AN ANALYSIS OF EFL STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE (WTC) IN CLASSROOM AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN RIAU

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ABSTRACT

This study examines third-semester EFL students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the classroom using MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) WTC Pyramid model as the main framework. A descriptive research design was employed by administering a questionnaire consisting of close-ended items (5-point scale) and open-ended questions to 68 students in an English Education program at a public university in Riau Province, Indonesia. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively to identify general tendencies across the WTC layers, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to enrich and explain the quantitative patterns. The findings indicate that students reported moderate to high willingness to communicate; however, their actual classroom participation was often constrained by psychological barriers (e.g., nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and fear of negative evaluation), linguistic unpreparedness, and unsupportive peer responses. Students' readiness and state self-confidence were higher when interacting with familiar classmates and topics but declined in less familiar contexts. Although students demonstrated strong motivational goals related to fluency development and future opportunities, these motivations did not consistently translate into speaking behavior when situational barriers were dominant. Overall, the results support the WTC Pyramid model by showing that classroom communication is shaped by interactions among multiple layers. Pedagogical implications highlight the importance of fostering psychologically safe classroom environments and strengthening students' communicative confidence to enhance WTC.

KEYWORDS: Willingness to communicate (WTC); EFL students; WTC Pyramid; classroom interaction.

1   INTRODUCTION

In EFL classrooms, the students are expected to participate actively in the learning activities. However, many students do not participate well in the classroom. Passive students might be seen as less competent students. However, the actual problems that the

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students have are not merely about insufficient linguistic knowledge. In fact, some of the students may have possessed sufficient knowledge to actively participating, but they remain silent during classroom activities due to multiple reasons. This phenomenon suggests that language proficiency alone does not guarantee students' engagement in the classroom. The researchers report that EFL students' decision to participate in classroom activities is influenced by the interplay of non-linguistic factors, including psychological, situational, and contextual conditions (Han, 2021).

One prominent work on studies of students' readiness to communicate in the classroom is known as Willingness to Communicate (WTC) by MacIntyre et al. (1998), which refers to students' readiness to initiate communication in a second or foreign language when given the opportunity. WTC model argues that students' readiness is pre-conditioned not only by linguistic competence but also by affective, situational, and social factors. As a result, understanding students' willingness and their reluctance (unwillingness) to communicate has become an important concern in EFL pedagogy.

Previous studies on students' readiness to communicate have widely used WTC model in their investigation and they reported consistent results. For example, Cetinkaya (2005), in her study of Turkish college students learning English as a foreign language, found that while many students possessed adequate language knowledge, their willingness to communicate varied considerably. Her findings revealed that linguistic self-confidence and attitudes toward the international community had a direct influence on WTC, whereas motivation and personality affected WTC indirectly through self-confidence. This study reports that students' silence in the classroom cannot be explained solely by lack of proficiency but must be understood in relation to students' perceptions and affective conditions. Some other studies about speaking performance have reported the central role of affective variables in shaping WTC. Some studies have shown that communication anxiety and perceived communicative competence are among the strongest predictors of WTC in EFL contexts (Cetinkaya, 2005; Shahbaz, Khan, Khan, & Mustafa, 2016; Ghani & Azhar, 2017). Students who experience higher levels of anxiety or fear of negative evaluation tend to withdraw from classroom interaction, even when they are capable of producing the target language. These findings suggest that reluctance to speak often represents a psychological response to classroom conditions rather than an absence of communicative ability. More recent studies have conceptualized WTC as a dynamic and situational construct. Rather than viewing willingness to communicate as a stable trait, researchers argue that WTC fluctuates depending on classroom tasks, interlocutors, topics, and instructional practices. For example, some students may demonstrate higher willingness to communicate in low-risk situations, such as pair work, however, the same students may be showing reluctance to communicate in whole-class discussions. Willingness to communicate is probably context-dependent and closely related to how the students perceive and experience classroom interaction.

Research on willingness to communicate (WTC) in the Indonesian EFL context shows that students' willingness to speak is influenced by both psychological factors and

classroom conditions. Several mixed-method studies found that anxiety can reduce students' WTC (e.g., Prihartanti, 2008). Other studies using surveys and interviews reported that although students know English is important, their WTC is still limited by factors such as large class size, task type, and teacher–student relationship (e.g., Wijaya & Rizkina, 2016). Survey findings also suggest that students are more willing to communicate in low-risk activities, especially group discussions with peer support (e.g., Weda et al., 2021). In line with this, qualitative interview studies show that WTC is not stable, but changes depending on the situation, such as the presence of supportive peers, familiar classmates, teacher support, audience size, and preparation time (e.g., Subekti, 2019). Classroom observation during the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum also confirmed that students' WTC varies across activities, and task type and classroom climate shape different participation patterns (Havwini, 2019). During the Covid-19 period, research on online learning found that students considered online group discussion helpful and felt less nervous when sharing ideas; however, many still preferred listening rather than speaking (Said et al., 2021). More recent studies have also modelled WTC as a multidimensional construct shaped by motivation, learner agency, mindset, metacognition, communication confidence, and classroom environment (e.g., Amalia et al., 2024).

To date, many Indonesian studies have tended to describe WTC as a general tendency, rather than examining how students make moment-by-moment decisions to speak or stay silent. Studies that explain these decisions using the layered WTC Pyramid framework are still limited. To respond to the research gap, the present study aims to descriptively examining students' willingness to communicate in the classroom. This study adopts the pyramid model as a theoretical framework to interpret students' willingness to communicate in English, the following research question is formulated: "How are third-semester EFL students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English described?

