



Antecedents of Willingness to Communicate in Online ESP Conversation Classes: A Cognitive, Affective, and Situational Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

English for Specific Purposes (ESP);
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Abstract: Communication studies students are required to develop effective oral communication skills in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses to support academic and professional readiness, including in online learning environments. Although previous studies have explored willingness to communicate (WTC) in ESP and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, limited attention has been paid to communication studies students and online ESP conversation classes. This qualitative case study explores the cognitive-linguistic, affective, and situational antecedents shaping WTC among 45 communication studies students at a university in Central Jakarta. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires. In cognitive-linguistic readiness, the students demonstrate awareness of the importance of English communication and employ cognitive strategies such as planning and lexical preparation, although some speaking elements are still developing. Affective factors, including speaking enjoyment and topic interest, as well as situational factors comprising supportive lecturer feedback and instructional clarity, stimulate the students' WTC. The study further suggests that the online learning environment functions as a space that shapes speaking readiness. The study recommends incorporating more authentic professional communication activities in ESP online classrooms to strengthen students' employability skills.

Kata Kunci:

Bahasa Inggris untuk Keperluan Khusus (ESP);
Kelas Percakapan Daring;
Kesiapan untuk Berkomunikasi (WTC);

Abstrak: Mahasiswa jurusan studi komunikasi dituntut untuk mengembangkan keterampilan komunikasi lisan yang efektif dalam mata kuliah Bahasa Inggris untuk Tujuan Khusus (ESP) guna mendukung kesiapan akademis dan profesional, termasuk dalam lingkungan pembelajaran daring. Meskipun studi sebelumnya telah mengeksplorasi kesiapan untuk berkomunikasi (WTC) dalam konteks ESP dan EFL, perhatian yang diberikan kepada mahasiswa jurusan studi komunikasi dan kelas percakapan ESP daring masih terbatas. Studi kasus kualitatif ini mengeksplorasi antededen kognitif-linguistik, afektif, dan situasional yang membentuk WTC di antara 45 mahasiswa jurusan studi komunikasi di sebuah universitas di Jakarta Pusat. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terbuka. Dalam kesiapan kognitif-linguistik, mahasiswa menunjukkan kesadaran akan pentingnya komunikasi bahasa Inggris dan menerapkan strategi kognitif seperti perencanaan dan persiapan leksikal, meskipun beberapa elemen berbicara masih dalam tahap perkembangan. Faktor afektif, termasuk kesenangan berbicara dan minat terhadap topik, serta faktor situasional yang meliputi umpan balik dosen yang mendukung dan kejelasan instruksional, menstimulasi WTC mahasiswa. Studi ini lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa lingkungan pembelajaran daring berfungsi sebagai ruang untuk membentuk kesiapan berbicara. Studi ini merekomendasikan memasukkan lebih banyak aktivitas komunikasi profesional yang otentik di kelas daring ESP guna memperkuat keterampilan kerja mahasiswa.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Oral communication proficiency constitutes a fundamental competence for students in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, particularly for those majoring in communication studies. Students in these courses should be prepared to face academic challenges (Nashaat-Sobhy & Carrió-Pastor, 2026) and professional interactions (Arnó-Macià et al., 2020) as part of preparation for future career readiness. Effective oral communication enables students to articulate ideas clearly, engage in discussions, and participate actively in real-world communication scenarios related to their field.

In the context of ESP conversation classes, students are projected not only to demonstrate linguistic competence but also to develop confidence in expressing specialized knowledge (Basturkmen, 2025). Unlike general English learning, ESP targets subject-specific vocabulary (SSV), real-world contexts, and communication skills, which highly correspond to their career target (Meristo & Heero, 2026). This makes speaking ability a crucial element of their language learning journey. It also aligns with the concept of communicative competence, highlighting the integration of grammatical, language in society, discourse, and strategic abilities in meaningful communication (Moore, 2020; Pilla et al., 2025).

