Research Paper

Interrelationship Among Variables Affecting Omani Students' Willingness to Communicate in English

Said Nasser Al-Amrani

Faculty of Language Studies, Sohar University, Sohar, Oman; *salamrani@su.edu.om*

Abstract

The study elaborates on MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) model of willingness to communicate (WTC) in an L2 by examining the impact of cultural context on shaping the interrelationship among variables affecting Omani students L2 WTC. In developing this mixed-design research, students ($n = 204$) first answered a questionnaire measuring their perceptions of the effect of various variables on their L2 WTC. Student volunteers ($n = 13$) were, then, invited to follow-up interviews to collect the qualitative data. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was utilized to examine a hypothesized model that integrated communication and affective constructs. SEM analysis of the model showed a good fit of the data. Self-perceived communication competence (SPCC) was the most potent variable influencing L2 WTC. However, communication anxiety positively correlated with L2 WTC, whereas motivation was indirect to L2 WTC through SPCC. Accordingly, this study adds meaningful sociocultural insights to previous work on L2 WTC.

Keywords: Arab Culture; EFL Learning; Motivation; Omani EFL Learners; Willingness to Communicate

1. Introduction

The concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) originally referred to an individual's communication in his or her first language (L1). It was defined as a person's tendency to initiate communication when given a chance to do so (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). However, using a second language (L2) to communicate is more complicated than using one's L1. MacIntyre (2020) explained this due to the complexity of the relationship between various variables influencing WTC in an L2. Given this suggestion, one could also add that people's competence in communicating, by definition, is higher in L1 than L2, varying from having almost no L2 competence to full L2 competence. More importantly, the effective use of L2 brings with it intergroup issues, having social and sometimes political implications that are typically irrelevant in L1 (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998; Wen & Clément, 2003). Hence, L2 WTC is defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547).

Investigating students' WTC has attracted the interest of applied linguists as an important strategy for developing students' actual communication skills in L2 (Kang, 2005). MacIntyre et al. (1998), for example, developed a multifaceted model that predicts students' WTC in L2 on the basis of social, affective, cognitive, behavioral, and motivational factors. A recent meta-analysis of factors influencing learners' L2 WTC, particularly self-perceived communication competence (SPCC), communication anxiety, and motivation factors, indicated that these three variables were moderately correlated with L2 WTC, with SPCC having the largest effect (Shirvan, Khajavy, MacIntyre, & Taherian, 2019). However, the meta-analysis reported that many other possible moderators that may significantly influence L2 WTC, such as intergroup processes, contextual variation in opportunities to use English as Foreign Language (EFL), instructional practices, demographic trends, and so forth. Moreover, the findings of the meta-analysis recommended the need for further study to explore other variables that were less explored but could play an important role in predicting L2 WTC, such as attitudes toward L2, attitudes toward learning L2, age, gender, etc., in a variety of different contexts. Wen and Clément (2003)

recommended expanding the scope of factors influencing learners' L2 WTC to include culturally specific predispositions and the influential relationship of such predispositions on learners' L2 WTC in various contexts.

Based on the above, L2 WTC is not simply a display of linguistic or communicative competence. It is a complex phenomenon that combines situational, communicative, affective, and sociocultural factors. Given that, several situational, contextual and cultural variables are likely to impact Omani students' WTC in EFL. Therefore, in addressing the importance of cultural factors and other contextual and situational variables on Omani learners' WTC in English, the present study is considered among the first to investigate the L2 WTC construct in an Arab EFL context.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Key Variations in WTC in L2 vs. FL Contexts

MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) pyramid L2 WTC model offers valuable insights into the critical dimensions of students' WTC in the L2 and provides the theoretical foundation for several relevant studies. In this model, different variables are organized according to the significance of their impact on students' WTC in the L2. Notably, social and psychological dimensions form the base of this model (as shown in Figure 1), indicating the significant impact of the learners' culture on L2 WTC:
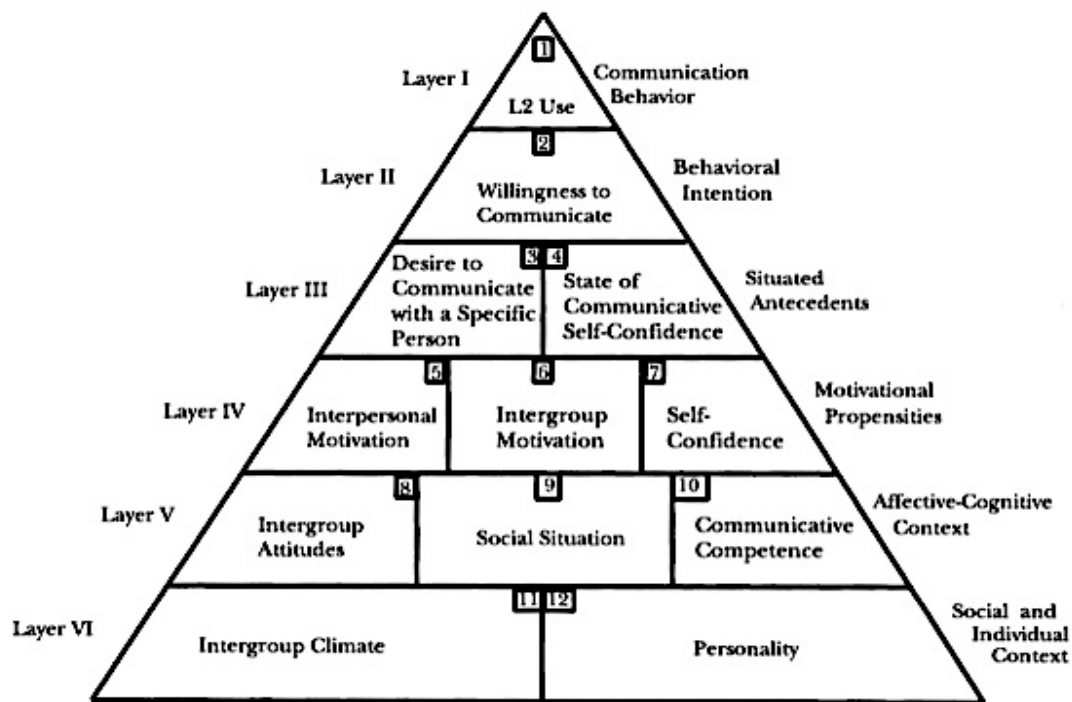

Figure 1. L2 WTC Pyramid Model (MacIntyre et al., 1998)

However, some studies have indicated that the two most potent predictors of learner' WTC in the L2 were SPCC and language anxiety (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003; Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2002; Yashima, 2002). These compose the communicative self-confidence in MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) L2 WTC construct.