Willingness to Communicate and the Pyramid Model

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) refers to an individual's readiness to initiate communication in a second or foreign language when given the opportunity (MacIntyre et al., 1998). In second language contexts, WTC is conceptualized as a dynamic construct influenced by multiple psychological, social, and situational factors rather than a stable personality trait. The factors are argued to belong to different layers that interacted with one another. However, the scientists claim that some factors are closer dan more distance to influence students' actual action to participate actively. Hence, in the pyramid, at the top layer, there is Communication Behavior (Layer I), representing actual language use by willing students. In the second layer, Willingness to Communicate (Layer II), which reflects a learner's immediate readiness to speak in a given situation. In the third layer is Situated Antecedents (Layer III) consists of desire to communicate with a specific person(s) and state communicative self-confidence, both of which are highly situational and close factors influencing Layer I. In the fourth layer is Motivational Propensities

(Layer IV) comprises kinds of motivations, such as interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, and L2 self-confidence. These factors are relatively stable and reflect students' broader motivational orientations toward language use. Layer V includes intergroup attitudes, social situation, and communicative competence, which shape students' perceptions of appropriateness and ability in communication. At the base of the pyramid, Level VI encompasses intergroup climate and personality, representing enduring social and individual characteristics.

Willingness to communicate (WTC) should be conceptualized as situated and dynamic, arising from the interplay between learners' individual characteristics and contextual conditions (Yashima, MacIntyre, & Ikeda, 2018). They argue that learners' willingness to speak fluctuates across classroom situations is not a stable trait, but influenced by perceived communicative competence, anxiety, and social risk vary depending on task demands and interactional context. This perspective highlights that willingness to communicate (WTC) is best understood through a person–context interaction lens, where both personal dispositions and situational affordances shape classroom communication. In the same vein, Zhang, Beckmann, and Beckmann (2018), in their review of situational antecedents of WTC, highlight that learners' willingness to speak is shaped by contextual conditions and, crucially, how these conditions are perceived by learners (e.g., perceived safety and potential social-evaluative consequences).

In a recent review of studies on L2 willingness to communicate (WTC), Peng (2024) explains that in the classic pyramid model, WTC is placed near the top because it is seen as the final step before learners actually speak in the second language. WTC is influenced by different layers of factors, including more stable factors (such as personality and general attitudes) and more immediate factors (such as confidence and anxiety in a specific situation). However, lately WTC pyramid is seen as dynamic and can change quickly depending on what happens in the classroom. He describes WTC pyramid as emerging from the interaction between two main pathways, the left and the right side. The left side refers to students' internal factors that happen inside their mind, such as perceived competence, confidence, anxiety, motivation, and emotions. The right side refers to students' external factors in the learning context, such as task demands, topic familiarity, the communication partner, classroom norms, peer reactions, teacher support, and opportunities to speak. From this view, the students speak English when they feel ready internally and when the classroom situation supports communication. Thus, Peng argues that increasing WTC is not only about improving language ability (cognitive factors) but also about creating supportive classroom conditions that help the students feel safe and confident to communicate (affective factors). Hence, Peng notes that later research shows WTC is not always stable and cannot be fully explained through a linear, step-by-step pyramid.

The literature review shows that students may feel willing to speak in one activity but choose to stay silent in another, depending on factors such as the task, the topic, the

speaking partner, teacher support, and peer reactions. For this reason, measuring WTC only through one type of questionnaire may not fully explain students' real classroom participation. Therefore, this study uses a research design that explores both students' personal feelings (such as confidence and anxiety) and classroom conditions (such as opportunities to speak and the level of support from teachers and peers). By using more than one source of data, the study aims to give a clearer picture of how WTC develops and changes in real classroom interaction.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design using both close-ended and open-ended questionnaire data to examine EFL students' willingness and unwillingness to communicate in English. The descriptive approach was selected to capture students' experiences and perception about their willingness to communicate in English. It is suitable to report students' perceptions and experiences, as descriptive research aims to describe trends, attitudes, or opinions within a population (Creswell, 2012)."

Participants
The participants were 68 third-semester students enrolled in an English Education program at a higher education institution in Indonesia. The sampling technique was total sampling, whereas the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the total population of 107 people via google form platform. However, the number students who returned answers was 68 people. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all responses were collected anonymously. The participants were asked about their willingness to communicate (WTC) by using the context of all classes they enrolled in the running semester.

Instrument
Data were collected using a questionnaire informed by the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) pyramid model proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998). The questionnaire included both fifteen close-ended 1-5 scale questions and four open-ended questions.

Close-ended questionnaire
Fifteen close-ended items were measured using a five-point scale questionnaire, ranging from 1 to 5. These items were organized into five sections, namely, communicative behavior (layer I), behavioral intention (layer II), situated antecedents (layer III), motivational propensities (layer IV), and affective-cognitive context (layer V).

Open-ended questions
To capture students' contextual explanations, the questionnaire also included four open-ended questions that allowed students to elaborate on situations in which they felt willing or unwilling to communicate in English.

Data Analysis
Data from the close-ended items were analyzed quantitatively to identify general tendencies in students' responses. The analysis focused on calculating the percentage and patterns of high (scale 4 and 5), moderate (scale 3) and low (scale 1 and 2) levels to describe the students' willingness to communicate (WTC) at layer I-V. Responses to the open-ended questions and classroom observation were analyzed using thematic analysis. The data were read repeatedly to identify recurring themes related to willingness and unwillingness to communicate. The themes were then categorized and interpreted in

relation to the relevant layers I-V of the WTC pyramid model which might have not directly captured through the close-ended measures.

Ethical Considerations
Prior to data collection, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Participation was voluntary, and students could choose not to respond to any question. All data were used solely for research purposes.

3   RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

1) Communicative behavior (Layer 1)

Communication behavior (Layer I) means the actual act of speech. Close ended responses show some of the students' actual speech in the classroom, namely, answering questions in class in English and participating in English class without being asked.

