

## FACTORS AFFECTING EFL STUDENTS' UNWILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH IN CAMPUS

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### **Abstract**

*Language learners' willingness to communicate in the target language is the key role in achieving their language learning goals. The notion of 'Willingness to Communicate' (WTC) is a model or concept that integrates psychological, linguistic, and communicative variables in order to describe, explain, and predict foreign or second language communication. This study was conducted to explore the possible factors affecting EFL students' unwillingness to communicate in English in campus. The data were gathered from three research participants using unstructured interview and were analyzed qualitatively using narrative inquiry method and thematic analysis strategy. The findings of this study revealed that the main factors affecting the students' unwillingness to communicate in English during the learning time in campus were linguistic, psycholinguistic, socio-cultural, and institutional factors. And among those major factors, socio-cultural and institutional factors were identified to be the most dominant ones that affected the participants' unwillingness to communicate in English in campus.*

**Keywords:** *English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Narrative inquiry, Willingness to Communicate (WTC)*

### **Abstrak**

*Kemauan mahasiswa jurusan bahasa untuk menggunakan bahasa sasaran dalam berkomunikasi adalah menjadi kunci utama untuk mencapai tujuan mereka mempelajari bahasa tersebut. Konsep kemauan untuk menggunakan bahasa sasaran dalam berkomunikasi adalah merupakan sebuah model yang mengintegrasikan variabel-variabel psikologis, linguistik dan komunikatif untuk mendiskripsikan, menjelaskan dan memprediksi kemampuan berkomunikasi dalam bahasa asing. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi faktor-faktor penyebab mahasiswa jurusan bahasa Inggris merasa enggan berbahasa Inggris dikampus. Data penelitian ini diperoleh dari tiga mahasiswa dengan menggunakan wawancara yang tidak terstruktur dan data tersebut kemudian dianalisa secara kualitatif dengan menggunakan metode 'narrative inquiry' dan strategi analisis tematik. Temuan dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa faktor-faktor utama yang menyebabkan mahasiswa merasa enggan untuk berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris dikampus adalah faktor-faktor linguistik, psikolinguistik, sosial budaya dan institusional. Faktor sosial budaya dan faktor institusional terbukti menjadi dua faktor yang paling berpengaruh terhadap penyebab keengganan mahasiswa untuk berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris dikampus.*

**Kata kunci:** *Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, Narrative inquiry, Kemauan untuk berkomunikasi*

The purpose of language learning is for communication. Therefore, language learners' willingness to communicate in the target language is the key role in achieving their language learning goals since the concept of 'Willingness to Communicate' (WTC) is a model that integrates psychological, linguistic, and communicative variables in order to describe, explain, and predict second or foreign language communication. The same applies to foreign language learning like English language as it is "one of the most important languages in the world" (Baugh & Cable, 2002, p. 3). So, English as foreign language (EFL) learners' willingness to communicate in English during the learning time and process plays an important role in forming and achieving their effective, fluent, and meaningful English speaking skills. Davies and Pearse (2000) stress the importance of communication as "the real success in English teaching and learning is when the learners can actually communicate in English inside and outside the classroom" (cited in Mart, 2012, p. 91). Besides, MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei & Noels (1998) define WTC as "a state of readiness to enter a discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons using a second language" (p. 547) or a foreign language. In brief, the importance of WTC concept is clearly needed to help EFL learners in forming and enhancing their English communication skills.

As a matter of fact, EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate in English has become a common and usual problem found in foreign language teaching learning context. Riasati (2012, p. 1287) argues that a very common problem faced by many language teachers in classroom is the students' unwillingness to speak in the target language. The same also happens to the EFL students at a foreign language academy in Pontianak, Indonesia. This

study, therefore, contributes to exploring the possible reasons or factors affecting the EFL students' unwillingness to communicate in English at the academy during their learning time both inside and outside of the classroom in campus.