On the other hand, a meta-analysis of studies conducted between 2000 and 2015 statistically proved that L2 WTC was more correlated with SPCC than communication anxiety and motivation (Shirvan et al., 2019). The sociocultural dimension, type of language learning program (immersion vs. nonimmersion), gender, and level of the L2 learning experience were also shown to have noticeable effects on learners' WTC in the L2 (Alemi, Tajeddin, & Mesbah, 2013; Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; Shirvan et al., 2019). Besides, the output-based instruction enhanced the students' WTC in the L2 more than the input-based one (Roohani, Forootanfar, & Hashemian, 2017).

Furthermore, situational and personality variables such as motivation, anxiety, attitudes, social contexts, communicative competence, interlocutor interrelationships could alter an individual's WTC in the L2 (Kang, 2005; Shirvan et al., 2019; Syed & Kuzborska, 2019). For instance, Kang (2005) revealed that situational context variables such as types of interlocutors and topics and variables related to psychological conditions of interlocutors such as excitement, responsibility, and security have a significant impact on their L2 WTC. Also, group size, types of interlocutors, interlocutor participation, and topic familiarity significantly influenced learners' WTC in the L2 (Cao & Philp, 2006). Indeed, MacIntyre and Legatto's (2011) approach offered a new, dynamic perspective on WTC in the L2 in which L2 WTC was seen as a vibrant, situational construct (rather than a trait-like predisposition) that changed moment-to-moment. Additionally, moment-to-moment fluctuations in WTC in the L2 appeared to be somewhat independent of anxiety.

Shirvan et al. (2019) noted that the language learning context (FL vs. L2) was among the essential variables potentially influencing L2 WTC. For instance, the classroom environment was the most potent predictor of L2 WTC in FL contexts (Khajavy, Ghonsooly, Fatemi, & Choi, 2016). According to Turjoman (2016), the amount of English language exposure and use increased students' self-confidence and SPCC. Moreover, contextual influence, such as classmates' reactions and group-level talk-silence, significantly affects L2 WTC (Yashima, MacIntyre, & Ikeda, 2018). Several studies have also suggested that students' perceived communication competence and anxiety level in FL settings were the most significant factors on L2 WTC (Hashimotto, 2002; Kim, 2004; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002). However, a meta-analysis of more recent studies in the context of FL reported that SPCC had a greater influence on L2 WTC than communication anxiety (Shirvan et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, motivation has been shown to indirectly impact learners' WTC in some EFL settings (Ghonsooly, Khajavy, & Asadpour, 2012; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004) and directly in others (Peng, 2014). In some FL settings, integrative motivation (Kim, 2004) and international posture (Yashima, 2002) were shown to impact L2 WTC significantly. Moreover, EFL students' beliefs regarding their role in language learning and communication greatly influenced other elements, such as prior learning and communication experience, learning styles, and social expectations (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). However, the nature of motivation needs to be well-understood concerning the social context and other EFL learning variables, including learners' attitudes toward the learning environment, their teacher, and the status of their native language in society.

Yashima (2002) found a direct but relatively weak relationship between WTC in English and international posture's role in WTC in Japanese EFL settings. On the other hand, studies in Chinese, Korean, and Iranian EFL contexts indicated that international posture had no direct effect on learners' WTC in English (Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Kim, 2004).

In brief, numerous studies have examined the potency and correlation of the variables that were likely to impact L2 WTC, including contextual variables such as the content of a conversation, type of context and type of interlocutor (Al-Amrani, 2019; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2018; Peng, 2014), cultural and sociohistorical factors (Al-Murtadha & Feryok, 2017), psychological variables, including motivation, anxiety, and perceived communication competence (Kadi & Madini, 2019; Shirvan et al., 2019) and L2 language proficiency (Bawazir, 2019; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011). More importantly, the different cultural backgrounds of learners appear to vary regardless of the L2 learning settings (L2 or FL), types of variables and their relationships to L2 WTC. In addressing the importance of cultural contexts on L2 WTC, the present study conceptualizes Omani learners' WTC in English in an Arab EFL context.

2.2. Research Questions

Even though the existing models of L2 WTC were mostly brought forward by MacIntyre et al. (1998) and supported and enriched by many relevant empirical studies (Shirvan et al., 2019), a review of the relevant literature reveals a gap concerning Omani learners' WTC in EFL settings. The findings of Al-Amrani's (2019) study indicated that the Omani students had a relatively low WTC in English and that both interlocutor and context types had a significant influence on their WTC. Such findings prompt the need for further analysis of the contextual, social, and cultural variables affecting their L2 WTC. Considering the overt value of the English language in Oman in the era of transnationalism, and the specific features of Arab culture, which are different to some extent from the cultural contexts in previous studies (Obeidat, Shannak, Masa'deh, & Al-Jarrah, 2012), this gap needs to be bridged.

Accordingly, the current study examines the causal relationships between crucial communication and affective variables influencing Omani students' WTC in EFL. The model in Figure 2 has been constructed to examine the interrelationship of L2 WTC variables in an Omani EFL context answering the following research questions:

1. Which variables are powerful influencers on L2 WTC regardless of the cultural context?

2. Which variables are powerful influencers on L2 WTC in an Omani EFL context?

3. Are some L2 WTC variables more direct influencers than others in an Omani EFL context?

4. How do the different L2 WTC variables (i.e. communication and affective constructs) correlate in an Omani EFL context?
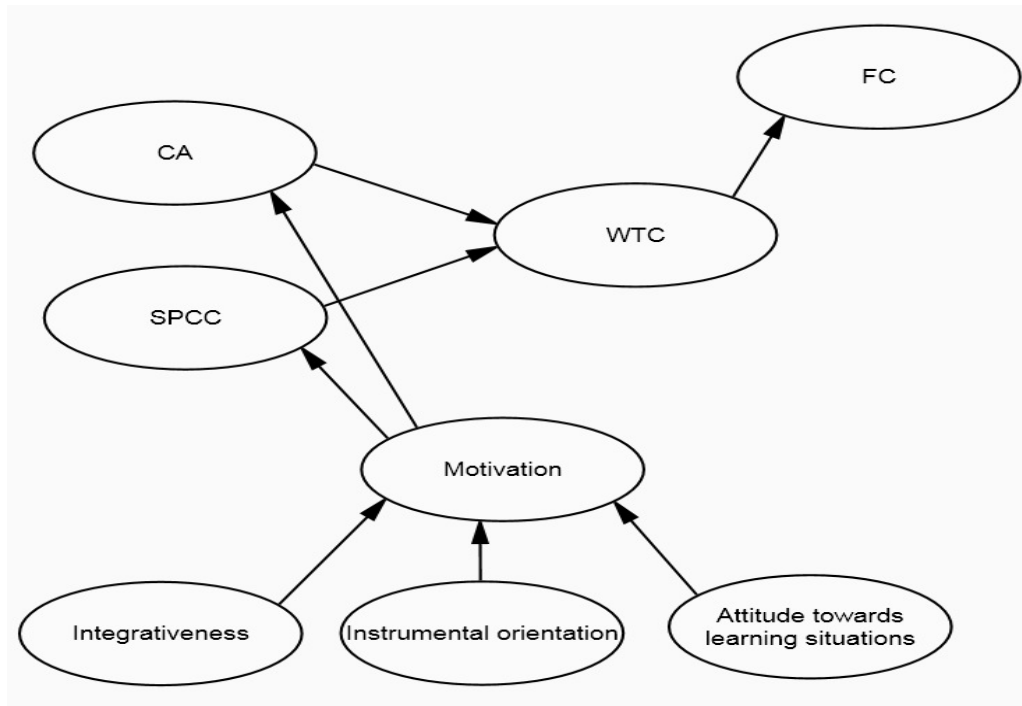