Beyond linguistic competence, students' willingness to communicate (WTC) serves a major role in determining the extent to which they engage in speaking activities. WTC is conceptualized as the as a person's engagement to communicate when getting an opportunity (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024). MacIntyre and Wang (2021) conceptualize willingness to communicate (WTC) as a multi-layered system shaped by both stable and situational factors. The model consists of six interconnected layers (MacIntyre, 2020; MacIntyre & Wang, 2021). The top layers represent actual communication behavior (Layer I) and behavioral intention or willingness to communicate (Layer II). These are influenced by situated antecedents (Layer III), such as the immediate desire to communicate and situational communicative confidence. Layer IV refers to motivational propensities, including interpersonal and intergroup motivation as well as self-confidence in communication. Layer V involves affective and cognitive context, such as communicative competence, attitudes, and situational appraisals. At the base, Layer VI consists of enduring influences such as personality traits and intergroup climate. This model highlights that WTC emerges from the interaction of psychological, motivational, social, and contextual factors shaping learners' communication behavior.

Apart from the importance of oral proficiency and WTC, ESP students frequently encounter barriers to participation, particularly in virtual learning settings. The challenges include a lack of confidence and anxiety related to online communication platforms (Yahia, 2025), or limited discipline-specific vocabulary (Haque et al., 2025; Saeedi & Najjarpour, 2025). Such issues reflect both internal factors (such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence), and external factors (e.g., classroom interaction, lecturer feedback, and task design). Both factors are the central elements within the WTC framework. For ESP students, especially in the communication major, these barriers are particularly significant since their academic and professional success depends heavily on effective oral communication.

Scholars in previous studies of WTC have explored various factors influencing students' willingness to communicate across ESP and EFL learning contexts using qualitative approaches. For example, Sjaifullah and Laksmi (2022), through a case study in ESP classes at a polytechnic, found that students' WTC was influenced not only by language competence but also by interlocutors, classroom activities, topics, tasks, classroom contracts, and instructional media. Similarly, Salam et al. (2022), using interview-based inquiry in English for Engineering classes, identified situated factors affecting ESP students' willingness to communicate, including linguistic mastery and personality traits. In broader EFL contexts, Li et al. (2024), investigated the dynamic fluctuation of WTC during classroom communicative tasks and revealed that students' willingness to communicate was shaped by linguistic, cognitive, affective, and social classroom conditions.

Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into factors influencing WTC in ESP and EFL contexts, limited attention has been paid to communication studies students and online ESP conversation classes. Most existing studies have focused on general EFL classrooms or ESP programs in other disciplinary areas, such as engineering and polytechnic education. Consequently, communication studies students remain underrepresented in WTC research despite the centrality of oral communication to their academic and professional development. In addition, the increasing use of online learning environments has transformed classroom interaction and communicative participation, yet limited research has specifically explored how students experience WTC in online ESP conversation classes. This limitation is significant because communication studies students are expected to perform, analyse, and manage communication actively across professional, multilingual, and digital contexts (Fuller et al., 2018; Sataøen & Lövgren, 2024). Therefore, further qualitative inquiry is needed to explore how students perceive and experience antecedents of WTC within professionally oriented online ESP conversation classes.

The researchers formulate the following research question: "What antecedents shape communication studies students' willingness to communicate?" Specifically, the study explores students' perspectives on their speaking ability and confidence, as well as the cognitive, affective, and situational factors influencing their WTC and communicative behaviour in online ESP conversation classes. Guided by the layered model of WTC, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological, linguistic, and contextual influences shaping students' communicative participation. Additionally, the study is expected to provide practical implications for optimizing students' oral communication development in online ESP learning settings.

