

## EFL Learners' Perception of Factors Influencing Willingness to Speak English in Language Classrooms: A Qualitative Study

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**Abstract:** A very common problem faced by many language teachers in classroom is the students' unwillingness to speak. The present study seeks Iranian EFL learners' perception of factors that influence their willingness to speak English in language classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven language learners to discover such factors. Results showed that a number of such factors contribute to willingness to speak. These factors include task type, topic of discussion, interlocutor, teacher, class atmosphere, personality and self-perceived speaking ability. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the nature and role of WTC in language pedagogy and suggest implications for an effective language teaching and learning.

**Key words:** Willingness to speak • Learners' perception • EFL learners

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### INTRODUCTION

Modern language pedagogy attaches a lot of importance to communication and training language learners who are able to communicate effectively in the target language. In a language classroom following communicative approach, language teachers are eager to have learners who are willing to use the language in class. The reason is that research has shown that a lack of willingness to use the language results in ineffective interaction and language production [1]. So, it is true that the notion of Willingness to Communicate (WTC), which is actually the intention and desire to initiate communication, plays a key role in learning a second/foreign language [2]. Willingness to communicate is defined as "readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons using a L2" [2]. Some researchers [2, 3] have argued that a fundamental goal of L2 education should be the encouragement of willingness to communicate in language learning, because WTC is expected to facilitate the language learning process so that higher WTC among students leads to increased opportunity for practice in L2 and authentic language use.

When given an opportunity to speak, some learners prefer to speak up and express themselves, whereas

others choose to remain silent. Why don't some language learners-even after studying English for a couple of years-voluntarily speak up in language classrooms? It is not, nevertheless, a simple question to answer, particularly when one takes into account the various relevant individual, social, linguistic, situational and other factors that may prevent one from speaking up [4]. This issue is undeniably important in the field of language pedagogy that it deserves to be delved into thoroughly. Therefore, understanding the variables that might increase or decrease language learners' opportunities and readiness to speak in language classrooms seems to be pertinent in today's context.

Given the fact that the goal of language teaching is to encourage learners to communicate effectively, it is really crucial to find out why some learners are reluctant to speak in language classrooms. Such reluctance will make learners lose their interest in learning the language. They will thus notice they are not making any progress in their learning. The problem is worse in an EFL setting where learners have little, if any, exposure to the target language outside the classroom. There are not ample opportunities for the students to practice their language and their practice is limited to classroom environment. If they do not take the opportunity to speak in the classroom, there is no other chance for them to practice their language.

This will make the learners unable to develop their speaking ability. The objective of the present study is to seek Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of factors that contribute to willingness to speak English in language classrooms.

**Antecedents of WTC:** Riasati and Nooreen [5] have done a thorough literature review of antecedents of WTC. A number of factors have been identified in the literature as directly or indirectly influencing WTC, including motivation [5-10], communication anxiety [11-15], perceived communication competence [6, 10, 15-18], personality [19-21] and content and context [22-24].

In a study of learners' perception of factors influencing WTC, House [25] found out that factors such as perceived politeness, the role of physical locality, the presence of the opposite sex, topic of discussion and learners' mood affected their WTC in language classrooms. In a similar study, Cao and Philp [23] identified four major factors which were perceived by learners as having an impact on their WTC: group size, self-confidence, familiarity with interlocutor and interlocutor participation. Other factors that the learners described were familiarity with topic, perceived competence in L2 and cultural influences. In a subsequent study, Cao [21] explored the factors that can influence learners' WTC in classrooms. These factors include topic, task type (pair, group and team work), interlocutor and teacher.

In a more recent study, Zeng [26] explored factors that influence willingness to speak. A range of factors were perceived by the interview respondents including familiarity with the environment, the effect of the relaxing classroom, teacher support, personality, self-confidence, fear of making mistakes and hence getting embarrassed, fear of leaving a bad impression as a result of making mistakes, losing face, one's perception of his or her speaking ability, topic familiarity and degree of familiarity with interlocutor.

