

ONE GOAL, MANY ROADS: INVESTIGATING INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN L2 WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AMONG UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: August 2025 Revised: September 2025 Accepted: September 2025 Published: October 2025	<i>This study examines the influence of Individual Differences (ID) on freshmen's L2 Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning context. The study you provided explores the role of ID in determining WTC in EFL learners, emphasizing how these differences affect language proficiency and communicative competence. The main gap addressed in this study is the lack of focus on personalized language learning strategies that take into account individual differences in WTC and proficiency among EFL learners. The study employs a qualitative method, data were collected through questionnaires for selective the participants by using the purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews were driven with the selected participants. The result has showed that factors such as self-confidence, motivation, language anxiety, classroom atmosphere, and peer support significantly shaped students' WTC. Students with positive self-perception and supportive environment were likely have the L2 willingness to communicate in English. On the other hand, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and unsupportive settings hindered participation. An effective strategy identified was personal preparation that gradually facilitated the students to the speaking opportunities and fostering a supportive and non-judgmental classroom environment. The research highlights the importance of considering individual learning characteristics in designing communicative language learning strategies to improve students speaking confidence and language acquisition outcomes. The further implications of teaching and learning process should be more open to facilitate student's IDs and to be more personalized.</i>
Keywords Individual Difference; L2 Willingness to Communicate; EFL Speaking Skill, EFL Learner.	
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INTRODUCTION

English is spoken worldwide and has attained the status of a global language (Wolf & Phung, 2019). With the globalization of education and increasing opportunities for international mobility, the demand for English language proficiency among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners has surged significantly. It will be easier to understand if language learning can be practiced rather than just given theory. The positive aspect of globalization is that communication is easier with people from different countries (Etim-James & Omini, 2024). With the increasing interdependence between countries around the world, English as a global lingua franca causes almost all countries around the world to use it (Rahmatika Aini & Nohantiya, 2020).

However, key challenges of studying EFL focused on English language proficiency, different learning styles, and cultural differences (Wolf & Phung, 2019). These emphasize the complexities of achieving proficiency in English, particularly in the context of EFL. Learners

must not only overcome linguistic barriers but also adapt to different learning styles and cultural expectations. This aligns with the growing focus on how individual differences (ID) impact language acquisition. One significant hurdle is mastering spoken English. Spoken language proficiency is of paramount importance in language learning, as it plays a crucial role in effective communication (Hoa, M.A, 2023). As Akhter et al. (2020) noted, the importance of speaking skills in learning English as a foreign language cannot be overstated, as speaking is a primary mode of communication. Without speaking skills, the purposes of communication cannot be performed effectively. Speaking allows individuals to express emotions, thoughts, and ideas, making it an essential part of daily interactions, whether in formal settings or casual conversations, spoken language remains a fundamental tool for human connection and correspondence (Febria & Marsevani, 2024; Pratiwi, 2022; Purba et al., 2024). Acquiring and honing these skills involves exposure to authentic language input through listening and reading.

In addition, communicating is one effort that can certainly also improve the ability to speak, but ID in personality characteristics means that some people have traits that make them speak less frequently. Although individuals who communicate effectively are rated good, well, some individuals talk infrequently due to these individuals' differences (Isma & Farid Baharuddin, 2022). ID in Willingness to Communicate (WTC) at both trait and state levels is an important predictor of language learning performance (Zhang et al., 2020). Therefore, several things can be done as an effort to improve communication. (Dilshad et al., 2019) mentioned that teachers through create an earning environment that may promote and sustain students' motivation for learning English, influencing their attitude, personality, effort, and persistence in acquiring proficiency in English as a Foreign Language. Motivation involves a constellation of closely related beliefs, perceptions, values, interests, and actions (Purmama et al., 2019).

Language learners need to have a complete understanding of communicative competence to be able to communicate effectively (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022; Nugroho, 2019). For EFL learners, mastering communication skills is essential for successful interaction with others (Pratiwi et al., 2024). Mastering good communication skills will encourage EFL learners to understand, create, manage, and communicate effectively in various forms, both verbal and non-verbal. In the context of English language acquisition as a Foreign Language, WTC serves as an important determinant of successful language learning and social integration. EFL learners with higher WTC are more likely to engage in language use, leading to better language production and overall proficiency.

