Willingness to Communicate in a Foreign Language: The Factors Affecting Students with a High English Ability in the Higher Education Classroom

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While there are ample studies on willingness to communicate (WTC) that do not specify the subject characteristics of the studies, a study on low willingness to communicate focusing on the factors of students with a high English ability is needed. This study investigates WTC factors in 110 EFL students majoring in ELT in Indonesia with low WTC and high English ability using a mixed-method approach. After assessing the inferential statistics, the partial and multiple regression analyses were applied to know the variables. To get more comprehensive data about the positive and significant variables, deep-interviews were carried out on the selected students. The findings show that the WTC factors are influenced by some conditions such as confidence and classroom environment. It is suggested that WTC factors for the subject characteristics are required to be carried out by other antecedents, propensities and contexts.

Key words: *willingness to communicate, motivation, attitudes, confidence in English, classroom, classroom environment.*

Introduction

From the shifts and revisions of approaches in second/foreign language emerges a new paradigm which is intended to achieve communicative competence for communication in real life. The ultimate goal of the latest approach attempts to provide meaningful activities for language students in order to communicate in their target language which influences selecting the communicative methods and techniques implemented in the classroom (Khajavy et al.,

2014). The communicative competence requires students to practice the target language frequently and communicatively in the classroom. Some communicative activities employed in the classroom will bring language students to be more proficient (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Hence, successful language students in ESL/EFL always speak in order to learn by participating in interactive and meaningful activities (Zarrinabadi, 2017).

However, in the ESL/EFL situation, problems commonly arise when students avoid participating in communication even though they have a high English ability, good communicative competence and some opportunities in a classroom. It is assumed that other factors may contribute to the willingness to communicate in the process of learning (Dornyei & Ryan, 2015). A number of linguistic, psychological, social and cultural factors impact directly or indirectly on willingness to communicate (WTC)(MacIntyre et al., 2011). These factors yield the differences in students' intentions when communicating in communicative activities in the classroom in the EFL context. Because the WTC construct is very multifaceted in nature and significant in foreign language learning, it is indispensable to explore the construct including the probable antecedents, the propensities and the contexts in order to find insight about how students become willing to communicate in English and what affects them in the learning process.

Literature Review

Factors contributing to WTC that have directly and indirectly been scrutinised in the ESL/EFL classroom situation are in relation to: integrativeness, international posture, ought to L2 self, ideal L2 self, valuing of global English (Munezane, 2013), emotional intelligence (Alavinia & Alikhani, 2014; Gholami, 2015), pronunciation anxiety, level of familiarity with interlocutor, group size, type of task, target-language proficiency, fear of negative evaluation (Baran-Łucarz, 2014), motivation and communication self-confidence (Fallah, 2014), attitudes, classroom environment (Khajavy et al., 2014), self-perceived communication competence (Zarrinabadia & Haidary, 2014; Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak, 2014; Bukhari and Cheng, 2017; Halupka-Rešetar et al., 2018), interest, perceived effectiveness, good groupmates, good classroom social situation, personal vision (Eddy-U, 2015), beneficial, lecturers who are up to date and interested in the topic, well-developed time management, cooperation and pair work with close friends, some opportunity to express ideas (Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015), personality of lecturer, positive classroom social climate (Wu and Lin, 2014; Asmali, 2016; Joe et al., 2017; Khany & Nejad 2017), ethnocentrism, sensation seeking (Fatemi et al. 2016) and a reason to communicate with the instructor (Amiryousefi, 2016).

Most of the aforementioned studies examined WTC at the tertiary level (Munezane, 2013; Fallah, 2014; Alavinia & Alikhani, 2014; Baran-Łucarz, 2014; Khajavy et al., 2014; Wu & Lin,

2014; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2014; Eddy, 2015,; Pawlak & Wiertelak, 2015; Asmali, 2016; Fatemi et al., 2016; Amiryousefi, 2016; Bukhari & Cheng, 2017; Halupka-Rešetar et al., 2018). The studies that scrutinise WTC are mostly conducted in subjects with a non-English major (Munezane, 2013; Baran Baran-Łucarz, 2014; Wu & Lin, 2014; Eddy, 2015; Asmali, 2016; Hosseini Fatemi et al., 2016; Halupka-Rešetar et al. 2018) whereas the other studies focus on English as an academic major (Fallah, 2014; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2014; Alavinia & Alikhani, 2014; Khajavy et al., 2014; Pawlak & Wiertelak, 2015; Amiryousefi, 2016; Fatemi et al., 2016; Bukhari & Cheng, 2017). The diverse studies examining WTC are influenced by different reasons. It is presumed that the language ability of a non-English major is good because they achieve a certain English proficiency score. Yet, it is not clear whether those studies scrutinise students with a high English ability that do not want to talk in the process of learning. Similarly, research in English majors involving the English students do not intend to investigate the high English ability students' problem in speaking. While those WTC studies do not specify the participant characteristics, the study focusing on the factors inhibiting high English ability students from communicating in a classroom where it is worthwhile to be investigated.

