

# Communication and Affective Variables Influencing Omani EFL Learners' Willingness to Communicate<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study examined Omani EFL learners' perceptions toward their willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. To this end, 204 students majoring in English language at a private university in Oman were assigned a questionnaire adapted from McCroskey's (1992) WTC scale to determine possible effects of communication and affective variables on their WTC in English. After assessing the normality distribution of the data and the reliabilities of the scales, descriptive analyses were used to characterize the participants' WTC. Also, repeated measures ANOVA analyses were conducted to measure the effect of different interlocutor types and the context type on the participants' WTC. Overall, the results showed that the Omani students had fairly low WTC in English. Their WTC significantly varied based on the interlocutor types and the context types. It was also found that the participants had moderate motivation to learn EFL and positive attitudes toward English learning situations and the L1 community.

**Keywords:** Willingness to Communicate (WTC); Omani EFL Learners; Communication Variables; Affective Variables

## 1. Introduction

The communicative language teaching approach has been widely used to promote students' communicative competence in English. However, it is possible to find EFL learners who have high levels of communicative competence, but tend to avoid entering communication situations in English (Dörnyei, 2005). Dörnyei asserts, "there is a further layer of mediating factors between having the competence to communicate and putting this competence in practice" (p. 207). The issue of whether or not students communicate in English when they have an opportunity and

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what enhances or impedes them to interact with others is the central concern of willingness to communicate (WTC) in an L2. Research on L2 students' WTC in an L2 has become a specialized area in L2 research (Kang, 2005). L2 WTC is defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2" (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998, p. 547). Although culture is placed at the most distal layer of the L2 WTC model (MacIntyre et al., 1998), it appears to be a powerful predictor of WTC in an L2. It explains the individual's WTC in an L2 from the perspective of the social context. Wen and Clément (2003) provided the first culture-specific conceptualization of the L2 WTC construct from the perspective of the Chinese culture. This study is among the first to investigate learners' WTC in English in an Arab EFL context. It aimed to provide an Arab conceptualization of WTC and to study how it is manifested in EFL students in the specific Arab context of Oman.

### ***1.1. Literature Review***

MacIntyre et al. (1998) developed a comprehensive L2 WTC model that integrates linguistic, communicative, and psychological variables to describe, explain, and predict L2 communication and acquisition (see Figure 1). They based their model on research related to European languages and L2 instructional settings in Canada. According to the model, all social, affective, cognitive, and situational variables affect L2 students' WTC, which, in turn, predict their actual use of the L2. The shape of the pyramid represents the proximal and distal or most direct and broadest foundational factors that can have potential influences on individuals' WTC in an L2. The model has six layers: The first three layers (i.e., behavioral intention, situated antecedents, and communication behavior) signify situational influence on WTC at a particular time; the other three layers (i.e., affective-cognitive context, motivational propensities, and social and individual context) represent enduring influences on WTC in an L2. Therefore, from top to bottom, the layers signify a move from the most direct, situation-based contexts to more stable, enduring influences on WTC in L2 situations.

Recently, WTC research has shifted to focus on the impact of EFL learners' cultural background on their WTC in English. Studies have extended the scope by studying the L2 WTC construct in more culturally different EFL contexts, for example, in Japan (Yashima, 2002; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004), China (Liu, 2017; Peng, 2007b; Peng & Woodrow, 2010), Turkey (Cetinkaya, 2005), Korea (Jung, 2011; Kim, 2004), and Iran (Yaghoubi, 2017). A key factor of WTC identified in previous studies is the affective state of the learner, including self-perceived communication confidence (SPCC) and motivation in L2 learning. Previous research also found that SPCC and communication anxiety were the most significant and direct variables affecting learners' WTC in an L2 (Clément, Baker,

& MacIntyre, 2003; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima et al., 2004). Moreover, motivation had a direct influence on L2 WTC (Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre et al., 2002; Peng, 2007a, 2007b) or to affect WTC indirectly through communication anxiety and SPCC (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004).

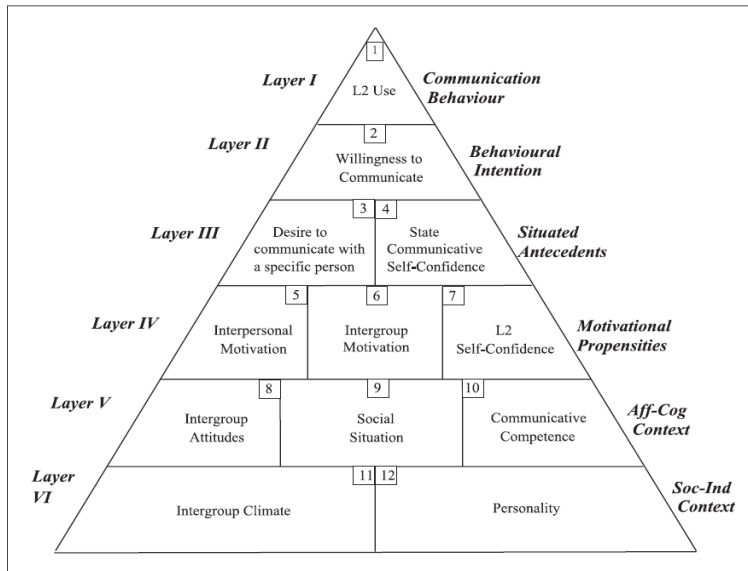


Figure 1. MacIntyre and Colleagues' Model of L2 WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998)