The previous study of Amirian et al. (2020) investigated the causality of WTC in communication and upgraded EFL learners' personality traits, the researcher provided teaching materials to develop knowledge, and with that knowledge can improve language learner communicative behaviours. Zhang et al. (2020) explored the relationship between WTC in second language and various factors such as personality traits and communication behaviour but with non-English major students as participants, the result of the research that personality traits have an important role in influencing WTC and suggested educators to focus on fostering learners' WTC. The other study from Dewaele (2019) encountered that in addition to the material, the teacher can also be the one success factor for the L2 acquisition, which teacher must be able to involve making the classrooms are emotionally friendly and quite a challenging and exciting environment.

The main gap addressed in this study is the lack of focus on personalized language learning strategies that take into account individual differences in the L2 WTC and proficiency among EFL learners. Therefore, the study you provided explores the role of ID in determining WTC in EFL learners, emphasizing how these differences affect language proficiency and communicative competence as the IDs have been emphasized on the freshmen respecting with L2 WTC. To respond to the need, this research aims to address certain gaps by focusing on

personalized language learning strategies based on ID and WTC. Unlike previous studies that explored WTC on personality traits, classroom environment, or specific learner groups, this study aims to integrate these factors to develop customized interventions. Furthermore, the study seeks 1) What factors that support and hinder to develop freshmen student's L2 WTC? 2) What Strategy to improve freshmen student's L2 WTC? as the research questions.

Literature Review

Individual Differences (ID)

Individual Differences are a construct in the first language (L1) of WTC that was initially viewed as a tendency-like trait that remains relatively stable across different situations (Zhang et al., 2020). ID refers to the distinct characteristics and variations among individuals in terms of their psychological, physical, and behavioral traits. In L2 Communication, ID is critical in influencing learners' speech production, WTC, and overall language learning success (Han et al., 2021).

ID thus plays an important role in shaping learners' experiences and learning outcomes in language acquisition (Demetriou et al., 2019). ID explains why people behave, think, and react differently even when faced with the same situation. These differences influence how individuals perceive, process, and respond to various stimuli, including those encountered in communication settings. ID encompasses a broad range of factors, such as personality traits, cognitive abilities, learning preferences, motivation, and emotional responses. Personality traits such as conscientiousness, openness, and emotional stability are significant predictors of academic performance (Smith et al., 2019). Personality traits might determine whether someone is naturally outgoing or reserved, which can impact their willingness to engage in social or communication activities. Cognitive ID in Second Language Acquisition majorly contributes to this tradition of exploring differential factors in foreign language learning (Biedroń, 2023).

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in L2 Learners

Definition of Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

The concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) originated with "Unwillingness to communicate" (Kalyar et al., 2018). This early conception of unwillingness to communicate has two sub-factors: actual communicative behaviour, "approach-avoidance", and "reward". This concept recognized the limitations of scale that primarily measured reluctance to communicate the scholars introduced a new construct called WTC. The importance of the desire to communicate stems from the reality that the main purpose of language teaching is to prepare learners to express their intended meanings and concepts in the target language, and in this case, the unwillingness to communicate reduces the success rate in learning a foreign language (Cheng & Xu, 2022). WTC is defined as "the extent to which individuals are ready to engage in communication, or the readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person, using a specific language" (Macintyre et al., 1998).

Criteria for High WTC

Various factors contribute to a high level of WTC, shaping an individual's readiness to interact in a foreign language. Among these factors, personality traits, emotional stability, and effective communication strategies are the most significant (Šafranĳ & Katić, 2019). Personality Traits: High WTC is often associated with personality traits such as extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. These traits can enhance communication behaviour and language learning performance (Peng, 2020). Emotional Factors: Learners with high grit and lower anxiety levels tend to have a higher WTC. Gritty learners are more persistent and motivated, which positively influences their communication willingness (Wang et al., 2022). Communication strategies: Learners with higher WTC often prefer communication strategies that actively engage them in dialogue, enhancing their WTC.