Given the importance of creating willingness to communicate among language learners as a fundamental goal of language education, it is essential to find out what factors affect language learners' willingness to communicate. It is, therefore, crucial to find out what makes some learners willing to speak while others unwilling, especially in an EFL context where learners do not have enough exposure to the target language outside class. Through qualitative interviewing, the present study attempts to explore what Iranian EFL learners think of the factors influencing their willingness to speak English in language classroom.

**Method:** The objective of the study was to elicit Iranian EFL learners' perception of the factors that contribute to willingness to speak English in language classrooms. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven language learners learning English as a foreign language in a private language institute. The use of interviews suits the purpose of the study, as according to [4], qualitative methods are advantageous when examining factors that may influence WTC because they provide "rich descriptions of [the] dynamic process in participants' own terms" (p. 572). Kim [27], too, considers interview as an appropriate data collection technique when trying to identify factors influencing WTC. Other similar studies [19, 21, 23, 26, 28] have made a similar choice in the collection of data. For this purpose, an interview protocol was prepared that consists of questions the participants were asked. To prepare interview questions, a group of questions related to the present study were selected based on [19, 23].

For the purpose of the present study, the technique that was adopted to enhance the validity of the qualitative part of the study, that is the interview data, was peer debriefing. The researcher provided a colleague with the raw data of the interviews as well as his own interpretation and explanation. The colleague reviewed the interpretations and provided the researcher with her comments and viewpoints. With regard to reliability, however, qualitative researchers are encouraged to check for the reliability through interrater agreement. An interrater method involves asking a peer to code the data and then compare the coding with the researcher's coding to determine whether they reached the same codes or different ones. For the purpose of the present study, the researcher asked a peer to code a sample of the interview data. The peer was familiarized with the coding system before the coding work. Any discrepancy in coding was later discussed with the peer. The following table illustrates the demographic information of the interviewees.

Table 1: Demographic information of interviewees

No	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Field of study
1	Azadeh	F	27	Social psychology
2	Anahita	F	32	Computer
3	Mac	M	28	IT
4	Parisa	F	25	Architecture
5	Poorya	M	27	Civil engineering
6	Mike	M	26	Computer
7	Mary	F	26	Law

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Having analyzed the data generated from the interviews, the researcher came up with a number of factors influencing willingness to speak. The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed following the typical and conventional qualitative data analysis procedures. The researcher of the present study transcribed the MP3 recordings of individual interviews verbatim to familiarize himself with the data at hand. Transcriptions were made of the recorded interview data. Once transcriptions have been completed, the researcher read the transcripts several times, looking for salient and recurring ideas emerging from the data. Moreover, while analyzing the data, the researcher looked for the factors the learners described as having an impact on their willingness to speak according to concepts and themes that exist in MacIntyre *et al.*'s (1998) WTC model, as well as those that emerged from the interview data. Once the codes were developed, the researcher attempted to put the similar codes together to arrive at categories or themes or findings. As an example, codes concerning topic (topic preparation, topic interest, topic familiarity) were categorized under the influence of topic. Once the data were analyzed, the researcher summarized the data and then interpreted them. The factors the learners described as influencing their willingness to speak are described below.

**Task Type:** One major factor that the interview respondents described as having an impact on their willingness to speak in class is task type, that is speaking individually, in pairs, or groups. Most of the respondents (five out of seven) seem to be more willing to speak in pairs or groups than individually. Anahita is more willing to speak in pairs and groups because she feels more comfortable doing so rather than speaking individually while everybody is listening.

*I prefer to speak with my classmates because I have less stress. I'm more comfortable, but if I want to speak individually I get anxious because I feel everybody is listening to me.*

The other reasons the interview respondents declared include having the opportunity to learn from others (Mike and Parisa), similar level of proficiency between the speakers (Mac and Poorya),

However, Azadeh and Mary, two other participants in the interview, had a different opinion in this regard. Azadeh is more willing to speak individually because of having more time to discuss a topic. She is of the view that when in groups, the time allotted is naturally shared among the members of the group and thus a limited amount of time is given to each member to speak.

When asked to express their degree of willingness to present a lecture in front of class, nearly all the respondents (6 out of 7) expressed low willingness to perform such an activity. Instead they preferred to give a lecture to their classmates in pairs or groups rather in front of all the class. Mary, as an example, is not willing to present a lecture in front of class due to the reason that such an activity reduces her self-confidence since everybody is staring at her and she is being watched closely.