However, Peirce (1995) pointed out that motivation needed to be perceived and understood with reference to the social context of EFL learning. Social variables include attitudes toward the learning situation, language teacher, and the status of L1/L2 learning in society. Learners' attitudes can be taken as affective factors influenced by the surrounding sociopolitical environment (Horwitz, 2008). Peng and Woodrow (2010) found that the learners' L2 WTC was affected by a combined influence of their beliefs, classroom environment, and motivation. The students' motivation was a complex process which was clearly related to, a large extent, to their beliefs and classroom environment. Motivation may be linked with more variables, possibly those outside of the classroom, such as their interest and needs for English competence. International posture, which includes interest in international affairs, willingness to travel overseas and so forth, are found to correlate with L2 WTC in the Japanese EFL setting (Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004). Yashima (2002) found that international posture had a direct but weak relationship with WTC in English in the Japanese EFL setting. However, studies in Chinese, Korean, and Iranian EFL contexts indicated that international posture had no direct effect on the learners' WTC

in English (Kim, 2004; Zeng, 2010). This might be interpreted to mean that the construct international posture is applicable only in the Japanese EFL context; hence, it was not the focus of this current study. Therefore, motivation and its related variables including attitude toward the learning situation, attitude toward English native speaking communities, integrativeness, and instrumental orientation deserve further investigation in an Arab EFL context, which is likely to be different from contexts examined in previous studies.

### ***1.2. The Present Study***

Although the existing models of L2 WTC, especially MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) model, are supported and enriched by many important empirical studies (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002), the review reveals a gap in the literature in terms of Omani EFL learners' WTC. Considering the overt value of the English language in the Omani setting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the era of transnationalism and the specific features of the Omani EFL context that are different from the contexts in previous studies, this gap needs to be addressed.

The current study dealt with WTC in an EFL Omani context. It is among the first of its type to investigate L2 learners' WTC in English in an Arab EFL context. The study was an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of communication and affective variables on students' WTC in English?
2. How do the interlocutor types (i.e., friend, acquaintance, stranger) and the context types (i.e., dyad, small group, large group in meeting, public) influence learners' attitudes toward L2 WTC key variables?

This study provides a deeper understanding of the complex L2 WTC model, which is based on European languages and L2 instructional settings, among EFL students in an Arab setting in Oman. Most importantly, as the relationship between WTC and diverse variables might substantially differ from one culture to another (McCroskey, Burroughs, Daun, & Richmond, 1990), the study tested the key variables of L2 WTC with a new EFL learning context where the learners are likely to have a different cultural and language learning background from learners in all previous studies. The study also focused on the influence of different context types (i.e., dyad, small group, large group in meeting, public) and interlocutor types (i.e., friend, acquaintance, stranger) on the EFL learners' WTC, as well as other key communication variables such as SPCC and communication anxiety. Thus, this study might enrich the theoretical foundation of the L2 WTC construct by examining it in a different cultural and linguistic environment from that which has been studied before. It also helps EFL instructors to better understand the types of contexts and

interlocutors where EFL learners are willing or unwilling to communicate in English and how each context type and interlocutor type affects their WTC in English.

## **2. Methodology**

### ***2.1. Setting and Participants***

This study was conducted in a private university in Oman where the English language is the medium of instruction in all the programs, except in Arabic studies and law. Although Arabic is the native and official language in Oman, English as lingua franca is receiving increasing emphasis. English has been the only official foreign language in Oman since early 1970s and receives significant political, economic, and legislative support (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). It is the language of communication among professionals in higher education institutions, hospitals, airports, and most (inter)national companies. The Omani students learn English from Grade 1 at primary schools, and most programs are taught in English in higher education institutions. However, most English language teachers in Omani schools focus on helping the students gain high scores and, therefore, spend a lot of time training them for exam purposes. Consequently, the English learning context in some schools is exam-dominated, which affects the students' motivation and attitudes toward English language learning (Al-Issa & Al-Belushi, 2012). Thus, some students come to see English as essentially an academic subject that they need to pass by the end of the school year, and less as a skill that could help them lead more productive lives and find better careers. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the extent of L2 students' WTC in English in an Omani EFL context, reasons for their unwillingness to communicate, and how to facilitate their willingness to use English for communication purposes.

The data were gathered randomly from 204 participants. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 27 and their L1 was Arabic. Their level of English language proficiency was deemed to be upper-intermediate by the university, which is equivalent to IELTS score 5 and B2 according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Only 11% of the participants had been to an English-speaking country for short visits for 1-2 months. The results also indicated that the majority of the students (90%) had communicated in English with both native and nonnative speakers of English at the university, clinics, hospitals, hotels, and so on. About 74% of the students used online communication tools to interact with other people both in English and Arabic.