Figure 2. Proposed Model of Omanis WTC in English in an Arab EFL Setting (CA = Communication Anxiety; FC = Frequency of Communication)

3. Research Methodology

The present study adopted a mixed-methods research design consisting of sequential procedures in collecting data. First, the quantitative examination tested theories and concepts; then, the qualitative analysis examined several cases and individuals in more detail (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative data were gathered through surveys and qualitative data through semistructured interviews. These interviews were, then, used to extend and elaborate on the findings collected from the questionnaires. The interviews helped the researcher better understand and explain the influence of the sociocultural context on Omani learners' perceptions and attitudes toward crucial communication variables related to L2 WTC.

3.1. Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at Sohar University, the first private university in Oman. Arabic is Oman's native and official language. English as a lingua franca is the only official FL in Oman, having received significant political, economic, and legislative support since the early 1970s (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). It is noted as the language of communication among professionals in higher education institutions, hospitals, airports, and most national and international companies.

After securing ethical permission from the institution to conduct the research, data were gathered at random from 204 female participants studying in the Department of English Language Studies. The volunteers ($N = 13$) were, then, invited to participate in semistructured follow-up interviews. The participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. The interviews were held in Arabic before being transcribed and translated into English. The participants are between 18 and 27 years old and their L1 was Arabic. Their English language proficiency level was considered to be upper-intermediate by the university, which is equivalent to an IELTS score of 5 and B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages.

3.2. Research Design and Instruments

A questionnaire was used to assess the key variables affecting the students' WTC in English. A certified Arabic-English translator validated the translation of the questionnaire into Arabic. The questionnaire was designed to gather data about the informants' demographic information and key communication and affective variables. This study differs from previous studies in that the respondents had to choose one of the following percentages to represent the extent to which they were willing to communicate in English in different situations that were likely to occur in their daily lives: 0%, 10%, 20%, to 100%. If the students had not personally had the experience, they were asked to imagine how they might feel about it.

The communication variables assessed included WTC, communication anxiety, SPCC and frequency of communication. McCroskey (1992) originally designed the WTC scale. A 20-item questionnaire was used to assess Omani EFL students' WTC in English, of which 12 items were related to four communication contexts (public, meeting, group, dyad) and three types of interlocutors (stranger, acquaintances, friends). The eight other items were fillers asking about situations such as communicating with a nurse, a previous teacher, and so forth. A 12-item questionnaire developed by McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) and used by Yashima (2002) and MacIntyre and Charos (1996) was adopted in this study to measure how confident the respondents felt about communicating in English. A communication anxiety scale consisting of 12 items (Yashima, 2002) measured the participants' English communication anxiety self-assessment. The questionnaire also included the following three affective domain scales:

1. The attitude toward language learning environment scale, which McIntyre and Charos (1996) developed, had two items to reflect the participants' attitude toward their English teachers and modules.

2. The integrativeness scale was adapted from Gardner's (2001) motivation construct to measure integrative orientation, attitude toward the target language community, and interest in FL learning.

3. The instrumental orientation scale, initially developed by Hashimoto (2002), had only one item, namely, studying English for employment. However, more items related to the future career and obtaining a good job were added to the scale.

Semistructured interviews were undertaken and used to collect the qualitative data using the questionnaire developed. To reduce the interview data to the variables related to the L2 WTC construct, the researcher asked questions to explore aspects relevant to L2 WTC variables. The interview themes were related to the participants' WTC in English, SPCC in English, communication anxiety in English, and communication frequency.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed, adopting an approach based on SEM through the analysis of moment structure (AMOS), statistical software (version 19). The study followed a two-stage modelling approach consisting of measurement modelling observed by SEM. First, the entire measurement model was specified and examined to establish its validity; second, the structural model was assessed to investigate the hypothesized directional relationships between the latent constructs. Model fit indices and parameter estimates were evaluated in both stages as per the considerations and criteria in Table 1.

The qualitative data from the semistructured interviews were analyzed deductively by following the process of thematic content analysis, which is reported in the Discussion section of this paper. The thematic content analysis involved analyzing the interview transcripts, identifying the themes, and connecting the quantitative analysis data to those themes (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008):

Table 1. *Fit Indices Used in the Study and Their Acceptable Threshold Levels*

No	Fit Index	Acceptable Threshold Levels
1	Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	SRMS less than 0.08 (Byrne, 2001; Hu & Bentler, 1999)
2	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	A 90% confidence interval falling within 0.05 and 0.08 (Byrne, 2001)
3	Normed Chi-Square (NC = ×2/ df)	NC less than 3 (Byrne, 2001) to less than 5 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004)
4	Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	GFI greater than 0.90 (Byrne, 2001)
5	Bollen's Incremental Fit Index (IFI) and Bentler's Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	IFI and CFI values greater than 0.90 (Byrne, 2001)

3.4. Reliability

All the scales showed adequate internal consistency reliabilities because almost all exceeded Cronbach $\alpha \geq 0.70$ (see Table 2). It was assumed that the scales of affective variables had lower reliability since they had fewer items than other scales of communication variables:

Table 2. *Internal Consistency Reliabilities of Scales Used in the Study*

Variables	Cronbach's α	No of Items
WTC in English	0.93	20
SPCC in English	0.93	12
Communication Anxiety in English	0.90	12
Frequency of Communication in English	0.86	12
Motivation to Communicate in English	0.71	3
Attitude Toward Language Learning Environments	0.73	2
Integrativeness: Orientation and Attitude	0.70	3
Instrumental Motivation	0.82	2

3.5. Sample Size

The sample size for the study was 204 female participants. Notably, SEM analysis needs a minimum sample size of 200 (Kline, 2011). The participants completed the questionnaire online, in which all the necessary items were to be answered to submit the questionnaire. As a result, there were no missing data.