Empirical studies on WTC have revealed that many variables contribute to WTC, but only a few of them influence strongly on WTC. Motivation is classified as motivational propensities in the WTC paradigm model that impacts directly and positively on WTC (Jung, 2011, Munezane, 2013; Fallah, 2014; Öz et al., 2015; Asmali, 2016). Similarly, in motivational propensities and transient variables, confidence in English communication is the strongest predictor of WTC (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Munezane, 2013; Fallah, 2014). Moreover, attitudes categorised in the affective-cognitive context become one of the variables that contribute and influence significantly on WTC (Asmali, 2016). Research results in WTC conducted in Iran reveal that the classroom environment in social and individual contexts is the most significant predictor of WTC (Khajavy et al. 2014).

Those aforementioned variables are analysed using macro-perspective in which the data from several students gathered through valid and reliable instruments can be generalised to other situations. In this case, the studies have one of the demerits because it does not deeply analyse the phenomenon. Thus, using a mixed-method approach, this study will gather more comprehensive data (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016). To achieve this aim, the significant four variables were chosen in line with the previous findings in WTC studies consisting of the WTC variables such as motivation, attitudes, confidence in the English classroom and classroom environment. Despite the fact that several studies found there were strong variables contributing to WTC, studies on factors inhibiting high English ability students from communicating in the classroom comprising the variables are still scant. Hence, this current study scrutinises and explores the factors of WTC inhibiting high English ability students in EFL situations. This present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that affect high English ability students inability to communicate in higher-education classroom?
2. How do these factors influence their willingness to talk (WTC)?

Research Methods

An explanatory sequential mixed method design aims to examine factors affecting low willingness of high English ability students to communicate in a classroom. In quantitative design, the researcher uses partial and multiple regression in order to collect and analyse the quantitative data. Then, it was followed up with a case study.

Participants of the Study

A total of 110 undergraduate EFL university students from seven classes at a Private University in East Java were involved in this present research including male (35%) and female (75%) participants. The majority of the participants (30.21 %) were aged between 18 - 20, 47.73% were aged between 21-23, and the remaining 22.06 % were over the age of 24. All of those selected were based on the result of TOEFL and GPA scores and are studying English Language Teaching as part of an academic major. They are frequently provided communicative activities in the classroom where lecturers use English as a medium for language instruction. The students possess a high English ability but are unwilling to communicate in respective classrooms.

Data Gathering Procedures

This study used two designs, quantitative and qualitative, in order to gather the data. In quantitative design, students are requested to answer five questionnaires including willingness to communicate in English in classroom adapted from Peng and Woodrow (2010), attitudes adapted from Ishag (2016), students' motivation adapted from Mori and Gobel (2006), classroom environment from Fraser et al. (1996), and confidence in English communication adapted from Woodrow (2006) and Horwitz et al. (1986). Those questionnaires are written in the form of statements with options on a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The students must select the statements by circling the options.

Of the 110 students, three students were selected by purposive sampling to be interviewed using a stimulated recall interview with an introspective technique. This technique provides the interviewee to think again why they were not participating in communicative activities in the classroom. The selected students were interviewed five times for an hour to get consistent answers and more comprehensive data about the factors.

Data Analysis Technique

The quantitative method required a precise statistical procedure to verify the theory of WTC dealing with the selected variables. Because the quantitative method has a flaw in discovering meanings, qualitative method was needed in order to get deep explanations about the factors through rigorous and a thorough analysis. To discover the WTC factors, partial and multiple linear regression analyses were applied to analyse the dependent variable i.e. WTC and independent variables i.e. motivation, attitudes, classroom environment and confidence in the English classroom. Before implementing partial and multiple regression analyses, normality, multicollinearity, and heteroskedasticity were tested using SPSS 23. The results of the assumption test fulfil all assumptions. To add the interpretation of quantitative data, the results of the interview were transcribed and coded to find themes. Some themes were created based on the interviewees' answers by comparing the differences and the commonalities.