Figure 1. Answering questions in English in class

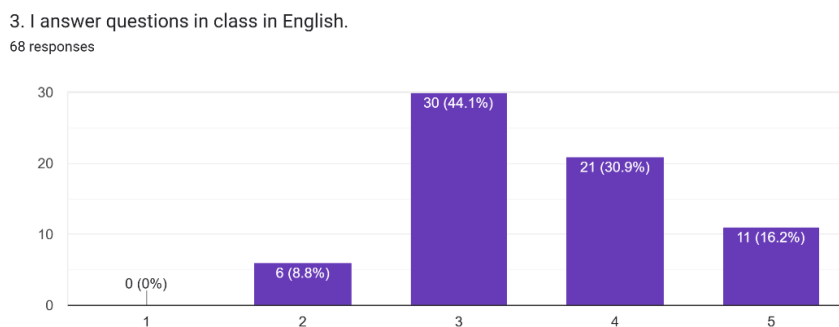3. I answer questions in class in English.
68 responses

Figure 1 shows that the students' willingness to answer questions in English was expressed by high (47%), moderate (44.1%), and low (8.8%) level of participation. In other words, a half of the students revealed that they used English not L1 when answering questions in English the class. Based on teacher researcher's informal classroom observation, on a regular basis, the number of students who were actively speaking during class activities not that many, around half or less of the said number. Based on their comments, their main motivation was probably to get some points, even though, some students were assumed genuinely interested to share their ideas. The rest students might have had some ideas but they remained silent. As the context covered all classes that the students enrolled in the running semester, their participation in different learning activities was assumed to be higher and lesser, depended on the teacher and the nature of learning activities. Some students had used English fully in the class, but some others asked permission from the teacher to code-switch with L1 when they were answering questions in class.

Figure **2. Participating in English speaking task without being asked**

4. I participate in English-speaking tasks without being asked.
68 responses
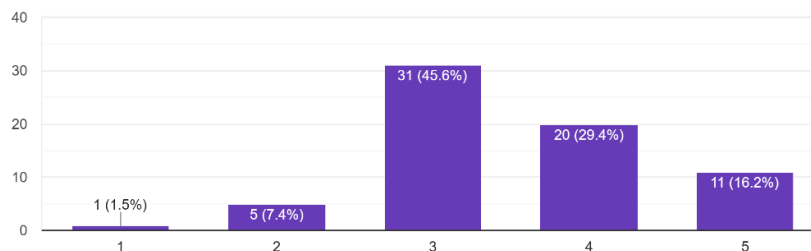
Findings in Figure 2 are almost in line with Table 3, whereas it reports that students' participation in English speaking tasks without being asked is almost consistent with the findings in table 1, that is almost a half of the students (45.6%). Another half of the students were moderate (45.6%) and low (7.4%) levels of willingness. Based on teacher researcher's informal classroom observation, on a regular basis, the number of students who were actively speaking during class activities not that many, around half or less of the said number. Based on their comments, their main motivation was probably to get some points, even though, some students were assumed genuinely interested to share their ideas. The rest students might have had some ideas but they remained silent. As the context covered all classes that the students enrolled in the running semester, their participation in different learning activities was assumed to be higher and lesser, depended on the teacher and the nature of learning activities. The students were more eager to use English without being asked in some learning activities that they considered safe, but less eager in some other learning activities.

Responses from open ended questions revealed some other information about students' communicative behaviors in using English. The students used English in class due to some contexts. For example, some students were active in class because they thought the topics were interesting or important for them, the use of English was mandatory and they were competent to express their ideas in English. Some other students revealed that they used English in class without being asked because the learning environment inferred the use English, such as, when they were studying some lesson, in charge to deliver presentations and assignments. Another context was that their peers or interlocutors were speaking English, they were watching English movies or songs and they wanted to practice some English they learnt. The excerpts are in the following.

"I usually want to speak English when I'm excited to practice what I've learned." (P1)
"Usually, I want to speak English when I have assignments, presentations," (P56)
"When there is something important to discuss and it is mandatory to use English. especially when I meet people who speak English or when I want to express my ideas more clearly in academic situations." (P27)
"When people around me speak English." (P33, P55, P65)
"When I (am) watching a film or hearing a music, and (then I) speak English with my friend in real life or online friend." (P66)

"Singing (English songs stimulated me to speak English)" (P69)

However, the students also reported about their speaking avoidance behaviors. In that case the students refused to speak English due to some reasons, namely, lack of language competence, inferiority. In reality, as the students were still learning, all the barriers mentioned were normally found in the learning journey. When the students could not make peace with their limitations, they would likely withdraw themselves from English participation. As the results, they canceled themselves from active participation in the classroom. Some excerpts are as follows.

"I avoid (speaking) because I don't have vocabulary and afraid if I make mistake." (Q3)
"When I feel nervous." (Q4)
"When there is vocabulary that I don't know yet." (Q6)
"I'm afraid of making mistakes or being judged." (Q10)
"I am afraid of making mistakes in using grammar." (Q18)
"When talking to people who are better at English." (Q22)
Sometimes I also avoid it when I can't find the right words quickly, which makes me lose confidence." (Q1)
"I'm afraid of making mistakes or being misunderstood." (Q5)

Taken together, Layer I findings show that actual English use occurs, but it is strongly shaped by task conditions, social cues, and perceived linguistic and psychological safety.

2) Behavioral intention (Layer II)

Behavioral intention (Layer II) describes the students' final mental consideration before they decided to speak. The students' decision making happened here whether they were ready to participate in the speaking tasks. Close-ended responses indicate that the students' readiness was higher when the context was in classroom, their interlocutors were friends, but it decreased when the interlocutors were strangers.