Criteria for Low WTC

While some learners show a high propensity to engage in communication, others may experience difficulties due to internal and external barriers. Some of the main factors contributing to low WTC include anxiety, cultural perceptions, and lack of self-confidence (Ozdemir & Papi, 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Anxiety and Emotional Barriers: High levels of L2 anxiety can decrease a learner's WTC. Anxiety acts as a barrier, reducing the possibility of engaging communication (Wang et al., 2022). Cultural and stereotypical Perceptions: Cultural stereotypes, such as the perception of EFL learners as passive learners, can negatively impact WTC by creating self-fulfilling prophecies in which students internalize these expectations (Zhang et al., 2020). Lack of Confidence: A weak correlation exists between language proficiency and WTC, with self-confidence being a critical factor. Learners with low self-confidence in their language abilities are less willing to communicate (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021).

Heuristic Framework of Factors Affecting WTC

L2 WTC study has largely been framed by the model in a pyramid-shaped structure proposed by (Macintyre et al., 1998) to characterize the construct of L2 WTC (Lubis et al., 2024). Identify six categories or variables within the model, which will be referred to as "layers". These top three layers represent the influence of the specific situation on the WTC at any given moment. These six layers can be categorized into two fundamental structures. From the bottom layer (layers IV, V & VI), which represents a long-term, stable communication process. In layer VI, the social and individual context includes Intergroup Climate and Personality. A supportive intergroup climate fosters positive attitudes toward L2 communication, while personality traits, such as extroversion or openness, influence one's confidence and motivation to engage in conversations. Layer V, affective-cognitive context, consists of Intergroup Attitudes, Social Situation, and Communicative Competence, which interact to influence WTC. Positive attitudes toward other language groups enhance WTC, while the social setting determines whether individuals feel comfortable speaking in L2. Additionally, communicative competence, including fluency and pragmatic skills, plays a crucial role in increasing confidence in L2 communication. Layer IV, motivational propensities, comprising Interpersonal Motivation, Intergroup Motivation, and L2 Self-Confidence. Interpersonal motivation drives communication with close individuals, whereas intergroup motivation fosters interactions in broader social contexts. L2 self-confidence, built through experience and proficiency, directly impacts an individual's WTC in the target language.

The top layers (layers I, II & III) reflect situational influences on WTC at a specific moment. Layer III, situated antecedents, includes Desire to Communicate with a Specific Person and State Communicative Self-Confidence. The desire to communicate arises from personal relationships and social contexts, while state communicative self-confidence fluctuates based on immediate experiences, such as past successes or failures in L2 use. Layer II, behavioural intention, consists of WTC, which reflects an individual's readiness to initiate L2 communication in different situations, influenced by confidence, motivation, and social context. Layer I, communication Behaviour, at the peak of the model is L2 Use. This underlying layer, as individuals with high WTC and confidence are more likely to engage in L2 conversations, enhancing their fluency and competence over time.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative method to explore the role of ID in learners' WTC. Qualitative research is essential for capturing participants' subjective experiences and perspectives, which are often missed by quantitative methods (Goodwin, 2019). Therefore, a qualitative approach is chosen because it is particularly effective for exploring complex,

dynamic, and dependent phenomena that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods alone. The procedure for conducting this study consists of focusing on studying one or two individuals, collecting data through collecting stories, reporting on one's experiences, and sequencing chronologically the meaning of experiences. According to Nassaji (2020) Qualitative methods can be used to explore an array of questions for which a quantitative method may not be suitable.

According to Purba & Setiawan (2021a), qualitative methods is conducted to obtain rich descriptions and in-depth analysis of the phenomenon. Qualitative research methods make a significant contribution to strengthening the evaluation process by providing in-depth descriptions or intervention, understanding the context within research the context within which research subjects operate, and investigating the mechanisms underlying the interaction between variables in the study.

Research Participants

In qualitative research, particularly within the educational context, it is common to involve 5 to 25 participants (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). In this study, the researcher selected 6 participants in English language learners to interview through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is an effective approach to selecting respondents who are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information and is a way to identify and select cases that will make effective use of limited research sources (Campbell et al., 2020). The researcher employed a questionnaire to select participants.

First-year students from a private university in Batam were chosen as participants in this study because they are in the transition stage from secondary to higher education, which can affect WTC. At this stage, they experience significant changes in their academic and social environments (Birkbeck & Pavelescu, 2021). In this study, the researcher examines first-year students who continue their studies in the English language program, as this study examines WTC in the L2 acquisition.