This study contributes novelty by investigating WTC within the relatively underexplored context of online ESP conversation classes for communication studies students. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the study examines cognitive, affective, and situational antecedents shaping students' communicative behaviour in professionally oriented online ESP learning environments. In doing so, the study extends WTC discussions beyond general language-learning settings and situates communicative willingness within the context of professional communication preparation.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study (Tisdell et al., 2025) was applied to explore students' perceptions and experiences that shape their WTC in online ESP conversation classes. A case study was selected with the intention of providing an in-depth insight into students' experiences and perspectives within the context of learning in online ESP conversation classes. This allows the researchers to capture the complexities of individual and social factors contributing to students' WTC. The participants involved in this study were 45 communication major students enrolled in online ESP conversation classes at a private university in Central Jakarta, Special Region of Jakarta, Indonesia. Those who actively participated in the online classes were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. All student participants were provided with informed consent before they agreed to participate in this study. Ethical considerations, including anonymity and confidentiality, were strictly maintained.

The data were collected using a questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2018) consisting of Likert-scale and open-ended items. The questionnaire was developed based on the WTC framework proposed by MacIntyre (2020) and MacIntyre and Wang (2021), particularly focusing on Layer III (situated antecedents), Layer IV (motivational propensities), and Layer V (affective-cognitive context). In addition, the indicators were adapted from Zhang and Zhang (2024) to suit the context of online ESP conversation classes. The questionnaire blueprints are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Questionnaire Blueprints based on the WTC Framework

Indicators	Questionnaire Items	WTC Layer
Students' self-perceived speaking ability	1, 5, 6, 8	III, V
Lecturers' support	2, 7	III
English-speaking significance for academic and professional purposes	3, 4	IV
Motivation and affective engagement in speaking activities	9, 10	III, V

Likert-scale items were used to identify the degree of students' agreement toward speaking-related experiences, while open-ended items allowed participants to elaborate on their perceptions and personal experiences regarding WTC in online ESP classes. Before the distribution, the questionnaire was reviewed to ensure content relevance and clarity of the indicators. The questionnaire was administered online through Google Forms to provide flexibility for participants in completing the responses. Participants were instructed to answer all items honestly and elaborate on their responses in the open-ended section. Data collection was conducted for one week upon the completion of the ESP conversation classes. Once all responses had been collected, the data were downloaded, anonymized, and prepared for analysis. The collected qualitative data were analyzed following the procedures proposed by Silverman (2024). The analysis involved several stages:

1. Data familiarization: The researchers repeatedly read all participants' responses to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data and identify initial patterns related to WTC experiences.
2. Initial coding: Significant statements, keywords, and expressions related to antecedents of WTC were highlighted and assigned initial codes.
3. Categorizing and theme development: The initial codes were grouped into broader categories and themes based on conceptual similarities and alignment with the WTC framework. Three major themes were chosen: (1) cognitive and linguistic readiness, including vocabulary knowledge, academic and professional importance of speaking English, speaking preparation strategies, self-perceived speaking ability, speaking challenges, and confidence; (2) affective conditions, encompassing the enjoyment of speaking English and interests in speaking topics; and (3) situational support, covering lecturers' feedback and teaching practice.
4. Theme validation and reviewing: The researchers re-examined all coded extracts and compared them with the original responses to ensure consistency and coherence between themes and participants' statements. Themes were revised, merged, or refined when overlapping meanings were identified.
5. Contextual interpretation: The validated themes were interpreted using the WTC framework and relevant previous studies to explain how cognitive, affective, and situational factors interacted in shaping students' willingness to communicate in online ESP conversation classes.
6. Presentation of findings: The findings were presented descriptively through thematic explanations supported by participants' responses to illustrate the antecedents of students' WTC.

To ensure validity and trustworthiness, methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2017) was employed by integrating Likert-scale responses with qualitative open-ended explanations. This process enabled the researchers to compare students' self-assessments with their detailed experiences and perceptions. In addition, repeated data analysis was conducted to enhance coding reliability and thematic consistency. These procedures strengthened the credibility, dependability, and accountability of the findings regarding students' WTC in online ESP conversation classes.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the questionnaire results, the researchers categorized the codes into three main themes as antecedents of WTC in online ESP conversation classes attended by communications studies students. The themes embrace cognitive and linguistic readiness, affective conditions, and situational support. The results are presented and segmented along with the discussion in the following section.