### ***2.2. Instruments***

The learners' WTC was examined through a questionnaire (see Appendix) that included different scales to assess the key variables affecting their WTC in

English. The scales in the questionnaire were adapted from previous studies (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996), and most items in the scales were used and tested by previous researchers (Cetinkaya, 2005; Clément et al., 2003; Kang, 2005; Kim, 2004; MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004). The questionnaire was designed to gather data about the participants' background information and measures related to communication and affective variables. The communication variables included the scales of WTC in English, SPCC, communication anxiety, and frequency of communication. The scale of each variable had 20 items, of which 12 items were related to three interlocutor types (i.e., friends, acquaintances, strangers), and four communication contexts (i.e., public, meeting, group, dyad). Some items were added to the questionnaire asking about situations where the students were likely to start a conversation in English, such as communicating with a nurse, a previous teacher, and so forth. The measures related to affective factors included the scales of motivation, integrativeness, instrumental orientation, and attitudes toward the learning situation. This current study is different from previous studies in that the respondents chose from percentages ranging from 0%, 10%, 20%, to 100% to present the degree to which they were willing to communicate in English in different situations that were likely to occur in their daily lives. The questionnaire was initially translated into Arabic by the researcher and validated by a certified Arabic-English translator.

### ***2.3. Data Collection***

The data were collected at a private university in Oman. Prior to the data collection, the ethical clearance approval and permission from the university were obtained to conduct the study. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the students in the Faculty of English Language Studies. It is worth noting that only 12% of the participants who completed the questionnaire were males because the majority of the students in the university were females. To avoid any gender issues, the analysis focused merely on the data collected from 204 female participants.

### ***2.4. Data Analysis***

Normality distribution of the data and the reliabilities of the scales were assessed. The internal consistency of the items within the instrument was used to estimate reliabilities of the scales. Descriptive analyses showing means and standard deviations were used to characterize the learners' WTC, communication anxiety, SPCC, frequency of communication, attitude towards learning situations, motivation, instrumental motivation, and integrativeness. Also, repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) analyses were conducted to measure the effect of different interlocutor types (i.e., friends, acquaintances, strangers) and context types (i.e., dyad,

small group, large meeting, public) on the students' WTC, SPCC, communication anxiety, and frequency of communication in English. Finally, McCroskey's (1992; 1988) normative guidelines for scoring and WTC level testing were used to determine the degree of the participants' WTC in English and other key variables.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Reliability

The internal consistency reliability of the instrumentation was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ):

Table 1. *Internal Consistency Reliabilities of Scales Used in the Study*

Variables	Cronbach's $\alpha$	<i>N</i> of Items
WTC in English	0.93	20
SPCC in English	0.93	12
CA in English	0.90	12
FC in English	0.86	12
Motivation to Communicate in English	0.71	3
Attitude Toward English Learning Situations	0.73	2
Integrativeness: Orientation and Attitude	0.70	3
Instrumental Orientation	0.82	2

Table 1 shows that all the scales had acceptable internal consistency reliabilities, as almost all exceeded Cronbach's  $\alpha \geq 0.70$ . It was assumed that the scales of motivation, attitude toward learning situation, integrativeness, and instrumental orientation had a lower reliability because they had fewer items than the other scales.

#### 3.2. WTC in English

Overall, the students had fairly low WTC in English. Table 2 shows the means and standard of deviations of the individual WTC items in descending order. The students tended to have somewhat higher WTC while communicating with a nurse, a salesperson, a previous teacher, or a shop clerk:

Table 2. *Students' WTC in English in Descending Order*

Item Description	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Talk with a nurse in the clinic	204	1	11	6.89	2.96
Talk with your previous teachers	204	1	11	6.53	3.11
Talk with a salesperson in a store	204	1	11	6.49	3.02
Talk with a shop clerk	204	1	11	6.21	3.11

Talk in a small group of friends	204	1	11	6.19	3.02
Talk with a waiter in a restaurant	204	1	11	6.07	3.23
Talk in a large meeting of friends	204	1	11	5.99	2.99
Talk with a librarian	204	1	11	5.89	2.88
Talk with a friend	204	1	11	5.83	3.12
Talk in a small group of acquaintances	204	1	11	5.57	3.03
Talk with an acquaintance	204	1	11	5.47	3.03
Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances	204	1	11	5.08	2.89
Speak in public to a group of friends	204	1	11	4.96	2.79
Speak in public to a group of acquaintances	204	1	11	4.88	2.86
Talk with an acquaintance in a café	204	1	11	4.60	2.58
Talk in a small group of strangers	204	1	11	4.30	2.59
Talk with a stranger on the bus	204	1	11	4.11	2.61
Talk with a stranger	204	1	11	3.67	2.53
Talk in a large meeting of strangers	204	1	11	3.67	2.49
Speak in public to a group of strangers	204	1	11	3.64	2.66
Average				5.30	2.88

The students' degree of WTC in English varied based on the communication contexts (i.e., public, meeting, group, dyad) and types of interlocutors (i.e., strangers, acquaintances, friends; see Table 3). The students tended to have fairly high WTC in English while talking with friends, compared with acquaintances or strangers, respectively:

Table 3. *Students' WTC Subscores Based on Interlocutor Type*

Interlocutor type	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Friends	204	5.74	2.43
Acquaintances	204	5.12	2.27
Strangers	204	3.88	2.06