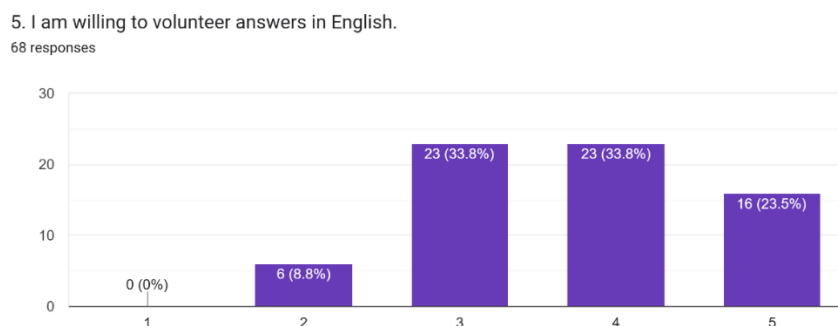Figure **3. Willingness to volunteer answers in English**

Figure 3 depicts that the students' readiness was high (57.1%), moderate (33.8%), and low (8.8%) intention to willingly volunteer to answer in English. This percentage looks consistent with previous table 1 and 2 earlier. In the classroom, about a half of the student the students were willing to volunteer answers in English, probably because

context of speaking was learning activities. Based on teacher researcher's informal classroom observation, even though the figure of students' willingness to volunteer is high, but on a regular basis, the number of students who were actively speaking during class activities was far little. As the context covered all classes that the students enrolled in the running semester, their participation in different learning activities was assumed to be higher and less, depended on the teacher and the nature of learning activities.

Figure **4. Willingness to speak English with classmates**
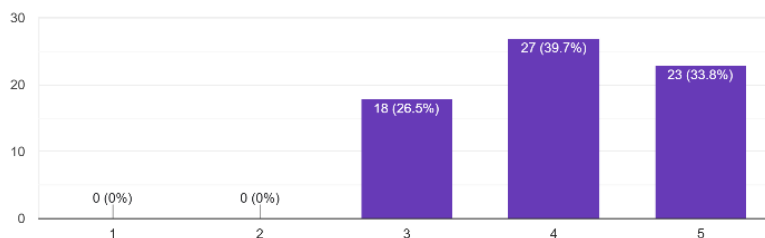

Figure 4 indicates that the communicative intention of the majority of the students to willingly speak English with their classmates were in high (73.5%) and moderate (26.5%) levels. It means majority of the students willingly speak English with their peers as the interlocutors. Teacher-researcher's informal classroom observation noted that students' participation in different learning activities was assumed higher and lesser, depended on the teacher and their learning activities.

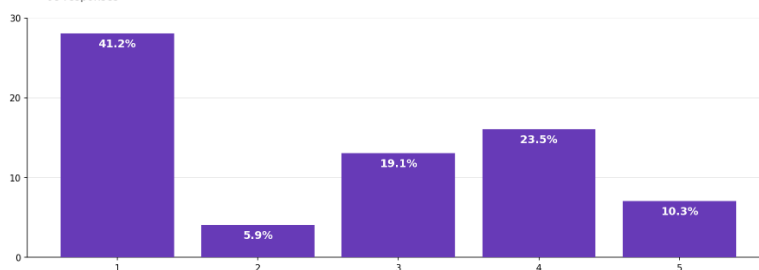Figure **5. Willingness to speak English with the strangers**

Figure 5 reveals that the students' intention to willingly speak English with the strangers was not as high as the intention to speak English with their friends. Only a third of the students expressed high (33.8%) and moderate (19.1%) levels of intention to willingness to speak English with strangers. Almost a half of students (47.1%) expressed a low intention. When the interlocutors were unfamiliar people, it affected students' intention to willingly speak English.

Open-ended responses revealed some other information that were related with their psychological needs that contribute to readiness to speak English. First, the students preferred familiar people as their speaking partner, during classroom activities, and when the topics were also familiar. Those things gave them psychological support and comfort when speaking English. Second, their communicative intention was also heightened by their preparedness to do the speaking tasks. Third, they feared negative judgement/behaviors from their interlocutors regarding their performance. Some excerpts are presented as follows.

"I feel most comfortable using English in relaxed or informal situations, such as talking with friends who are also learning, or during activities where I don't feel pressured. I also feel more confident when I have prepared the topic beforehand." (P1)
"When I talk with friends or in casual classroom activities." (P9)
"…I also feel comfortable when the environment is relaxed and the people around me are open-minded and supportive. Online chats or presentations that I have practiced well also make me feel more comfortable." (P62)
"I usually want to speak English when there are friends who also want to talk English, and (therefore) we do not judge each other." (P44)
"When there someone or people judges my English harshly, and they laughed the way I pronounce some English word." (Q44)

Yet, some mentally strong students also reported their mental process to fight negative thoughts that potentially disrupting their desire to participate. The excerpt is as follows.

"Fear of mistakes or lack of familiar topics sometimes holds me back, but I push through with preparation." (Q50)

Overall, Layer II findings demonstrate that readiness to communicate is not fixed; it is conditional on interlocutor familiarity, perceived support, preparedness, and the likelihood of negative evaluation.

3) Situated antecedents (Layer III)

Findings related to Level III highlight the students' desire to communicate and immediate self confidence that were influenced by immediate factors. Close-ended responses show that the students had desire to communicate and its interaction with their level of self-confidence. Students' self-confidence level was determined by some types of situational contexts, such as, their self-confidence to speak English tended to rise during the learning activities. However, speech performance also faced some potential barriers that influenced students' state self-confidence, such as, nervousness and worries. The data from close-ended responses are presented in the following.
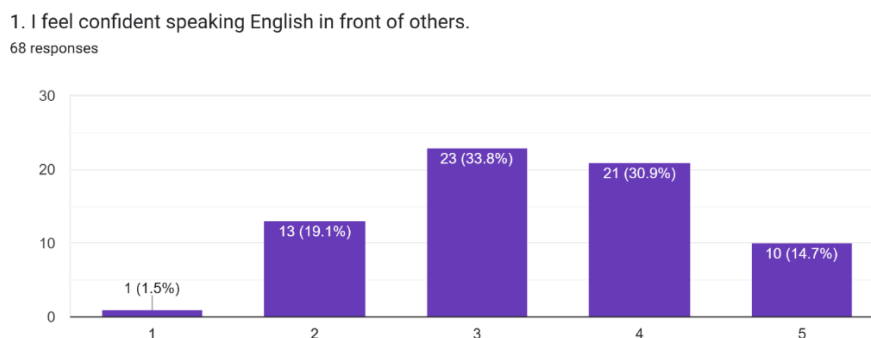
Figure **6. Feeling confident speaking English in front of others**