It seems that the learners of the present study are more comfortable speaking in pairs or groups and that they acknowledge the effectiveness of such activities. Such finding is consistent with [29] who found that pair and group activities are preferred to speaking individually. Likewise, Cetinkaya [19] showed that the individuals in his study preferred to speak in dyads, or groups rather than speaking individually in front of a large group of people. Cao and Philp [23], too, contend that running a pair-or group work in class gives individuals greater opportunity to speak than in the case of speaking individually. Indeed, such activities create a more relaxed atmosphere in classroom, reduce anxiety and thus result in an increase in both quantity and quality of practice [30].

**Sex of Interlocutor:** Of the seven students who were interviewed, three stated they were more willing to speak with a person of their sex, two individuals expressed their willingness to speak with a person of the opposite sex, while the other students believed that sex of the interlocutor does not matter. Azadeh is the girl who said she is more willing to speak with the opposite sex and she attributes this preference to psychological point of view.

Similarly, Mike, the young boy who took part in the study, has a different opinion in this regard. To Mike, the sex of the interlocutor matters and he is more willing to speak with a girl rather than a boy since it is an opportunity to get to know each other and to see to what extent they can interact well with each other.

*I really like to speak with opposite sex; it's so interesting for me to know that the opposite sex can interact with me very well or not, so I really like to communicate with the opposite sex.*

In contrast, Parisa is more willing to speak with a person of the same sex as she thinks she can learn better from the same sex and that she is more comfortable speaking with such an individual. Two other participants of the study (Anahita and Mac), too, have a similar idea to that of Parisa and are more willing to speak with a person of the same sex. The other two respondents, namely Poorya and Mary adopt a middle-of-the road approach to the issue and express their equal willingness to speak with both sexes.

**Age of Interlocutor:** Students were asked to express their degree of willingness to speak with a person who is younger or older than them. Among the seven individuals who were interviewed, two expressed a neutral belief in this regard, two felt to be more willing to speak with a younger person and the other three were more willing to speak with an older interlocutor. Azadeh and Mike were the two individuals who believed that the age of the interlocutor does not have any impact on their degree of willingness to speak in language classrooms. However, three individuals, Anahita, Parisa and Poorya expressed more willingness to speak with a person who is older than them. They express different reasons for this preference including the opportunity to learn from an older student (Anahita and Parisa) and receiving motivation and encouragement (Poorya). Two other individuals responded that they are more willing to speak with a person who is younger than them because of the chance of receiving more energy from a younger person (Mary) and higher self-confidence (Mac).

**Familiarity with Interlocutor:** Familiarity with the interlocutor is another important factor that some of the respondents refer to. Among the respondents, four stressed the importance of this factor in making them willing or unwilling to speak in class. They expressed more willingness to speak with a person whom they know well and hence they are more comfortable with. The major reason they express is the higher sense of motivation to speak they receive when talking with a person whom they are familiar with. An example is Mike who stated:

*An important factor is the person I'm talking to and our relationship. If I know that person well and if he or she is my close friend, I feel more motivated to speak. (Mike)*

**Interlocutor Participation:** Interlocutor participation was also noted by three of the learners as having an impact on their degree of willingness to speak. Mary, for example,

regarded her interlocutor's degree of participation and performance as a motive for her to contribute to the discussion.

*If I talk to a person who is motivated to speak, I also get motivated to participate in the discussion. But if I talk to a person who prefers to talk less and listen all the time, I'll lose my motivation to speak.*

Mac expresses a similar idea arguing that he does not like to be the sole speaker in a discussion and that he prefers to exchange ideas.