Research Instruments

This study adopts a qualitative approach, employing a two-stage data collection process. Initially, a questionnaire will be administered to identify participants who meet the research criteria, enabling their progression to the subsequent stage. Thereafter, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' identities and their WTC in English within the context of EFL learning. The first data collection utilizes a scale questionnaire to gather data on various aspects of ID that may impact students' WTC. This stage will be one of the steps to select relevant participants for the research. The researcher adapted several theories to be included in the questionnaire, with the questionnaire topics being lack of confidence, lack of motivation, anxiety, desire to communicate, and cultural background awareness (Abdullah et al., 2019; Althwaibi & Halabi, 2022; Guo & Modehiran, 2023; Pahargyan, 2021).

Structured interviews are conducted with a subset of participants to gain deeper, qualitative insight into the ID underlying their WTC. Semi-structured interviews, which differ from less structured unstructured interviews in that their direction is fully controlled, are expected to provide a deeper understanding of how this mode of interviewing can be used effectively in qualitative research, ultimately allowing researchers to obtain robust findings (Mashuri et al., 2022). Interviews are designed to follow up on the questionnaire responses, allowing participants to elaborate on specific topics, such as personal experiences in language learning, cultural influences on communication, and strategies they use to overcome communication barriers. The interviews are recorded and transcribed to ensure accurate data capture.

Data Analysis

This study employs a qualitative data analysis approach to explore how ID influences English-learning freshmen's WTC in an EFL context. Thematic analysis consists of several analytical approaches, each of which has different goals, philosophical foundations, and methods (Ayre & McCaffery, 2022).

Coding Category

As stated by Miles, B. M., & Huberman (1994) in their book, coding serves as a tool for summarizing segments of data. The aim is to understand patterns, relationships, and how people give meaning to the experiences or things they discuss. The researcher applied the code family developed from Bogdan & Biklen (2003).

Table 1
Code Family developed from Bogdan & Biklen (2003) and Purba & Setiawan (2021b)

Code Family	Code Description
Setting/ Context Codes	Research setting (environment, topic, subject)
Definitions of Situation Codes	Participants' views of settings, events, topics
Perspectives Held by Subjects	Shared norms, beliefs, and values
Way of thinking about People and Objects	Perceptions of others and objects
Process Codes	Event sequences and changes over time
Activity Codes	Recurring behaviors or routines
Event Codes	Specific incidents or activities
Strategy Codes	Strategies and techniques used
Relationships and Social Codes	Social interactions and relationships
Method Codes	Research process, challenges, ethics

In qualitative research, this section outlines the coding categories developed from the interview data. The coding process facilitates interpretation of large qualitative data by breaking it down into meaningful segments and recognizing recurring themes, patterns, and relationships (Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, 2003). The data is thoroughly reviewed to develop an initial understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences.

After coding, the researcher refined categories to align with the study goals, ensuring themes addressed research questions and revealed insights into students' WTC. This systematic approach ensured transparency and replicability, linking the theoretical framework to real-world experiences for richer findings. Therefore, the collected data in this study were divided into segments aligned with the study's focus, which examines ID influence on English learning freshmen's WTC in an EFL context. (Locke et al., 2022) also highlight the significance of putting a pattern of code as a crucial step in generating an important source of ideas that inform researchers' theorizing.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

In this section, researchers analyze the collected interview data to explore individual differences among freshmen English language learners in terms of their WTC, selected based on the questionnaire results. Initially, the questionnaire was distributed to 21 freshmen in English Language Education (ELE) majors. However, 18 participants filled in the questionnaire because 2 participants did not fit the criteria of English as a foreign language, and 1 participant could not fill it in due to health problems and time constraints, but the researcher continued the research anyway. Then, the researcher selected 6 participants who fit the predetermined criteria for further interviews. Furthermore, the results of the interviews were transcribed to facilitate data processing. By systematically examining the interview transcripts, the aim was to identify recurring themes and patterns that explain the factors that influence students' WTC in EFL contexts. This process involved coding the data, categorizing it into meaningful themes, and interpreting the findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of each freshman's

differences underlying their WTC in English. Such an approach not only facilitates the organization of complex qualitative data but also increases the reliability and validity of the research results.

Factors that support and hinder freshmen's L2 WTC development

The first theme generated in this study aims to answer the research question, “What are the factors that support and hinder the development of WTC L2 in freshmen?”