1. I feel confident speaking English in front of others.
68 responses

Figure 6 depicts that the students expressed high (45.6%), moderate (33.8%), and low (20.4%) levels of confidence to speak English in front of peers. It means about a half of the students were excited to be active in class. The role of peers as the interlocutors seemed to play a major role in nurturing the students' self-confidence. The students were in relatively the same level of ability; therefore, they felt confident speaking English in front of them as well as they were friends who supported each other in their learning journey.
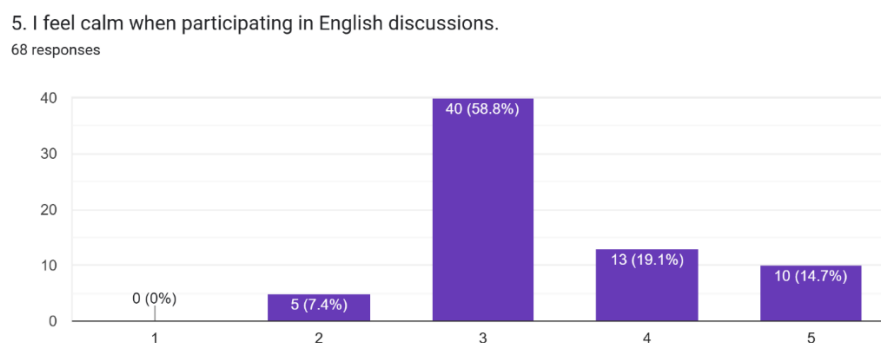
Figure **7. Feeling calm when participating in English discussions**

5. I feel calm when participating in English discussions.
68 responses

Figure 7 shows that during class discussion, more than a half of the students expressed that they felt moderately (58.6%) calm, one third felt highly (33.8%) calm, and a little percentage (7.4%) were not calm. It means, in a highly cognitive setting, like having class discussions, their level of confidence was decreased when compared with the results in Figure 6. In other words, they felt some pressure that might have influenced their confidence level.

Figure **8. Feeling nervous when speaking English**

3. I feel nervous when I have to speak English.
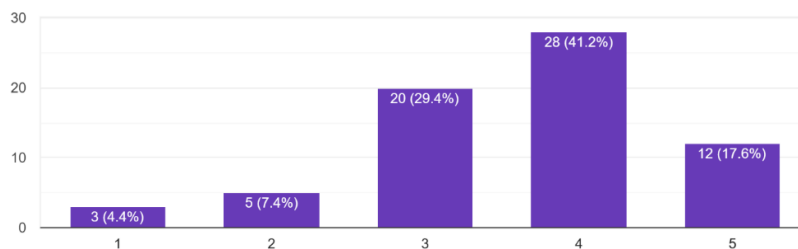68 responses

Figure 8 represents that the students' confidence level was influenced by nervousness when they were speaking English. More than half expressed high (57.8%), moderate (29.4%), and low (11.8%) levels of nervousness in learning activities. It indicates that the students' self-confidence was unstable and the students might have to compromised this negative feeling with other more positive feelings to finally decided to speak English in class.

Figure **9. Feeling worry about making mistakes when speaking English**

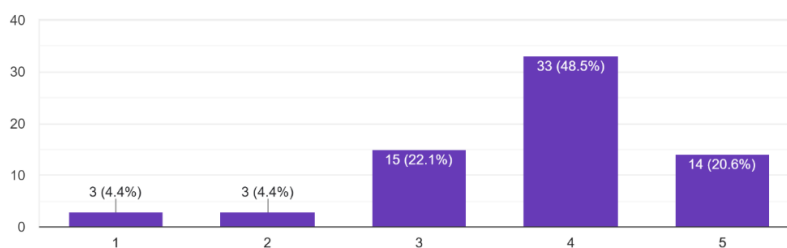4. I worry about making mistakes when speaking English.
68 responses

Figure 9 depicts that majority of the students felt worry about making mistakes when speaking English. A proportioned of high (69,1%), moderate (22,1%), and low (8,8%) levels of worry was indicated. It means that worries about making mistakes a major barrier. However, probably, the level of worries was in mild level because in previous tables the students indicated that they were also nervous but they were describing that they were highly and moderately active participants.

Data from open-ended responses revealed some other information about immediate factors that influenced their self-confidence. Some of the information supported the students' answer in close-ended responses. For example, the students' desire to communicate and peers' progress and friendly support influenced one another in class, such as, excitement to practice English lesson, assistance from supporting peers, a. The excerpts are in the following.

"I usually want to speak English when I'm excited to practice what I've learned..." (P28)
"I support my friend and have some friend to speak together." (P9)
"When I see other people fluent in English." (P54)

On the other hand, some negative judgements were also identified in the open-ended responses. The students reported that their peers' actions had influenced them negatively, such as throwing some mockery that attacked some other students' fragile self-confidence and the existence of L1 dominant peers that discouraged some students from using more English in class. The students' desire to speak English diminished when they detected unsupportive situations that reduced their self-confidence level that prevented them from participating further. These combinations were commonly reported in EFL contexts. Some of the excerpts are in the following.

"Some mockery (were thrown in the class)." (Q37)
"Sometimes, what makes me avoid speaking English is because most of my friends prefer to speak Indonesian." (Q38)
"… when I feel nervous or unprepared and not confident." (Q19)
"… when I'm afraid of making mistakes or when I feel nervous about being judged." (Q1)
"I lack self-confidence." (Q40)

Thus, Layer III findings show that classroom speaking is strongly governed by the interaction between supportive cues (e.g., peers' encouragement) and evaluation threats (e.g., mockery, fear of mistakes), which jointly shape students' moment-to-moment confidence.