A one-way within subjects (or repeated measures) ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of interlocutor type on the students' WTC in English. There was a significant effect of interlocutor type on the learners' WTC in English: Wilks' Lambda = 0.58,  $F(2, 202) = 72.76$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Mauchly's Test of Sphericity showed that the assumption of sphericity had been violated,  $\chi^2(2) = 81.170$ ,  $p < .05$ . On the other hand, the students had the most WTC in English while talking in small groups and the least WTC while talking in public with a large group (see Table 4). The small group conversation involved about five people, whereas the public communication involved about 30 people:



Table 4. *Students' WTC Subscores Based on Context Type*

Context type	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Dyad	204	4.74	2.00
Group	204	5.35	2.34
Meeting	204	4.91	2.16
Public	204	4.49	2.25

A one-way within subjects (or repeated measures) ANOVA analysis showed that context type had a significant influence on the learners' WTC in English: Wilks' Lambda = 0.78,  $F(201) = 18.97$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had not been violated,  $\chi^2(5) = 3.343$ ,  $p = .109$ . Mauchly's Test of Sphericity showed that the assumption of sphericity had not been violated,  $\chi^2(5) = 8.79$ ,  $p = .118$ , either.

### 3.3. SPCC in English

Overall, the students had fairly low SPCC in English. Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations of individual SPCC items in descending order. However, the students' degree of SPCC varied based on the communication contexts (i.e., public, meeting, group, dyad) and interlocutors (i.e., strangers, acquaintances, and friends; see Table 6). The students' SPCC in English was higher while speaking with friends than with acquaintances or strangers, respectively:

Table 5. *Students' SPCC in English in Descending Order*

Items	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Talk with a friend	204	1	11	8.20	2.71
Talk with an acquaintance	204	1	11	6.81	2.64
Talk in a small group of friends	204	1	11	6.79	2.77
Talk in a large meeting of friends	204	1	11	6.17	2.64
Talk in a small group of acquaintances	204	1	11	6.10	2.65
Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances	204	1	11	5.59	2.65
Speak in public to a group of acquaintances	204	1	11	5.58	2.79
Speak in public to a group of friends	204	1	11	5.53	2.59
Talk with a stranger	204	1	11	4.89	2.75
Talk in a small group of strangers	204	1	11	4.53	2.45
Talk in a large meeting of strangers	204	1	11	4.24	2.70
Speak in public to a group of strangers	204	1	11	4.04	2.46
Average				5.71	2.65

Table 6. *Students' SPCC Subscores Based on Interlocutor Type*

Interlocutor type	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Friends	204	6.67	2.16
Acquaintances	204	6.02	2.28
Strangers	204	4.42	2.24

A one-way within subjects (or repeated measures) ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of interlocutor type on the students' SPCC in English. There was a significant effect of interlocutor type: Wilks' Lambda = 0.61,  $F(202) = 65.62$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Mauchly's Test of Sphericity showed that the assumption of sphericity had been violated,  $\chi^2(2) = 100.603$ ,  $p < .05$ .

The students felt most competent communicating in English in small group or dyadic conversations and the least competent while speaking in public in a large group (see Table 7):

Table 7. *Students' SPCC Subscores Based on Context Type*

Context type	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Dyad	204	5.41	2.09
Group	204	5.81	2.21
Meeting	204	5.33	2.20
Public	204	5.05	2.21

A one-way within subjects (or repeated measures) ANOVA analysis showed that context type had a significant influence on the learners' SPCC in English: Wilks' Lambda = 0.75,  $F(201) = 22.30$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Mauchly's Test of Sphericity showed that the assumption of sphericity had been violated,  $\chi^2(5) = 46.66$ ,  $p < .05$ .

### 3.4. Communication Anxiety

Overall, the students showed low anxiety while communicating in English. Table 8 shows the means and standard deviations of the individual communication anxiety items in descending order:

Table 8. *Students' Communication Anxiety in English in Descending Order*

Items	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Talk in a large meeting of strangers	204	1	11	6.39	3.19
Speak in public to a group of strangers	204	1	11	6.03	3.09
Talk with a stranger	204	1	11	5.94	3.12
Talk in a small group of strangers	204	1	11	5.62	3.00

Speak in public to a group of acquaintances	204	1	11	5.24	2.80
Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances	204	1	11	5.16	2.66
Speak in public to a group of friends	204	1	11	4.79	2.81
Talk in a large meeting of friends	204	1	11	4.60	2.70
Talk in a small group of acquaintances	204	1	11	4.13	2.52
Talk in a small group of friends	204	1	11	4.00	2.68
Talk with an acquaintance	204	1	11	3.92	2.94
Talk with a friend	204	1	11	3.39	3.15
Average				4.93	2.89

The students experienced different degrees of communication anxiety in English based on interlocutor types and social context types (see Table 9). They felt more anxious while speaking to strangers than acquaintances or friends, respectively:

Table 9. *Students' Communication Anxiety Subscores Based on Interlocutor Type*

Interlocutor type	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Friends	204	4.20	2.80
Acquaintances	204	4.61	2.77
Strangers	204	6.00	2.57

A one-way within subjects (or repeated measures) ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of interlocutor type on the students' communication anxiety in English. There was a significant effect of interlocutor type: Wilks' Lambda = 0.70,  $F(202) = 42.55$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Mauchly's Test of Sphericity showed that the assumption of sphericity had been violated,  $\chi^2(2) = 90.166$ ,  $p < .05$ . The students had almost the same degree of anxiety in public speaking and in meeting with larger groups of people. They felt less anxious talking in small groups or in dyads (see Table 10):

Table 10. *Students' Communication Anxiety Subscores Based on Context Type*

Context type	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Dyad	204	5.16	2.29
Group	204	5.81	2.21
Meeting	204	5.38	2.23
Public	204	5.35	2.33

A one-way within subjects (or repeated measures) ANOVA analysis showed that context type had a significant influence on the learners' communication anxiety in English: Wilks' Lambda = 0.95,  $F(201) = 3.87$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . Mauchly's Test of Sphericity showed that the assumption of sphericity had been violated,  $\chi^2(5) = 151.357$ ,  $p < .05$ .