Getting familiar with public speaking, the student gradually develops their EFL speaking confidence

Freshmen's perceptions of their English skills are crucial in shaping their confidence in speaking English. Based on the questionnaire data, most participants showed varying levels of confidence in speaking English. Only 22.2% of participants felt confident speaking English despite making mistakes, while 33.3% felt insecure when their mistakes were noticed by others. Students with a solid English foundation report higher confidence and comfort when speaking, leading to more active participation and will to express ideas (Alisa Khan et al., 2020). So it can be interpreted that students who have a strong foundation in English tend to feel more comfortable speaking, whereas students who perceive their abilities as weak often experience hesitation and anxiety. This is in line with the interview results, which revealed that self-perception, greatly affects students' engagement in English communication. Students who believe they have a strong foundation in English tend to feel more comfortable speaking, whereas students who perceive their abilities as weak often feel hesitant and anxious.

The result of the interview, Participant 6 and Participant 5, showed high WTC, which was due to continuous experience and practice. Participant 6, who has done events as an MC using English, shared that his familiarity with public speaking in English reduced his anxiety:

Participant 6: “I have often been an MC at events on campus, and indeed, events require me to use English. If I make mistakes, it's okay because learning is a process.” (Own Translation)

This is reinforced by the questionnaire results which show that motivation plays an important role in building self-confidence, where 61.1% of participants admitted that they wanted to learn English to increase their confidence in speaking with foreigners. Similarly, Participant 5, who attended a public speaking course, stated that her confidence came from preparation and belief in her abilities

Participant 5: “I'm just confident. If I know what I want to say, I just speak. I don't worry too much about mistakes. The important thing is to know what you want to say.” (Own Translation)

On the other hand, students who had a negative perception of their English ability were more hesitant to engage in conversation. Participant 4 and Participant 1 both struggled with self-doubt and fear of making mistakes, which significantly lowered their WTC. As in the questionnaire, 44.4% of participants admitted to feeling less confident when making mistakes in pronunciation or word choice, and 55.6% felt anxious when having to speak in English in front of classmates. Participant 4, despite having previous experience in English speech competitions, admitted that she often thought too much and hesitated to speak

Participant 4: “For myself, maybe if I make a mistake, I will feel nervous. It makes me hesitate to speak again. Maybe in a day or two, I will be too lazy to speak English.” (Own Translation)

This was reinforced by the results of the questionnaire data, which showed that 35% of the participants experienced high anxiety when speaking in English in front of others. Similarly, Participant 1, who felt insecure about her grammatical errors, found it difficult to speak English confidently, especially in formal situations. This was reflected in the questionnaire data which showed that 55.6% of participants felt anxious about speaking with native English speakers.

Despite negative traits, students will likely develop confidence if the classroom environment is supportive

Based on the results of the questionnaires and interviews conducted, it was found that the classroom environment in the context of communication plays an important role in shaping students' comfort level and engagement in speaking English. Contextual factors such as classroom atmosphere, teacher support, peer participation, task, topic, and interactional patterns, as well as individual factors. These can be factors that encourage or inhibit students from actively participating in English communication. The interview findings revealed that students felt more confident and engaged when the classroom environment was supportive and provided opportunities to speak gradually. However, high-pressure situations, strict teaching styles, and fear of assessment often lead to anxiety and hesitation in using English.

Although students may have negative traits such as fear of making mistakes, anxiety, and limited English proficiency, a supportive classroom environment is crucial in fostering their confidence. From the interview results, Participant 4 and Participant 2 felt that the pressure in the classroom, both from academic demands and expectations of perfect grammar, hindered their participation. This was reinforced by the questionnaire results which showed that 55.6% of students agreed and 16.7% strongly agreed that they would feel anxious when their classmates did not understand explanations made using English in presentations. Participant 4, for example, found it difficult to speak when she felt anxious due to self-doubt and fear of judgment.

Participant 4: *"When I make a mistake, of course I will be nervous, especially when I'm nervous and stuttering. So those are the two things that are so deadly when I make a mistake, I immediately overthink."* (Own Translation)

Participant 2 also had difficulties in participating in class because he was afraid of making mistakes when speaking English, and if he made mistakes he would feel small and not confident.

