



Individual Factors Affecting Learner's Willingness to Speak in EFL Classroom

Suhartini Syukri¹, Sri Wahyuni², Azwar Abidin³

¹ Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kendari, Indonesia.

² Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kendari, Indonesia

³ Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kendari, Indonesia

Corresponding email: suhartinisukri@gmail.com

Article info

Submitted : January 26th, 2024

Revised : January 30th, 2024

Accepted : January 31st, 2024

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aims at investigating what individual factors affecting learners Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in EFL classroom. Data were generated using reflection which were distributed to 15 learners of the fifth semester at the English Education program in one of universities in Southeast Sulawesi. The researcher analyzed the learners' reflection using thematic analysis (TA) through coding the data by underlining code and conceptual framework of WTC. The study result shows that several individual factors were identified as having an influence on learners' willingness to speak, including perceived opportunity to communicate, emotions, interest, anxiety, feeling of insecurity, self-confidence, L2 proficiency and personalities. This study implies that these nine individual factors were found to be influential in effecting students' WTC in English in this particular study, and the teachers need to pay more attention to these factors in providing instructions in EFL classroom.

Keywords: *English foreign language classroom; English foreign language learners; individual factors; willingness to communicate.*

INTRODUCTION

In language classrooms, student's communicative competence is the essential goal of modern language teaching. Following the communicative approach, language teachers are eager to have learners willing to use the language in class and desire to initiate communication. Students' volitional decision to engage in L2 communication with a specific person or group is the notion of willingness to participate in verbal communication (WTC) by MacIntyre, Dornyei, et al., (1998). WTC in language teaching has been explored in the last 20 years. It was primarily concerned with classroom issues (Amiryousefi, 2016; Miller & Pearson, 2013; Riasati & Rahimi, 2018; Shen & Byfield, 2018; Syed & Kuzborska, 2020; Zarrinabadi et al., 2014) applied the WTC construct to second-language communication and proposed situational models of second-language WTC where it is essential to reveal learners' communication psychology and promote communication engagement in class. Amiryousefi (2016) also expounded that WTC gives



students opportunities to get involved in the communicative tasks to facilitate their language learning and to improve their communicative abilities.

In Indonesian EFL context, a research study was done by Amalia et al., (2019) examined Indonesian learners' perspectives on their willingness to communicate. They revealed that classroom systems such as teaching strategies, social and classroom context, linguistic competence, and individual differences affect participants' WTC in L2. Another research done by Riasati and Rahimi (2018) focuses on factors engendering Iranian EFL learners' willingness to speak English in a language classroom. They found that several factors were identified as influencing learners' willingness to speak, including the topic of discussion, the effect of interlocutor, shyness, self-confidence, teacher, and classroom atmosphere. In another place, a study about WTC was also conducted in Surabaya, Indonesia by Shen & Byfield (2019). His study focuses on increasing students' communication through the tasks-based instruction method. The results reveal that learners' WTC fluctuates during three task performances in conjunction with variables that interplay and interconnect one to another.

Those all previous studies focus on willingness to communicate as a facilitation to the learning process to increase students' opportunity for practice in the second language and authentic language use and most of those studies have shown that one of the strongest predictors of WTC is an individual factor (Freiermuth & Ito, 2020). However, the research about the factor that affects students' WTC is still less especially the study that focuses on the individual factor that affects student's WTC. As Fadilah (2018) state that students' reasons for willingness to communicate are interesting and challenging issues to discuss. With this motivation, the study about Willingness to communicate dealing with individual factors needs to be done because the individual factor is one of the main factors that affect student's unwillingness to communicate. Therefore, the more knowledge about individual factors on students' WTC that contribute to the learner's willingness to speak, the teachers can be in a better position to take steps to create an environment that builds up learners' willingness to speak Riasati and Rahimi (2018). Therefore, this study focuses on the individual factor of student's willingness to communicate. This study is expected to be a reference for teachers teaching in the classroom.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research used qualitative which is a method that does not test the hypothesis but it describes the information as it is in accordance with the variables under study. By design, the qualitative research is getting much more information about students WTC especially the individual factor which affects their willingness to communicate. This study focused to look at individual factors which affect students WTC when learning English in the Speaking class in one of university in Southeast Sulawesi, Kendari.