4) Motivational propensities (Layer IV)

Findings related to Layer III, reveal the long-term goals that contribute to students' willingness to communicate, namely, motivational propensities. Motivational propensities are exemplified by kinds of motivation that the students have. Their influences on willingness to communicate are argued to be more stable than layer III factors, for example, intrinsic motivation, interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, and L2 stronger confidence. However, their realization did not always happen because higher layers might have prevented it to happen. In the findings, majority of the students indicated that they had a solid motivation to practice English but due to psychological barriers the students chose what learning activities that they were willing to participate.

Figure **10. I want to communicate in English because I enjoy speaking English**

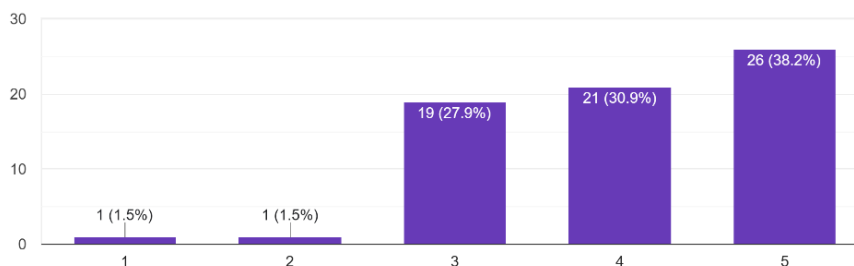1. I want to communicate in English because I enjoy using it.
68 responses

Figure 10 reveals that English enjoyment was one of the motivations that the students had. The enjoyment of speaking English was mostly in high (69.1%) and moderate (27.9%) levels. It means, majority of the students felt an enjoyment in speaking English. However, the enjoyment would be relative because learning activities had different challenges.

Figure **11. Speaking English to improve English fluency**

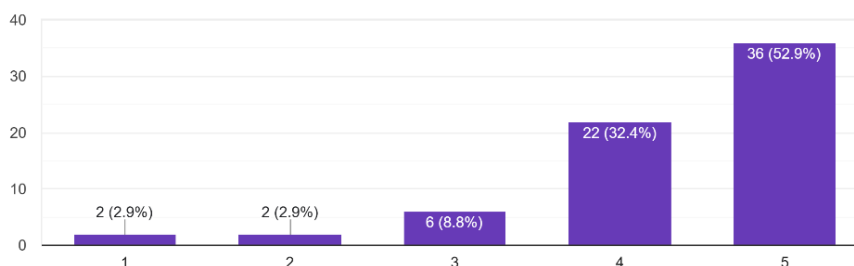2. I want to speak English to improve my fluency.
68 responses

Figure 11 shows that fluency is another motivation that made the students to be willing to speak English. Majority of the students aimed for fluency as the purpose of speaking English was highly motivated (85.3%). A small percentage of the student was in moderate (8.8%) and low (2.9%) motivation. Theoretically, learning activities that were believed could help them become fluent speakers would be favored and their willingness level to participate would be higher. In reality, more variables determine the students' willingness to communicate.

Figure 12. Communicating in English increases self-confidence

3. I want to communicate in English because it makes me feel confident.
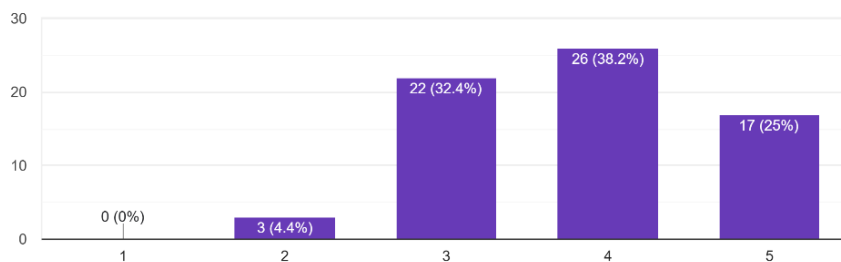68 responses

Figure 12 describes that gaining confidence was the next major motivation that the students had.   Almost a half of the students highly (43.2% high) and moderately (32.4%) thought that English proficiency led to self-confidence. However, becoming proficient required learning commitments that were not easy to maintain. In this context, the students reported highly feared making mistakes, even though the learning process itself inevitably involved making many mistakes.

Figure 13. Being able to speak English even when not required to

5. I want to speak English even when I am not required to.
68 responses
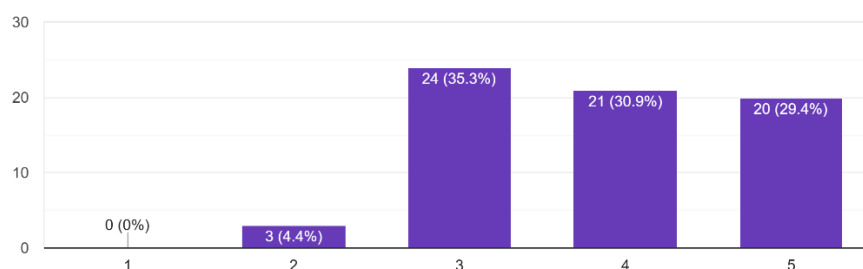

Figure 13 represents that almost all of the students had ambition to be able to speak English even when not required to. More than a half of the students highly (60.3%) and moderately (35%) wished to participate in English even they were not required to. It means that majority of the students actually intended to use English in the classroom, even though it was still far from being realized.