3.6. Normality and Outliers of Data

The normality distribution of the data for SEM was examined at univariate and multivariate levels. Skew and kurtosis tests were used to measure whether the data were normally distributed. Kline (2011) suggests a skew index (SI) of SI < 3.0 and kurtosis index (KI) of KI < 8.0 to indicate normality. According to Kline's rules of thumb, the data of the current study were normally distributed. Mahalanobis distance ($p < 0.001$) was used to identify multivariate outliers, in which the analysis showed relatively few outliers' scores, with their p values slightly less than 0.001. After testing the distribution normality of the datasets, the outliers' scores were changed to remain extreme. However, their p values were marginally more than 0.001.

4. Findings

The hypothesized L2 WTC model consisted of two primary constructs: a communication construct and an affective construct. The communication construct had three latent variables: SPCC, communication anxiety, and communication frequency, while the affective domain construct had four latent variables, namely, motivation, integrativeness, attitude toward language learning environment, and instrumental motivation. Before examining the relationships between the communication and affective constructs in the proposed L2 WTC model, each construct's confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was measured separately. The main objective of the CFA of each construct was to

test their validity. SEM analysis was, then, carried out to examine the extent to which the hypothesized model would adequately describe or fit the sample data.

4.1. CFA for Communication Construct

The initial CFA model for the communication construct appeared to have an inadequate fit, as the indices were not satisfactory: SRMR = 0.08, RMSEA = 0.09, NC = 2.26, GFI = 0.48, IFI = 0.66 and CFI = 0.66. The examination of the construct also revealed that the only source of ill fit was that some of the observed variables had a standardized regression weight (factor loading) less than 0.50 with a standardized residual covariance greater than 1.00. After removing these items, the construct (see Figure 3) had an adequate fit: SRMR = 0.05, RMSEA = 0.07, NC = 1.91, GFI = 0.90, IFI = 0.93 and CFI = 0.93. All the factor loadings of items, ranging between 0.63 and 0.84, were considered significant at $p < 0.001$, suggesting convergent validity. All the correlation coefficients between each pair of factors, ranging between 0.03 and 0.78, were less than 0.85, which supported the discriminant validity of the construct:
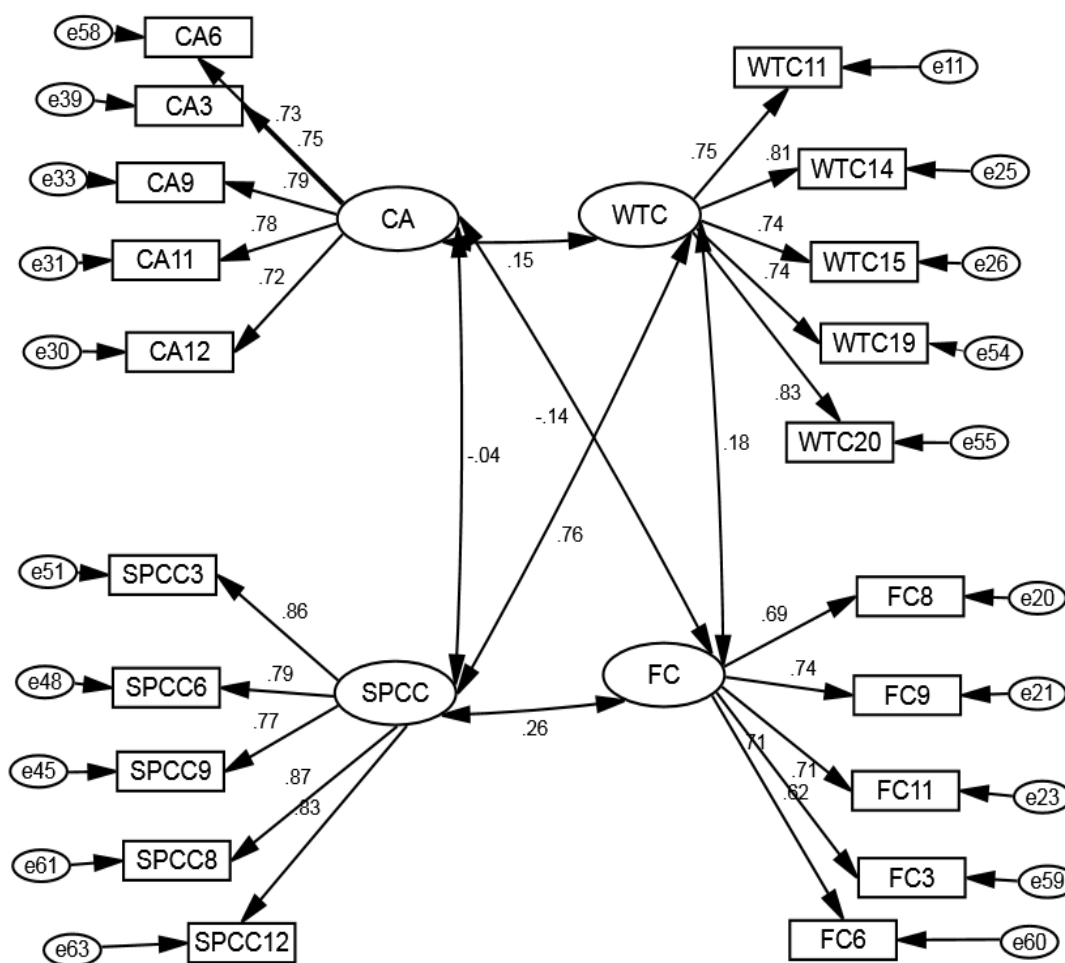