This study utilizes Reflection as an instrument to collect data that can answer the research questions. The reflective practice helps students' link knowledge with practice and develops a sense of ethical management (Khajavy et al., 2016). Data will be analyzed descriptively by identifying individual factors that make students willing to speak in class. After downloading the data which has been presented in Excel form, the gathered data was analyzed using the technique



of analyzing data by Braun and Clarke (2017) that is Thematic Analysis (TA) where they argued that thematic analysis is the useful and flexibel qualitative analytic approach to find a theme in qualitative research which conduct by identifying patterns and themes within the result. Moreover to analyze some themes of categorization as the research findings, the reasearchers interpreted the data and analized them using MacIntyre et al., (1998) WTC framework, then compared or contrast the data with the previous studies and additionally insight form some experts relates to the individual factors of students WTC in speaking class.

Therefore, based on TA in analyzing the data, there are several phases that the researchers used in this study; (1) reading all documents to transcribe it easier to find themes of the data related to Individual factor affect students WTC in ; (2) highlighting, labelling, collating, and also taking note for several important answers which related with individuals factors themes; (3) searching and identifying themes which is analyzed at the broader level of themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and categorizing themes of the data; and (6) reporting which the themes need to embedded within analytical narrative that provides a clear interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2017) narrated by 11 participants on their reflection. In addition, the data was organizing the findings using WTC framework of MacIntyre et al., (1998) to elaborate the factors affecting students' WTC. The data displayed by excerpt pseudonymous showing the reflection, then they were linked to the theoretical framework to explore more in discussion.

RESULT

The findings show three themes made up motivational propensities that contributed to the students WTC are Perceived Opportunity to Communicate (POC) ($N=6$, 12,76%), students' interest ($N=4$, 8,51%) and self confidence ($N=11$, 23,40%). Next, three factors made up the affective context such as anxiety ($N=4$, 8,51%), feeling of insecurity ($N=4$, 8,51%) and emotions ($N=1$, 2,12%). In cognitive context, researcher found L2 proficiency vocabulary ($N=11$, 23,40%) also affect students WTC. and the last theme is Personal Characteristic which are extravert ($N=2$, 4,20%) and introvert ($N=4$, 8,51%).