Figure 14. I want to communicate more in English in the future

4. I want to communicate more in English in the future.
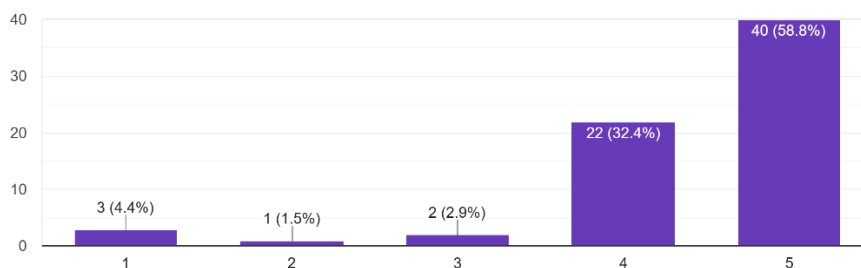
68 responses

Table 14 shows that almost all students expressed a high (91.2%) level of intention to increase their use of English in the future. Only a small percentage of students who have moderate (2.9%) and low (5.9%) levels of intention. On the level of motivation layer, majority of the students showed that they had a very positive outlook about learning English.

Data from open ended revealed some other information about students' qualitative findings of layer IV. The students reported that they had some motivations in learning English that were related with hobbies and future plans, such as, enjoying language learning, improving communication skills, gaining confidence, supporting digital needs and future opportunities. The excerpts are as follows.

"I want to improve my skills and communicate with more people". (P5, P20, P22)
"(1) want to be able to speak English for the future as an educator and for a brighter future." (P19)
"I usually want to speak English because I want to improve my fluency and communicate confidently with others. It also feels exciting when I can express my ideas clearly." (P23)
"Wanting to be fluent when speaking with foreigners and useful for the future." (P34)
"I like speaking English because it's fun and I enjoy learning new words." (P36)
"Because I want to improve my English communication skills. And I want to be a translator. (P38)
"What makes me want to speak English is because I want to travel abroad and want to study abroad." (P40)
"I want to speak English when I'm motivated to improve my skills, especially when I talk with friends, watch English content, or need to practice for class presentations." (P41)
"(I) want to speak English because I want to improve my skills and gain more confidence." (P42, P65, P66, P24)
"Because I want to increase my language experience, and because I like learning several languages." (P59)
"Here's the short version: I usually want to speak English because it helps me communicate with more people, understand global media, and improve my skills for future opportunities." (P69, P43).

Overall, Layer IV findings show that students' motivational bases are strong and diverse; however, their impacts into actual communication behavior remains contingent upon psychological safety and situational confidence.

5) Affective cognitive contexts (Layer V)

Affective cognitive contexts on Layer V factors, includes the students' metacognitive awareness about speaking English. Specifically, it consists of students' knowledge and experiences about their communicative competence, intergroup attitude and social climate.

Figure 16. Beliefs about English competence

2. I believe I can make myself understood in English.
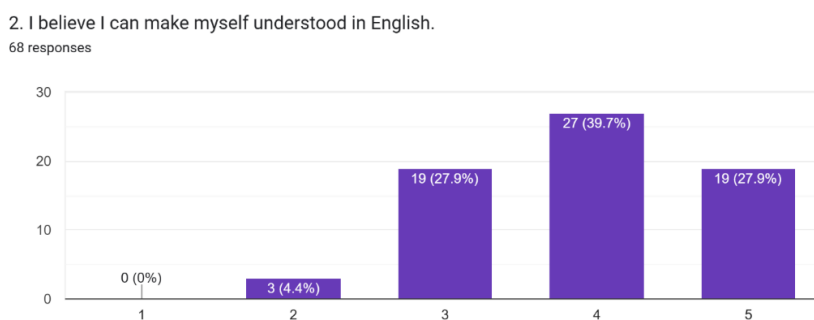68 responses

Figure 16 depicts the students self-report about their English competence. The results indicate that more than half of the students were highly (66,6%) and moderately (27,9%) assumed that their English was understood by others. However, the results should be interpreted cautiously because identifying students' actual language competence must be held through tests, not a survey. Therefore, the data was taken as the students' perceived ability, rather than a valid evaluation.

Data from open-ended responses reveal that the students had metacognitive awareness about their strengths and weaknesses in English proficiency. Some students also inferred about their perceived trait, like being shy and resilient. Some excerpts are presented as follows.

"My biggest challenge is maintaining fluency while speaking. Sometimes I understand what I want to say, but I struggle to form the sentences quickly. This makes me pause too much and lose confidence. I'm still working on expanding my vocabulary and improving my speaking speed" (Q3)
"I am a shy person" (Q69)
"Nothing can make me stop speaking English because I love to speak English." (P48, Q53, Q55, Q58)

Taken together, Layer V findings suggest that students' willingness to communicate is grounded in perceived self-beliefs and experiences. Even when motivation is strong (Layer IV), the students' participation depends on how students interpret their competence positively and regulate negative beliefs

B. Discussion

The findings from Layers I–V are critically discussed and situated within the existing literature in the following section.

Layer I: Communicative Behavior: Actual speech as the observable outcome of WTC

At Layer I, findings of close-ended responses suggested that the students reported moderate to high engagement in actual classroom speaking. However, this tendency should be interpreted with caution because the informal teacher-researcher observation indicated that students' real participation might be lower than what they reported. Such a gap between self-report and observed behavior is not uncommon in classroom-based studies, as some students may respond in ways that reflect expectations rather than their actual performance (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). Findings of open-ended responses further explain this discrepancy by highlighting strong barriers that hinder the students' actual speech action. These barriers found in the findings include psychological constraints (e.g., nervousness, worry, fear), linguistic limitations (e.g., limited vocabulary, lack of preparation), and environmental pressures (e.g., talking to more proficient peers) (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017, Ross & Stuckler 2025).). These findings confirm that "communicative behavior" is not solely determined by intention; it is also shaped by learners' emotions, preparedness, and the interpersonal classroom environment (e.g., Galajda, 2017; Liu, 2001; Yuan, 2011).

Overall, findings at Layer I shows that actual speaking in class is the final and most visible outcome of WTC, yet it is highly vulnerable to immediate psychological, linguistic, and social barriers (Alemi, Daftarifard & Pashmforoosh 2011). To understand why these students speak less than expected in the learning activities, it is necessary for us to move beyond behavior level and examine the students' intention and situational confidence as found at Layer II.