Findings

Factors Inhibiting Speaking in the Classroom

The first question in this study deals with the factors that affect high English ability students not to communicate in the classroom. The quantitative data collected from the participants was analysed. In order to answer the first question, partial and multiple regression were analysed. Before the process of partial and multiple regression, the normality, multicollinearity, and heteroskedasticity were tested using SPSS 23. The results of the test assumptions fulfilled all assumptions described in table 1.

Table 1: The Test Assumptions for Normality, Multicollinearity, and Heteroskedasticity.

Normality	*Z*	*P*
Willingness to communicate	0.071	0.200
Multicollinearity	**Tolerance**	**VIF**
Classroom environment	0.734	1.363
Attitude	0.588	1.701
Motivation	0.529	1.889
Confidence in the English classroom	0.631	1.584
Heteroskedasticity	*P*	
Classroom environment	0.820	
Attitude	0.854	
Motivation	0.912	
Confidence inEnglish Classroom	0.695	

The partial regression analyses were used to discover the influence motivation on WTC, attitudes on WTC, classroom environment on WTC and confidence in the English classroom on WTC. Based on the criteria of the test, if the t$_{observed}$ ≥ t$_{table}$ or the probability < *level of significance* (α), there is a significant influence partially motivation on WTC, attitudes on WTC, classroom environment on WTC and confidence in the English classroom on WTC. Moreover, multiple linear regression strengthens the results of partial regression. Table 2 shows the partial and the multiple linear correlation result of the motivation, the attitudes, the classroom environment and the confidence in the English classroom on WTC.

Table 2: The Partial and Multiple Linear Correlation Results

Coefficients[a]								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.617	.443		1.392	.167		
	Convidence in English	.357	.099	.308	3.623	.000	.734	1.363
	Attitude	.023	.115	.019	.202	.840	.588	1.701
	Motivation	.111	.137	.081	.812	.419	.529	1.889
	Convidence	.396	.087	.418	4.565	.000	.631	1.584

a. Dependent Variable: WTC

As informed in Table 1, attitudes and motivation variables do not influence on WTC partially and significantly as t is .812 and Sig is .419 in motivation whereas t is .202 and Sig is .840 in attitudes. Subsequently, classroom environment and confidence in the English classroom influence on WTC partially and significantly as t is 3.623 and Sig is .000 in classroom environment whereas t is 4.565 and Sig is .000 in confidence in the English classroom . Moreover, based on unstandardised coefficients B, attitudes and motivation variables do not impact on WTC significantly as B is .111 in motivation and B is .023 in attitudes whereas classroom environment and confidence in the English classroom variables impact on WTC significantly and positively as B is .357 in classroom environment and B is .396 in confidence in the English classroom.

The Causes of Low Willingness to Communicate in the Classroom

In the interviews, one of the students contended that he did not feel confident if he created some mistakes related to content. Student preferred keeping silent in the classroom to avoid

making mistakes in the classroom. The student thought that his friends would laugh at him loudly if he could not answer the question properly. He said

> *I don't want to speak in the classroom because I'm quite afraid if my opinions, arguments and comments are not correct. Then, my friends laugh me loudly. It seems that they will be mocking me inside and outside the classroom* (Student 1).

The negative perception of their classmates' responses became a barrier to participating in the communicative activities. It seems that the student did not attempt to give their opinions, arguments and comments. The student would be interested in participating in the learning process if the lecturer asked a question or some questions to the student individually by calling the student's name.

The students usually waited for the other friends that were classified as smart students to contribute communicatively in the classroom. They just watched their friends' responses when participating in the classroom. They did not want to object the opinions, arguments and comment even though the student knows the most suitable rejoinders. This was shared by the student:

> *I usually just wait and see my smart friends to participate communicatively in the classroom. I think that his/her answers usually are better than me. Even though he/she makes mistakes or I did not agree with his/her opinions, I still keep silent* (Student 1).

Based on the student's answer, the lack of confidence happened again because of the fear of making mistakes. To overcome the fear of making mistakes, the student can spend time preparing and planning to minimise the presentation's weaknesses.

The student did not actively participate in the classroom due to the other classmates' and lecturers' perceptions. Asking an uncommon question to the lecturer made them classified as one of the slow students in the classroom. Similarly, the students did not want to ask questions frequently because they were afraid of being categorised as "slow student" by their classmates. This was shown when a student stated:

> *If I ask a question, and the other students never ask a question that I ask, I feel the stupidest student in the classroom. Also, if I ask some questions many times to the lecturer, I will be classified as one of the slow students* (Student 2).