### 3.5. Frequency of Communication

In general, the students tended to communicate in English rather frequently (see Table 11):

Table 11. *Students' Frequency of Communication in English in Descending Order*

Items	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Talk with a friend	204	1	5	4.26	0.98
Talk in a small group of friends	204	1	5	3.76	0.98
Talk with an acquaintance	204	1	5	3.65	1.06
Talk in a large meeting of friends	204	1	5	3.36	1.04
Talk in a small group of acquaintances	204	1	5	3.33	1.02
Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances	204	1	5	3.09	0.98
Speak in public to a group of friends	204	1	5	3.06	1.09
Speak in public to a group of acquaintances	204	1	5	2.97	1.14
Talk in a small group of strangers	204	1	5	2.92	1.20
Speak in public to a group of strangers	204	1	5	2.91	1.22
Talk with a stranger	204	1	5	2.79	1.35
Talk in a large meeting of strangers	204	1	5	2.52	1.23
Average				3.22	1.11

However, the students' frequency of communication varied based on interlocutor type and context type. The type of interlocutor significantly affected their frequency of communication. They tended to communicate in English more frequently with friends than with acquaintances or strangers (see Table 12):

Table 12. *Students' Frequency of Communication Subscores Based on Interlocutor Types*

Interlocutor Type	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Friends	204	3.28	0.80
Acquaintances	204	3.26	0.79
Strangers	204	2.79	1.03

A one-way within subjects (or repeated measures) ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of interlocutor type on the students' frequency of communication in English. There was a significant effect of the interlocutor type: Wilks' Lambda = 0.74,  $F(202) = 35.09$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated,  $\chi^2(2) = 53.251$ ,  $p < .05$ .

The type of context had a significant influence on the students' frequency of communication. The students tended to communicate more frequently in dyads and

small groups than in large groups and tended to communicate less frequently in public with a large group of people (see Table 13):

Table 13. *Students' Frequency of Communication Subscores Based on Context Type*

Context type	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Dyad	204	3.12	0.89
Group	204	3.34	0.82
Meeting	204	2.99	0.79
Public	204	2.98	0.88

A one-way within subjects (or repeated measures) ANOVA analysis showed that context type had a significant influence on the learners' frequency of communication in English: Wilks' Lambda = 0.74,  $F(201) = 23.95$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . Mauchly's Test of Sphericity showed that the assumption of sphericity had been violated,  $\chi^2(5) = 12.504$ ,  $p < .05$ .

### 3.6. *Affective Variables*

The affective variables had 10 items divided into four subcategories: motivation, attitude toward learning situation, integrativeness, and instrumental orientation. In general, the students were moderately motivated to learn English as a foreign language. They worked somewhat hard and had a favorable desire and positive attitude toward learning English (see Table 14):

Table 14. *Students' Motivation*

Items Description	Max	Min	Mean	<i>SD</i>
I rate how hard I work at learning English.	2	7	5.32	1.32
I rate my desire to learn English.	2	7	6.43	1.01
I rate my attitude toward learning English.	1	7	5.86	1.37
Average			5.87	1.23

The students had a somewhat positive attitude toward their English instructor and English language course overall (see Table 15):

Table 15. *Students' Attitude toward Learning Situations*

Items Description	Max	Min	Mean	<i>SD</i>
My attitude toward my English instructor	1	7	5.25	1.43
My attitude toward my English course	1	7	5.06	1.51
Average			5.16	1.47

In general, the participants had favorable feelings about studying English to be able to communicate with native speakers of English. They also had a positive attitude toward the English-speaking community and a moderate interest in foreign language learning (see Table 16):

Table 16. *Students' Integrative Motivation*

Items Description	Max	Min	Mean	SD
My feelings about learning English to interact with the English-speaking community	2	7	6.06	1.21
My interest in foreign languages	1	7	5.33	1.65
My attitude toward the L2 community	1	7	5.50	1.45
Average			5.63	1.44

Overall, the participants had a considerable instrumental motivation. They believed that learning English was important to get a good job and for their future careers (see Table 17):

Table 17. *Students' Instrumental Motivation*

Items Description	Max	Min	Mean	SD
I rate how important it is for me to learn English for getting a good job.	2	7	6.52	1.00
I rate how important it is for me to learn English for my future career, I would say.	1	7	6.55	0.93
Average			6.54	0.97