1. Cognitive and Linguistic Readiness

Table 2. The Result of the Questionnaire on Cognitive and Linguistic Readiness

Questionnaire Item	Likert Results	Open-ended Answers	Codes
Q1 – vocabulary sufficiency	5= 14 (31.1%) 4= 14 (31.1%) 3= 13 (28.9%) 2= 2 (4.4%) 1= 2 (4.4%)	Resources for vocabulary enrichment: formal education, media exposure, self-study, social interaction	Vocabulary knowledge
Q3 - academic importance of English	5= 35 (77.8%) 4= 8 (17.85%) 3= 1 (2.2%) 2= 1 (2.2%) 1= 0	English speaking elements needed for academic success: presentation skills, public speaking, daily communication, translating/interpreting	Academic and professional importance of speaking English
Q4 - future job importance	5= 37 (82.2%) 4= 6 (13.3%) 3= 1 (2.2%) 2= 1 (2.2%) 1= 0	Most important job requiring English: public relations and communication, educators, digital marketing, content creators, hospitality,	
Q5 - idea formulation	5= 14 (31.1%) 4= 17 (37.8%) 3= 11 (24.4%) 2= 2 (4.4%) 1= 1 (2.2%)	Students' preparation before speaking: cognitive planning, translation, vocabulary selection, following the lecturer's regulation and guidance	Speaking preparation strategies
Q6 - opinions on speaking ability	5= 5 (11.1%) 4= 16 (35.6%) 3= 21 (46.7%) 2= 2 (4.4%) 1= 1 (2.2%)	Elements mastered by students: pronunciation focus, grammar/syntax issues, developing fluency, and confidence	Self-perceived speaking ability
Q8 - speaking ease	5=15.6% 4=35.6% 3=40% 2=8.9% 1=0%	Factors underpinning ease in speaking English: practice and exposure Factors underpinning difficulty in speaking English: anxiety of making mistakes, confidence, less practice, limited language mastery (pronunciation, grammar, fluency, idea construction)	Speaking challenges and confidence

From Table 1, students' cognitive and linguistic readiness to communicate in English is reflected through several indicators showing generally positive tendencies across vocabulary sufficiency, idea formulation, speaking ability, and speaking ease. In short, the pattern suggests that learners possess a foundation of perceived linguistic competence that supports their willingness to initiate communication in online ESP settings. Regarding vocabulary sufficiency, most students reported high perceived adequacy, while the remainder indicated moderate to low levels. Within the WTC framework, this reflects perceived linguistic competence as a key antecedent to communication initiation, with learners who believe they possess sufficient lexical resources more likely to engage in spontaneous interaction. Vocabulary confidence, therefore, functions not only as a knowledge indicator but also as a psychological trigger for communicative willingness. This aligns with Heidari

(2024), who found that learners with stronger communicative initiative tend to possess broader vocabulary repertoires.

In terms of the perceived importance of English (Q3 and Q4), most respondents rated English as highly important for both academic success and future employment. This indicates that students' motivation to communicate is not purely classroom-based but strongly shaped by instrumental and future-oriented goals. From a WTC perspective, this suggests that intention to communicate is strengthened when learners perceive English as part of their professional identity formation. Xiao and Qiu (2022) similarly argued that awareness of academic and professional value increases learners' communicative motivation. Importantly, in ESP communication contexts, this awareness becomes discipline-specific rather than general. Communication students do not view English as a generic subject, but as a professional tool for media production, public speaking, audience engagement, and digital communication. This means that the students have already been alarmed of their future-oriented needs when learning in this ESP class (Bui, 2022). Therefore, WTC in this study reflects an early stage of professional identity construction, where English is internalized as a workplace communication instrument rather than an academic requirement alone.

