

Fostering Willingness to Communicate: An Investigation of Psychological and Situational Factors in EFL Context

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 13/11/2025

Revised: 30/12/2025

Accepted: 31/12/2025

Keywords:

Willingness to Communicate
Psychological Factors
Situational Factors
EFL
Speaking Classroom

ABSTRACT

Since it measures how prepared students are to use the target language in authentic situations, Willingness to Communicate (WTC) has emerged as a key concept in second and foreign language studies. Despite its importance, there are still few studies conducted in Indonesian higher education, especially when it comes to examining the combined effects of situational and psychological factors on students' WTC. This study aims to explore how these factors interact and to identify strategies for enhancing communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study involved first-year students enrolled in the Speaking for Survival Function course at Esa Unggul University through in-depth interviews and closed-ended questionnaires. The findings reveal that psychological factors, including self-confidence, perceived communicative competence, learning anxiety, motivation, and personality, play a significant role in shaping students' WTC. In addition, situational factors such as teachers' roles and attitudes, task types, topics, classroom atmosphere, and interlocutor characteristics strongly influence students' communicative behavior and engagement. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of implementing supportive and encouraging instructional strategies to enhance students' readiness to communicate in English within Indonesian higher education contexts.

I. Introduction

In today's globalized world, the ability to communicate in English is crucial for academic and professional success. In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is a crucial factor in determining their participation in classroom discussions and communicative competence [1]. According [2], students with high WTC tend to participate more actively, take risks when speaking, and feel more confident and happier. However, many students still exhibit low WTC, which hinders their language development, especially in Asian contexts.

It is generally accepted that one of the most important concepts in foreign language acquisition research is willingness to communicate (WTC). It describes a person's willingness or propensity to start a conversation in a particular circumstance [3]. WTC highlights the psychological and situational factors that affect a learner's decision to speak or keep quiet, reflecting their voluntary choice to use the target language when the opportunity presents itself. Stated differently, WTC encompasses more than just language proficiency; it also involves the intrinsic drive and self-assurance that propel classroom communication behavior.

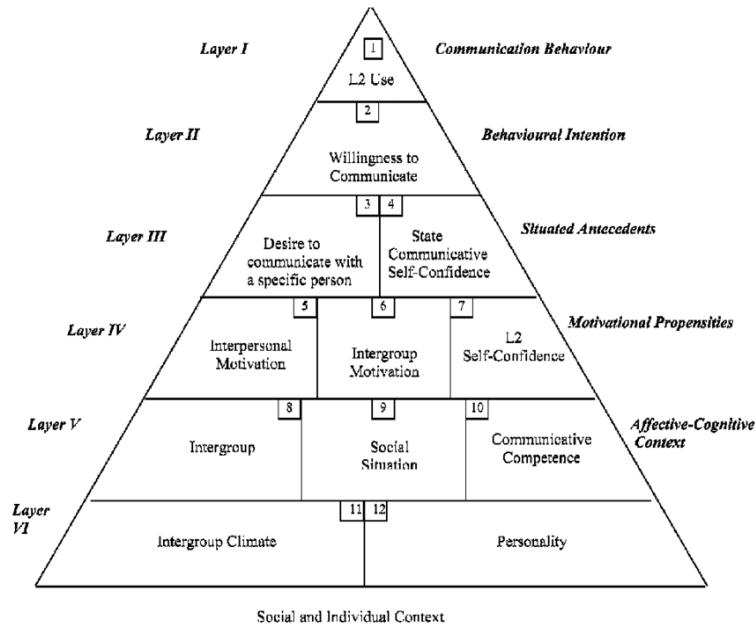


Figure 1 pyramid model of wtc macintyre et al. [3]

One of the most commonly used models to explain WTC is the WTC Pyramid Model by [3]. This model is heuristic and describes the various socio psychological factors that influence an individual's decision to communicate in a second language or not. The six levels are then divided into two main divisions: the more permanent and long-lasting effects that emerge over time are reflected in the lowest three layers, whereas the more temporary situational variables are represented by the top three levels