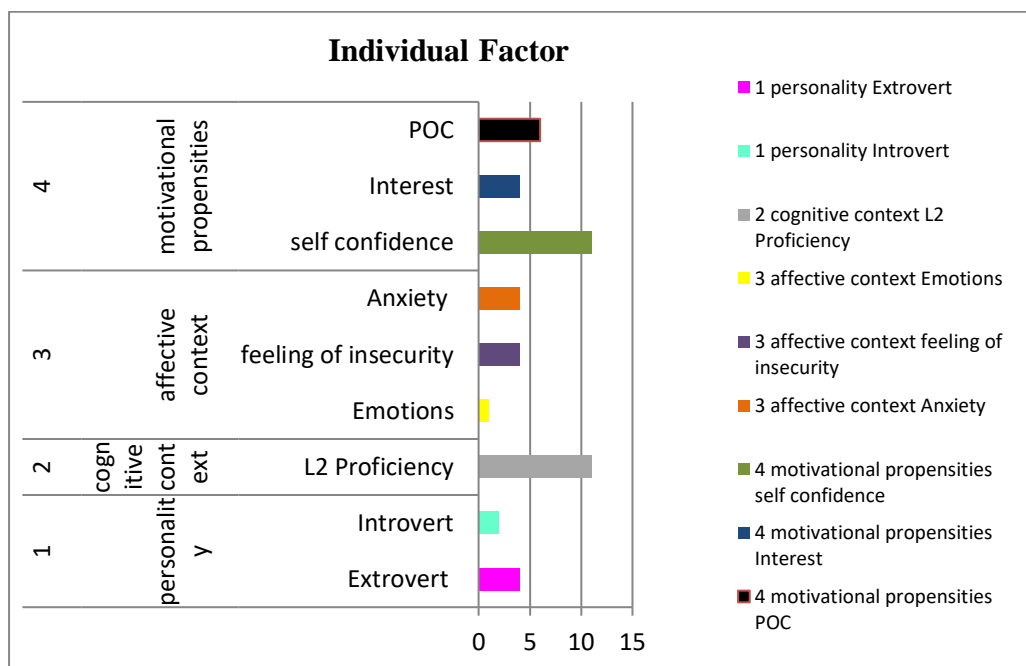


Figure 4.1. Individual Factors Affected students WTC

Motivational Propensities

Data from participants was analyzed using the thematic approach by identifying patterns and themes within the finding. Motivational Propensities identified in this study included perceived opportunity, interest, and self-confidence.

Perceived Opportunity to Communicate

Students' L2 use strongly depended on their perception of the opportunity to talk. The majority of the students reported that their L2 WTC was dependent on their interlocutors, especially the teacher, for the opportunities. The following comments were translated into English:

"I chose this because in class the lecturer provides space for us as the recipient of the information in class to speak" (P11 OF Q1A)

For instance, the data above show that P6, P9, and P11 use L2 because their lecturer gives them opportunity to communicate. Those participant said the lecturer provides the opportunity for them to prepare the topic they want to talk. To build students' WTC, lecturers do not limit the topics they can talk about. They can give their personal opinion, tell about their experiences and



other knowledge that they don't get in the classroom. It indicates that the teacher's role in providing opportunities for students to speak greatly affects student participation in speaking in class. Some students with big fearness sometimes don't have the initiative to show their hands, but when the teacher deliberately provides opportunities to talk and doesn't limit the topic, students are happy to take part in communicating in class because the students feel that the lecturer supports them to communicate.

Students Interest

There was students' statement based on their interest in participating in classroom communication as follows:

"Interest is certainly an important factor because it can influence someone to prepare and appear to speak in front of the class" (P15 of Q1G)

"I'm also lazy to talk, especially if the topic that is delivered actually looks boring to me" (P9 of Q2)

Those data above indicate that all of the participants above agree that interest is one of the factors that support their WTC. When students feel uninterested with the topic, the lecturer, or the class atmosphere, it will lower their mood in learning. They will not engage in communication if there is nothing that makes them interested in talking. This often happens to introverted students. On the other hand, if students have a great interest in something, their enthusiasm will also increase. For example, students who previously did not like to talk, when they find an interesting topic, they will be enthusiastic about learning the topic and enthusiastically participate in class communication.

Self Confidence

Another affective factor related to participants' WTC was self-confidence. As we know, people with a strong sense of self-confidence can face difficulties and have the courage and determination to overcome difficulties. As P4 narrated in the data below:

".....and even though the answer is correct, I am not confident with my English skill, which I feel are still lacking. I sometimes can't find the right vocabulary words to describe the ideas in my head." (P6 of Q1E)

As P5 narrated in the data above, her confidence depends on their ideas. Sometimes some students feel confident to speak but when they realize the idea they have which is not good, they prefer to not express the idea. Similarly with P5, P6 also stated that actually he already has some ideas to talk but he does feel not confident with his English proficiency. When he wants to say something, he can not find the appropriate vocabulary to express his ideas.

Affective context

The results showed that affective factors were another set of factors underpinning the emerging patterns of participants' WTC. The most frequently mentioned obstacle concerning WTC was emotion, anxiety, and feeling insecurity.

Emotion

Positive or negative emotions also affected students' WTC. The positive feeling included empathy and good mood, while the negative feelings involved feeling hurt, sadness and shyness.



For example, some students avoided speaking because they do not want to get hurt by their classmates' responses when they do mistakes while speaking.