It is a real disadvantage to become a successful language student in an EFL setting even though he or she possesses good grade point average and proficiency. It did not automatically assure high performance and good communication frequency in communicative activities. While, lecturers tend to like active students that ask uncommon question and many questions related to the learning content.

Dealing with encouraging low willingness to communicate of high English ability students in the classroom, the lecturer must conduct many activities in pairs since the fear of students to speak was seen by several people. This was stated by a student:

> *I don't like to present and to work in a large group because my friends will see my performance and competence. I prefer doing some communicative activities in pairs to large groups which consist more than two people or just writing it in paper (Student 1).*

In this situation, the student felt that the condition did not support him to communicate. He thought that he was shy because other students would judge his or her competence and performance. Thus, the student tends to choose to deliver opinions, comments and answers in written form or only seen by his peers.

The Classroom Environment in the Social and Individual Contexts

According to the result of the interview, the students would have a high willingness to communicate by actively participating in the classroom when the lecturer has a good relationship with the student. The lecturer must smile sometimes in the process learning, must be patient when the students create some mistakes and errors, know the name of each student, and must be objective to all students, as stated by one of the subjects as follows:

> *I want speak in the classroom if the lecturer and I know each other. He/ she has a beautiful smile and must be patient and objective to all student in the classroom* (Student 2).

The student would not have WTC in the classroom if the lecturer was not friendly with the students, did not give wait time for student to respond the given questions, became angry when the student created content mistakes, grammatical errors, pronunciation errors and semantic errors, the lecturer did not know the students' names, and the lecturer tended to be subjective to the students in classroom.

The student would be interested in communicating in the classroom if the lecturer integrated the use of ICT and English materials. In fact, the lecturers did not always integrate between ICT and English material integration in the classroom. Thus, the student tended to be unwilling to communicate, as indicated by student 3,

> *I like learning and participating in the classroom if lecturer implements ICT in the teaching process, but our lecturers infrequently use ICT and English material integration* (Student 3).

Based on the student's explanation, lecturers have to increase the frequency of teaching using ICT in communicative activities and learn how to integrate between ICT and English material. Therefore, it can boost WTC for the students.

Students inclined to participate actively and communicatively in the classroom if the lecturer could create a positive classroom climate and minimise negative classroom climate, for example,

> *I tend to involve in communicative activities if the teaching and learning processes are fun and challenging* (Student 2).

Inevitably, maintaining a positive classroom climate was required for boosting the students to speak up in communicative activities. The lecturer must have some ways to build the classroom climate in order to get fun and challenging situations. Hence, it could encourage the student to participate in communicative activities. In fact, the student did not feel that the lecturers provided a positive classroom climate in the communicative activities, and it impacted on negatively on students' willingness to communicate in the classroom.

Choosing interesting, up-to-date and beneficial materials that is a part in developing a lesson plan is prominent for the process of learning in communicative activities. The student's motivation to participate in the communicative activities become higher if lecturers are able to determine the interesting, up-to-date and beneficial materials, as asserted by student 3,

> *If lecturer creates interesting, up-to-date, and beneficial materials for us, I will contribute to communicate activities without being asked to participate in the communicative activities* (Student 3).

In other words, the uninteresting, out-of-date and unbeneficial materials will not increase students' participation and motivation to speak in the classroom because the student needs interesting, up-to-date and beneficial materials in order to contribute to the communicative activities.

Discussion

Unexpectedly, the findings dealing with factors affecting low willingness of high English ability students to communicate in classroom reveals that attitudes and motivation do not impact the students to communicate in the classroom whereas confidence in the English classroom in motivational propensities and classroom environment in social and individual context are the influential factors for the subject. The finding related to attitudes and motivation is contrast with the research results conducted by Munezane (2013), Fallah (2014), Öz et al. (2015) and Asmali (2016) that reveal attitudes and motivation influence the students to communicate in the classroom. Moreover, when juxtaposed with other research results from the previous studies by Cao (2011) and Khajavy et al. (2016), this research confirms the confidence in the English classroom and the classroom environment as essential factors that can increase students' willingness to communicate. The factors cannot function well because of the joint effect of the conditions in the classroom namely fear of making mistakes, fear of

being considered slow students, fear of speaking and being seen by a number of people, students' and lecturers' adjacency, limitedness of ICT and English material integration, negative classroom climate, uninteresting, out-of-date and unbeneficial materials, a few of questions for brainstorming, explicit corrective feedback, peer groups, and appreciation.