Participant 2: *"I felt embarrassed and disappointed because I wanted to show my ability, but I still made mistakes. It makes me feel small in front of others."* (Own Translation)

Another significant challenge affecting students' confidence is limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Participant 3 admitted that she often hesitated to speak because she was unsure of the correct words or sentence structure

Participant 3: *"Many things need to be learned, like from the vocabulary, grammar so. Even in class, I tend to use Indonesian more often. However, it makes it harder for us to improve our English speaking skills because we use it less."* (Own Translation)

These responses illustrate that fear of making mistakes is a common barrier to speaking confidence. However, students in a supportive classroom environment reported that their confidence gradually improved, especially when they felt encouraged rather than criticized. A non-judgmental atmosphere allows students to see mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures, thus reducing anxiety and encouraging participation.

Strategies to improve freshmen students' L2 WTC

The next theme generated in this study aims to answer the research question, "What strategy can improve freshmen students' L2 WTC?"

Personal preparation is the most effective strategy for the freshmen to improve their WTC

Many students experience anxiety and hesitation when speaking English due to lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, or limited vocabulary. In the average questionnaire results, where on average 35% of students agree and 19% of students strongly agree that they have high anxiety. Therefore, building confidence in communicating in English is a necessary process. The interview results revealed that new students often experience nervousness and hesitation

when speaking English. Participant 2 and Participant 3 admitted that a lack of practice made them hesitant to speak English. This is consistent with the questionnaire results which showed that 33.3% of students agreed and 27.8% of students strongly agreed that students feel anxious when speaking English in front of the class, and the results of 27.8% of students agreed and 16.7% of students strongly agreed that the fear of making mistakes inhibits their courage to speak. Participant 2 explained that although he wanted to talk more, his fear of making mistakes often stopped him:

Participant 2: *"I know I should practice more, but I get nervous because I feel like my English is not good enough. If I don't speak often, it becomes harder to start."* (Own Translation)

Participant 3 stated that limited exposure to English made it difficult for him to gain confidence:

Participant 3: *"Since I don't use English much outside of class, I don't have the confidence to speak. I need to find ways to practice more."* (Own Translation)

One of the most effective strategies students used to increase their confidence was to provide speaking opportunities gradually. Participant 4 who initially felt anxious about speaking in English, found that starting with smaller conversations and working up to larger discussions helped her feel more comfortable. Participant 4 recounted how progressing from small to larger discussions increased her confidence

Participant 4: *".... I only felt comfortable speaking English with one or two people. After feeling that I had progressed, I could then have discussions with four to five people. This gave me time to think and practice first."* (Own Translation)

Those statements suggest that students feel more in control when engaging in conversation and students who develop mental resilience and a positive mindset are more likely to overcome their fear of communication and further build their confidence. Personal preparation in this area helps freshmen build a stronger English WTC.

Discussion

Factors Supporting and Hindering Freshmen's L2 WTC Development

Freshmen students' WTC in English as a L2 is shaped by a dynamic interplay of supporting and inhibiting factors, which can be understood through established theoretical frameworks such as Macintyre et al., (1998) WTC model, and S. D. Krashen (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. A primary factor influencing WTC is students' self-perceived English proficiency, which significantly impacts their self-confidence, a key component of WTC model (Macintyre et al., 1998). This model posits that WTC is determined by a combination of situational and enduring factors, with self-perceived communicative competence and communication anxiety being central predictors of an individual's readiness to engage in L2 communication. In this study, students with a strong English foundation often built through prior experiences such as public speaking competitions, debate clubs, or structured language programs, exhibit higher WTC. For instance, students who exhibit high levels of WTC report high confidence in communicating in English, and this is due to a positive self-perception as a competent learner with a strong desire to speak. These students' prior experiences, such as delivering speeches in English or participating in language workshops, have reinforced their belief in their communicative abilities, aligning with (Macintyre et al., 1998) assertion that perceived competence fosters WTC. Conversely, negative self-perception, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety about interacting with native speakers significantly hinder WTC.

Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) further strengthens the theoretical grounding of these findings by explaining how affective factors, such as anxiety and self-confidence, modulate language acquisition and communication. According to this theory, a high affective filter triggered by anxiety, low motivation, or negative self-perception impedes language input processing and output production, reducing students' WTC. In this study, Students with low

WTC can be attributed to a heightened affective filter, driven by their fear of making mistakes and anxiety about native speaker interactions, which inhibits their ability to engage in English communication. In contrast, Students with high WTC reflects a lowered affective filter, facilitated by their confidence and positive self-perception, which allows them to process and produce language more effectively. This theoretical lens highlights the importance of addressing affective barriers to enhance WTC, suggesting that interventions targeting anxiety reduction and confidence-building are critical for supporting L2 communication.

In this study, a supportive and interactive classroom environment fosters students' WTC by providing a safe space to practice speaking skills. The results indicate that students feel more comfortable speaking English in classrooms where mistakes are normalized as part of the learning process, reducing the fear of judgment. For example, Students who exhibit medium levels of WTC reported increased confidence when teachers implemented gradual exposure to speaking opportunities, such as starting with pair-based dialogues before progressing to whole-class discussions. These students noted that supportive teacher feedback and a relaxed classroom atmosphere alleviated their anxiety, allowing them to experiment with English. This finding aligns with (Svitlana et al., 2024) who argue that a positive learning environment fosters motivation and reduces anxiety, thereby enhancing WTC. Conversely, strict teachers, overly formal settings, or high-pressure discussions, such as those requiring immediate, error-free responses, discourage students from speaking, as they heighten anxiety and elevate the affective filter (Krashen, 1982).

According to (Cao, 2011), peer support and collaborative learning create a safe space that significantly increases students' desire to communicate by promoting a sense of community and shared learning goals. In contrast, negative peer comparisons and exclusion can severely impede WTC. Students with low WTC frequently avoided discussions due to fear of judgment or feeling outpaced by classmates who spoke more fluently, which reinforced their reluctance to engage and heightened their affective filter (Krashen, 1982). Academic support from teachers also plays a critical role in modulating WTC. Students high WTC reported that teachers who provided positive reinforcement, such as praising efforts or offering constructive feedback, and incorporated interactive learning activities, like role-plays or group discussions, significantly bolstered their confidence. However, overly critical teacher feedback, such as harsh corrections or public criticism, as experienced by some students, increased anxiety and discouraged communication, particularly for those with lower WTC. This finding is consistent with (Macintyre et al., 1998) WTC model, which highlights communication anxiety as a key inhibitor of L2 engagement.

By anchoring the discussion on the WTC models of (Macintyre et al., 1998) and (S. D. Krashen, 1982), this study reduces potential bias by situating its findings within robust and widely accepted frameworks that explain L2 communication behavior across a variety of contexts. These theories provide a comprehensive lens for interpreting the interplay between individual, affective, and social factors that influence WTC, ensuring that its findings do not rely too heavily on subjective interpretations of student behavior. For example, although this study identified differences in WTC among students, the application of these theories universalizes the findings, indicating that self-confidence, anxiety, and social support are important drivers of WTC in a variety of EFL settings, not just in the particular sample studied.

Effective Language Learning Strategies and Interventions to Improve L2 WTC

This study underscores the pivotal role of consistent practice and strategic interventions in enhancing freshmen students' WTC in English as L2, with theoretical frameworks such as (Oxford, 2003) Language Learning Strategies. Continuous engagement with English through diverse activities, such as reading authentic texts, watching English media, and participating in conversational practice, significantly improves students' fluency and confidence, thereby fostering greater WTC. For instance, students who exhibit high levels of WTC, employed

structured preparation techniques, such as pre-rehearsing vocabulary or scripting responses before speaking, which bolstered their confidence during classroom interactions. These students regularly engaged in activities like watching English films with subtitles or joining language clubs, which provided rich linguistic input and opportunities for practice. This is in line with (Oxford, 2003) framework, which categorizes language learning strategies into cognitive such as analyzing and practicing language input through reading or listening, metacognitive such as planning and monitoring one's own communication efforts, and social for example, collaborating with peers or seeking out conversational opportunities.

In this study, students who participated in group-based activities, such as peer-led discussions or language games, reported increased confidence and WTC due to the social support and shared learning experiences. For example, Students with high WTC benefited from joining English conversation groups, where they practiced with peers in a low-stakes environment, receiving encouragement and feedback. This social dimension of learning underscores the importance of interactional strategies, as highlighted by (Li, 2022), who notes that social strategies, such as collaborating with others or engaging in group tasks, are critical for L2 development. The study's emphasis is on social practice opportunities, such as language clubs or online forums. This theoretical grounding mitigates potential bias by universalizing the findings, suggesting that social strategies are effective across various EFL settings, not just the specific sample studied.