McCroskey & Richmond (1987) state that willingness to communicate is the most fundamental orientation toward communication, and they also emphasize that almost anyone is likely to respond to a direct question, but many will not continue or initiate interaction. Then, Jamaledin and Lashkarian (2015, p. 173) argue that willingness to communicate shows learner's optional inclination to be a partner in a conversation that facilitates language learning. Besides, Jamaledin and Lashkarian (2015) add that WTC can be affected by a lot of factors. Cameron (2013, p. 178) also claims that variables such as self-confidence, personality, attitude, international posture, gender and age, and social and learning context have also been isolated as possible affective/individual and social variables which may have an influence on WTC.

Communicative language teaching approach plays an important role in second or foreign language teaching since it is clear that "there is a focus on the use of language for meaningful communication in the process of language learning and acquisition" (Ketabdar et al., 2014, p. 638). Ketabdar et al. (2014) investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and WTC among Iranian EFL learners and the results showed that there was "a positive correlation between WTC and all the four learners' emotional intelligence factors – interpersonal relationship, empathy, emotional self-awareness, and assertiveness" (p. 644). In addition, Alemi et al. (2011) carried out a research to investigate the impact of language anxiety and language proficiency on WTC in EFL context among Iranian EFL learners. Contrary to

previous studies by MacIntyre et al. (2005) and Yashima et al. (2004), the results of Alemi et al.' study showed that "anxiety did not affect the learners' participation in communication (WTC)" (p. 150), so the impact of anxiety on WTC was not proved to be meaningful. In relation to language proficiency, the results of the study revealed that the Iranian university students' WTC was directly related to their language proficiency, which meant that WTC affected the students' language proficiency. But the surprising thing from the results of the study was that more proficient learners showed to be less communicative than less proficient ones outside the classroom. According to Alemi et al. (2011, p. 150), "linguistic variables appear to be more predictive of WTC for Iranian students", and therefore they suggested language instructors to work on the students' English proficiency.

Riasati (2012, p. 1287) claims that modern language pedagogy attaches a lot of importance to communication and training language learners who are able to communicate effectively in the target language. But there are a number of factors that contribute to willingness to communicate in the target language when learning a foreign language, and the contributing factors include "task type, topic of discussion, interlocutor, teacher, class atmosphere, personality and self-perceived speaking ability" (Riasati, 2012, p. 1287).

According to Mahdi (2014, p. 17), "many linguistic and non-linguistic factors play major roles in communication. Specifically, psycholinguistic and socio-cultural factors are quite relevant to willingness to communicate" in English especially in a second or foreign language context. A recent investigation on 'Willingness to Communicate' (WTC) was conducted by Kamprasertwong (2010). He examined how individuals' factors affect

and interact with WTC in English oral production. Another purpose of the study was to determine whether there were any differences in individual backgrounds that influence individuals' WTC in second or foreign language speech. The study was conducted with Thai, Chinese, and Dutch speakers of English in order to determine whether cultural and personality traits affected their WTC.

The more recent studies on WTC have been conducted by Zarrinabadi and Addi (2011) and Barjesteh, Vaseghi, and Neissi (2012). Zarrinabadi and Addi investigated the relation between Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate inside and outside the classroom and their language learning orientations. The authors concluded that language orientations correlate more closely with WTC outside rather than inside the classroom. The study by Barjesteh et al. explored Iranian EFL learners' perceptions of their willingness to initiate communication across four types of contexts and three types of receivers. Barjesteh et al. concluded that Iranian EFL learners were willing to initiate communication in familiar situations such as group discussions or when communicating with their friends; they are less willing to communicate in unfamiliar situations such as public speaking.

According to Clandinin (cited in Yang, 2011, p. 198), "narrative inquiry, or narrative research, is a research methodology that is growing in acceptance and practice in disciplines such as nursing, medicine, and law, and especially organizational studies, therapy in health fields, social work, counselling, psychotherapy, and teaching." Then, Yang (2011, p. 198) states that "narrative inquiry, like other methodologies used by social science researchers, 'inquires' into or asks questions about and looks for deeper understanding of particular aspects of