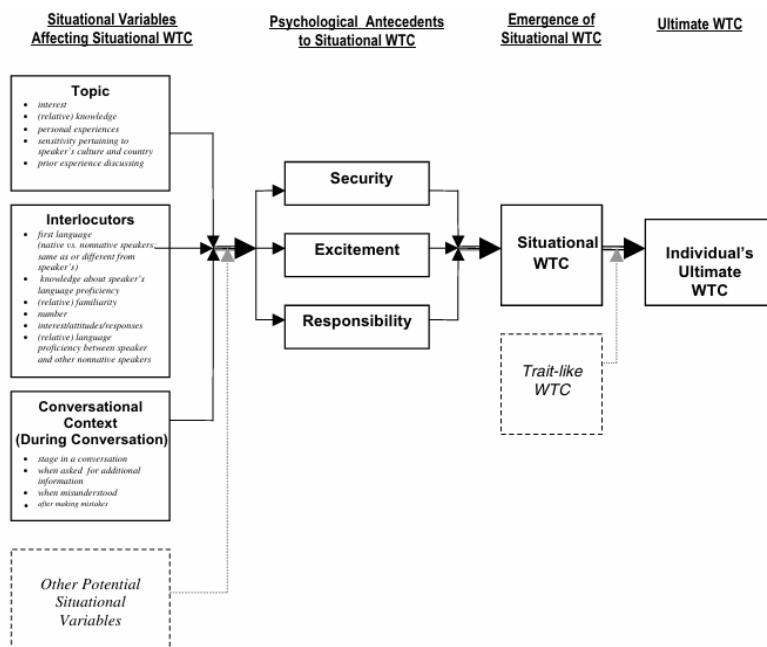


Figure 2 The situational model of wtc by kang [4]

And [4] classified that the situational factors that influence situational WTC into three categories: topic, interlocutors, and conversational setting. The psychological precursors to situational WTC have been separated into three categories: security, excitement, and responsibility, and each of these factors interacts with both the situational variables and each other. The combination of these various factors will result in situational WTC, followed by ultimate WTC.

Previous research also has shown that WTC is influenced by situational factors (teacher role, type of assignment, classroom atmosphere, topic famimiliarity, interlocutors) as well as

psychological factors (self-confidence, anxiety, motivation, and personality) [5], [6], [7], [8]. Research in Indonesia is still limited, although countries such as China, Ethiopia, and Vietnam have produced in-depth findings. While local studies such as [9] emphasize the importance of classroom environment and self-confidence, these studies largely focus on high-ability learners. The experiences of first-year students, often face more challenging psychological and situational challenges, are still limited.

By examining the situational and psychological actors influencing WTC among first-year EFL students at Esa Unggul University, this study fills this knowledge gap. It also examines methods students believe are effective in breaking down communication barriers, including preparation time, group projects, role-playing, and constructive feedback, all based on [5] framework. The uniqueness of this study lies in its contextual focus on first-year undergraduate students in Indonesia, which provides insight into how WTC develops in the early stages of higher education and helps foster more open and conducive communication in the classroom.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the situational and psychological factors that influence students' WTC in EFL classroom. This study also aimed to determine the strategies students found most effective in overcoming communication barriers and improving their readiness to interact in English.

II. Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate psychological and situational factors as well as instructional strategies influencing students' WTC in EFL classroom. The participants were thirty one first-year students enrolled in the Speaking for Survival Function course at Esa Unggul University. All students in the course were invited to participate and completed a closed-ended questionnaire, applying total population sampling. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale to examine students' perceptions of psychological and situational factors affecting their WTC and perceived strategies for enhancing classroom communication. Based on the questionnaire results, nine students were purposively selected for in-depth interviews to represent varied levels of WTC (high, moderate, and low), as well as their willingness and availability to participate further. This selection aimed to capture diverse communicative experiences. The questionnaire was adapted from an established framework, while the interviews provided deeper insights into students' experiences. All interviews were anonymized, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed thematically following [10] six-phase framework, and methodological triangulation between questionnaire and interview data was employed to enhance credibility. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and secure data handling using pseudonyms. The demographic information of the questionnaire and interview participants is presented in Table 1 and 2.