*The person that I talk to is very important to me. I don't like to talk to a person who is only listening to me and does not take part in the discussion. I like to both speak and hear my partner's opinions.*

In short, the four major characteristics of interlocutor that are important to learners are age, gender, degree of familiarity with the interlocutor and degree of interlocutor's participation. The important role of the interlocutors' characteristics such as age and gender on one's willingness to speak is supported by [31] who argues that the presence of an opposite sex and age in a conversation may motivate the learner to maintain an acceptable level of accuracy provably in order to demonstrate one's higher proficiency level. In terms of interlocutor familiarity, other research [22, 28, 32] demonstrated that when interlocutors are not familiar with each other, they seem to be reluctant to speak to each other. To support the importance of interlocutor participation, Cao and Philp [23] claimed that it is a key factor contributing to their willingness to communicate. It seems learners need to be motivated to speak by their partner and that they do not like to be the sole speaker all the time and instead prefer to exchange ideas.

**Grading:** This factor concerns learners' degree of willingness to speak when they know their speaking is being graded. The individuals expressed different views in this regard. Azadeh, for example, is among those respondents who believed that the score she receives can be a good measure of one's speaking ability and thus she is willing to be evaluated by the teacher while speaking.

*Yes of course because I want to evaluate myself... to check myself... of course I'm sometimes scared of the score but I have motivation to know how my speaking is.*

Parisa and Poorya hold similar beliefs and contend that the only way to get to know if one is improving or not is to be judged and marked by the teacher. Another reason they mention is the fact that the grades the teacher assigns to certain individuals create a sense of motivation as well as competition among them, which makes them make more attempts to be better than others.

The other four respondents, in contrast, hold different views in this regard, believing that being graded has more harms than benefits. They see scores and being scored as a stressful activity that prevents them from displaying their full potentials. They also believe that most students are afraid of being negatively evaluated by the teacher, which may ultimately lead to a failing score.

In short, learners' knowing the fact that they are being graded while speaking causes anxiety, which will prevent them from showing their real speaking ability. They fear they will be negatively evaluated by the teacher, especially if the score they receive will be counted as a part of their final exam and a criterion for a passing or failing grade. To support such finding, MacIntyre *et al.* [7] managed to show that learners' willingness to communicate decreases if they know they are being formally evaluated. The Iranian EFL learners in Jamshidnejad's [31] study, too, reported that they are over-concerned with making mistakes and being negatively evaluated by others and that the fear of making mistakes increases the chance of losing one's face.

**Correctness of Speech:** Respondents were required to express the extent to which they are willing to speak if they are sure their speech is correct. Most of the interviewees (five out of seven) believed that accuracy is important to them and that if they are sure of the accuracy of what they want to express, they would be more willing to speak. Mac pays particular attention to the grammaticality of his sentences before producing them.

*For me, the grammar of my sentences are very important; so I try to choose sentences and structures that I'm sure they are correct. (Mac)*

Azadeh, as another respondent, pays special attention not only to the grammar of her speech but also the content.

*I always try to speak correctly both in grammar and content, so before I speak I try to prepare everything carefully in mind and then start to speak (Azadeh).*

Similar to this is Lisa [33] who found out that 85 percent of the individuals in the study are more willing to talk only if they are show their answer is correct. The reason one can think of is that learners in an EFL context in general and in the context where the data were collected, in particular, are accustomed to paying too much attention to the grammar of their speech to the extent that fluency is sometimes sacrificed. As such, while speaking, they are overly concerned with the correctness and the grammaticality of their speech and if they are not sure of this, they avoid speaking. This lack of self-confidence in one's fluency results in low degree of willingness to speak.

**Topic of Discussion:** Another factor that was found to exert an influence on the learners' degree of willingness to speak English is topic of discussion. The features of the topic that were important to the learners are topic familiarity, topic interest, topic preparation and discussing a topic the learners are comfortable discussing. Topic familiarity is equally important to the individuals who took part in the interview. They unanimously believe that this factor significantly influences their degree of willingness to speak and that when they benefit from ample knowledge and information concerning a particular topic, they would be more willing to speak about it. Mike, for example, expresses the fact that the more information he possesses about a certain topic, the more willing he will be to discuss it.

*If I have enough information about a topic, I really like to talk about it. But when I don't have any information or enough information, I don't like to speak.*

Another major characteristic of topic that the respondents refer to is topic interest. They believe that the more interested they are in a certain topic, the more willingness they would display to speak about it. Mike, for example, argues that:

*To tell you the truth, if the topic is interesting, I really like to talk more, but if the topic is not interesting to me, I don't like to talk about it, for example topics related to sports, especially football and music.*

To Mac, topic interest is a very important factor in shaping his willingness to speak in class. He feels most of his classmates think similarly.

