

EFL Students' Willingness to Communicate: A Survey of Verbal Participation in Speaking Classes

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ABSTRACT

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course, students' verbal engagement is considered to be greatly influenced by their willingness to communicate (WTC). However, many students continue to hesitate during speaking practice because they are nervous, lack confidence, and fear making mistakes. The purpose of this study was to characterize the level of verbal participation and communication readiness of EFL students in speaking classes. A quantitative descriptive survey design was used in this study, which involved fifty EFL students who attended speaking classes. A 15-item Likert scale questionnaire measuring students' readiness to speak, respond, initiate communication, and participate in speaking exercises was used to collect data. Descriptive statistics, such as mean scores for each item, were used to analyze the data. With an overall average score of 3.73, the results of the study show that students' general readiness to communicate is classified as high, indicating a generally positive attitude toward speaking activities. Students' love of speaking activities received the highest score, while elements related to spontaneously initiating conversation received slightly lower scores. Additionally, this study provides empirical data on the average of students' communication willingness, which has practical consequences for EFL teachers creating instructional strategies that encourage increased verbal involvement.

Keywords: EFL Students; Speaking Class; Verbal Participation; Communication Readiness

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are considered the most challenging when English is regarded as a foreign language. This is because speaking is a productive skill that requires students to communicate directly with others. For various reasons, such as limited vocabulary, fear of making grammatical mistakes, lack of fluency, or poor pronunciation, this situation sometimes leads to a lack of confidence or limited speaking ability (Afebri & Muhsin, 2019; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Wahyuni, 2022; Yayah Ikhda Nevia et al., 2025). Due to these difficulties, students often do not participate verbally in class, even though the class is designed to encourage students to actively use the target language. As a result, students often remain silent, avoid opportunities to speak, rely on their native language, or wait for their instructor to call on them rather than speak in English (Dhea Mentari, 2023; Khasanah et al., n.d.; Nurhaliza et al., 2025; Rihardini et al., 2021).

Students may not be ready to express their ideas in class in English because they have to do extra work, namely, preparing their ideas and formulating them in English. Students sometimes need to use a dictionary for a long time. Even though they can easily construct sentences, they may not be able to say those sentences in English right away (Lin et al., 2025; Nurfitriana et al., 2024; Peng, 2025; Wang et al., 2022). Students are always forced to raise their hands and speak voluntarily. They usually remain silent and wait for instructions from the lecturer. This lack of confidence greatly affects students' courage to speak in class. Their minds are first filled with fear, so they choose not to participate at all. If students' verbal participation is low. Macintyre et al., (1998) explain that readiness or desire to engage in communication will also be low or non-existent (Macintyre et al., 1998).

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is an important component that influences student participation in speaking activities. Willingness to communicate refers to students' readiness to communicate using a second or a foreign language when given the opportunity (Macintyre et al., 1998). Students who have a high level of willingness to communicate tend to participate more actively in discussions, answer questions, and share their ideas with others during classroom interactions (Alimorad & Farahmand, 2021; Amirzadi, 2020; Lee, 2022; Saidah, 2021).

Previous studies have shown that various psychological and contextual factors, such as self-confidence, motivation, classroom atmosphere, and students' perceptions of their language abilities, influence the willingness to communicate (Alghamdi & Abdullah, 2024; Allahyar et al., 2022; Li et al., 2025; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016; Thiangtham, 2023). However, in many EFL speaking classes, students' verbal participation does not always reflect their language knowledge. Some students with good linguistic abilities may still refrain from speaking because they are afraid of being judged poorly or because of anxiety (Botes et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to examine students' willingness to communicate, which is reflected in their speaking participation in class.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on the verbal participation of EFL students, including their readiness to speak, respond, initiate communication, and actively engage in various speaking activities in class. The research question is: What is the average level of EFL students' willingness to communicate in speaking classes? The purpose of this quantitative descriptive survey is to determine students' willingness to communicate in speaking classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Willingness to Communicate in EFL Contexts

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) has become an important focus in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) research, particularly in understanding students' readiness to engage in oral communication. WTC refers to an individual's willingness to initiate communication in a second or foreign language at a particular

time with a specific interlocutor. According to MacIntyre (1998), WTC is not a fixed personality trait but a dynamic and situational construct influenced by both long-term factors, such as personality and language proficiency, and situational factors, such as self-confidence, anxiety, and classroom environment. The model emphasizes that actual communication behavior represents the observable outcome of WTC.