life experience.” Yang (2011) also claims that when it is viewed as a research method, “narrative inquiry is to inquire into *narrative ways of knowing*” (p. 195). Besides, White (1981) also claims that to ask the question of the nature of narrative as the reflection on the nature of humanity itself (cited in Yang, 2011, p. 200). According to Yang (2011, p. 200), there are “some basic features of narrative extending from humanity.” He also claims that those basic features can be described as primary act of mind, life story, and life history. *As primary act of mind*, narrative is a vital human activity and it crosses all boundaries. *As life story*, humans live by narrative and ‘make up stories’ to live. In other words, narrative is life story. *As life history*, humans as storytelling organisms live not only individual storied lives (‘make up stories about themselves, the personal past and future’) but also social storied lives (‘make up stories about others, the social past and future’). Narrative is a story of life history. In summary, Yang (2011, p. 202) points out that “narrative, viewed as life history, is the language of past-oriented social existence. Viewed as life story, narrative is the future-oriented language of possibility. As a primary act of mind, narrative is the present-oriented language of understanding.” Then Yang (2001) concludes that narrative defined by nature is both human experience and the meaning making (Polkinghorne, 1989; Rosen, 1985), of and for, the past, the present, and the future.

In reference to the nature of narrative discussed above, narrative inquiry used as a research methodology means “to study the ways humans experience the world and how they make meaning out of their experience” (Yang, 2011, p. 202). Yang (2011) draws a conclusion by saying that “narrative inquiry is used as a research methodology to allow the

inquirer/researcher and readers to enter into the experiences of others and serves as a starting point for understanding, interpretation, and imagination” (p. 205).

According to Yang (2011, p. 205), “the study of narrative is of interest to disciplines as diverse as literary criticism, philosophy, anthropology, theology, linguistics, art, psychology, drama and history.” Furthermore, Mitchel (1981) points out that thinking about the problem of narrative has moved beyond the province of the ‘aesthetic’ in poetic, dramatic or fictional narrative to the exploration of the role of narrative in social and psychological formations, particularly in the formation of value and cognition (cited in Yang, 2011, p. 205). Yang (2011) also adds that in terms of cognitive functioning, narrative inquiry aims to produce knowledge of human experience. It is viewed as a research method to inquire into ‘narrative ways of knowing’.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Research method is directly related to the nature of a research study and its objectives. Since the present study was narrative in nature, so qualitative method was employed, to be more specific – narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry involves the collection and development of stories, either as a form of data collection or as a means of structuring a research project. Informants often speak in a story form during the interviews, and as the researcher, listening and attempting to understand, we hear their ‘stories’. The research method can be described as narrative “when data collection, interpretation and writing are considered a ‘meaning making’ process with similar characteristics to stories” (Gudmundsdottir, 1996, p. 295).

### **Research Setting**

This study was conducted at a foreign language academy located in Pontianak, in the region of West Kalimantan, Indonesia. In this research study, 'Borneo Foreign Language Academy' (pseudonym) is used to identify this particular institution.

### **Research Participants**

The participants of the present study were three students of the English study program of Borneo Foreign Language Academy who were studying at the academy in the academic year 2015/2016. Those three students were selected using purposive sampling technique. The first participant was from the second semester class, the second participant was from the fourth semester class, and the third one was from the sixth semester class. This small number of students was selected because it was a manageable group for conducting an in-depth investigation.

### **Instrument for Data Collection**

The present study employed unstructured interview as the instrument for data collection (interview recordings). This technique was selected because it allows the researcher considerable flexibility to probe the views and opinions of the participants and gives the researcher the opportunity to gain deep information about the phenomena being investigated (Corbetta, 2003). The interviews were tape-recorded and supported by field notes written by the researcher during each interview. The interviews lasted for about one and a half hours for each participant.

### **Techniques for Data Analysis**

The data of the present study was analyzed qualitatively by interpreting and narrating the participants' stories in narrative inquiry approach. The data analysis involved the process of data

reduction, selection and simplification (Creswell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To conduct this analysis work, the data (interview transcripts) were coded according to the key themes, development of clusters, and analysis based on the literature and emerging themes.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Research Findings**

The findings of the present study were reported under two major parts, which was discussed in the 'Discussion of Research Findings' below.