*Of course everybody likes to talk about topics that are interesting, such as football, music, fashion, movies, etc.*

Another factor that the respondents describe as having an influence on their degree of willingness to speak English is topic preparation. Mike, for example, is more willing to discuss a topic he is prepared to discuss.

*When I prepare something before a class, I can speak very well without mistakes. Also I can search and gather lots of information about a topic. This helps me speak better in class and attract other students.*

Azadeh and Mary share similar ideas in this regard, believing that being prepared about a topic before class is an important element for a successful presentation and it can dramatically reduce their stress and nervousness, which can lead to a better speaking performance.

To summarize, the topic of discussion plays a vital role in making learners willing or unwilling to speak. To learners, topic familiarity, topic interest and topic preparation are the essential features of a certain topic. Moreover, respondents tend to discuss a topic they feel they are more comfortable with. Clearly, the type of topic under discussion influences the ease of language use to a great extent. Having enough knowledge about a certain topic and being familiar with the register enhance one's linguistic self-confidence, while lack of knowledge about a topic and its appropriate register result in one's avoiding communication [2]. As Kang [22] contends, some particular topics may bring about greater "responsibility" to involve; that is, one feels the need to discuss a topic because it is intrinsically and instrumentally interesting to him or her. Finally, one's lack of knowledge, interest and preparation for a certain topic can greatly influence one's perceived competence since one feels he or she has nothing to contribute and hence prefers to remain silent. Such affective constraints can considerably reduce willingness to speak.

**Personal Characteristics:** Another factor that the respondents describe as contributing to their degree of willingness to speak is their personal characteristics and their personality. Four of the respondents unanimously describe this factor as an important contributor to their degree of willingness to speak. To Azadeh, one reason why some students are more willing to speak than others is personality.

*Another important factor, I think, is the students' personality. Some students are shy by nature and prefer to be silent, but some others are very active and like to talk all the time.*

Anahita, too, believes that personality is an important factor that makes some students willing to speak while some others unwilling. Furthermore, she notes the effect of the learners' perceived competence.

*A very important factor is personality. Some students are very shy, some others are not. So they speak more. Also, some students do not have enough confidence in their abilities and they don't believe themselves.*

Mac refers to personal characteristics of the individuals as well as their self-confidence as two most important factors that influence learners' willingness to speak. Likewise, Parisa mentions learners' shyness, self-confidence and their self-rated speaking ability as two important factors in this regard.

*Probably one factor is shyness. Or because some students do not have enough self-confidence to speak or they think their speaking is not good and that they are weak, so they prefer to be silent.*

It is not surprising that the participants of the study mention shyness and personality factor as an important factor contributing to their willingness to speak. The fact is that Iranian EFL learners are highly sensitive to the judgment of the other students on their performance and will therefore try to avoid situations that are risk-taking. Such predisposition influences their willingness to speak to a great extent. Shyness is a factor that is mentioned in MacIntyre *et al.*'s [2] WTC model as an enduring factor having an impact on one's WTC. Chu [28], too, found out that there is a positive correlation between shyness and foreign language classroom anxiety, which leads to less degree of willingness to communicate. Chu argues that the shy students tend to feel more anxiety in language classrooms. This anxiety makes them less willing to communicate. This phenomenon supports MacIntyre's [2] concept of L2 confidence which consists of foreign language anxiety and perceived competence. Along with this, [34] contend that personality can be "the determining factor" of an individual's communication behavior (1990, p.21).

Other interview participants mentioned lack of self-confidence as a cause of reticence. This sense of lack of confidence can also be attributed to one's perceived competence of his or her abilities as well as the degree of anxiety one feels in a particular setting. This can be enough evidence to confirm that self-confidence, which is identified as a combination of perceived communication competence and lack of anxiety by previous research [3, 7, 11, 13, 35] is perceived by the respondents in the present study as a determining factor in their willingness to speak. Consistent with the findings of the present study is [36] who attributed the students' reticence to their shyness and lack of self-confidence.