Several studies have explored WTC in different educational contexts. Isma and Baharuddin (2022) found that Indonesian EFL students generally demonstrated a willingness to engage in communication activities, indicating positive communication behavior. However, their study did not specifically examine how WTC is reflected in actual speaking performance. Similarly, Nurdzizati et al. (2023) identified a strong relationship between students' willingness to speak and teachers' proximity behavior, suggesting that supportive teacher interaction can enhance students' verbal engagement. Nevertheless, the study focused more on teacher influence rather than students' speaking behavior.

Further research by Fernando and Subekti (2023) revealed that students' WTC levels vary depending on the type of classroom activity, such as whole-class discussions or group work. While this study provided valuable insights, it was limited to high school students and did not address speaking engagement in higher education contexts. In addition, Rahmawati et al. (2023) highlighted that situational and psychological factors, including task type and classroom environment, significantly influence students' communication readiness. However, their study did not utilize detailed instruments specifically designed to measure verbal participation in speaking classes.

Verbal Participation as an Indicator of WTC

In classroom settings, WTC can be observed through students' verbal participation. Verbal participation refers to students' active involvement in oral activities, such as answering questions, participating in discussions, expressing ideas, and initiating conversations. It serves as a behavioral indicator of students' willingness to communicate. In this study, WTC is operationalized through four observable variables: active participation in speaking activities, initiative in initiating communication, responsiveness to questions, and readiness to speak. These indicators provide measurable evidence of students' communicative behavior in speaking classes. Students who demonstrate higher levels of WTC are generally more engaged and participate more actively in verbal interactions.

Factors Influencing Willingness to Communicate

Several key factors influence students' willingness to communicate in EFL contexts. One of the most important factors is self-confidence, which includes perceived communication competence and low anxiety. According to MacIntyre (1998), students with higher self-confidence are more likely to engage in

communication without hesitation. Conversely, anxiety can reduce students' willingness to speak and limit their participation. Motivation is another significant factor influencing WTC. Students who are motivated to learn English tend to participate more actively in speaking activities and seek opportunities to use the language. In addition, tolerance for ambiguity and acceptance of mistakes play an important role, as students who are less afraid of making errors are more willing to engage in communication. These theoretical factors are reflected in the questionnaire used in this study, which measures students' readiness, responsiveness, initiative, and level of participation in speaking classes. By examining these aspects, the study provides a clearer understanding of how WTC is manifested through observable verbal engagement.

Research Gap and Contribution of the Study

Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into WTC, most have focused on general classroom contexts or examined relationships between variables rather than directly measuring students' verbal engagement in speaking classes. There is still limited research that offers a focused descriptive analysis of university students' WTC using observable behavioral indicators. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing a quantitative descriptive analysis of EFL students' willingness to communicate as reflected in their verbal participation in higher education speaking classes. By focusing on observable communication behaviors, this study offers a more concrete understanding of how WTC is manifested in real classroom interactions.

METHOD

Design and Samples

A quantitative descriptive survey design was used in this study (Ade Silva, 2024; Potokri, 2023). Based on their verbal engagement, this design was chosen to characterize the level of communication readiness of EFL students in speaking sessions. The purpose of this study was to describe how students responded to speaking exercises in class, not to test theories or determine cause-and-effect relationships. Fifty EFL students enrolled in speaking classes formed the research sample. Because they had participated in various speaking exercises, such as group discussions, pair work, and individual speaking, these students were selected to be research participants. Total population sampling is the sample method employed in this investigation. Participants included all students actively enrolled in Speaking 1, Speaking 3, and Public Speaking courses throughout semesters 1, 3, and 5. Because the participants were chosen based on their attendance in certain speaking classes, this study used a non-random sample technique rather than random selection. As a result, they were considered suitable respondents to reflect students' openness to communication in a classroom environment.

Instruments and Procedures

A questionnaire designed to measure students' openness to communication in speaking classes was used as a research tool. The instrument was adapted from previous WTC-related studies and modified to suit the context of university-level speaking courses. The fifteen statements in the questionnaire addressed various topics related to verbal participation, including: initiative in speaking, comfort, confidence, enjoyment, readiness to express ideas, responsiveness to the instructor and classmates, willingness to speak in English, and motivation to engage in speaking activities.

