Willingness to Communicate in English: An Interview Study with Indonesian Vocational High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Research into willingness to communicate in English has gained momentum in second/foreign language learning recently. Applied linguists have argued for the factors that may hinder learners to communicate in English. However, although extensive studies on willingness to communicate in English have been carried out, the studies have much focused on university and high school students. As a result, very little is known about the hindrances of students' willingness to communicate in English in the context of vocational high schools. To fill such a lacuna, this study was designed to explore hindrances of willingness to communicate in English among Indonesian vocational high school students. In-depth interviews were conducted with 6 participants from three Indonesian vocational high schools with regard to the hindrances they encountered when communicating in English. To analyze the data, we employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. Findings from the study suggest four emerging themes: 1) lack of self-confidence, 2) presence of fear, 3) teacher's teaching style, 4) and vocabulary provision. Our study reveals that, even though the participants are aware of the problems, situated supports in the forms of out-of-class English communications are needed to help solve their hindrances in English communications. Pedagogical implications of this study are offered at the end of this article.

Keywords: EFL students; second/foreign language learning; vocational high school; willingness to communicate in English

1. Introduction

In recent years, the ability to speak foreign languages, especially English, is one of the main factors to be able to compete globally. This is because English is one of the most important international languages to master or learn (Ubaidillah, 2018). In addition, the ability to speak good English also has a significant influence on the development of communicative skills in each individual (Setyan et al., 2020; Wijaya, 2015). With adequate mastery of English language skills, each individual not only is able to express their ideas, feelings, and desires both orally and in writing but also explore the required knowledge which is the demand of the progress of the times.

Thus, communications in English, particularly speaking, has been an essential issue that need special attention among language researchers.

In the Indonesian contexts, research related to willingness to communicate in English has been extensively carried out, both among elementary schools and universities (Fajri & Alimin, 2021; Salam et al., 2021). Research conducted by Maleki and Zangani (2007) reported several contributing factors of learners' willingness to communicate in English, starting from English proficiency, teacher support and class activities, as well as psychological aspects. Earlier research has pinpointed that willingness to communicate is defined as preparation to enter into a discourse at a certain time with certain people, using language. It was further explained that the willingness to communicate is influenced by linguistic, psychological, and social variables (MacIntyre, 2007). In addition, it was also reported that there were two situational factors that influenced each individual's willingness to communicate in English, namely, linguistics (vocabulary achievement, sentence structure, idea construction) and aspects of their personality (self-confidence, motivational skills) (Salam et al., 2021). Nevertheless, research related to the willingness to communicate in English among Indonesian vocational high school students seem sparse.

Vocational high school is a form of formal education unit that organizes vocational education at the secondary education level and prepares students specially to work in certain fields. Students can continue their vocational education after completing their education at the junior high school level or equivalent. Several majors are usually of interest to prospective vocational students, including the Department of Multimedia, Animation, Administration, Accounting, Pharmacy, Tourism, Shipping, and Mechanical Engineering. Each department expects students to be able to speak English properly and correctly in order to be able to produce graduates who can work productively, have the ability, and skills, and are ready to work (Kemendikbud, 2023).

Theoretical foundations of willingness to communicate in English call for broadening current theoretical and epistemological lenses of general communication by examining people's readiness to enter into discourse at a given time with a particular person or people (MacIntyre et al., 1998). This is achieved by incorporating the social foundations present in WTP techniques, which place the study of people's readiness to communicate in the realm of actual interactional settings as opposed to hypothetically oriented data, as much of previous research has tended to do. Thus, previous works have the premise that demonstration of students' verbal and physical engagement within the framework of class participation through public observation Examples of (possible) indicators of their readiness to participate include paying attention, taking turns, and taking appropriate participation roles (Evnitskaya & Berger, 2017). A real possibility for L2 WTC research is to focus on analyzing these indices as they change during acts of communication. This makes it possible to relate the study of the L2 WTC to real-world circumstances rather than imaginary ones. In addition, it enables the study of situations in which individual willpower (or lack thereof) influences their meaningful engagement in L2 meaning creation and, thus, L2 learning (Kasper, 2004).

Given the aforementioned explanations in this study, there are serious problems with the ability to speak English where one of the factors is the willingness

of each individual or student to communicate in English. In addition, vocational high school students are also required to master and be able to speak English for special needs such as entering the world of work. Therefore, research on willingness to communicate in English which is focused on vocational high school students is worthdoing. Thus, this study aims at exploring the hindrances of vocational high school students' willingness to communicate in English.

Previous Studies: Gaps in the Literature

Previous research (see Salam et al., 2021) revealed the fact that internal and external domains affect students' willingness to communicate. As an example. This study has reported situational factors that influence students' willingness to communicate in English. Two main problems were found; namely, students' linguistics (e.g., vocabulary attainment, sentence structure, idea construction) and aspects of their personality (self-confidence, motivational skills). While the results of this study may offer interesting insights into our understanding of second language willingness to communicate, they are not without limitations. More specifically, Alimorad and Farahmand (2021) carried out research on willingness to communicate in English by Iranian EFL learners. The data were collected through observations, stimulated recalls, and semi-structured interviews indicated that the learners' willingness to communicate in English was emerged within multiple factors such as ongoing associations among individuals. Such factors could work as both facilitating and inhibiting willingness to communicate in English by EFL learners.