"Sometimes I try to talk, but the fear of being wrong and the fear of being laughed at as my first trying makes my nervousness even bigger."(P14 of Q1F)

As P14 said that sometimes their classmates laugh at them when they make mistakes when speaking. So on the next chance, they prefer to not speak anymore because of such bad experience which made them have a bad feeling when they want to start speaking. It indicates that negative emotions are one of the factors affect students WTC. when the student's try to speaking in front of many people certainly requires a lot of courage. However, if previously there was a bad experience such as being laughed at when making mistakes, that experience made the courage to speak disappear and be replaced with negative emotions. where they would have guessed that the same thing would happen as before. And to anticipate the same thing happening twice, the students choose not to speak at all.

Anxiety

Anxiety worked as the most debilitating affective factor. Most importantly students' anxiety was mainly related to contextual factors such as real or anticipated fear of the teacher or classmates' criticism and jokes, lack of perceived competence, and lack of preparation for the topic.

The most frequently cited anxiety included the teacher's or classmates' attitude. For example,

"I have fearness and shame if I make a mistake. I don't want to be laughed at by friends or even used as a mockery when my pronunciation is wrong."(P11 of Q1F)

As P11 narrated on data above that the students avoided communication due to their classmates' attitudes. The students are afraid to make mistakes and end up embarrassing themselves in front of their friends. It's natural for their friends to laugh when they make mistakes, but it has an impact on students' anxiety levels. Next time, when they want to start to talk, anxiety will arise. They were afraid of being laughed at like before. They fear negative comments and then losing face when they make mistakes while speaking.

Feeling of insecurity

Another source of anxiety was associated with the students' feeling of insecurity which stemmed from the students' shyness when they have to speak with a friend that has a higher level than them. As P8 narrated in the quotes below how she felt insecure when she knows her friend she want to talk has a higher level than her.

"Sometimes when talking with peers I feel less confident, especially when my friends have a higher level." (P8 of Q1J)

The data above indicate that Insecurity arises because students often compare their abilities with others. Students who can overcome their insecurity well can improve their learning abilities, but on the other hand, students who cannot overcome their insecurity will increasingly avoid the opportunity to speak because they are constantly inferior in their abilities.



Cognitive Factor

In this study, the researcher found L2 proficiency as the main factor which affects students' L2 Fluency. L2 proficiency refers to participants' ability to comprehend or produce L2 vocabulary or grammatical structures at a given moment in the conversation. When difficulty occurred in comprehension, either listening or reading, the participant reported that it affected their willingness to talk and consequently they prefer to be silent. As P11 reported:

"I sometimes don't speak because I don't understand what the lecturer is saying. And when I didn't understand, there was an urge to ask questions regarding the material that had been given."(P11 of Q2)

The quotes above indicate that vocabulary plays an important role in students' WTC, when the students lack of vocabulary, they will not be able to express the idea. They will find it difficult to determine what vocabulary is suitable for expressing the sentences they have compiled. Some students agree that vocabulary determines their fluency in speaking English. so that if they feel their vocabulary is still very lacking, communication in class will also be hampered. And in the end, this lack of vocabulary makes students lose confidence to communicate in class.

Personal Characteristics

Introverted learners are quiet and shy and lack of confidence in class participation, and sometimes are nervous when start to communicate. As P6, P13 and P14 reported:

"I am an introvert and also only talk when there is something that needs to be asked"(P6 of Q1B)

"I prefer to pay attention when people talk rather than having to take the opportunity to speak in class"(P13 of Q2)

"So far I have never taken the initiative to speak during class. Because I don't want to be the center of attention when I talk and I'm worried if I make a mistake what I will say is different from the topic being discussed." (P14 of Q2)

P6 are lazy to start communication. Sometimes he participates in communication but only when he doesn't understand the topic that day and needs to ask. Similarly with P6, P13 and P14 also prefer to be silent students. They just pay attention when the lecture explains the topic but they don't take the opportunity to speak in class. They are ashamed to be the center of attention and also they felt worried when they made mistakes while speaking

DISCUSSION

Motivational propensities

To begin with, the first three individual factors are Perceived opportunity to communicate (POC), interest and self-confidence are as in the layer IV of WTC pyramid by MacIntyre, Dornyei, et al., (1998) as motivational propensities. From the data, the researcher found POC and interest as interpersonal motivation where this factor is from person to person which are the students and the teacher, and also affects by situational conditions such as us the topic of discussion. Then, self confidence in layer IV means the confidence between the person and L2 and they feel competent and willing to use L2.