For idea formulation as part of speaking preparatory activities (Q5), responses show mixed readiness. While most students report being able to organize ideas before speaking, a considerable proportion still rely on translation, cognitive planning, vocabulary selection, and following instruction strategies. This indicates that spontaneous communication is still cognitively demanding. In online ESP conversation classes, this cognitive demand may become more visible because students must process ideas while simultaneously managing digitally mediated interaction. This reflects a transition gap between linguistic knowledge and real-time production ability, where learners experience hesitation when required to respond instantly. Ertugruloglu et al. (2023) emphasize scaffolding as essential in reducing this cognitive burden. Similarly, modelling (Matiso, 2024) and clear instruction (Shao, 2025) are necessary to support real-time communication readiness. Lee and Liu (2024) further confirm that structured emotional and instructional support accommodates WTC in online environments.

For self-rated speaking ability (Q6), the results indicate a balance between moderate and high confidence levels. The fact suggests developing but not fully stable speaking competence. This further implies that WTC is strongly facilitated by self-efficacy rather than actual ability alone. The students who perceive limitations in fluency or grammar will have a tendency to participate less actively. This aligns with Rahmawati et al. (2025), who highlight the role of grammar mastery in supporting confidence, and Zhang and Dai (2024), who found strong relationships between WTC, self-efficacy, and motivation.

Speaking ease (Q8) further confirms that communicative comfort is uneven and dependent on exposure and practice. Students with more frequent practice demonstrate greater ease, while limited exposure increases hesitation. Within online conversation settings, speaking practice may also involve adaptation to virtual interaction patterns such as delayed responses, limited nonverbal feedback, and reduced immediacy during communication. Although the students did not explicitly identify technological barriers, the online environment may still facilitate communicative comfort by interactional presence and participation. This supports Li (2025) and Yang et al. (2024), who emphasize the role of sustained practice in developing communicative confidence. Anxiety and low self-esteem remain key limiting factors, as also noted by Ayudhaya et al. (2026).

In ESP learning settings, these findings spotlight the necessity to adjust language instruction to real-world communicative demands. ESP pedagogy emphasizes the development of functional language skills tailored to specific professional contexts (Talib et al., 2026) such as public speaking, media communication, and public relations. In this context, cognitive readiness is not only about knowing English, but about being able to structure ideas in ways that match professional genres such

as presentations, media reporting, or persuasive communication, because, precisely, communication professionals should serve as the delivery agents of messages (Tan, 2024) to the audience or public. Accordingly, to meet the speaking skills that correspond to the demand of communication and global employability skills for communication professionals, adopting standardized frameworks used worldwide, such as CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and the employability skills framework, is of high significance (Yilik & Tanriverdi-Koksal, 2026).

However, the moderate levels of speaking ability and ease reported by the students suggest that current learning experiences may not sufficiently simulate authentic communication scenarios. Incorporating authentic tasks, such as presentations, role-plays, and collaborative projects, can enhance both confidence and communicative engagement. Within the context of this study, these activities may provide communication students with opportunities to rehearse professional speaking practices while gradually building their WTC in online ESP classes with the use of authentic speaking tasks (Pamuji et al., 2025) of domain-specific communication (Basturkmen, 2022). Consequently, fostering WTC in ESP classrooms requires a balanced approach that integrates linguistic competence, psychological readiness, and contextually relevant practice.

2. Affective conditions

Table 3. The Result of the Questionnaire on Affective Conditions

Questionnaire Item	Likert Results	Open-ended Answers	Codes
Q9 - students' enjoyment of speaking	5=28 (62.2%) 4=13 (28.9%) 3=2 (4.4%) 2=2 (4.4%) 1=0 (0.0%)	Reasons for enjoying speaking: career motivation, personal enjoyment, self-development, language improvement	Speaking enjoyment
Q10 - students' interest in speaking topics	5=12 (26.7%) 4=26 (57.8%) 3=5 (11.1%) 2=1 (2.2%) 1=1 (2.2%)	Interesting topic for students: daily lives and personal experiences, hobbies, socializing, current trends, and academic discussion, including grammar, formal and informal language	Topic interest

Table 3 represents students' affective conditions, which are generally portrayed through high levels of enjoyment and interest in speaking activities. The findings indicate generally favorable emotional orientations toward English communication. Speaking enjoyment (Q9) is predominantly high, suggesting that the students experience positive emotional engagement during speaking activities. Within the WTC framework, enjoyment acts as a facilitating emotional condition that reduces anxiety and increases communicative initiation. Zhang et al. (2026) confirm that enjoyment significantly predicts WTC, while Wang et al. (2025) highlight its role in fostering a positive learning mindset and classroom environment. As a result, students who enjoy speaking activities are more likely to participate actively and communicate more confidently in classroom interactions. This finding suggests that creating enjoyable and supportive speaking environments may strengthen students' WTC and encourage more frequent use of the target language.