Tabel 1. Participant questionnaire close-ended

No	Class Location	Gender	
		Male	Female
1	Class 1	2	2
2	Class 2	1	12
3	Class 3	3	11
4	Total Gender	6	25
Total		31	

Tabel 2. Participant interviews

No	Participants	Gender	Age
1	P1	Female	19
2	P2	Female	19

3	P3	Female	20
4	P4	Female	24
5	P5	Female	19
6	P6	Male	19
7	P7	Female	18
8	P8	Female	19
9	P9	Female	20

III. Results and Discussion

A. Psychological Factors

Table.3 Interview Result of Psychological Factor

No	Psychological Factors	Themes Mentioned
1	Self-Confidence	10
2	Communicative Competences	9
3	Learning Anxiety	9
4	Motivation	9
5	Personality	9

Table.4 Questionnaire Result of Psychological Factor

No	Psychological Factors	Percentages
1	Self-Confidence	52% → Confidence Through Academic and Pair Support 32% → Apprehension Prior to Initial Language Effort
2	Communicative Competences	39% → Grammar and Vocabulary Accuracy 42% → English Conversation Retention
3	Learning Anxiety	48% → Error-Related Hesitation in English Communication 39% → Worry About Peer Judgment During Conversation
4	Motivation	39%
5	Personality	36% → English Speaking Confidence Within Introverted 37% → Discomfort With Initiating English Dialogue and Attendance to Respond

Psychological factors, including self-confidence, communicative competence, learning anxiety, motivation, and personality, were found to influence students' WTC in English. These factors emerged from thematic analysis of interview data, while questionnaire results were used to illustrate students' general tendencies toward each psychological dimension rather than to indicate statistical significance.

The interview findings indicate that self-confidence played a central role in students' WTC in English. This theme was identified in ten coded responses across interviews, with multiple references highlighting the importance of understanding the topic, repeated practice, and peer support. P1 said, "*I feel confident when I understand the topic being taught,*" while P2 and P5 mentioned that frequent practice helped them reduce hesitation. Similarly, P9 shared, "*My friends motivate me, so I try not to think negatively,*" illustrating how both peer encouragement and internal coping strategies contributed to increased confidence. These perceptions are supported by the questionnaire results, which showed that 52% of students felt more confident speaking English when receiving academic or peer support, although 32% still reported apprehension before making initial attempts to speak. This finding aligns with [11] researched the role of supportive environments in fostering learners' self-assurance.

Communicative competence also emerged as an important psychological factor influencing WTC. This theme emerged in nine coded segments during the interviews. Interview participants frequently reported difficulties related to vocabulary, grammar, and public speaking skills, which affected their confidence when communicating in English. P3 observed, "*I'm less confident because I lack vocabulary and my public speaking isn't very good,*" while P8 explained, "*I focus more on being understood than speaking perfectly.*" Questionnaire data further reflected this tendency, with 39% of students highlighting challenges related to grammar and vocabulary accuracy and 42% indicating difficulties in maintaining English conversation. These findings reflect [12] perspective that communicative effectiveness often takes precedence over grammatical perfection in real communication.

Learning anxiety was identified as a persistent psychological barrier to WTC. This theme was mentioned in nine coded responses during the interviews. Interview data revealed that fear of making mistakes and receiving negative evaluation often inhibited students' WTC. P8 said, "*I feel nervous when the lecturer suddenly asks me to speak without preparation,*" while P9 described a gradual reduction in anxiety through repeated exposure, noting, "*At first, I was nervous, but now I'm more relaxed.*" These experiences are supported by questionnaire findings, which showed that 48% of students hesitated to speak due to fear of errors, and 39% worried about peer judgment during conversations. This pattern aligns with [13] and [14] argued that supportive classroom conditions and repeated practice can gradually reduce communication anxiety.

Motivation also the important role in shaping students WTC. This theme appeared in nine coded excerpts from the interview transcripts. Interview participants generally expressed positive attitudes toward speaking activities, particularly when they perceived them as enjoyable or beneficial for self-improvement. P5 stated, "*I enjoy it because I can see whether my English is good or not,*" and P9 added, "*I like English even if I forget some words; I still feel happy speaking it.*" Questionnaire results indicated that 39% of students reported motivation as a contributing factor to their WTC. These findings support. [15] and [16] emphasized that intrinsic motivation as a key driver of communicative engagement in language learning.