In summary, based on McCroskey's (1992) normative guidelines for scoring and WTC level testing, the Omani students showed slightly low WTC in English. To gain a better understanding of the Omani students' level of WTC in English, their scores were compared with other L2 students' WTC in other contexts and settings of English language learning, where the same instrumentation used to gather the data. The mean scores were converted to percentages to compare the scores in different studies, as different scales have been used. Table 18 shows the mean scores in percentages of WTC subscale from studies in Puerto Rico and Canada as ESL settings (Richmond, McCroskey, McCroskey, & Fayer, 2008; Zeng, 2010), in Turkey and Korea (Cetinkaya, 2005; Jung, 2011), and Oman (from this study) as EFL settings. Compared with L2 learners in ESL settings, the Omani EFL students tended to show less WTC in English than the Chinese and Puerto Rican students. Compared with other EFL students, the Omani students tended to have higher WTC in English than the Turkish students, but less WTC in English than the Koreans. Overall, the L2 learners in ESL settings seemed to have higher WTC than those in EFL settings. These findings indicated that both the language learning setting and context had significant influence on the students' WTC in the L2:

Table 18. *Mean Scores in Percentages of WTC Subscales by Countries*

Measures	L2 WTC in ESL settings		L2 WTC in EFL settings		
	Chinese Students in Canada*	Puerto Rican Students**	Korea***	Turkey****	Oman (This Study)
Overall	52.5	65.1	48.7	47.4	48.2
Friend	51.0	83.6	54.6	50.6	52.2
Acquaintance	52.9	82.9	51.2	51.2	46.6
Stranger	51.9	49.0	40.3	43.4	35.3
Dyad	57.6	68.4	61.2	43.3	43.1
Small Group	54.9	68.1	46.6	48.2	48.6
Large Meeting	50.7	59.9	46.3	47.3	44.6
Public	46.9	64.3	40.9	51.1	40.8

Note. \*(Richmond, McCroskey, McCroskey, & Fayer, 2008); \*\*(Zeng, 2010); \*\*\*(Jung, 2011); \*\*\*\*(Cetinkaya, 2005)

#### 4. Discussion

##### 4.1. Key Communication Variables Affecting WTC in L2

SPCC and communication anxiety are the most immediate determinants of WTC in an L2 and comprise the communication self-confidence construct in MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) L2 WTC model. The Omani EFL students reported lower communication anxiety (45%) than the Korean or Chinese students who had values over (80%) and (70%), respectively (Jung, 2011; Yu, 2009). However, the Omani students had slightly higher communication anxiety than the Turkish students (43%; Cetinkaya, 2005). However, interlocutor type had a significant impact on their communication anxiety. They had the highest level of anxiety while communicating with strangers and the least while communicating with friends. Overall, the Omani EFL learners reported relatively low SPCC in English, compared to McCroskey and McCroskey's (1988) normative guidelines for scoring and level of SPCC in the L2. When compared with other EFL settings, the Omani students (51%) tended to have higher SPCC in English than the Koreans (39.6%; Jung, 2011). Interlocutor type and context significantly affected the learners' SPCC. Unlike other students, the Omani students had the highest SPCC while communicating in small groups and the least while communicating in public. This finding indicated that the Omani students neither felt highly confident in communicating in English nor perceived themselves as being competent users of English. One possible explanation is that although English is the media language of communication in Omani universities, the students are more likely to be involved in English practice inside the classroom than outside of class. The classroom environment had a significant and direct influence on the

learners' communication confidence and WTC in the L2 (Peng, 2007b; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). A comfortable classroom environment might boost L2 learners' SPCC and lessen communication anxiety. This might also explain the influence of interlocutor types and context type on the learners' SPCC in English.

The data in this study revealed that the Omani students tended to communicate more frequently with friends and acquaintances than with strangers. Their frequency of communication was higher in small groups than in dyads or in public. This finding was consistent with previous findings that the frequency of communication significantly differed across a variety of communication contexts and interlocutor types (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990a). L2 WTC can predict communication frequency or degree of actual communication in the L2, and frequency of communication has a positive relationship with L2 WTC (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre et al., 2003; MacIntyre et al., 2002).

#### ***4.2. Key Affective Variables Affecting WTC in L2***

Affective variables in the current study refer to motivation, integrativeness, instrumental orientation, and attitude towards the learning situations. These factors are the components of Gardner's (1985) socioeducational model. The average score for motivation in the present study was 5.87 out of 7, which was the highest score of all components of Gardner's socioeducational model. This means that the Omani students made moderate efforts to learn English as a foreign language, had a high desire to learn English, and somewhat positive attitudes towards learning English. The average mean score of integrativeness was 5.63 out of 7. The students showed favorable feelings about learning English in order to interact with members of the international English-speaking community. They also showed a positive attitude towards members of international English-speaking communities and showed interest in foreign language learning. Gardner (2006) stated that the integratively motivated students demonstrated high levels in other attributes. In terms of their instrumental motivation, an average mean score of 6.54 out of 7, it was clear that the Omani students considered learning English to be highly important to get a better job and for future career promotion. In terms of attitude towards learning situation, the students displayed a positive attitude towards their English teacher and courses.

Another interesting finding is that, on the one hand, the Omani students in demonstrated the desire to learn English as a foreign language, positive attitudes toward learning the language and the learning situation, and were instrumentally and integratively motivated. On the other hand, they showed low WTC in English, compared to McCroskey's (1992) normative guidelines for scoring and level of L2 WTC. Wen and Clément (2003) distinguished between desire to communicate (DC, Layer III) in MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) L2 WTC model and WTC in the L2 (Layer II).