Layer II: Behavioral Intention: Readiness to speak depends on familiarity and confidence

At Layer II, the students' behavioral intention, namely, readiness to communicate and state self-confidence were highly context-dependent. Findings of close-ended responses revealed that students were more ready and confident when interacting with familiar interlocutors (e.g., classmates) and familiar topics In contrast, their readiness decreased substantially when communicating with strangers or less familiar tasks. Findings of open-ended responses supported this pattern, indicating that familiarity reduces perceived risk and enhances comfort. In familiar settings, the students expect supportive responses and feel less anxious, making communication more likely. Conversely, unfamiliar interlocutors increase uncertainty and fear of negative judgment, which weakens intention to speak and thus failure to actual action of speech. The findings echo previous studies that students' behavioral intention is not stable across situations; instead, it fluctuates with perceived safety and anticipated social consequences (Peng,

2024; Yashima, MacIntyre, & Ikeda, M. (2018). Zhang, Beckmann & Beckmann, 2018; Poteau, 2011).

Since intention is shaped by immediate classroom conditions, the next layer (Layer III) helps explain which situational factors most strongly influence confidence and decision-making.

Layer III: Situated Antecedents: Desire to communicate and state confidence as immediate triggers of silence

Layer III's findings highlight that situated antecedents play a central role in determining whether students' intentions translate into actual communication. Both close-ended and open-ended data revealed recurring mental barriers such as nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and fear of negative evaluation. These factors often reduced students' confidence and led to silence decisions even when they recognized the importance of speaking in English. Layer III findings are in line with the findings reported by Ahsan, Asgher, and Hussain (2020) whereas nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and fear of negative evaluation prevented the EFL students from active participation. On the other hand, those students who enjoyed speaking English saw it as an opportunity to express themselves. This indicates that WTC is socially constructed: classroom interaction is shaped not only by the students' competence but also by situational self-confidence, which influences their immediate communicative choices (Peng, 2016; Yue, 2016).

Hence, Layer III demonstrates that some desire and state self-confidence factors explain moment-to-moment the students' hesitation, Layer IV helps clarify whether students still have motivation to speak despite these barriers.

Layer IV: Motivational Propensities: Strong goals do not guarantee actual speaking behaviors

At Layer IV, findings of both types of responses indicated that the students generally held strong motivational goals, such as improving fluency and gaining better future academic or career opportunities. These motivations reflect the students' positive orientation toward English use and their belief in the long-term value of communication. Nevertheless, motivation did not consistently translate into actual speaking in the classroom. Many students expressed strong goals but still chose silence because Layer III constraints, particularly, anxiety and fear of negative evaluation were dominant in their mind. The findings lend support to King and Smith's (2017) findings that silence is often a protective response to perceived social risk. In this view, students may remain silent not because they lack intentions or aspirations, but because the classroom interactional environment triggers anxiety-related self-protection. This supports the WTC Pyramid model's assumption that long-term motives can be overridden by mental pressures, meaning that even highly motivated students may remain quiet if they perceive the classroom environment as psychologically unsafe.

To understand why some students remain vulnerable to anxiety despite strong motivation, Layer V provides insights into deeper cognitive and affective foundations such as perceived competence and personality traits.

Layer V: Affective–Cognitive Context: Perceived Competence and Shyness as Foundational Influences

At Layer V, the findings were very limited compared to the findings of other layers. Based on available data, the students' perceived competence and perceived trait, such as shyness, shaped their communication experiences. Students who perceived themselves as less capable in English tended to develop negative self-related cognitions and anticipate failure, which heightened their language anxiety (Hashemi, 2011). Similarly, students who perceived themselves as shy reported discomfort in speaking publicly, making them more likely to remain silent, particularly in formal or evaluative classroom moments. In particular, learners who viewed themselves as shy or socially cautious described discomfort in speaking publicly, which made them more likely to remain silent in whole-class interaction. The findings is consistent with Chung's (2021) report that Thai university students often "participate silently" in English-medium classrooms due to reluctance toward verbal participation. Therefore, silence should be understood not as passivity alone but as a socially and psychologically mediated participation choice in response to classroom interactional pressure.

However, the foundational factors at layer V should not be viewed as fixed determinants. The interaction between perceived competence and perceived traits suggests that students' WTC can still be developed through systematic scaffolding, confidence-building activities, and supportive peer interaction. In conclusion, Layer V shows that perceived competence and trait-like tendencies influence how students experience communication, shaping their vulnerability or resilience in speaking tasks.

Taken together, the findings at Layer I-V provide clear support for MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) WTC Pyramid model in explaining classroom communication among EFL students. Students' silence should not be interpreted simply as lack of motivation; rather, it emerges from the interaction of multiple layers, where strong motivational goals (Layer IV) and positive intentions (Layer II) can be disrupted by anxiety and peer pressure (Layer III), ultimately influencing actual speech behavior (Layer I). This layered interpretation highlights that WTC is dynamic and context-sensitive rather than stable and uniform across situations.

4   CONCLUSION

This study examined third-semester EFL students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in the classroom by applying MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) WTC Pyramid model and analyzing both close-ended and open-ended questionnaire data. The findings indicate that students' WTC is highly situational: although many students reported moderate to high willingness and motivational goals, their actual classroom participation was often constrained by psychological barriers such as nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and

fear of negative evaluation. These constraints were intensified by linguistic unpreparedness and, in some cases, unsupportive peers, whereas familiar interlocutors and a supportive environment increased students' confidence and readiness to speak. Overall, the results of this study show support the MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) WTC Pyramid model by demonstrating how deeper motivations and perceived competence (Layers IV–V) may not translate into speaking behaviors when immediate situated factors (Layers II–III) remain challenging. Future research should triangulate survey findings with systematic classroom observation or recorded interaction. Adding proficiency measures would also help clarify how perceived competence aligns with actual performance.

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