On the other hand, students who had less self-confidence tended to underestimate their abilities. The findings showed that the participants with less self-confidence tend to perform fearful hardship and hold a passive attitude. They fear they cannot find the appropriate words to express their ideas and finally they would choose to keep silent during the most of class time. The students' confidence depends on their ideas. Sometimes the students want to participate in class, but when they realize they have such an ordinary idea, finally they prefer to be silent. On the other hand, when the students have a good idea to talk they are also confused about how to deliver the idea. They do not find the appropriate vocabulary to express it. This result is in line with Wood (2016) who stated that students' self-confidence has influenced the degree of their class participation.

Affective context

The finding shows that in this affective context, the researcher found three individual factors which affect students WTC. These factors are anxiety, feeling of insecurity and students' emotions as in the layer V of WTC pyramid by MacIntyre, Dornyei, et al., (1998). The most frequently mentioned obstacle concerning WTC was anxiety caused by peers, lack of competence, and lack of preparation. Some students did not engage in communication because they avoided being criticized by their classmates. The students were losing face in front of other students when mistakes were made and those fears increased students' anxiety. Montazeri and Salimi, (2019) stated that the arousal of anxiety causes an increase in self-focused attention and distraction. In addition, students who have anxiety are always preoccupied with other evaluations and fear rejection. Also, they tend to have less self-confidence and too much self-focused attention (Lee & Lee, 2020).

On the other hand, students' emotions have a substantial effect on the quality of classroom communication. Positive or negative emotions also affected students' L2 WTC. In this study, some participants showed negative feelings such as shyness, sadness, and feeling hurt. Some participants avoided to speak because they do not want to get hurt by their classmates' responses when they do mistake while speak. When they felt such negative emotions like shyness or fearness, it makes the students prefer to be silent and lose the chance to participate in the classroom. That is supported by Bruce & Hansso (2011) who reported that the students are over-concerned with making mistakes and being negatively evaluated by others and that the fear of making mistakes increases the chance of losing one's face.

Cognitive Context

This study revealed linguistic factor that is second language proficiency (L2 proficiency) as in the layer V of WTC pyramid by MacIntyre, Dornyei, et al., (1998). This study found that vocabulary plays an important role in Students WTC. Vocabulary is one of the most important skills in a language. This finding was supported by Buckingham & Alpaslan (2017) who stated that Vocabulary is one of the components of language exists without word. Word is symbols for ideas. They are the means by which people exchange their thought. The more words we learn, the more ideas we should have to that we can communicate the ideas more effectively.



Personal Characteristics

Another factor that the participants described and contributing to their degree of willingness to speak is their personal characteristic which is introverted and extroverted. This study found that in class participation, the extraverted students have a stronger sense of participation, and are willing to talk. Freiermuth and Ito (2020) clearly stated that extroverted students get more language input and communication opportunity in class owing to their characteristic traits. They can absorb what they have learned through extensive try and practice. Extroverted learners are good at communication.

Introverted learners, on the other hand, are quiet and shy and lack of confidence in their studies. They are easier to get anxious when coming to answering questions. However it is supported by Riasati and Rahimi (2018) who stated that another important factor is the student's personality, some students are shy by nature and prefer to be silent, but some others are very active and like to talk all the time. Some students do not have enough self-confidence and they think their English and their speaking is not good enough, so they are afraid of speaking.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion is drawn based on the findings of the data analysis. The study exposed the individual factors that affect students' willingness to speak in EFL classrooms. This study found four categorized individual factors which are motivational propensities, affective context, cognitive context, and personal characteristics. The motivational propensities include a perceived opportunity to communicate, interest, and self-confidence. Then, the affective context includes students' anxiety, students' feelings of insecurity, and students' emotions. Then, the cognitive context includes vocabulary. The last personal characteristic includes extrovert and introvert. It was shown that these factors influence learners' willingness to speak English in Speaking Class. It should be noted that these nine individual factors did not always affect each student's WTC because each student had their own factors that influenced his or her WTC. Nevertheless, these nine factors were found to be influential in affecting students' WTC in English in this particular study.