Confidence in the English classroom in motivational propensities in this research becomes students' problem since the students tend to hinder them to contribute in communicative activities. The confidence in the English classroom is caused by some situations that make students' unwilling to communicate. In regard to the conditions, fear of making mistakes lessens their willingness to communicate because they do not want to be laughed by their friends. The students sit without participating actively in the classroom or wait for their friends' answers. The students will speak if the lecturers gave a presentation task. This research finding is similar to what Juhana (2012) found. Furthermore, the students are quite afraid of being considered as a slow student if they always ask questions and uncommon questions. Regarding the situation, the lecturer has to change students' perceptions. Asking some questions regularly or unusual questions does not reflect that the student can be classified as a slow student. Yet, it means that the questions never appear in the other students' mind in the process of learning in communicative activities. Thus, students must be confident to ask some questions or uncommon questions rather than just keeping those questions in their mind. Dealing with fear of speaking seen by several people, the students tend to choose presenting in front of the peer that they know each other. The same findings of fear of speaking seen by a number of people were also found in Pakistani participants (Bukhari et al. 2015). Thus, the empirical studies conducted by MacIntyre (2007), Cao (2011), Baran-Lucarz (2014), Pawlak and Mystkowska-Wiertlak (2015) and Vongsila and Reinders (2016) have suggested choosing the appropriate interlocutor for students in communicative activities in a peer group that has a closeness with each other. Because of the intimacy, students will speak in English without thinking about their mistakes and errors, and the communication becomes two-way communication.

Another important factor is dealing with the classroom environment. Students will contribute to communicative activities maximally if they think positively towards some aspects in the classroom environment condition. Hence, the insight of classroom management is required to build a positive classroom environment since it will increase on low willingness to communicate students to participate in the classroom. The students' first impression that sees their lecturer's smile before explaining the material will attract students to have WTC. Similar finding were also shown in Cao's study (2011), Osterman's study (2014), and Zarrinabadi et al. s' study (2014). They inform that lecturer has to smile in order to facilitate WTC in ESL students as it can build students' and lecturers' rapport in the process of learning. Moreover, lecturers must manage a positive classroom environment to be happy, fun and enjoyable by controlling and minimising all the negative factors, similar to those found Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlaks' study (2014). Also, to avoid the decreasing of students' willingness to

speak in the classroom, implicit corrective feedback will be better to be implemented in the classroom for low WTC students or error correction can be employed after the students finish their speech to reduce students' anxiety (Zarrinabadi et al., 2014; Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi, 2018).

In addition, the classroom environment is determined by lecturers' knowledge and skill in teaching English as a foreign language. Low willingness to communicate students will change their bad practices in the classroom if the lecturer creates creative and innovative materials (Eddy-U 2015). The students will unconsciously participate because of the result of creativeness and innovativeness yielding interesting, up-to-date and beneficial communicative tasks. Subsequently, the communicative task needs a clear instruction which can be explained in the process of learning materials by lecturer before the students do the actual stages in the learning process, and some questions for brainstorming must be delivered in pre-teaching to activate students' background knowledge and to attract students' attention (Eddy-U, 2015). Moreover, lecturers must possess ICT skill on how to integrate between technology and English material to entice students' participation in communicative activities through online chat (Freiermuth & Nagoya, 2006), digital game based learning (Reinders & Wattana, 2015) and asynchronous computer-mediated practice (Buckingham & Alpaslan, 2017). In the process of learning when asking some question to students, lecturers have to distribute their questions to all students objectively since low WTC students are very interested in being asked instead of asking question voluntarily. After low WTC students answered some questions, lecturers can respond to it by giving compliments and rewards as appreciation towards student's effort in communicative activities (Edwards, 2016).

Conclusion and Implications

This research offers corroboration of the WTC factors within confidence in the English classroom and classroom environment for low WTC students that have a high English ability in communicative tasks, but they do not want to participate actively and communicatively inside the classroom. Based on the mixed-method research, the WTC variables that influence low WTC students to speak in the classroom are confidence in the English classroom and classroom environment in social and individual contexts. This research finding substantiates the WTC paradigm that motivational propensities and social and individual context influence on WTC (Macintyre et al., 1998).

An implication of these research results is the changing way in treating low willingness to communicate of students with high English ability in classroom. The findings in this research confirmed that there are many students' characteristics in the classroom which must be handled differentially according to their characteristics. Therefore, based on these research results, lecturers have to some strategies in encouraging students to participate in communicative

activities. Further exploration of WTC regarding these assisting factors is necessary. This research focuses on the factors of the low WTC students with high English ability, yet forthcoming research, with larger participants in interview, might examine the lecturers' strategies in facilitating the factors inside classroom.

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