Another finding within the affective domain is the interest in speaking topics (Q10), which is also regarded as high. The results explain that participation is strongly influenced by topic relevance. This suggests that WTC is not stable but context-sensitive, increasing when topics are personally meaningful or relatable. In online ESP classrooms, topic relevance may become even more important because virtual interaction environments can reduce spontaneous engagement if discussions are not personally meaningful. Interesting and relatable topics potentially help students overcome the interactional distance commonly associated with online communication settings. Corresponding to

the result, Wei and Cao (2024) emphasize that topic relevance significantly shapes communicative willingness.

In ESP instructional practices, affective engagement operates differently from general EFL contexts. Instead of simply increasing enjoyment, affective readiness must be strategically aligned with professional identity formation. Speaking tasks in ESP should not only be enjoyable but must simulate authentic professional communication situations such as interviews, media conferences, or public campaigns. Sarwari (2024) confirms that authentic materials and learner-centered design have the potential to enhance WTC. Consequently, affective readiness becomes meaningful only when it is transformed into professionally relevant communicative engagement, not just classroom enjoyment.

3. Situational support

Table 4. The Result of the Questionnaire on Situational Support

Questionnaire Item	Likert Results	Open-ended Answers	Codes
Q2- lecturers' feedback	5=33 (73.3%) 4= 8 (17.8%) 3= 3 (6.7%) 2= 0 1=1 (2.2%)	Feedback received from lecturers: performance praise, positive comments; corrective and constructive feedback on pronunciation and grammar, question-based feedback, and grades	Lecturers' feedback and instructional clarity
Q7 - lecturers' teaching practice	5=34 (75.6%) 4=8 (17.8%) 3=3 (6.7%) 2=0 1=0	Teaching procedures given by lecturers (in order): asking how students are, warming up, reviewing previous materials, explaining materials, including specific vocabulary and expressions, and giving clear instructions for assignments	

From Table 3, situational support is strongly reflected in lecturer feedback and instructional clarity, both of which are perceived positively by students. Lecturer feedback (Q2) is generally perceived as supportive, combining praise, correction, and guidance. From a WTC perspective, feedback functions as a risk-reduction mechanism, lowering fear of negative evaluation and increasing willingness to speak (Jaroslava et al., 2023). Sarwari (2024) and Lee and Liu (2024) further confirm that supportive feedback enhances participation and communicative confidence. In the lens of communication studies, feedback is reported to enhance students' intense engagement with the learning goals, encourage confidence, and get students ready to enter collaboration in the workforce (Ballantyne et al., 2025). In light of these, feedback serves a fundamental position to promote students' WTC during classes which will create more dynamic interactions.

Lecturer's teaching (Q7) is also perceived as highly structured and clear. Generally, teacher support (Zarrinabadi et al., 2021) can stimulate students' WTC. More specifically, instructional clarity will help students understand tasks and expectations. This reduces cognitive overload and increases readiness to participate. In online ESP conversation classes, instructional clarity becomes even more essential because students rely heavily on verbal guidance, organized task procedures, and structured interactional management during virtual communication. Clear instructions may reduce uncertainty and support smoother participation in digitally mediated speaking activities. Janesarvatan and Asoodar (2024) and Shao (2025) emphasize that clarity of instruction significantly predicts WTC and gives students a more beneficial impact (Dewaele et al., 2025). Instructional clarity is specifically claimed to be effective at increasing participation (Zarrinabadi et al., 2021) and stronger relationships between instructors and students (Han & Li, 2025). Then, it is reasonable to say that situational support may either facilitate or hinder WTC depending on how instructional practices are implemented in the classroom.

