactions, such as lacking the appropriate vocabulary.

Besides, other than CS training, helping learners to improve their linguistic competence can also help to lessen their anxiety and heighten their L2 WTC (Zhong, 2013). An empirical study on L2 WTC among a group of Chinese university students conducted by Zhong (2013) which reveals that accuracy is one of the main factors that affects communication in class. In a study conducted by Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi (2018), an intervention was implemented to improve the use of corrective feedback in teaching two specific grammar concepts. In the experimental group, the teacher provided metalinguistic feedback and explicit corrections whenever students made errors with these grammar items. The results showed that explicit feedback had a positive impact on students' L2 WTC. The researchers concluded that enhancing students' linguistic skills reduced anxiety levels and boosted their perceived linguistic abilities.

Moreover, some studies have empirically shown that L2 WTC can also increase when learners are given the opportunity to become more autonomous (Matsuoka et al., 2014). Autonomy refers to a concept where learners are seen as active beings in making decisions about their own learning, and that the capacity to become autonomous lies on a continuum: from total dependence on the teacher to becoming autonomous (Nunan, 2003). For instance, Khosravani, Khoshshima, and Mohamadian (2020) utilized action research methodology to investigate how L2 WTC could be enhanced among a group of language teachers. The study involved allowing the learners to collaborate in selecting activities for their speaking skills course over a five-week action research cycle. Results indicated that the learners showed increased willingness to participate in spoken English discourse following the interventions. Many learners noted that they became more vocally engaged as a result of the engaging activities implemented in the classroom.

Additionally, literature suggests that another effective stimulation technique is visualization, specifically imagining a community (Al - Murtadha, 2019): studies have explored how being part of a desired community, such as professionals like lawyers and academics, can inspire learners to effectively learn a language even when faced with challenges. Some research has focused on visualizing a future where English proficiency is beneficial (Montazeri & Salimi, 2019) and visualization and goal setting (Al - Murtadha, 2019; Munezane, 2015) could help increase L2 WTC. Al - Murtadha (2019) conducted research on enhancing L2 learning using visualization and goal-setting methods. Over a six-week period, participants engaged in a series of activities focused on four key elements: general imagination, potential selves, visualization, and goal setting. Analysis of the numerical data revealed a notable enhancement in the participants' willingness to communicate in their second language. They expressed increased motivation, dedication, and optimism towards their language learning process. The goal-setting exercises inspired them to intensify their learning efforts and equipped them with effective planning techniques to regulate their learning and attain their objectives.

2.2 Theme 2: Error Correction

Previous research has indicated that error correction impacts students' L2 WTC (Kang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 1998). Some previous studies examined the impact of immediate versus delayed error correction on L2 WTC. The results suggest that informing learners about their errors after they have completed their speech (delayed) can boost WTC in future situations. For example, in a study by Fadilah (2018), the language teachers were given the chance to influence the activities in their speaking skills course to enhance their L2 WTC. Over a four-week action research period, the learners were encouraged to select the activities they wanted for future lessons. The results showed that the learners showed increased willingness to participate in spoken English conversations after the interventions. Many learners noted that they became more vocal in class discussions as a result of the engaging activities they experienced.

Some recent teaching approaches that promote active learning such as problem-based learning (PBL) (Alikhani & Bagheridoust, 2017; Lin, 2017), debate instruction (DI) (Shamsudin et al., 2017) and group dynamics-oriented instruction (GDOI) (Cheng, Chen, Duo, & Wang, 2023) have also been used as treatments to increase L2 WTC. The individuals involved in these research studies completed activities that necessitated them to participate in verbal communication in the specified language. Lin (2017) utilized PBL in her research by implementing a teaching approach with five stages: introduction of the problem, problem review, problem analysis, problem reevaluation, and solution presentation. During each stage, participants were divided into small groups to

collaborate on tasks and were provided with necessary phrases and vocabulary as needed. Additionally, they were allowed to use Mandarin for better communication and efficiency. The study revealed a significant increase in L2 WTC among participants, which the researcher attributes to the close bond formed over the five-week period of working together. This supportive environment fostered comfort and confidence in using English for communication.

2.3 Theme 3: Learning Topics

Kang (2005) proposed that knowledge of the topic under discussion can enormously contribute to situational WTC in the L2, who indicated that the students felt anxious when talking about a subject for which they had the least topical knowledge. In Kang (2005)'s study, Students often experienced increased anxiety when speaking about a topic they were not familiar with due to a lack of ideas, difficulty understanding specialized vocabulary, and comprehension issues. Even shy students felt pressured to join in when they saw their classmates actively participating. This demonstrates that L2 learners can become more engaged in speaking activities when they have a higher L2 WTC, especially when the topics and tasks are relevant and interesting to them. Allowing them to have a say in the discussion has led to a more motivating classroom environment where they are more willing to participate in learning tasks.