### **Discussion of Research Findings**

The discussion of findings was done by narrating (1) the summary of interview results and (2) the factors affecting the research participants' unwillingness to communicate in English in campus respectively.

#### **(1) Summary of the Interview Results**

The summary of interview results was coded according to the key themes, development of clusters, and analysis as follows.

### **Participants' Main Purpose of Choosing English Major, English Competence Level, and English Speaking Ability**

Basically all of the participants had more or less the same main purposes of choosing English major as they admitted that they chose English major because they liked English and they wanted to improve their English skills. The participants' English competence levels were in the range of 'quite good until good level' or from low intermediate until low advanced level and their English speaking ability was also in the range of 'quite good until good level'.

### **Frequency of Time for Participants to Communicate in English inside and outside the Classroom**

All of the participants claimed that they always tried to speak in English in the classroom especially with their lecturers, but they seldom talked in English with their friends because only some of their friends that replied them in English when they spoke to their friends in English. All of the participants also claimed that they seldom talked in English outside the classroom because most of their friends preferred using their mother tongue (Chinese) or the national language (Bahasa) to English so they just followed their friends to speak in Bahasa or Chinese. There were a very limited number of students that were willing to speak in English with them outside the classroom.

### **Frequency of Time for Participants to Communicate in English Each Day and Most Frequently-Spoken Language in Campus**

All of the participants confessed that they usually spoke in English in campus both inside and outside the classroom for about two until three hours each day on average, and they also honestly admitted that the language which was used most often by most of the students in campus was Chinese (the Chinese students' mother tongue) because most of the students of the academy were Chinese.

### **The Most Comfortable Situation or Time for the Participants to Practice Speaking English inside the Classroom and Most Preferred Activities Done by Them to Improve Their English Skills outside the Classroom**

All of the participants confessed that their most comfortable time or situation for them to practice their English communication skills was when they were in small groups because they

could feel more relaxed and more freely to express (e.g. asking, answering, or sharing) whatever they had in their minds to their group members. And to improve their English skills and more specifically their English speaking skills, the participants usually practiced speaking English with some certain friends, watching English movies, listening to English songs, and chatting with English speaking friends from foreign countries.

### **Feeling Afraid of Being Mocked or Corrected by Other People**

When communicating in English, one of the participants (Ana) confessed that she just felt 'a bit afraid' of being mocked by her friends, but two of the participants (Budi and Paul) claimed that they did not feel afraid of being mocked by the lecturers or their friends when communicating in English in campus. One of the participants (Ana) felt happy if someone corrected her mistakes while she was speaking in English because she could understand about her mistakes which could help her improve her English skills, but Budi and Paul felt a bit annoyed at first though in the end they admitted that it was good for them when someone tried to correct their mistakes while they were speaking English because it would improve their English skills.

### **Participants' Self-Confidence in Speaking English and Their Feelings When Talking Directly to English Speaking People**

The participants' self-confidence in speaking English was in the range of quite confident until very confident (two of them felt quite confident and one felt very confident). All of the participants confessed that would feel happy if they had the chance to talk directly to English speaking People since they could have the real experience of communicating in

English with the native speakers of English.

#### **Participants' Opinion on the Importance of English Speaking Practice and Their Opinions about Their Friends' WTC in English**

All of the participants agreed that practicing or communicating more often in English would really improve their English skills especially their English speaking skills, and all of them also confessed that most of their friends were not really willing to communicate in English in campus as they confessed that most of the students seldom practiced speaking English among themselves and most of them preferred using their mother or the national language.

#### **Participants' Opinion about Their Friends' English Speaking Ability and Their Opinions on someone's Grammar Ability in Relation to Speaking Ability**

All of the participants admitted that their English speaking ability and their friends' (other students) were generally more or less the same and they all claimed that someone's good English grammar would not guarantee his or her English speaking skills.

#### **Participants' Opinions about the Influences of Their Friends and seniors on Them to Communicate in English in Campus**

The three participants honestly admitted that most of their friends did not influence them much to communicate in English in campus as they clearly confessed that most of their friends seldom talked in English in campus, but they clearly confessed that some of their senior students played an important role in motivating and influencing them to speak English more often in campus because when they saw and heard some of their seniors speaking in English they also felt motivated to

speak in English more often. However, when they saw most of their seniors speak in Bahasa or their mother tongue they felt demotivated and it could also make them feel uneasy to always speak in English.