Figure 3. Final CFA for Communication Construct

4.2. CFA for Affective Construct

As seen in Figure 4, the CFA for the affective construct appeared to have a good fit, as all fit indices were adequate: SRMR = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.07, NC = 2.00, GFI = 0.95, IFI = 0.96 and CFI = 0.96. All the factor loadings, ranging between 0.53 and 0.85, were significant at the $p < 0.001$, suggesting convergent validity. All the correlation coefficients between each pair of factors, ranging between 0.46 and 0.84, were less than 0.85, supporting the discriminant validity of the construct.
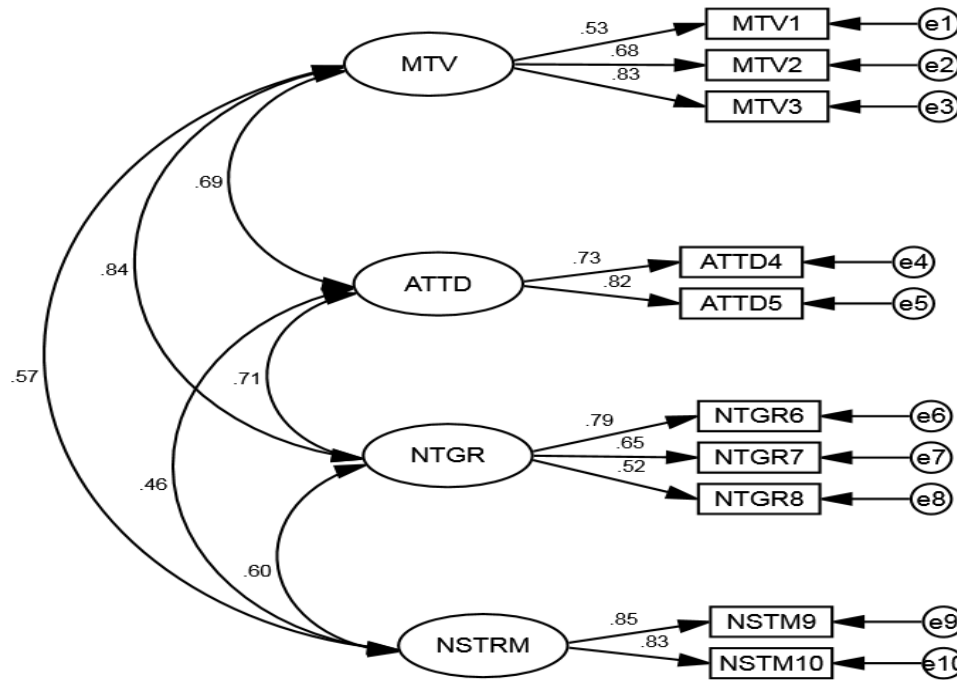
Figure 4. CFA Model for the Affective Construct (MTV = Motivation; NTGR = Integrativeness; NSTM = Instrumental Orientation; ATTD = Attitude Toward Learning Situations)

4.3. L2 WTC Model Assessment

In SEM, one variable can be both endogenous and exogenous. Therefore, WTC, CA, SPCC, and motivation were acknowledged as endogenous and exogenous variables. The ovals above symbolize latent variables, while rectangles symbolize indicator (observed) variables. Each indicator variable has an error term (e.g., e1 and e2), indicating measurement errors. Moreover, each endogenous latent variable (WTC, SPCC, CA, FC, and motivation) has a residual term (r1, r2, r3, r4, and r5). Byrne (2001) asserted that residual errors symbolize an error in predicting endogenous latent factors from exogenous latent factors. The circles represent error and residual terms because they refer to unobserved variables.

4.4. Measurement Model Results

The SEM analysis of the initial measurement model showed that SRMR was 0.099, RMSEA was 0.080, and NC was 2.484, which indicated a poor fit of the model. GFI was 0.50, IFI was 0.69, and CFI was 0.68 (see Table 3). As these were below 0.90, indicating a poor fit. Thus, the overall indices revealed that the model fitted the dataset poorly.

Accordingly, several items were removed, having factor loadings less than 0.50, and items with a standardized residual covariance greater than 1.00 were also deducted. The final measurement model showed that SRMR was 0.07, RMSEA was 0.05, and NC was 1.50, indicating an acceptable model fit. GFI was 0.90, IFI was 0.94, and CFI was 0.94, which revealed an acceptable model fit, as shown in Table 3 below. All indicators had a significant loading ($p < 0.001$) on their particular constructs. All correlation coefficients between each pair of constructs were less than 0.85, suggesting adequate discriminant validity (Kline, 2011):

Table 3. *Step-by-Step Modifications of L2 WTC Model*

Model fit Indices	NC	SRMS	RMSEA	GFI	IFI	CFI
Initial Measurement Model	2.24	0.08	0.07	0.50	0.69	.68
Final Measurement Model	1.52	0.06	0.05	0.90	0.94	0.94
Structural Model	1.55	0.07	0.04	0.90	0.94	0.94

4.5. Structural Model Results

Following the assessment of the validity of the measurement model, the structural model was, then, assessed to examine the relationships between its variables (see Figure 5). Overall, the model specified WTC, communication anxiety, SPCC, frequency of communication, and motivation as endogenous variables, whereas attitudes toward language learning environment, instrumental motivation, and integrativeness were specified as exogenous variables.

Model fit indices, similar to those used in the measurement model assessment, were used as a threshold to accept or reject the hypothesized relationships between variables. The standardized path coefficients between constructs were required to be significant at $p < 0.05$ level to consider their relationships meaningful:
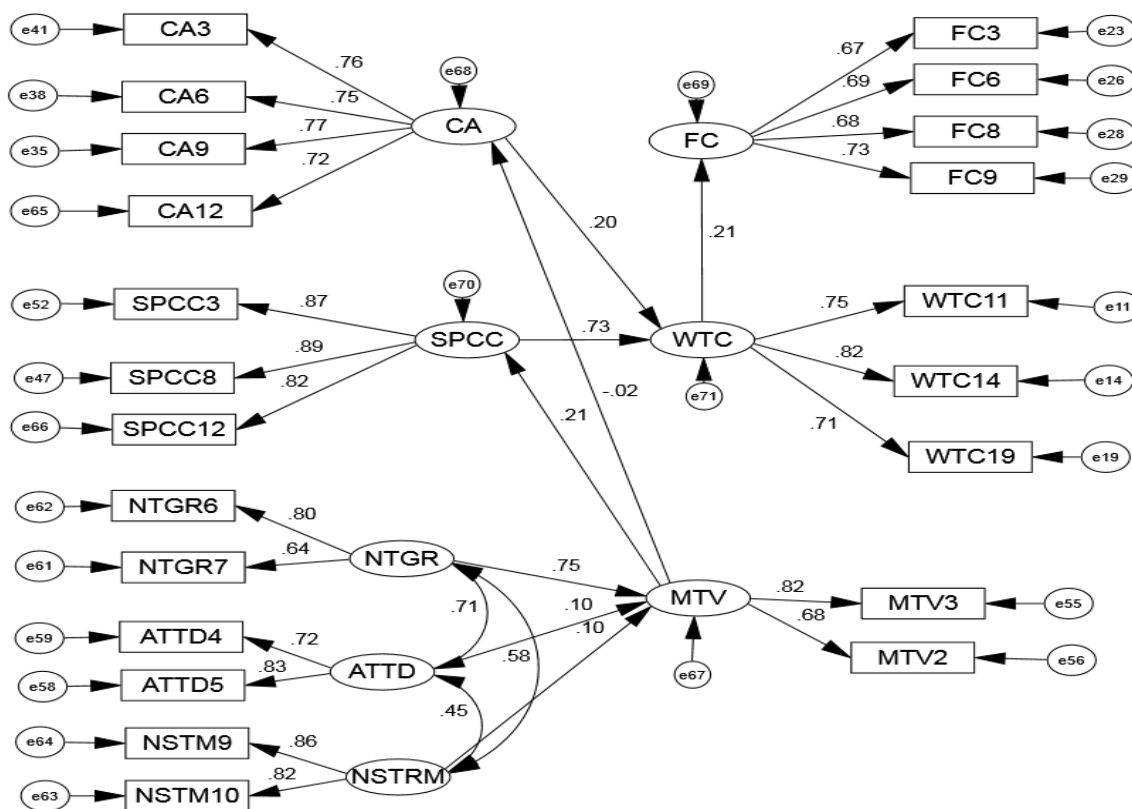