Moreover, in a study conducted by Sato (2023), the focus was on enhancing L2 WTC by allowing learners to select topics for class activities. Throughout the action research cycle that took several weeks, the students were asked to choose the types of topics that they preferred to have in the subsequent lessons. Findings reveal that the learners became more willing to engage in spoken discourse using English in different theme settings. Several participants reported that they became more active verbally due to the interesting themes that they had in class.

Additionally, in the study of Zarrinabadi and Alipour (2020), the teacher requested that students bring their preferred subjects to class, including pictures, videos, and other related materials. After gathering a variety of topics, the teacher selected the most popular ones for a group discussion. Subjects like marriage, the internet, football, and movies were chosen for the whole-class conversation. Additionally, students were grouped based on their shared interests when some topics were only selected by a few students.

2.4 Theme 4: Task-based Learning

Task-based learning (TBL) was used as a teaching method to help learners improve their ability to communicate effectively by involving them in meaningful communication activities through the completion of tasks (Shintani & Ellis, 2014). A rich body of research has informed the effects of TBL, examined through three theoretical perspectives: cognitive e.g., as a meaning negotiation process (Foster & Ohta, 2005); sociocultural, e.g., collaborative interactions (Swain & Lapkin, 1998), and psycholinguistics, i.e., complexity, accuracy, and fluency in L2 production (Skehan, 2018). Grant (2020) conducted a quantitative study with 150 EFL learners at a university in Macau, focusing on perceived competence, language anxiety, motivation, and international posture as antecedents to L2 WTC. The participants engaged in a three-week high immersion program consisting of structured morning sessions with university lecturers, afternoon sessions with language assistants, and unstructured evening sessions for practicing the target language. Additionally, participants were encouraged to engage in autonomous learning using online resources. The study found that this high immersion program effectively improved the participants' L2 WTC by providing opportunities for authentic communication, enhancing perceived competence, and reducing anxiety when using L2.

In their study, Toyoda, Yashima, and Aubrey (2021) examined Japanese junior high school students who took part in a four-month TBL program. The research showed that students experienced a significant improvement in their L2 WTC during the TBL period. They also expressed enjoyment when engaging in authentic social interactions in the L2. Similarly, Yu (2015) conducted problem-solving communication tasks with Chinese students of similar difficulty levels. In these tasks, students had to select and rank solutions, compare their choices with their partners, and negotiate until reaching a consensus on the ranking. The findings suggest that instructors implementing task-based language teaching should consider learners' WTC as a dynamic motivational factor closely linked to their communication behaviors. It is important for instructors to be mindful of participants' WTC

when designing group communication activities to create a supportive environment that encourages language output.

While study of Grant (2020) includes both in-class and out-of-class learning experiences as the treatment to foster L2 WTC, Reid and Trofimovich (2018) used activities outside of the classroom to help adult language learners improve their WTC. They selected participation in a kindergarten setting as the method because they believed it would be easier for adult learners to practice the target language in that environment. This is because kindergartens are visually stimulating, use songs, stories, and poetry for learning, repeat material frequently, and have patient and non-critical communication partners (Reid & Trofimovich, 2018). Two individuals served as classroom assistants in a kindergarten class for seven weeks, interacting with the native-speaking children. Their WTC improved as a result of this experience, and it was noted that this increased confidence extended beyond the classroom setting to other social and academic environments. This study suggests that exposure to new socialization settings can enhance WTC, even if they differ from the learners' usual experiences. Besides, J.-E. Peng (2012) conducted a study on the use of digital storytelling (DST) to improve English as a Foreign Language WTC. They provided a DST workshop to the students in China, focusing on prescript writing, video creation, and postscript writing. Data collected included DST videos, prescripts, postscripts, and interviews, with a detailed analysis on two key students. The findings revealed a significant increase in the participants' WTC in English when writing postscripts compared to prescripts. Similarly, a study on college students in Bangladesh also suggested that incorporating more interactive activities like real-life conversations and dialogues in English classes can enhance learners' WTC (Alam et al., 2022).

2.5 Theme 5: Team Size and Type

Past research reports that the group member type and the size of group influences learners' WTC (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005). For instance, in the study of Zarrinabadi, Ketabi, and Abdi (2014), the participants were divided into different small groups to enhance their accountability in engaging in discussions. During whole-class activities, some learners spoke less because they perceived others as more proficient in language skills. The study also found that placing participants in small groups helped increase their accountability and decrease stress. When assigning learners to groups, those who spoke less or were considered to have similar abilities were grouped together. As anticipated, having smaller groups and more uniformity in speaking abilities significantly boosted the amount of conversation generated.