Finally, personality was found to influence students' participation styles and comfort levels when speaking English. This thematic analysis revealed nine coded instances representing this theme. Interview data showed that more extroverted students tended to participate actively, as illustrated by P9's statement, "*I'm quite open and brave enough to ask questions,*" whereas introverted students, such as P4, admitted, "*I feel awkward and shy when asked to speak.*" Some participants positioned themselves between these traits; for instance, P8 noted, "*Because I'm used to it, I feel brave enough to speak in front of the class.*" Questionnaire results supported this variation, with 36% of students indicating confidence in speaking English despite being introverted, while 37% reported discomfort when initiating English dialogue or responding spontaneously. These findings are consistent with [3] and [5] highlighted that the interaction between personality traits and situational conditions in shaping communication readiness.

Overall, the findings suggest that students' WTC in English is shaped by an interaction of internal psychological factors, including confidence, competence, anxiety, motivation, and personality, alongside supportive external conduct such as peer encouragement, task clarity, and constructive teacher feedback. Developing communicative competence and self-confidence within a psychologically safe learning environment where mistakes are accepted and meaning is prioritized over perfection appears essential for fostering students' WTC in EFL contexts.

B. Situational Factors

Table.5 Interview Result of Situational Factor

No	Situational Factors	Themes Mentioned
1	Teachers' roles or attitudes	11
2	Task types	15
3	Topics	14
4	Classroom atmosphere	11
5	Interlocutors	20

Table.6 Questionnaire Result of Situational Factor

No	Situational Factors	Percentages
1	Teachers' roles or attitudes	52% → Impact of Positive Feedback on Speaking 32% → Barrier Communicate With Lecturer
2	Task types	48% → Speaking Motivation With Real World Contexts 32% → Preference for Collaborating Speaking Activities
3	Topics	42% → Discomfort Speaking with Unknown Topics 45% → Increase Speaking on Personal Topics
4	Classroom atmosphere	42%
5	Interlocutors	58% → Peer Support in Speaking English 48% → Speaking Comfort With Classmate

Situational factors, including teachers' roles and attitudes, task types, topic familiarity, classroom atmosphere, and interlocutors, were found to influence students' WTC in English. These factors emerged from thematic analysis of interview data, while questionnaire results were used to illustrate students' genera; tendencies toward each situational condition rather than to indicate statistical significance.

The findings indicate that teachers' role and attitude played a crucial role in influencing students' WTC. Interview data revealed that encouragement and positive feedback from teachers increased students' confidence. This theme emerged in eleven coded segments during the thematic analysis of the interviews. As P1 said, *Praise makes me happy, especially if someone says my pronunciation is good; it makes me want to speak more.*" Questionnaire results showed that 52% of students perceived positive feedback as encouraging their speaking, although 32% reported difficulty communicating with lecturers, indicating that teacher-related factors can function as both facilitators and barriers. These findings are consistent with [17] and [18] highlighted the role of constructive feedback in fostering motivation and learner resilience.

Task types also played an important role in shaping students' participation and confidence in speaking. Interview data showed that students felt more willing to communicate when tasks were clearly explained and connected to real-life contexts. This theme appeared in fifteen coded excerpts from the interview transcripts. P6 stated, "*When the lecturer explains the task clearly, I know what to do and feel more ready to speak,*" while P3 noted that structured speaking activities such as presentations made student feel "*more confident in public speaking in front of unfamiliar people.*" These perceptions are supported by the questionnaire results, which revealed that 48% of students

felt more motivated to speak when tasks were related to real-world contexts, and 32% preferred collaborative speaking activities. This finding aligns with [19] and [20] said that authentic and well-structured tasks enhance learners' engagement and communicative competence.