Figure 5. Final Structural Model of Omani Students' WTC in English

The structural model indicated an adequate fit of the data (NC = 1.50, SMRS = 0.07, RMSEA = 0.05, GFI = 0.90, IFI = 94, CFI = 0.94). Most of the hypothesized relationships between variables were significant at the ($p < 0.05$) level, as reflected in Figure 4 and Table 3. SPCC (0.73) and communication anxiety (0.21) had significant direct paths to WTC. The relationship between WTC and the frequency of communication was significant (0.21). Motivation had significant relationships with integrativeness (0.75), and SPCC (0.21), attitude toward learning situations (0.10), and instrumental orientation (0.10). However, motivation did not significantly correlate with communication anxiety (0.02).

5. Discussion: Omani students' Conceptualization of WTC in English

The SEM analysis in this study revealed that the data provided a good model fit and that most of the hypothesized relationships between variables were significant at $p < 0.05$ level. The standardized regression coefficient for the path from SPCC to WTC was 0.74, indicating that SPCC acted as the most powerful influencer on L2 WTC in the Omani EFL context. This finding supported MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) L2 WTC model, where students' SPCC had a direct and significant influence on their WTC in the L2. Indeed, it was also consistent with empirical studies in other L2 settings (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; Clément et al., 2003; MacIntyre et al., 2002) and FL settings (Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Khajavy et al., 2016; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004). It seems that this finding is universal,

regardless of regional or cultural diversity. The students who evaluated themselves as capable communicators in the L2 tended to show high WTC in the L2.

The qualitative data also revealed that students felt competent to communicate in English with friends who would support them, listen to them attentively, and give them immediate positive feedback. For instance, Mary (interviewee) commented, "I felt competent to speak English when my friends were with me. They could respond immediately to me, and they could help me because their English language might be better than mine." Also, Mensa (interviewee) commented, "I felt very competent in class discussion because when I expressed my ideas in English, my friends listened to me attentively, and they gave me their points of views, too."

However, Roqai highlighted the importance of the teacher's support by saying, "I felt very competent to communicate in class discussion because if I made a pronunciation mistake, my teacher would correct me immediately. Most of my classmates usually didn't pay attention to pronunciation errors." In other words, the sense of belonging to a group and immediate positive feedback from their classmates and teacher made them feel more confident to communicate in English with their favorite classmates and in small groups.

The findings of Al Amrani's (2019) study indicated that the Omani students had low SPCC while communicating with acquaintances, strangers, a large group of people, or in a public setting. A possible justification for this finding could be that the cultural background of Omani students and situational contexts have a significant influence on their SPCC in English. Omani students come from a collectivist culture (Obeidat et al., 2012), which significantly contributes to determining their relationships with one another, making their social life situation-centered and showing considerable attention to members of their extended family over their desire and needs (Nydell, 1987; Yousef, 1974).

An important finding of the current study is that communication anxiety was positively and directly related to WTC with a standardized regression coefficient of 0.21, indicating a low significance level. This is inconsistent with the findings of previous studies in L2 settings (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2003; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996) and FL settings which indicated that communication anxiety had a profoundly negative correlation with WTC (see Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Khajavy et al., 2016; Khajavy, MacIntyre, & Barabadi, 2018; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004).

Moreover, the qualitative data highlighted that some informants were less anxious and reluctant to communicate in English. For instance, Alana said, "when I speak in English, I need only convey my message to the person, and I don't need to worry about grammar or other things as long as the idea is clear to the listener." However, some factors could impact the level of the students' anxiety, such as shyness, immediate response, and fear of making mistakes or using the wrong vocabulary. For instance, Anwaar commented (interviewee), "I had high anxiety to speak in English when I could not think of the right vocabulary quickly to use it for the conversation,' whereas Meyssa and Roqai (interviewees) said, "we felt very anxious to communicate in English because we had to answer questions immediately and we didn't have time to think before answering them." Bashyer (interviewee) said, "I was anxious to communicate in English with my classmates when I didn't understand them, and I could not ask them to repeat. Also, if I disagreed with her, I felt shy to express my opposite perspective." Maryam added, "I sometimes avoid speaking in English because I was afraid to make mistakes, so I would feel embarrassed and lose face." According to Al-Amrani (2019), the Omani students had overall low communication anxiety; however, their English communication anxiety degrees varied based on interlocutor and social context types. The students felt more anxious while communicating with strangers than acquaintances or friends, respectively.

On the other hand, the Omani EFL students had high communication anxiety when speaking in public and large meetings. However, they still felt less anxious while having conversations with small groups or in dyads. From a sociocultural perspective, Omani students cannot separate themselves from their obligations to others and are susceptible to public appraisal and care about the evaluation of significant others (Sharabi, 1977), which generates a face-protection tendency among them.

However, consistent with previous studies in L2 settings (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre et al., 1998) and FL settings (Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Khajavy et al., 2016; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004), the findings in this study indicated that motivation had an indirect influence on L2 WTC through SPCC and communication anxiety (0.73) and that motivation had a significant relationship with SPCC (0.21). A possible explanation

for this is that motivation alone is insufficient to cause EFL learners to communicate in English. Wen and Clément (2003) emphasized the difference between the desire and the WTC, stating that having the desire to speak does not necessarily mean having WTC in the L2. The desire to communicate refers to a deliberate choice or preference to communicate, whereas WTC means readiness to communicate in the L2 provided the opportunity exists.

Furthermore, integrativeness, attitude toward the language learning environment, and instrumental motivation predicted motivation by the Omani EFL students. Of these three predictors, integrativeness (0.75) was the most powerful predictor of the students' motivation. This finding is consistent with Gardner's (1988) socioeducational model indicating that integrativeness, which is the center of L2 motivation, is applicable in EFL settings where learners do not have substantial direct contact with L2 native speakers. One possible explanation for this could be that EFL learners develop a global citizenship identity along with their local identity (Arnett, 2002). Moreover, EFL learners' transnational identities allow them to use English as a lingua franca to communicate with people worldwide when they travel or through modern media technologies, namely online social media (i.e., WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

This study demonstrated that integrativeness had the most reliable predictive power for motivation, which supported Gardner's (2001) view, claiming that the socioeducational model was appropriate for the Canadian context. It was also developed for other cultural contexts. A possible explanation for the consistency in the findings of this study with those in Gardner's work could be that the participants of this study were university students, and the medium of instruction at the university was English. However, transferring these findings to other EFL contexts and different language learning levels should be made with caution. For instance, EFL learning at the school level in Oman is exam-driven, and students study English simply to pass English language tests. Also, many studies in Chinese EFL contexts suggest that integrative motivation plays a lesser role among Chinese students (Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005). As Peng and Woodrow (2010) mentioned, English language learning and teaching occurred in the Chinese EFL context in the classroom and is mainly exam-driven.