In addition, based on the results and discussion of this study it also can be concluded the most individual factors which affect students' willingness to communicate are self-confidence and vocabulary. Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basic for how well learners speak, listen, read and write. Students who are able in speaking, confidence is needed in speaking and vocabulary is one of the key to success in the language. Mastery adequate vocabulary and have confident in speaking will make students are willing to communicate.

REFERENCES

- Amalia, S. N., Asib, A., & Marmanto, S. (2019). Indonesian EFL learners' willingness to communicate in the instructional context. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 4(2), 215–228. <https://doi.org/10.21462/ijefl.v4i2.167>
- Amiryousefi, M. (2016). Willingness to communicate, interest, motives to communicate with the instructor, and L2 speaking: a focus on the role of age and gender. *Innovation in Language Learning*

- and Teaching, 12(3), 221–234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2016.1170838>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2017). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Applied Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-35913-1>
- Bruce, B., & Hansso, K. (2011). Promoting peer interaction. *Autism Spectrum Disorders - From Genes to Environment*, 16, 313–327. <https://doi.org/10.5772/20034>
- Buckingham, L., & Alpaslan, R. S. (2017). Promoting speaking proficiency and willingness to communicate in Turkish young learners of English through asynchronous computer-mediated practice. *System*, 65, 25–37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.12.016>
- Fadilah, E. (2018). Willingness to communicate from Indonesian learners' perspective: A dynamic complex system theory. *Journal of ELT Research*, 3(2), 168–185. <https://doi.org/10.22236/JER>
- Freiermuth, M. R., & Ito, M. F. (2020). Seeking the source: The effect of personality and previous experiences on university students' L2 willingness to communicate. *Learning and Motivation*, 71, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lmot.2020.101640>
- Khajavy, G. H., Ghonsooly, B., Fatemi, A. H., & 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/10.1002/tesq.204>
- Lee, J. S., & Lee, K. (2020). Role of L2 motivational self system on willingness to communicate of Korean EFL university and secondary students. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 49(1), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10936-019-09675-6>
- MacIntyre, P. D., Dörnyei, Z., Clement, R., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: a situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82(4), 545–562. <https://doi.org/10.2307/330224>
- MacIntyre, P. D., Dörnyei, Z., Clément, R., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to a L2: Communicate in confidence model situational. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82(4), 545–562.
- Miller, A., & Pearson, J. (2013). Can I Talk to You? The Effects of Instructor Position, Nationality, and Teaching Style on Students' Perceived Willingness to Communicate and on Teacher Evaluations. *Communication Quarterly*, 61(1), 18–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2012.719059>
- Montazeri, M., & Salimi, E. A. (2019). Assessing motivation to speak (MTS) and willingness to communicate through metalinguistic corrective feedback. *Learning and Motivation*, 68, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lmot.2019.101594>
- Riasati, M. J., & Rahimi, F. (2018). Situational and individual factors engendering willingness to speak English in foreign language classrooms. *Cogent Education*, 5(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2018.1513313>
- Shen, X., & Byfield, L. (2019). Promoting english learners' willingness to communicate in content-area classrooms. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 91(6), 250–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2018.1541856>
- Syed, H., & Kuzborska, I. (2020). Dynamics of factors underlying willingness to communicate in a second language. *Language Learning Journal*, 48(4), 481–500. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2018.1435709>
- Wood, D. (2016). Willingness to communicate and second language speech fluency: An idiodynamic investigation. *System*, 60, 11–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.05.003>
- Zarrinabadi, N., Ketabi, S., & Abdi, R. (2014). Facilitating willingness to communicate in the second language classroom and beyond. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 87(5), 213–217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2014.924895>