Another situational factor that influenced WTC was topic familiarity. Interview participants reported feeling more confident and enthusiastic when discussing familiar or personally relevant topics. This theme appeared in fourteen coded excerpts from the interview transcripts. P5 shared, "*I get more excited to speak when the topic is about my hobbies or favorite movies.*" The questionnaire results further supported this finding, with 45% of students reporting increased WTC when topics were personal, while 42% expressed discomfort when required to speak about familiar topics help reduce anxiety and improve speaking fluency. This aligns with the findings of [5] found that when the topic felt familiar and interesting, students were more likely to participate.

The classroom atmosphere was also identified as an important situational condition affecting WTC. Interview participants described a supportive classroom environment as one in which mistakes were accepted and students felt emotionally safe. This theme was emerged in eleven coded segments during the thematic analysis of the interviews. P4 characterized such an atmosphere as "*supportive, no one blames or laughs when we make mistakes.*" This perception is reflected in the questionnaire results, where 42% of students indicated that classroom atmosphere influenced their WTC. This finding supports [21] found that a positive classroom climate reduce anxiety and encourages student participation.

Finally, interlocutors or interaction partners were found to influence students' comfort in speaking English. Interview data showed that students felt more relaxed when communicating with familiar peers. This theme appeared in twenty coded excerpts from the interview transcripts. P2 stated, "*I feel more relaxed when talking with close friends because they don't judge me,*" while P1 described speaking with unfamiliar interlocutor as "*more challenging and exciting.*" Questionnaire results supported this pattern, with 58% of students indicating that peer support encouraged them to speak and 48% reporting greater comfort when speaking with classmates they knew well. These findings align with [3] and [22] emphasized the important of social familiarity and interpersonal comfort in shaping communicative confidence.

Overall, the results suggest that students are more willing to communicate when situational conditions provide clarity, relevance, and psychological safety. Authentic task design, familiar and engaging topics, supportive teacher attitude, a positive classroom atmosphere, and encouraging peers work together to reduce anxiety, build confidence, and promote meaningful communication in EFL classroom.

C. Strategies

Table.5 Interview Result of Strategies

No	Strategies	Themes Mentioned
1	Allocating sufficient time for speaking task preparation	5
2	Implementing group or pair work	9
3	Fostering a friendly classroom environment	9
4	Providing positive corrections	9
5	Delivering constructive feedback	7
6	Designing practical and authentic communication tasks	9

Table.6 Questionnaire Result of Strategies

No	Strategies	Percentages
1	Allocating sufficient time for speaking task preparation	55%
2	Implementing group or pair work	55%
3	Fostering a friendly classroom environment	48%
4	Providing positive corrections	58%
5	Delivering constructive feedback	52%
6	Designing practical and authentic communication tasks	48%

The interview data were thematically analyzed to identify instructional strategies perceived by students as effective in enhancing their WTC in English. The strategies discussed in this section emerged from participants' interview responses, while the questionnaire percentages are used to illustrate students' overall tendencies toward each strategy rather than to indicate statistical significance.

The findings revealed that allocating sufficient time for speaking task preparation was considered an important strategy for improving students' confidence and reducing anxiety. This strategy emerged in five coded instances across the interview data, indicating that several students explicitly emphasized the importance of preparation before engaging in speaking activities. P5 stated, "*I feel more confident if I've practiced first and know what I'm going to say,*" while P8 admitted, "*I get nervous when the lecturer suddenly asks me to speak without preparation.*" These interview findings are supported by the questionnaire results, which showed that 55% of students agreed that having sufficient preparation time increased their confidence when speaking English. These findings align with [15] and [14] argued that preparation enhances learners cognitive and emotional readiness, thereby reducing speaking anxiety.

Another prominent strategy identified through the interviews was the implementation of group or pair work. This theme appeared in nine coded excerpts from the interview transcripts. This theme appeared in nine coded excerpts from the interview transcripts. Student perceived small group interaction as less intimidating and more natural than individual speaking tasks. P2 explained, "*It's easier to talk in pairs because it feels more natural,*" while P8 added, "*I prefer small groups; it's more interactive, not just one-way talking.*" consistently, the questionnaire results showed that 55% of students agreed that group or pair work encouraged them to communicate more actively. This finding supports [20] emphasized that peer collaboration and small group interaction foster a supportive learning environment that encourages students to express themselves more freely in English.