#### **Participants' Opinion about Their Lecturers' Support and Influence on Them**

Basically, all of the participants agreed that the lecturers supported and motivated them to communicate in English especially when they were in the classroom though two of them (Budi and Paul) emphasized that there were still certain lecturers that did not always give good motivation in the right way. For example, Budi claimed that certain lecturers had a tendency in criticizing the students in a harsh way when they (the students) made mistakes when communicating in English which could make the students feel demotivated to communicate more often in English. Budi also added that certain lecturers still applied teacher-oriented way when they taught. And Paul also added that certain lecturers still used Bahasa in the classroom when they taught and it was not a good example or model for the students.

#### **Influences of the Institution on Participants' WTC in English in Campus**

According to the participants, the institution played a big role in influencing their WTC in English in campus. About the lecturers' influence, the three participants confessed that basically all of the lecturers influenced them to communicate in English because when the lecturers came into the class and they taught in English, the students felt more motivated to speak more often in English. The participants also admitted that the lecturers often motivated and encouraged the students to communicate in English though some

certain lecturers often criticized the students in a harsh way when they made mistakes. For the facilities, all of the participants admitted that the facilities of the institution were already good. But for the rules, the three participants clearly confessed that the rules at the academy were not really clear and strict yet. And for the environment atmosphere, all of the participants strongly claimed that the environment atmosphere was not supportive for them to practice communicating more in English. They also added that the environment atmosphere became the most influential factor which influenced their unwillingness to communicate in English in campus.

### **Participants' Suggestions to the Institution**

All of the participants suggested that the academy (institution) should have clearer and strict rules in the future time. They all hoped that there would be a fixed rule which would state and require all of the lecturers and students to use English all the time especially during the learning time process in the class and they hoped the lecturers to have an authority to give a kind of punishment for the students if they use Bahasa or their mother tongue in class. They also suggested the lecturers to always motivate the students to communicate in English by starting from themselves. They should give a model for the students by always speaking English when they teach in the class and when they are outside the class as well. One of the participants also suggested that all of the lecturers should always try to teach in a more communicative way in order that more students would get involved during the teaching and learning process and have more opportunities to practice speaking English. And the last suggestion from one of the participants was that it would be better if the academy could employ

English speaking person or people to teach at the academy since it could influence the students to practice communicating in English more often because the students would feel more interested to talk to English speaking people.

### **(2) Factors Affecting the Research Participants' Unwillingness to Communicate in English in Campus**

The factors that affected the research participants' unwillingness to communicate in English in campus were as follows.

#### **Linguistic Factor**

Though it was not the biggest factor, linguistic factor was still one of the factors that influenced the participants to feel unwilling to communicate more often in English in campus sometimes. Take for example the first participant's confession, Ana honestly admitted that she sometimes felt unwilling to speak more often in English because she occasionally had a bit difficulty in using the right grammar (still lack of English grammar knowledge), lacking of vocabularies, mispronouncing some English words, and other sorts of things.

#### **Psycholinguistic Factors**

Psycholinguistic factors, like feeling a bit shy and feeling uneasy, were the second factor that influenced the participants' unwillingness to communicate in English in campus. Ana, for example, admitted honestly that she sometimes felt a bit shy to communicate more often in English because she was afraid of making mistakes though she clearly confessed that it was normal to make mistakes in language learning especially a foreign language. All of the participants confessed that they felt uneasy to always speak in English with their friends



because they were afraid of being judged as 'showing-off' or 'arrogant' type by their friends. They all admitted that this kind of uneasy feeling always haunted them when they tried to always communicate in English with their friends.

### **Socio-cultural Factor**

Socio-cultural factor became the third factor affecting the participants' unwillingness to communicate in English in campus because all of the participants claimed that most of the students of the academy were Chinese and in fact they preferred using their mother tongue most of the time in campus. This kind of habit or culture really influenced the participants' unwillingness to communicate in English because they felt demotivated to communicate more often in English when they saw most of their friends use their mother tongue. In short, the three participants confessed that this kind of situation became one of the most influential factors affecting their unwillingness to communicate more in English in campus.