**Perceived Speaking Ability:** Another factor the learners noted as contributing to their willingness to speak is perception of their speaking ability. The respondents argued that they were not very satisfied with their current speaking ability and that this is a factor that discourages them to speak in class. Mac, for instance, attributes his low willingness to speak to his poor speaking ability.

*I know my speaking is not very good when I compare myself with my classmates they speak better than me; maybe it's a reason I prefer to listen most of the time than speak. (Mac)*

However, Parisa believes that her speaking is good enough and she takes every opportunity in class to speak.

*I'm happy with my speaking; I think it's good. I know the class is the only place for me to practice my speaking, so I try not to miss this opportunity.*

As shown by previous research [6, 19, 27], individuals who have a higher perception of their abilities experience less degree of anxiety and benefit from more self-confidence. All these features pave the ground for creating more willingness to speak within an individual. To [37], the most common reason for the learners' unwillingness to speak in class is learners' perception that other students in the class have more knowledge of the language and they cannot compete with them. As a result, they think it is better to remain silent than try to get involved in an unequal competition.

**Teacher's Role:** Another factor the respondents described as influencing their degree of willingness is the teacher and the role he/she plays in the classroom.

Azadeh believes an effective teacher needs to pay equal attention to all the students in class and motivate them all to speak.

*I think one of the most important things that a teacher can do is encouragement. When the teacher encourages all the students, not only some special students, I think it's a very good strategy to motivate all students to speak.*

Getting students involved in classroom discussions is the technique Mac suggests teachers can do in order to make learners more willing to speak.

*I think teacher should involve the students more and more in speaking activities and he should encourage them to practice their speaking by asking them questions and requesting their opinions.*

Mike blames the teacher for making some students unwilling to speak. He contends that some teachers have dictator-type behaviors and create a stressful atmosphere in the class, which makes everybody afraid of speaking because of the fear of making mistakes and losing their reputation.

**Some Teachers Are Dictators:** They talk all the time and don't give enough time to students to speak. Their class is usually full of stress and students are afraid of speaking because they know if they speak and then make a mistake, something bad may happen.

The interviewees contend that the vital role the teacher plays in making learners willing or unwilling to speak cannot be neglected. The respondents unanimously stress the fact that their teacher is a key figure that can make them willing to speak or conversely unwilling to speak. Clearly, a teacher's attitude and teaching style can dramatically influence the learners' willingness to participate. More recent research [20, 21, 26, 36], too, confirm the findings of the present study and acknowledge the important role of teacher in facilitating or inhibiting learners' participation.

**Classroom Atmosphere:** Another important factor that is evident in the respondents' interviews is the atmosphere of the classroom, which makes them willing or unwilling to speak. Four of the respondents consider the class atmosphere as an important factor contributing to their degree of willingness to speak. Respondents contend that

Table 2: Learners' perceptions of the factors affecting willingness to speak

Factors Affecting Willingness to Speak	N/7
Task type	5
Topic familiarity	3
Topic interest	4
Topic preparation	3
Sex of interlocutor	5
Age of interlocutor	5
Familiarity with interlocutor	4
Degree of interlocutor participation	3
Personality (Shyness)	4
Teacher' role	4
Class atmosphere	4
Self-confidence	4
Perceived speaking ability	4
Grading of speech	4
Correctness of speech	5

they feel more willing to speak in a stress-free environment where there is a friendly rapport between the teacher and the students. One related remark is as follows.

*Everybody needs to be relaxed in class. The class should have a positive atmosphere and it is the teacher's job to create such an atmosphere. In this situation, all the students will be motivated to speak. (Parisa)*

The respondents agree that the classroom atmosphere can either facilitate or hinder their participation. They tend to speak more in an environment which is friendly enough so that they feel secure and relaxed. This is consistent with [26] who contend that learners' degree of participation increases as a result of the relaxing environment in which they learn and the degree of familiarity with it. One reason could be the fact that in a relaxing environment, learners get to know and trust each other better. This would contribute to more participation. Moreover, in such an environment, learners feel secure enough to express themselves and are not afraid of making mistakes and then being ridiculed. They can make certain that even if they make a mistake or run into a difficulty, others will respond in a friendly and encouraging manner. Another advantage of putting learners in a relaxing environment, according to [26], is that "similarities are appreciated and differences are tolerated" (pp: 197).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the interview data, a number of factors were perceived by the learners to have an impact on their degree of willingness to speak in English classes.