In ESP conversational classrooms, situational support is not simply about classroom management but about simulating professional communication environments. ESP instruction must reflect workplace communication structures (Raddaoui, 2026) such as briefing sessions, audience interaction, and performance-based evaluation. Thus, lecturer feedback in ESP should not only correct linguistic errors but also evaluate communicative effectiveness in professional terms such as clarity, persuasion, and audience impact. In practice, lecturers are advised to create structured and targeted instruction in enhancing ESP communication outcomes (Basturkmen, 2025). Notwithstanding, WTC remains dynamic and depends on consistent instructional quality and interactional support. Task design and assessment tools (Wei & Cao, 2024) also play a crucial role in instructional clarity. For specialized English, project-based learning is recommended as it is claimed to improve students' communicative competence (Madan et al., 2026) and meet the relevance of the field (Huang et al., 2023).

Additionally, with the use of virtual technology in the conversational courses, equipping students with excellent digital literacy is prominent. Although students growing up in a digital environment are categorized as digital natives by many experts (Huang et al., 2023), this does not automatically indicate their readiness to participate effectively in online academic communication. The findings of this study suggest that the online environment functions not solely as a technological platform but as a communicative space requiring students to adapt to digitally mediated interaction, participation norms, and instructional structures. Therefore, lecturers' company and guidance are critically needed to support students' communicative engagement (Nur et al., 2023).

Across the three antecedent categories, the online learning environment appears to function less as a technological barrier than as a contextual space shaping communicative participation in ESP conversation classes. Although the students did not identify digital platforms or technical issues as primary obstacles to communication, the findings imply that online learning environments still accommodate WTC through lecturers' support (Wang et al., 2026), such as interactional structure, instructional clarity, communicative preparation, and participation dynamics. This may suggest that online learning has become a relatively normalized mode of building essential skills for students (Richardson et al., 2026), including interaction in digitally oriented communication studies contexts. Nevertheless, students' WTC remains closely shaped by how effectively online ESP instruction facilitates meaningful interaction, emotional engagement, and professionally relevant speaking practices. Therefore, WTC in online ESP settings should be understood not purely in terms of technological access, but as part of a digitally mediated communicative experience.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explores the antecedents of students' WTC in an online ESP conversation course by focusing on cognitive and linguistic readiness, affective conditions, and situational support. The findings indicate that the interaction between perceived language competence, emotional readiness, and supportive classroom environments shapes students' WTC. Although the students recognize the importance of English for academic and professional communication, their WTC is still influenced by anxiety, self-confidence, and dependence on preparatory strategies before speaking. In addition, supportive lecturer feedback, clear instructional guidance, and structured classroom practices facilitate WTC in online ESP speaking activities. The findings further suggest that the online learning environment functions not simply as a technological platform but as a digitally mediated communicative space that influenced students' participation and speaking readiness. This study contributes to ESP communication research by showing that WTC among communication students is closely connected to professional communication demands rather than merely general English interaction. Students viewed English as an important tool for public speaking, media communication,

audience engagement, and other profession-oriented communication practices. In online ESP settings, WTC also reflects students' adaptation to digitally mediated communication environments.

Based on these findings, ESP instructors are recommended to implement more WTC-oriented learning practices in online conversation classes. Lecturers may incorporate spontaneous speaking activities, role plays, discussions, authentic materials, and communicative tasks related to media and public communication contexts that simulate real professional communication situations. Supportive feedback, low-anxiety classroom environments, and clear instructional guidance should also be consistently maintained to strengthen students' communication confidence and participation. This study has limitations in some areas. It involves a limited number of communication students and relies mainly on open-ended questionnaires, which may not fully capture students' communicative behavior. Future studies are encouraged to involve broader ESP contexts and use multiple data collection methods, such as interviews and classroom observations, to obtain more comprehensive findings regarding students' WTC.

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