Recently in the field of education, there have been many innovative methods proposed by different scholars for the purpose of enhancing students' eagerness to communicate, cooperative learning (CL) can be one of these novel methods that focuses on learners' communication and WTC (Bahadori & Hashemizadeh, 2018; Habibi & Fard, 2024). According to Johnson and Johnson (1998), CL is becoming more and more popular in school, college, and university settings all around the world and it is claimed to be immensely influential in foreign/second language education by scholars (Johnson & Johnson, 1998; Kagan, 1990; Slavin, 1996). In CL, students are placed in various groups by teachers and are encouraged to collaborate as a team. Each group consists of three to five students who work together, share ideas, study, and discuss to build a collective understanding and achieve a common goal or solve a specific learning challenge, rather than working alone and competing with peers. Essentially, CL is a set of specific teaching and learning methods where students take an active role in their learning process by engaging in communication and interaction with their group members.

Based on the CL theory, Habibi and Fard (2024) investigate the impact of group-work techniques based on Kagan (1990)'s cooperative structures on Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' L2 WTC. Out of an initial group of 75 EFL students, 60 were chosen through convenience sampling based on Nelson proficiency test results. These participants were then randomly divided into a control group and an experimental group. The experimental group, consisting of 30 students, received instruction on various group-work techniques using cooperative structures over 15 sessions, with each session lasting 20 minutes. An analysis of the WTC scores, conducted through an independent sample test after the instructional treatment, revealed a significant improvement in EFL learners' WTC. These findings suggest that implementing cooperative learning structures can enhance students' L2 WTC

and overall learning outcomes, offering valuable insights for educators seeking to boost their students' language proficiency.

3. Discussion

The review shows that almost half of the identified studies done on increasing WTC focuses on in-class environment. Similar observation has been made by Richards (2022) who points out that in SLA research, much of the focus has been on in-class learning. This somehow reflects the idea that in-class learning is more superior to out-of-class learning. This research trend on facilitating L2 WTC echoes the cognitive view of language learning (Kubanyiova, 2019) where according to Lafford (2007) learning a L2 takes place primarily in the classroom. Meanwhile, the study showed that teachers can enhance students' L2 WTC by employing specific techniques and strategies in the classroom. By considering factors such as students' experiences, error correction methods, group dynamics, and motivation levels, instructors can promote a conducive environment for generating classroom discussions. The authors suggest a set of principles based on the study's results to encourage situational WTC and foster a more talkative student body.

First, motivational strategies, as suggested by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998), encompass a number of suggestions that can be helpful in increasing learners' willingness to talk in classrooms. Teachers aim to establish a calm and enjoyable atmosphere in the classroom by using nonverbal cues like smiling, nodding, and providing support. This approach is beneficial not only in language classes but also in various subject-specific courses. Fostering a relaxed classroom setting boosts students' confidence in communicating and engaging. In all classrooms, teachers demonstrate the significance of student participation through eye contact, smiles, and enthusiastic demeanor. Simultaneously, efforts are made to reduce learners' anxiety and enhance their self-assurance by offering guidance on managing stressful situations.

Second, selecting the topic of discussion with flexibility, use the topics for which the students have the most experience or interest. Teachers can use survey and brainstorming techniques to gather information about topics (McDaniel & DiBella-McCarthy, 1989). Besides, consider implementing delayed correction for mistakes or incorrect information. Addressing errors and inaccuracies can lead to feelings of anxiety. Teachers should aim to correct mistakes and inaccuracies in a manner that does not induce stress, embarrassment, or hinder future engagement. Rather than correcting immediately, teachers can allow students to complete their speech and then inquire if other students agree or disagree with the error or inaccurate information.

Finally, along with the activities involving the entire class, arrange the students into smaller groups. The groups can be formed based on the students' interests in specific topics or their proficiency in language. This approach can help boost participation in various subject-specific courses like math, psychology, and sociology. It is more comfortable for students to communicate in a small group compared to a larger one. In small groups, students are more accountable for engaging in classroom tasks. Each group member takes ownership of their responsibilities, leading to increased participation.

4. Conclusion

This article ends by emphasizing two key points. Firstly, for L2 WTC research to have a meaningful influence on teaching methods, researchers should broaden their perspective to consider not only in-class activities but also factors outside the classroom. Additionally, teachers should focus on creating conditions that enhance WTC to the best of their ability (Kang, 2005). The study advised teachers to not prioritize one facilitating factor over others, but instead strive to provide all factors simultaneously to the best of their ability. In conclusion, the authors recommend that teachers view WTC as a crucial element and work towards fostering WTC to leverage its potential benefits.

5. Ethics Committee Approval

The author(s) confirm(s) that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: 22/07/2024).

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