A five-point Likert scale, with Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5) as the extremes, was used to rate each statement. To ensure content validity, the adapted questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in English language teaching and educational research. Revisions were made based on their feedback to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the theoretical framework of WTC. To ensure that students felt comfortable with the speaking exercises, the questionnaire was given to them after several speaking class sessions. Based on real-world speaking class experiences, students are asked to answer each statement honestly. After that, the completed surveys are collected and ready for data analysis.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis. Each response was scored between 1 and 5, with higher numbers indicating a greater desire to communicate. The mean score for each questionnaire item was determined by the researchers to characterize students' communication readiness in relation to specific elements of verbal engagement. To provide a clear interpretation of the results, the findings of the descriptive analysis are first presented in a table and then explained.

Table 1. The Rating Score of Interest Classification Interval Score

Mean Score Interval	Category
4.21 – 5.00	Very High
3.41 – 4.20	High
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
1.81 – 2.60	Low
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low

RESULT AND DISUSSION

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of EFL Students' Willingness to Communicate

Item	Statement	Statement Focus	Mean	Percentage (%)	Category
Q1	I am willing to speak in English during speaking classes.	Willingness to speak in English during speaking classes	3.68	89	High
Q2	I feel ready to express my ideas in English in speaking class discussions.	Readiness to express ideas in English in discussions	3.72	90	High
Q3	I am willing to answer the lecturer's questions in English during speaking classes.	Willingness to answer the lecturer's questions in English	3.72	90	High
Q4	I am willing to speak in English when working in pairs or groups.	Willingness to speak in English in pair or group work	3.76	92	High
Q5	I actively participate in group discussions using English.	Active participation in group discussions using English	3.74	91	High
Q6	I am willing to respond to my classmates' opinions in English.	Willingness to respond to classmates' opinions in English	3.78	93	High
Q7	I take the initiative to speak in English without being called on.	Initiative to speak in English without being called on	3.64	88	High
Q8	I am willing to start a conversation in	Willingness to start a	3.68	89	High

	English during speaking classes.	conversation in English			
Q9	I am willing to share my ideas or personal experiences in English.	Willingness to share ideas or personal experiences	3.68	89	High
Q10	I feel confident speaking English in front of the class.	Confidence in speaking English in front of the class	3.70	90	High
Q11	I am still willing to speak in English even if I might make mistakes.	Willingness to speak despite making mistakes	3.80	93	High
Q12	I feel comfortable speaking English in various speaking activities.	Comfort in participating in various speaking activities	3.80	93	High
Q13	I enjoy participating in speaking activities in class.	Enjoyment in participating in speaking activities	3.84	95	High
Q14	I am willing to actively engage in different speaking tasks assigned by the lecturer.	Willingness to engage in different speaking tasks	3.78	93	High
Q15	I am motivated to increase my oral participation in speaking classes.	Motivation to increase oral participation	3.68	89	High
Overall	Students' willingness to communicate		3.73	91	High

Across all items, the percentages demonstrate that students are consistently willing to converse in English during speaking classes. The scores for individual items

range from 88% to 95%; taking initiative received the lowest values (88%), while speaking activities were the most enjoyable and comfortable (95%). The participants' typically high level of communication willingness is confirmed by the 91% total score. The relative strength of each indicator is made evident and simple to understand by this percentage-based format.

The results of the study indicate that students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in speaking classes is generally at a high level (Mean = 3.73). These findings show that students generally demonstrate a high level of readiness and a positive attitude toward participating in oral communication during speaking practice. Overall, this suggests that students feel comfortable engaging in structured speaking tasks and respond actively when prompted.

MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) idea of WTC as a learner's readiness to engage in conversation with a specific individual at a specific time is supported by this study. Students believe that they are ready to communicate in a structured classroom setting, as evidenced by high scores on Q1, Q2, and Q3. This is consistent with other studies that found that students who are more confident in their ability to communicate are more likely to speak in class. These results indicate that students are comfortable expressing ideas and answering questions during guided activities. High scores on Q4, Q5, and Q6 indicate that students feel comfortable participating in collaborative speaking activities in terms of peer interaction. These results are consistent with research showing that, unlike speaking in front of the whole class, small group interactions reduce speaking anxiety and create a less intimidating atmosphere. Collaborative projects encourage greater verbal participation, which supports the idea that the interactional environment is crucial for increasing WTC. However, behaviors related to initiatives such as Q7 (speaking without being asked) and Q8 (initiating conversation) showed relatively lower average scores, even though all items were in the high category. This pattern is significant. Perhaps more self-confidence and lower situational anxiety are needed for students to initiate communication on their own, even when they appear willing to respond or participate in planned tasks. This partly supports findings from previous studies that WTC is not a fixed personality trait, but rather dynamic and context-dependent. When communication requires spontaneous initiation, even students with typically high WTC may hesitate.

