



Analysis of Willingness to Communicate in English as a Second Language among Erstwhile FATA Students

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Abstract: The construct of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) plays a significant role in the field of second language (L2) acquisition. Acquiring proficiency in English as a second language is a challenge for many L2 learners and this proficiency is linked with the communication in a second language. But it is generally observed that L2 learners tend to remain silent in the classroom and they are not willing to communicate in L2 with classmates and teachers. The present study is related to the willingness to communicate among erstwhile FATA students in KP, Pakistan. The main focus is on the questions of how much L2 learners at FATA University is willing to communicate, does gender differences affect willingness to communicate and what factors affect willingness to communicate. The study follows qualitative method where the researcher has collected data from the 20 students 10 male and 10 female students through structured interview. The findings reveal that most of the students are not willing to communicate due to many social and psychological factors and that gender difference has no effect on the level of willingness to communicate.

Keywords: Willingness to Communicate, Second language Acquisition

1. Introduction

English language is the compulsory subject in Pakistan from the grade 1 to almost undergraduate level of education but students after these many years engaged in learning English language still face problems in speaking English and they are not proficient. Although, majority of these students understand English but they are unable to express themselves in English language and one of the major reason may be that these students are not willing to communicate in English language during their studies. The present study takes into account the construct of willingness to communicate introduced by McCroskey and associates in the 1980s (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). McCroskey and associates conceptualized WTC as a characteristic of personality where some individual tend to communicate more than the other while some do not. Since then many studies have been conducted to validate this construct. (Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988; Sallinen-Kuparinen & McCroskey, 1991). Furthermore, the construct of willingness to communicate was validated and analyzed in various contexts by different researchers across the globe in the acquisition of English as second language. (Ghoonsoly et al., 2014; Alimorad & Farahmand, 2021), (Aomr, Goh, and Kapol, 2020) (Başöz & Erten, 2018), (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Zhang, Beckmann, & Beckmann, 2022; Kun, Senom, and Peng, 2020), (Alam, Ansarey, Abdul-Halim, Rana, Milon, & Mitu (2022), Pakistan (Ubaid, Ramanair, & Rethinasamy, 2022).

In almost all the studies, the researchers have followed either the quantitative method of inquiry or the mixed

method. Those who followed the quantitative methods have exploited the Willingness to Communicate Scale developed by McCroskey and Baer in 1985. Although reliable, its origin in first language (L1) research has led L2 researchers to modify or create new scales suited for their L2 research environment. Popular L2-WTC scales include the WTC Inside and Outside the Classroom scale by MacIntyre et al. (2001), the L2-WTC scale by Weaver (2005), and the WTC in English scale by Peng and Woodrow (2010). The major reasons pointed out affecting WTC are mostly related to the age, gender classroom environment, fear of losing face, teacher status, L2 speaking anxiety, and trust. However, as pointed out by Başöz and Erten (2019), there is a need to investigate the WTC model in the acquisition of a second language through qualitative methods

The present study addresses the WTC in the erstwhile FATA region in Pakistan which is comparatively very backward in terms of modern facilities. This area has also been gone through the troubles of war on terror which has further affected the area badly. The education ratio is very low in the area due to lack of educational institutions and facilities. There is only one university in the name of FATA university established recently, imparting education to the undergraduate students since 2016. The study focuses to answer the following questions.

1.1 Research Questions

- a) What is the level of willingness to Communicate in English as Second Language among the undergraduates of erstwhile FATA?
- b) Does the gender of the individuals affect the level of willingness to communicate in English as second language?
- c) What are the factors affecting the willingness to communicate among the undergraduates of erstwhile FATA?

2. Methodology

This study follows the qualitative method of research. In total 20 students from the undergraduate students belonging to erstwhile FATA region have been selected in the present study. Among these 20 students 10 students are male while 10 are female students. All these students are the students of English and Political Science Majors and they all share the same linguistic and sociocultural background. The data has been collected from these selected students through structured interviews. The questions on the interview is given below which is mostly based on the L2 WTC scale of Peng and Woodrow (2010).

- a) Are you willing to speak English with your classmate in the classroom?
- b) Do you use English for asking questions from teachers in the classroom?
- c) Are you willing to interact with your teachers in English?
- d) Do you willingly participate in the classroom activities that are conducted in English like role play or presentations?
- e) Do you think your female gender hinders in speaking English in the classroom?
- f) Is it easy for a male or a female to interact in English in English?
- g) What psychological factors do you think creates problem in your willingness to communicate in English?
- h) What social or cultural factors do you believe affect your willingness to communicate?