The following table presents such factors and the number of participants who noted each factor in the interviews.

Findings of the present study showed that willingness to speak is affected by a range of factors. It can be claimed that the present study partially supports MacIntyre *et al.*'s WTC model as a number of factors that emerged in the study match the variables in MacIntyre *et al.*'s WTC model, including learning anxiety, learning motivation and perceived speaking ability. However, there are a number of factors arrived at in the present study which do not exist in MacIntyre *et al.*'s WTC model. Since the current study focused on foreign language classroom setting, the classroom environmental factors identified as influencing willingness to speak are classroom-specific, such as task type, topic, teacher, classroom atmosphere and grading and correctness of speech. Such factors are not identified in MacIntyre *et al.*'s model which is applicable to general L2 conversation contexts [21]. It is hoped that this study would shed more light into the complex and dynamic nature of WTC.

As demonstrated in the study, willingness to speak is influenced by a range of factors. Thus, teachers should not attribute students' reticence to one single factor such as personality or shyness. They need to be aware of the factors that could encourage or discourage communication among learners. Therefore, it is really necessary for language teachers to promote factors that facilitate communication and remove those that hinder communication. They should also be mindful of the interactions between variables while planning learning activities [23]. Further, the results of the study demonstrated that different learners displayed different behaviors according to contexts and that their preferences were not uniform. As an example, some were more willing to speak with their teacher, while others preferred to speak in pairs or groups. Such differences clearly support the necessity of practicing a wide range of activities in language classrooms, for example pair or group activities, as well as individual practices. Teachers need to bear in mind that different learners learn the language differently and that there is no fixed teaching methodology that appeals to all students [29]. As a result, such differences need to be taken into account while planning teaching and learning activities.

The respondents' concern about the topic they are discussing and its fundamental role in making them active or passive in discussions was another finding of the study. This implies that to generate willingness to speak among individuals, they need to discuss topics they are interested in, with which they are familiar with and for



which they are prepared to talk. This is indicative that teachers should provide students with such topics in order to encourage them to speak. To do this, teachers need to know their students' area of interest. Kang [22] suggests brainstorming, taking a survey and getting learners to propose discussion topics as the techniques teachers can adopt to identify the topics learners prefer to discuss. Another thing teachers can do is to get the learners to interview each other in order to know each other better and discover one another's area of interest. With this in mind, they can group them in more homogenous groups in order to increase their participation and involvement.

In addition, learners need to know that the only way to learn a second/foreign language is through practice. The more they practice their language and the more they expose themselves to the target language, the greater will be their chance of success in learning the language. They need to be aware of the negative influences of being passive in class. Being reticent reduces their self-perceived linguistic abilities and their self-confidence and makes them more anxious in class. They should always be aware of the fact that those who take part in the learning process are more successful language learners than others [38]. The problem is worse in an EFL context such as that of the present study, since in such an environment, learners do not have much exposure to the target language outside the classroom. Equipped with this knowledge, learners need to try to take every opportunity to speak in the foreign language and take an active role in class discussions. They must be aware that if they want to improve, there is no secret other than practice.

In order to enhance learners' participation in language classrooms and ultimately improve their fluency in the target language, students' reticence needs to be removed and learners need to be made more willing to speak [39]. Clearly, more willingness to speak increases students' participation in class, which will, in turn, lead to a better speaking performance. As [7] contend, a more successful language learner is the one who is more willing to communicate in language classrooms. They further contend that higher degree of willingness among students leads to more opportunities to for language practice and language use, which is expected to facilitate language learning process. The findings of the present study revealed a number of factors that contribute to willingness to speak in language classrooms. Language learners and teachers can make use of these factors in order to create situations that lead to more participation and ultimately be more successful in their language teaching and learning.

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