### **Institutional Factors**

Institutional factors like unclear rules of the institution and lecturer teaching styles became the fourth factor that affected the participants' unwillingness to communicate in English in campus because all of the participants admitted that the rules of the institution were not really clear and strict. The institution did not have clear and strict rules which required all of the lecturers and the students to always speak in English especially during the teaching and learning time in the classroom. Besides, there were no clear consequences for those who broke the rules. The participants also claimed that some certain lecturers still applied lecturer-oriented teaching style; which meant that the lecturers were more

active than the students during the teaching and learning process took place. This teaching style did not give more opportunities for the students to practice their English communication skills in the class. In addition, one the participants also claimed that there were certain lecturers who tended to criticize the students in a harsh way if the students made mistakes when they communicated in English. This kind of action would demotivate the students to communicate more often in English. The students would prefer to be less active during the class process since they were scared of being criticized if they made mistakes. Furthermore, one of the participants also claimed that some certain lecturers were still inconsistent in giving good model for the students. For example, the lecturers did not consistently use English during class process because they sometimes followed the students to speak in Bahasa when the students asked them questions in Bahasa. As a good role model the lecturers should always speak in English in class though some students asked them in Bahasa. These institutional factors were also said (by the participants) to be one of the most influential factors affecting their unwillingness to communicate more often in English.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the present study, it could be concluded that the major factors which affected the participants to feel unwilling to communicate more often in English in campus were linguistic factors (e.g. lack of English grammar knowledge, lack of vocabularies, improper pronunciation, and other sorts of things), psycholinguistic factors (e.g. feeling a bit shy of making mistakes and feeling

uneasy of being judged as ‘showing-off’ person), socio-cultural factor (i.e. the majority of the students were Chinese and they preferred using their mother tongue most of the time in campus), and institutional factors (e.g. no clear and strict rules, lecturers’ teaching styles, lecturers’ inappropriate way of criticizing students’ mistakes, and lecturers’ inconsistency in speaking English).

Socio-cultural and institutional factors were identified to be the most dominant factors affecting the students’ unwillingness to communicate in English in campus. Therefore, to increase the students’ willingness to communicate in English, the academy needs to have a clearer and stricter rule which requires all the lecturers and students to always and consistently use English inside and outside the classroom as well. This can be started from the lecturers themselves, they have to use English all the time consistently when teach in class and when they are outside the classroom as well. The academy also needs to consider the consequences for those who break the stated rule(s). All of the lecturers need to apply more communicative teaching style in order that the students get involved as much as possible during the teaching and learning process. All of the lecturers need to create better class atmosphere by providing more interesting topic discussion, having more small-group tasks, avoiding negative comments for students’ mistakes, and becoming good role models for the students.

### **Suggestions**

In reference to the conclusion stated above, the following suggestions were provided. In this era of communication, the importance of

communication is really needed by people when they want to share opinions, ideas, and information with others. Therefore, modern language teaching approaches need to pay more attention it (communication) since the main aim of the modern language teaching approaches is to train and educate students who can use appropriate forms of a language in different real occasions. The starting point can be begun from creating good rapport and atmosphere between the teachers and students which lead to raising the students’ willingness to communicate more in the target language.

The concept of ‘Willingness to Communicate’ in the target language has a really close relation to modern language teaching learning approaches. As MacIntyre et al. (1998) claim that the fundamental aim of language instruction is to promote language learners’ willingness to make meaningful intercultural encounters in the target language.

The pedagogical implications of WTC are clearly related to and important for foreign language teachers and students because the importance of WTC in the target language and the key role it can play in fostering one’s ability to communicate effectively and meaningfully are really needed. Since the aim of language pedagogy is to train language learners who become autonomous enough to be able to communicate effectively and confidently both inside and outside language classrooms, it is crucial to encourage them to increase their WTC and help them get rid of the obstacles in their way.

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