4. Analysis

a) Willingness to Speak English with Classmates

The interviewees generally expressed a reserved stance toward speaking English with their classmates. A consistent pattern emerged among both male and female students, with the majority indicating a reluctance to engage in English conversations during regular classroom interactions. The responses suggest a prevailing comfort in using their native language for peer communication within the classroom setting. As participant 1 who is male stated "I prefer talking in [native language] with my friends. English feels a bit forced." While the participant two female stated that "I don't mind English, but we usually just use our own language. It's what everyone's comfortable with."

b) Use of English for Asking Questions from Teachers

The findings indicate a similar trend in the use of English for posing questions to teachers during class. Both male and female students tended to avoid employing English for seeking clarification or engaging in academic discourse with their instructors. As the following responses from a male and female participants illustrate. "I never ask questions in English. It feels strange, and I'm not used to it" and "Most of us just ask in [native language]. It's

easier, and the teachers understand us better."

c) Willingness to Interact with Teachers in English

The participants exhibited a hesitancy to interact with teachers in English, revealing a prevailing inclination toward using their native language when communicating with instructors. While some students acknowledged the importance of English proficiency, the overall willingness to engage in English conversations with teachers remained limited. The participant 5 is thus of the view that "I think it's important, but I'm not really comfortable talking to teachers in English. I stick to [native language]." In the same direction a female participant 6 point out that "Maybe if it's something important, but usually, we just talk to them in our language."

d) Participation in English-conducted Classroom Activities

The students, both male and female, displayed a general reluctance to actively participate in classroom activities conducted in English, such as role-plays or presentations. The responses suggested a preference for using their native language in academic activities as the following responses highlight.

Participant 7 (Male): "I'd rather not do role-plays in English. It feels awkward, and I'm not sure what to say."

Participant 8 (Female): "English presentations make me nervous. I prefer doing them in [native language]."

E. Perception of Female Gender Hindering English Speaking:

The responses from predominantly female participants suggest a prevalent perception among them that their gender might create hindrances in speaking English in the classroom. Several female participants expressed concerns or uncertainties related to their gender impacting their ability to engage in English communication. For instance, one participant stated in this connection that "Yeah, I think so. Sometimes I worry that people judge my English skills because I'm a girl."

F. Ease of English Interaction for Males and Females

Regarding the ease of English interaction for males and females, opinions were more divided. While some participants emphasized that the challenges were universal and not gender-specific, a notable number of female participants leaned towards perceiving English interaction as comparatively easier for males. The female participants thus stated that "boys seem more confident speaking English. I think they find it easier." On the other hand the male participant 4 highlight that "It's about practice, not about being a guy or a girl. Anyone can get better."

G. Psychological Factors Affecting Willingness to Communicate in English

Participants, both male and female, widely acknowledged the influence of psychological factors on their willingness to communicate in English. The responses revealed a range of personal concerns and internal barriers that contribute to the hesitancy in using English in the classroom. The male participant is of the view that "I get nervous about making mistakes. Fear of judgment, you know?" similarly, the female participant stated that "Sometimes, it's lack of confidence. I doubt if I'm good enough in English."

H. Social or Cultural Factors Impacting Willingness to Communicate

In terms of social and cultural factors, participants pointed out external influences that go beyond individual psychology. The impact of peer perceptions, societal expectations, and cultural norms emerged as significant contributors to the hesitancy in English communication. Regarding this factor, a male participant added that "Our culture sometimes sees English as a bit fancy. People might think you're showing off." In the same connection, a female participant added that "When classmates mostly speak our native language, it feels odd to use English.

Discussion

The consistent reluctance among both male and female students to use English in various classroom contexts indicates a cultural or habitual preference for the native language. While the reasons for this hesitancy were not explicitly provided, the responses underscore the need for targeted interventions and language support initiatives to foster a more inclusive and language-diverse classroom environment. Efforts to build confidence and encourage English language use should be considered to bridge the existing communication gap within the academic setting.

The prevailing sentiment among the predominantly female participants, perceiving their gender as a potential hindrance, reflects the existence of nuanced concerns in the context of English language interaction. The identified

perception may stem from societal expectations or personal insecurities that contribute to a perceived gender-related disadvantage in English communication.

Understanding and addressing these concerns are crucial for creating an inclusive and supportive language-learning environment. Educational institutions can implement targeted interventions such as confidence-building activities and mentorship programs to empower female students in their English language journey. Further research exploring the specific factors contributing to these perceptions and their impact on language learning outcomes could provide valuable insights for designing effective interventions.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that combines individual support mechanisms, such as confidence-building workshops, with broader cultural sensitivity initiatives within the educational environment. Creating a classroom culture that encourages open communication and embraces linguistic diversity can contribute to mitigating the impact of these identified factors.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of interview responses from both male and female students reveals a consistent pattern of reluctance towards using English in various classroom contexts. The predominant preference for the native language in peer interactions, questioning teachers, participating in activities, and the perception of gender-related challenges collectively shape the language dynamics within the classroom setting. The overarching theme that emerges from the participants' responses is a comfort and preference for using their native language in diverse classroom scenarios. The participants express a sense of ease, familiarity, and naturalness when communicating in their mother tongue, indicating a strong inclination towards maintaining linguistic comfort. Across all aspects of classroom communication – be it peer interactions, questioning teachers, or participating in activities – both male and female students consistently exhibit a reluctance to engage in English. The reasons cited range from a perceived awkwardness to a lack of confidence, contributing to an environment where the native language prevails. The acknowledgment of psychological factors such as fear of judgment and lack of confidence unveils internal barriers that significantly influence the students' willingness to communicate in English. Strategies addressing these psychological aspects could play a pivotal role in fostering a more confident language use. The impact of social and cultural factors emerges as a key determinant. Peer perceptions, societal expectations, and cultural norms contribute to the hesitancy, indicating the need for a holistic approach that considers the broader cultural context influencing language choices.

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