Gradual exposure to structured speaking opportunities represents another highly effective intervention for improving WTC, allowing students to build confidence incrementally in a supportive environment. Students with medium levels of WTC reported that starting with small group discussions, where they could practice with familiar peers, before advancing to larger class discussions significantly reduced their anxiety and enhanced their comfort in speaking English. This approach aligns with S. D. Krashen (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition is most effective when learners are exposed to comprehensible input in a low-anxiety environment. A lowered affective filter, facilitated by supportive settings and gradual exposure, enables students to process linguistic input and produce output more effectively, as seen in the increased WTC of Students medium WTC. In contrast, Students with low WTC, struggled in high-pressure settings, such as formal presentations, where their affective filter was heightened by fear of errors, limiting their engagement. This finding is corroborated by (Santoso, 2024), who found that gradual exposure through activities like role-playing, peer discussions, and guided dialogues significantly boosts students' confidence and participation in L2 communication.

Strategies that reduce anxiety and reframe mistakes as an integral part of the learning process are critical for enhancing WTC, particularly for students with varying levels of confidence. Students with high WTC managed nervousness by employing techniques such as avoiding direct focus on audience reactions during speaking tasks, instead concentrating on the content of their speech. These strategies enabled both students to maintain a lowered affective filter, facilitating their engagement in English communication. In contrast, Students' low WTC reported debilitating anxiety driven by fear of criticism or appearing incompetent, which deterred them from speaking. These findings align with (McCroskey et al., 1985), who argue that foreign language anxiety negatively impacts speaking performance and WTC, with the degree of anxiety determining students' tendency to engage or avoid communication. McCroskey's Communication Apprehension Theory further explains that anxiety acts as an antecedent to communication avoidance, particularly for students like Students' low WTC, whose high anxiety levels inhibit their WTC.

The emphasis on these theoretical frameworks, Language Learning Strategies (Oxford, 2003), Sociocultural Theory by Krashen (1982), and Theory of Communication Understanding (McCroskey et al., 1985), strengthens this study by providing a powerful multidimensional lens

through which to interpret its findings. These theories collectively address individual dimensions such as cognitive and metacognitive strategies, affective, such as anxiety and self-confidence, and social, such as peer and teacher interactions of the WTC, ensuring a comprehensive analysis that reduces potential bias. Although this study highlights specific student behaviors, the theoretical underpinnings universalize these observations, suggesting that the strategies and interventions identified are broadly applicable across EFL contexts, not limited to the study sample. This approach reduces the risk of overgeneralizing or favoring a particular student profile by demonstrating that the effectiveness of strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully addresses the research question by identifying the enabling and inhibiting factors that influence freshmen English learners' WTC and highlighting effective strategies to improve communication in an EFL environment. The findings underscore the important role of self-confidence, motivation, exposure to English, and a supportive classroom environment in fostering WTC, while language anxiety and a high-pressure environment act as barriers. By reinforcing the importance of individual differences in language learning, this study contributes to both theoretical and practical domains, offering valuable insights for educators to improve students' communication skills. However, limitations such as the small sample size and lack of long-term evaluation of the intervention point to the need for further research.

Practically, this study provides valuable insights for language educators and teachers. The findings of this study suggest that teachers should incorporate personalized teaching strategies that accommodate students' individual differences. For example, students who have lower self-confidence may benefit from gradual exposure to speaking and positive reinforcement, whereas highly motivated students may require more challenging communicative tasks to maintain engagement. In addition, this study highlights the importance of creating a low-anxiety classroom environment, where students feel encouraged to participate without fear of being overly criticized. By implementing these pedagogical strategies, educators can foster a learning atmosphere that enhances students' WTC and ultimately improve their English communication skills. Socially, fostering a more supportive and interactive learning environment can help students develop better communication skills, which are crucial for academic and professional success. Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, notably its small sample size, which was limited to a small group of freshmen English learners, potentially reducing the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Future studies should include participants from diverse institutions and cultural contexts to determine if the identified factors influencing WTC are consistent across varied settings.

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