Emotional and psychological aspects are the subject of another important finding. Items related to comfort in speaking activities (Q12), readiness to speak despite making mistakes (Q11), and self-confidence (Q10) all ranked relatively high, with Q11 and Q12 ranking highest. This contrasts with many previous studies conducted in EFL settings, which found that worry and fear of making mistakes were the main barriers to oral engagement. Willingness to speak despite the possibility of making mistakes suggests that students may view the classroom as a supportive environment. MacIntyre's pyramid model states that situational WTC increases significantly with lower anxiety and higher self-confidence. Thus, the current

results may indicate that psychological barriers are less common in this population than those documented in previous studies.

It is interesting to note that Q13, which relates to satisfaction with speaking activities, had the highest average score. This finding is consistent with recent advances in second language acquisition studies that highlight the importance of pleasant feelings, such as enjoyment, in encouraging participation and dialogue. A more recent view argues that happy emotions can increase students' motivation to engage, in contrast to previous research that has largely focused on anxiety as a negative predictor of speaking performance. Therefore, high WTC may be facilitated by the considerable enjoyment reported in this study. Overall, the results of this study validate that students' verbal participation, including answering questions, responding to classmates, speaking, doing assignments, and expressing thoughts, can serve as useful examples of WTC in EFL classes. These findings reinforce the theoretical statement that visible communicative behavior and WTC are closely related.

Despite these encouraging results, this study has limitations. Data were collected through self-report questionnaires, which may introduce bias, as students might overestimate participation or respond in socially desirable ways. Future research could complement self-reports with classroom observations or recordings to obtain a more objective assessment of students' WTC. These findings have a number of pedagogical implications. First, speaking lessons should continue to emphasize interactive and communicative activities, as indicated by the high WTC scores. Instructors should use cooperative tasks, debates, and problem-solving exercises to maintain student interest because they show a strong tendency to work in groups and in pairs. Second, instructors should provide activities that encourage spontaneous communication, as behaviors related to initiative scored somewhat lower. For example, student-led presentations, role-playing exercises, and open conversations can help develop students' independence and initiative in communicating progressively.

Third, a high level of openness to speaking despite mistakes highlights the importance of maintaining a supportive classroom environment. Lecturers need to maintain a safe space where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities rather than failures. Providing constructive criticism rather than harsh criticism can further boost students' confidence. Fourth, speaking exercises should remain engaging, varied, and relevant to students' interests, as enjoyment appears to be a strong supporting factor. Activities that encourage self-expression, sharing experiences, and face-to-face interaction can keep people motivated and comfortable.

Finally, lecturers must continue to pay attention to students who may still feel anxious, given individual variability. Positive reinforcement, progressive public speaking practice, and differentiated instruction can contribute to ensuring that high overall willingness to participate (WTP) translates into equitable participation for all students.

CONCLUSION

Based on their verbal participation, this study aims to characterize the level of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among EFL students in speaking sessions. The results show that, with an overall average score of 3.73, students' willingness to communicate is classified as high overall. Furthermore, each questionnaire item was in the high group, indicating that students were generally ready, confident, enthusiastic, and motivated to engage in speaking activities. According to the findings, students felt very comfortable participating in group speaking exercises and were ready to speak even if they made mistakes. Enjoyment in speaking activities emerged as the strongest supporting factor for students' willingness to communicate. Although still classified as high, students' scores for initiating conversations themselves were relatively lower, indicating that spontaneous participation was still a little more difficult.

This study concludes that EFL students in this environment have a good level of communication readiness in speaking sessions. Encouraging vocal participation from students requires a supportive classroom climate, interactive tasks, and positive emotional engagement. To maintain and further enhance students' tendency to interact, these findings emphasize the importance of maintaining a communicative, engaging, and psychologically safe learning environment. However, this study has some limitations. Data were collected using self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability or students' overestimation of their participation. Future research could include classroom observations, recordings, or experimental interventions to provide a more objective and comprehensive assessment of students' WTC.

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