Desire refers to a deliberate preference to communicate in the L2, whereas WTC refers to a readiness to initiate a conversation with a particular person or persons at a given time. Hence, even if students have the desire to communicate in the L2, they may not necessarily be willing to communicate in that situation. That is to say, there might be factors other than motivation and attitudes that influence their WTC in the L2 in a particular context, such as their perceived competence, anxiety, or a perceived tense atmosphere. In addition, Peng and Woodrow (2010) measured the relationship between WTC and motivation within the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation framework in a Chinese EFL context. They found that motivation had an indirect influence on L2 WTC through communication confidence. These findings replicated the finding by Yashima (2002) in a Japanese EFL context where the socioeducational model was not applicable. Yashima replaced the socioeducational construct with an international posture construct that was considered applicable to the Japanese EFL context. Peng and Woodrow (2010) concluded that although motivation was closely related to L2 WTC in the EFL context, the students with L2 learning motivation might not necessarily be willing to communicate in the L2. That was because motivation in the Chinese EFL context may be more related to the need to pass examinations, rather than to communicate in the L2. Moreover, cultural factors may play an important role in enhancing or inhibiting individuals to initiate a conversation with particular people in a given context. These cultural variables could be the evaluation of significant others or being worried about making errors and losing face.

#### ***4.3 Role of Omani Learning Context on Students' WTC in English***

The Omani culture is more collectivist than individualistic (Obeidat et al., 2012), and this significantly contributes toward determining members' relationships with others. Thus, social life in Oman tends to be situation-centered, with loyalty to one's extended family and larger group taking priority over individual needs and goals (Nydell, 1987; Yousef, 1974). Hence, individuals in Oman cannot separate themselves from obligations to others. They are also sensitive to public appraisal and care about the evaluation of significant others (Sharabi, 1977), which generates a face-protection tendency among them. This might provide a possible explanation for the influence of interlocutor types and context types on the Omani students' level of WTC in the L2. In this current study, the students showed higher WTC with friends than with acquaintances or strangers, respectively. They also tended to be more willing to communicate in small groups than in large groups and had the lowest WTC in English while communicating in public. In addition, the Omani EFL students tended to be low-risk takers. They avoided wrong or inappropriate uses of the L2 that might have caused them to lose face in front of significant others. As a result, they might have become reticent and have avoided communicating in English. This

provides a possible explanation of why the Omani EFL students' WTC means scores were disappointingly low.

Power distance is another feature of the Omani culture that clarifies the influence of the nature of the Omani culture on the students' WTC in English. According to Hofstede's (2001) scale, Arabs are high-power distance people (Obeidat et al., 2012). They accept that power and authority are distributed unequally among people and that everyone has a particular place or position in this world. Social hierarchy is predominant and institutionalizes that inequality, regulating the personal relationship between superiors and subordinates. In terms of communication, high-power distance people use formal and hierarchical communication. They also use titles and polite addresses in their communication. In terms of L2 WTC, it is very likely that Arabs' readiness to initiate communication in the L2 might be low due to a high level of power distance. This might also explain the significant influence of interlocutor type and context type on the L2 WTC of these individuals. In the current study, the Omani students had the highest WTC in English with a small group of their friends, but the lowest WTC in English with a large group of strangers or in public.

The Omani people tend to be less tolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty according to uncertainty and avoidance dimensions in Hofstede's scale (Obeidat et al., 2012). This tendency results from their face-protection orientation, as mentioned before. It is very common among Omani if one is not certain about the answer to a question, it is better to reply with *I do not know*. This could also provide an explanation of their lower SPCC and WTC in English, as compared to other groups in ESL contexts such as Puerto Rican (Zeng, 2010). It seems that if the Omani students are not certain about the language elements (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, structure, pronunciation, and meaning), they prefer to be reticent and silent, rather than enter into a discourse. This also might explain the influence of context type and interlocutor type on the learners' communication anxiety and SPCC.

To sum up, the Omani students' WTC in the L2 seemed to be influenced by the language learning setting, type of interlocutors, type of contexts, and their cultural backgrounds. L2 learners in ESL settings tend to show more WTC in the L2 than in EFL settings. Overall, the students in this study reported a higher WTC with friends than with acquaintances or strangers, respectively. They also tended to avoid communicating with large groups in public. However, the learners' culture played a stronger role in determining their degree of WTC in the L2.