In brief, this study revealed that communication anxiety had a positive and low significance level on the learners' WTC due to cultural and social reasons. This finding was specific to the Omani EFL context. Another important specific finding is that the Omani EFL learners could develop integrative motivation toward English native communities, even in the absence of direct contact with them. This was related to the Omani students' understanding of the status of English as the lingua franca in Oman, in particular, and in the globalized world, in general. The findings related to other factors, however, were consistent or partially consistent with those of previous studies, particularly in regard to potent influencers. SPCC, for example, had a significant and direct interrelationship with the Omani students' WTC. In addition, integrativeness was the most potent predictor of the Omani students' motivation. The indication here is that SPCC and integrativeness are primary and universal predictors of L2 WTC across diverse cultures and English language learning settings. Motivation also influenced L2 WTC indirectly, as shown in previous studies, specifically through SPCC and communication anxiety, suggesting that having the desire to communicate does not always produce learners with high WTC in the L2. The latter point represents a feature of the L2 WTC construct in the Omani EFL context.

6. Conclusion

This study elaborated on MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) L2 WTC model by developing a model of variables affecting L2 WTC in an Omani EFL context. The model is based on answering questions related to the effects of the Omani context on shaping the interrelationship among variables influencing EFL Omani learners' WTC. While the Omani context influenced the impact of some variables like communication anxiety and integrativeness, SPCC remained a potent influencer indicating that it is a primary and universal predictor of L2 WTC across diverse cultures. The pedagogical implications of these findings are given below.

6.1. Pedagogical Implications

An important finding of this study is that the most potent predictor of L2 WTC in EFL settings is students' SPCC. However, it should also be noted that Omani students' SPCC does not refer to their actual communication skills or competence. Instead, it relates to how they perceive their competence in the L2. Thus, language instructors need to encourage Omani students to build on and improve their SPCC to acquire higher WTC in English by inspiring them to positively and optimistically view their competence. Generally speaking, improving EFL learners' SPCC can help

improve their overall confidence. To achieve this, language instructors need to encourage and inspire students to create and work on action plans, participate in voluntary speaking, and be more autonomous learners (Al-Murtadha, 2019). Moreover, equipping EFL learners with communication skills, including interpersonal communication skills, presentation skills, and public speaking skills, may significantly increase their SPCC and, in turn, improve their WTC in English.

Dörnyei and Csizér (2005) found that L2 contact and interaction had a positive and significant relationship with students' SPCC. Considering these findings, Ortega (2005) suggested that "change in WTC becomes a theoretical necessity, a function of increased proficiency and wider communication experiences accrued through participation across different contexts that foster diverse circumstances for L2 use" (p. 204). As such, language teachers in FL settings need to engage students with English language contact and interaction beyond the classroom by enhancing traditional language classrooms with modern technologies. They can use social media, chat rooms, and discussion forums where EFL students can communicate in English more comfortably, confidently, and more frequently (Al-Amrani & Harrington, 2020). Besides, equipping students with communication strategies could significantly enhance their L2 WTC (Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh, 2014). More importantly, metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective learning strategies could help reduce learners' anxiety and cultivate personal motivation and a positive attitude (Al-Amrani, 2009; Al-Kalefawi & Al-Amrani, 2021).

6.2. Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

The respondents were female undergraduate students in a private university in Oman, and the results can be generalized to this group with some certainty. However, any further generalization from this study should be made with caution, considering that, as previous studies indicated, the L2 WTC construct could be related to gender variables (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2002). Also, given the female students in this study were members of a collectivist culture, it is expected that their WTC could be significantly affected depending on whether the interlocutors were from the same or opposite gender, which requires further research. As SPCC is the most significant factor in students' L2 WTC, further studies are recommended to examine the sociopsychological and interpersonal process by which Omani university students increase their level of SPCC and eventually enhance their level of WTC in English.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

References

Al Amrani, S. N. A. (2019). Communication and affective variables influencing Omani EFL learners' willingness to communicate. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics, 10*(1), 51-77. https://doi.10.22055/RALS.2019.14179

Al-Amrani, S. N., & Harrington, M. (2020). The impact of online social presence on Omani female students' willingness to communicate in English. *Computer-Assisted Language Learning Electronic Journal, 21*(2), 220-237. http://callej.org/journal/21-2/Al-Amrani-Harrington2020.pdf

Al-Amrani, S. N. (2009). Strategies for reading online and printed texts by Omani EAP students. In T. Roche (Ed.), *Orientations in language learning and translation* (pp. 41-60). Muscat: Al Falaj Press.

Alemi, M., Tajeddin, Z., & Mesbah, Z. (2013). Willingness to communicate in L2 English: Impact of learner variables. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics, 4*(1), 42-61.

Al-Kalefawi, Z. M., & Al-Amrani, S. N. (2021). Enhancing reading strategies of Arab EFL students using I-CARE program: A case study. *Computer-Assisted Language Learning Electronic Journal, 22*(1), 414-431

Al-Murtadha, M. (2019). Enhancing EFL learners' willingness to communicate with visualisation and goal-setting activities. *TESOL Quarterly, 53*(1), 133-157. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.474

Al-Murtadha, M., & Feryok, A. (2017). Studying English in Yemen: Situated unwillingness to communicate in sociohistorical time. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 11*(3), 230-240. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2017.1317258

Al-Issa, A. S., & Al-Bulushi, A. H. (2012). English language teaching reform in Sultanate of Oman: The case of theory and practice disparity. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice, 11,* 141-176. http:// doi.org/10.1007/s10671-011-9110-0

Arnett, J. J. (2002). The psychology of globalization. *American Psychologist, 57*(10), 774-783. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.57.10.774

Baker, S. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2000). The role of gender and immersion in communication and second language orientations. *Language Learning, 50*, 311-341. https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00119

Bawazir, M. A. (2019). Factors influencing Saudi EFL learners' willingness to communicate in the classroom. *EIMJ*, 15, 1-46.

Burnard, P., Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Analysing and presenting qualitative data. *British Dental Journal*, 204, 204-432. https://www.nature.com/articles/sj.bdj.2008.292

Byrne, B. M. (2001). *Structural equation modelling with AMOS: Basic concepts, application, and programming.* Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Association.