Creating a friendly and supportive classroom environment also emerged as a key strategy, as this theme was identified in nine code instances across the interview data. Students highlighted the importance of a nonjudgemental atmosphere in reducing fear and encouraging participation. As P5 noted, "*In a relaxed class, I'm not afraid of making mistakes,*" while P6 stated, "*When the class is silent and no one responds, I get confused and nervous.*" The questionnaire results further supported these findings, with 48% of students agreeing that a positive classroom atmosphere helped them feel more comfortable speaking English. These findings are consistent with [23] and [24] argued that a balance between emotional safety and instructional structure maximizes student engagement.

This interviews also revealed that positive correction and constructive feedback played an essential role in enhancing students' confidence and motivation. Positive correction was mentioned in nine codes and constructive feedback emerging in seven code responses during the interview. P2 stated, "*When my mistakes are corrected gently, I feel encouraged to keep going,*" and P9 added, "*If they correct me politely, I take it as something to help me improve.*" These perceptions are supported by the questionnaire results, which indicated that 58% of students responded positively to positive corrections and 52% agreed that constructive feedback encouraged them to speak more

confidently. These findings aligned to [18] found that positive reinforcement combined with constructive criticism can boost self-esteem, reduce anxiety, and increase openness in communication.

And the last, designing practical and authentic communication tasks was identified as a highly effective strategy, as this theme appeared in nine coded excerpts from the interview transcripts. Students responded positively to tasks that reflected real-life situations and personal experiences. P2 stated, *"When the topic is something I've experienced, like TikTok or animals, I feel more confident to talk,"* while P7 reflected, *"Once I explained something to a stranger on campus, it was useful because I practiced speaking and tested my courage."* Questionnaire results showed that 48% of students agreed that authentic communication tasks increased their WTC. These findings support [19] and [25] argued that authentic task enhance motivation and develop practical communication competence.

Overall, the findings indicate that a combination of planned preparation, collaborative learning, a supportive classroom environment, positive and constructive feedback, and authentic speaking tasks play a crucial role in enhancing students WTC in English. These strategies not only help reduce anxiety but also foster confidence, motivation, and meaningful engagement in EFL classrooms, highlighting the importance of pedagogical approaches that integrate both psychological and situational support.

IV. Conclusion

According to this study, first-year EFL students WTC in the classroom is significantly influenced by situational and psychological factors. Students' readiness to communicate in English is strongly influenced by psychological factors, including motivation, personality, learning anxiety, self-confidence, and perceived communicative competence. Simultaneously, it was found that situational elements such as task type, classroom environment, teacher role, familiarity with the topic, and interlocutors can promote or inhibit students' communicative behavior. These results suggest that WTC is a dynamic construct influenced by the interaction of internal and external factors in the learning environment, rather than a fixed attribute.

Furthermore, the study found that students believed several strategies were helpful in breaking down communication barriers and improving their WTC. These strategies included giving students sufficient time to prepare for speaking assignments, assigning group or pair work to reduce pressure, creating a friendly and supportive learning environment, providing constructive feedback and correction, and creating authentic communication assignments that mirror real-world scenarios. By using these techniques, instructors can reduce student anxiety, improve their self-esteem, and foster more inclusive and engaging classroom relationships.

The study's implications emphasize how crucial it is to create an enjoyable and engaging learning environment where students feel secure and inspired to express themselves. Lecturers need to use communicative teaching techniques, promote teamwork, and improve the confidence of learners by giving them encouraging feedback. The findings of this study, however, are not more generally applicable because it was restricted to a small sample of first-year students at a single university. It is recommended that future studies examine the long-term effects of instructional interventions on students' WTC development, use larger and more varied sample sizes, and incorporate quantitative data analysis for wider validation.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the English Education Department of Esa Unggul University, the lecturers, and *Speaking for Survival Function* students for their valuable support, participation, and contribute to this study.

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Supplementary Material

This supplementary file includes the close-ended questionnaire adapted from Tuyen and Loan [5], interview guide questions, and anonymized excerpts from participants' responses used in thematic analysis.