## 5. Conclusion

This study investigated the Omani students' perception towards L2 WTC key variables. One of the major findings of this study is that the collectivist culture

of the Omani students plays a determining role in keeping their WTC low. This means that educational institutions should help EFL learners acquire a competent intercultural communication through intercultural knowledge, awareness of their own and others' cultural differences, and increased interaction. However, despite the fact that the Omani students showed overall low WTC in English, they reported higher WTC in English while communicating with people who may not have shared their L1 with them, including nurses, previous English teachers, salespeople, and so forth. This could be because the students did not expect incentive values from or anticipate future interaction with the same persons of these groups. Therefore, the Omani students' WTC needs to be stretched beyond the comfort zones of insignificant others, friends, and small groups by incorporating interactionist and sociocultural approaches like collaborative learning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

Interlocutor types and communication contexts were found to have a significant impact on some L2 WTC key variables, including WTC in English, SPCC, communication anxiety, and frequency of communication. For instance, the students tended to have more WTC in English with friends than acquaintances or strangers, respectively. They also had more WTC in English with small groups than in large meetings or in public. Given this, English language instructors may create a context in which L2 students communicate interpersonally. They should enforce small-group works and peer-tutoring practices in language classes, as this is a crucial feature of student-centered classes. Practice in communicating with different interlocutor types and in various communication contexts and peer tutor-based sessions are expected to increase L2 students' SPCC and reduce their communication anxiety. In turn, this will significantly increase L2 students' WTC in English. In addition, it is expected that incorporating peer tutors into the classroom will significantly influence L2 students' WTC.

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**Appendix**  
**Questionnaire: Omani Learners' WTC in English**

This questionnaire measures key communication and affective variables affecting learners' willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language.

***Section 1: Personal Information and Background of English Language Learning***

**Directions:** Please complete the questionnaire. It is about your personal information and your English language learning background.

1. Age (Years): • 18-22                      • 23-27                      • 28-33                      • +34
2. Gender: • Male                              • Female
3. Languages you speak:
  - Arabic                      • English                      • Urdu                      • Baluchi                      • Others
4. Academic year: • Year 1                              • Year 4
5. When did you start learning English at school?
  - Grade 1                      • Grade 2                      • Grade 3                      • Grade 4                      • Others
6. Have you taken any English courses outside the school or the university?
  - Yes    • No
7. How often do you communicate with native or nonnative speakers of English?
  - Always                      • Usually                      • Sometimes                      • Rarely                      • Never
8. Have you ever used online communication/chat tools (e.g., MSN messenger, Google Talk, Skype ... etc.)?
  - Yes    • No
9. Have you been to an English-speaking country? • Yes    • No

***Section 2: Willingness to Communicate in English***

**Directions:** Below are 20 situations in which you might choose to communicate in English or not. Imagine you have completely free choice to initiate or avoid communication. At the left of each situation, indicate the percentage of the times you would choose to communicate in English by using one of the options from 0% to 100%.

0%    10%    20%    30%    40%    50%    60%    70%    80%    90%    100%

*I never communicate*                      *I sometimes communicate*                      *I always communicate*

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Talk with an acquaintance in a café.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Talk with a stranger on the bus.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Talk with a salesperson in a store.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Talk with your previous teachers at the university.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Talk with a friend while standing in line.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Talk with a waiter/waitress in a restaurant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of acquaintances.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Talk with a shop clerk.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of acquaintances.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Talk with a nurse in the clinic.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Talk with a librarian.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of acquaintances.

***Section 3: Self-Perceived Communication Competence in English***

**Directions:** Below are 12 situations in which you might need to communicate in English. People’s abilities to communicate noticeably vary from one situation to another. Please indicate how competent you believe you are to communicate in English in each of the situations described below. Indicate in the space provided at the left of each item by using one of the options from 0% to 100%.

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%   90%   100%

*entirely incompetent*

*somewhat competent*

*entirely competent*

*(I cannot do it at all)*

*(I can do it well)*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Talk with an acquaintance.



- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Talk with a friend.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of acquaintances.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Talk with a stranger.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of acquaintances.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of acquaintances.

***Section 4: Communication Anxiety Competence***

**Directions:** Below are 12 situations in which you might need to communicate in English, but you might feel different degree of anxiety. Please indicate the degree of anxiety you believe you will feel about communicating in English in each of the situations described below. Indicate in the space provided at the left of each item by using one of the options from 0% to 100%.

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%   90%   100%

*I don't feel anxious at all   I feel somewhat anxious   I always feel anxious*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Talk with an acquaintance.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Talk with a friend.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of acquaintances.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Talk with a stranger.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of acquaintances.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of strangers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of friends.



**Section 6: Affective Variables**

**Directions:** This questionnaire measures students' affective variables in English situations. They are motivation, integrativeness, attitude towards the learning situations and instrumental orientation. Please indicate your opinion after each statement by putting an X that best describes the extent to which you believe the statement applies to you.

1. If I were to rate how hard I work at learning English, I would say that it is:

Very Little \_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_ Very Much

2. If I were to rate my desire to learn English, I would say that it is:

Very Low \_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_ Very High

3. If I were to rate my attitude toward learning English, I would say that it is:

Unfavorable \_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_ Favorable

4. If I were to rate my attitude toward my English instructor, I would say that it is:

Unfavorable \_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_ Favorable

5. If I were to rate my attitude toward my English course, I would say that it is:

Unfavorable \_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_ Favorable

6. If I were to rate my feelings about learning English in order to interact with members of the English-speaking community, I would say that it is:

Weak \_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_ Strong

7. If I were to rate my interest in foreign languages, I would say that it is:

Very Low \_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_ Very High

8. If I were to rate my attitude toward members of the second language community, I would say that it is:

Unfavorable \_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_ Favorable

9. If I were to rate how important it is for me to learn English for getting a good job, I would say that it is:

Very Low \_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_ Very High

10. If I were to rate how important it is for me to learn English for my future career, I would say that it is:

Very Low \_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_:\_\_\_ Very High