Chen, J. F., Warden, C. A., & Chang, H.-T. (2005). Motivators that do not motivate: The case of Chinese EFL learners and the influence of culture on motivation. *TESOL Quarterly, 39*(4), 609-633. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588524

Clément, R., Baker, S. C., & MacIntyre, P. (2003). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The effects of context, norms and vitality. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 22*(2), 190-209. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X03022002003

Dörnyei, Z., & Csizér, K. (2005). The effects of intercultural contact and tourism on language attitudes and language learning motivation. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 24*(4), 327-357. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X05281424

Gardner, R. C. (1988). The socioeducational model of second-language learning: Assumptions, findings, and issues. *Language Learning, 38*(1), 101-126. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1988.tb00403.x

Gardner, R. C. (2001). Integrative motivation and second language acquisition. In Z. Dörnyei & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Motivation and language acquisition* (pp. 1-19). Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press

Ghonsooly, B., Khajavy, G. H., & Asadpour, S. F. (2012). Willingness to communicate in English among Iranian non-English major university students. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 31*(2), 197-211. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X12438538

Hashimoto, Y. (2002). Motivation and willingness to communicate as predictors of reported L2 use: The Japanese ESL context. *Second Language Studies, 20,* 29-70. Retrieved August 9, 2020, from the World Wide Web: http://hdl.handle.net/10125/40649

Hu, L.-t., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cut-off criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria vs. new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal, 6*(1), 1-55. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705519909540118

Kadi, R. F., & Madini, A. A. (2019). Causes of Saudi students' unwillingness to communicate in the EFL classrooms. *International Journal of English Language Education, 7*(1), 51-69. https://doi.org/10.5296/ijele.v7i1.14621

Kang, S.-J. (2005). Dynamic emergence of situational willingness to communicate in a second language. *System 33*, 277-292. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2004.10.004

Khajavy, G. H., Ghonsooly, B., Fatemi, A., & Choi, C. W. (2016). Willingness to communicate in English: A microsystem model in the Iranian EFL classroom context. *TESOL Quarterly, 50*(1), 154-180. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263117000304

Khajavy, G. H., MacIntyre, P. D., & Barabadi, E. (2018). Role of the emotions and classroom environment in willingness to communicate: Applying doubly latent multilevel analysis in second language acquisition research. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 40*(3), 605-624.

Kim, S. J. (2004). *Exploring willingness to communicate (WTC) in English among EFL (English foreign language) students in Korea: WTC as a predictor of success in second language acquisition.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, USA.

Kline, R. B. (2011). *Principles and practice of structural equation modelling* (3rd ed.)*.* New York: The Guilford Press.

MacIntyre, P. D. (2020). Expanding the theoretical base for the dynamics of willingness to communicate. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 10*, 111-131. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2020.10.1.6

MacIntyre, P. D., Baker, S., Clément, R., & Conrod, S. (2001). Willingness to communicate, social support, and language learning orientations of immersion students. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 23,* 369-388. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263101003035

MacIntyre, P. D., Baker, S. C., Clément, R., & Donovan, L. A. (2002). Sex and age effects on willingness to communicate, anxiety, perceived competence, and L2 motivation among junior high school French immersion students. *Language Learning, 52*(3), 537-564. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9922.00194

MacIntyre, P. D., Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualising willingness to communicate in an L2: a situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *Modern Language Journal, 82*, 545-562. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb05543.x

MacIntyre, P. D., & Charos, C. (1996). Personality, attitudes, and affect as predictors of second language communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 15*(1), 3-26. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X960151001

MacIntyre, P. D., & Legatoo, J. J. (2011). A dynamic system approach to willingness to communicate: Developing an idiodynamic method to capture rapidly changing effect. *Applied Linguistics, 32*(2), 149-171. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amq037

McCroskey, J. C. (1992). Reliability and validity of the willingness to communicate scale. *Communication Quarterly, 40*(1), 16-25. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379209369817

McCroskey, J. C., & McCroskey, L. L. (1988). Self-report as an approach to measuring communication competence. *Communication Research Reports, 5*(2), 108-113. https://doi.org/10.1080/08824098809359810

Mesgarshahr, A., & Abdollahzadeh, E. (2014). The impact of teaching communication strategies on EFL learners' WTC. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4*(1), 51-76. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2014.4.1.4.

Mystkowska-Wiertelak, A. (2018). Fluctuations in willingness to communicate during a semester: A case study. *The Language Learning Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2018.1469660

Obeidat, B. Y., Shannak, R. O., Masa'deh, R. e., & Al-Jarrah, I. M. (2012). Toward a better understanding of Arab culture: Implications based on Hofstede's cultural model. European *Journal of Social Sciences, 28*(4), 512-522.

Ortega, L. (2009). *Understanding second language acquisition.* London: Hodder Arnold.

Peng, J. (2014). *Willingness to communicate in Chinese EFL university classroom: An ecological perspective*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Peng, J. E., & Woodrow, L. (2010). Willingness to communicate in English: A model in the Chinese EFL classroom context. *Language Learning, 60*(4), 834-876. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2010.00576.x

Roohani, A., Forootanfar, F., & Hashemian, M. (2017). Effect of input vs. collaborative output tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' grammatical accuracy and willingness to communicate. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics, 8*(2), 71-92.

Schumacker, R. E., & Lomax, R. G. (2004). *A beginner's guide to structural equation modelling* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Sharabi, H. (1977). Impact of class and culture on social behavior: The feudal bourgeois family in Arab society. In L. C. Brown & N. Itzhowitz (Eds.), *Psychological dimensions of near eastern studies* (pp. 24-256). Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press.

Shirvan, M. E., Khajavy, G. H., MacIntyre, P. D., & Taherian, T. (2019). A meta-analysis of L2 willingness to communicate and its three high-evidence correlates. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research, 48*(6), 1241-1267.

Syed, H., & Kuzborska, I. (2019). Understanding the nature of variations in postgraduate learners' willingness to communicate in English. *Cogent Education, 6*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2019.1606487

Turjoman, M. O. (2016). Willingness to communicate in English among Saudi female university students. *International Education Studies, 9*(7). Retrieved August 18, 2020, from the World Wide Web: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1106533.pdf.

Wen, W. P., & Clément, R. (2003). A Chinese conceptualisation of willingness to communicate in ESL. *Language. Culture and Curriculum, 16*(1), 18-38. https://doi.10.1080/07908310308666654

Yashima, T. (2002). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The Japanese EFL context. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*(1), 54-66. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00136

Yashima, T., MacIntyre, P. D., & Ikeda, M. (2018). Situated willingness to communicate in an L2: Interplay of individual characteristics and context. *Language Teaching Research, 22*(1), 115-137.

Yashima, T., Zenuk-Nishide, L., & Shimizu, K. (2004). The influence of attitudes and affect on willingness to communicate and second language communication. *Language Learning, 54*, 119-152. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2004.00250.x