In high-use multilingual settings, where language choice in interaction is almost always possible, the use of a time series design reveals how changes in willingness to communicate become meaningful in terms of the underlying 'pull' of contact language willingness to communicate. Thus, the willingness of contact language to communicate can be understood as forming the context in which the willingness to communicate develops. In an ongoing process of coevolution between these two components in a person's willingness to communicate system, changes in the tendency to use one language appear to be motivated by changes in the tendency to use the other (Henry et al., 2021).

Studies show that learners' lack of linguistic competency affects their listening and speaking comprehension, which in turn affects their willingness to speak (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021). Both can prevent students from having effective communication in second language classes if they are treated ineffectively. The findings of this study call for effective pedagogy in second language speaking classes. The results showed that the willingness of students in second language classes to communicate was influenced by various factors including classmates, learning methods, teachers, atmosphere, materials, class size, fear of being ridiculed, afraid of being wrong, topic interest, topic of intimacy. Shyness, introversion, knowledge of vocabulary. words, pronunciation, practice, and past communication experiences (Basoz, 2019). These five sub-variables seem to have influenced the willingness of a second language to communicate within the English Department (Lee et al., 2019). That if students are provided with information about their performance and progress, they may be more motivated and willing to use their knowledge (Tavakoli, 2023). Interventions to improve communication with

visualization and goal setting were successful, and students had very good impressions (Murtadha, 2018). The fit of the model to the data in the current study indicates that second language communication in this context is well accounted for by the model (Yashima et al., 2018). Based on the above conclusion, previous studies have studied students majoring in English at the university level and few have studied students majoring in English at vocational high schools. Therefore, to fill this void, this research focus on vocational high school students. Researching them is essential because they are also required to master and be able to speak English for special purposes such as entering the workplaces, traveling abroad, and inviting foreign people for tourism visits.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

In general, our data collection employed an in-depth interview model (Creswell et al., 2006). In so doing, we recruited 6 students three Indonesian vocational high schools consisting of 3 male participants and 3 female participants. At the time this study was conducted, they were on break and had much time for the interview sessions. Before attending the vocational high schools, these participants had very little experience in communicating in English. Thus, they were recruited through a purposeful sampling technique. Informed consent and anonymity of participants' identities were first given and clarified prior to data collection. Then, our participants were coded into S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6, respectively.

2.2. Instruments

Data collection was carried out by means of in-depth interviews conducted using participants' national language (Bahasa Indonesia). Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to 45 minutes. This data elicitation method was used to ensure that participants engaged in uncontrolled responses with respect to their willingness to speak English. As a result, follow-up questions were asked during the interview sessions. Participants' responses were audio recorded and transcribed word for word. Our interview questions begin with general questions regarding what factors influence participants to communicate in English. Afterward, we asked further questions about their complex willingness to communicate, including reluctance to use English to communicate.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a thematic model as recommended by Braun and Clarke's six thematic analysis procedures (2006), such as identifying recorded data, performing data transcription, reading interview transcripts, marking important data found, making potential themes, and concluding final themes in the data. We read each transcript and carefully scrutinized similar responses and incorporated them into one emerging theme. From the 6 interviews, we analyzed 6 responses from the participants. This analytical procedure is usually carried out to find out the themes that emerge from the interview study. To ensure data saturation, we conducted member-checking by inviting participants to comment on our draft of analysis.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Findings

The current study inquired about what hindrances vocational high school students' willingness to communicate in English. The findings from the interviews were grouped into four themes; they are 1) lack of self-confidence, 2) presence of fear, 3) teacher's teaching style, and 4) vocabulary.

3.1.1. Lack of confidence

In the initial interview, we asked about the participants' activeness in English lessons. This is done to ensure that they have English communication skills which will later affect their classroom learning. Our interviews with the participants (S1 and S3) revealed that not all students were active because of their lack of self-confidence. They revealed that:

Excerpt #S1

Because the teacher himself prefers to use Indonesian so which makes students in my class less confident when they want to speak English because seeing the teacher like that because the teacher often speaks Indonesian and rarely uses English makes students less confident when they want to speak English in class.

Excerpt #S3

I usually only use English in class when needed, so for example in discussions like that I usually still use Indonesian because I still have insecure fear of my answer being wrong not to mention I think my English pronunciation is wrong, besides using English in my classes weren't mandatory either, my teacher didn't have any comments either, so I chose to take it easy like that.

Interestingly, even though S1 and S3 were lack of self-confidence, our interview with S2 indicated that he had good self-confidence that he was very active in his class. In our interview, S2 shared that:

Excerpt #S2

The problem is if the teacher invites us to work together to speak English, I also have to be able to speak English so that it's easier and understand the explanations given by the teacher and I have to be confident in myself so that I can communicate in full English with my teacher in class.

Unlike the other participants, S4 did not have any self-confidence at all. S4 contended that:

Excerpt #S4

Because at the beginning of the lesson the teacher did not give a learning contract to use or speak English so I chose to use Indonesian for each English lesson and I was not confident at all that I could speak English because my vocabulary was still lacking.

The study unpacks that, from the first interview session with S1, S2, S3, and S4, issues such as self-confidence have been cited mostly by the participants. Even though some have good self-confidence, it cannot be denied that not all students have confidence in their own English. This finding indicates that confident-arising activities

in English classrooms for such students are necessary to help increase their willingness to communicate in English.

3.1.2. *The existence of fear*

This section presents data collected from interviews which reveal that students are afraid of communicating in English. The following are the responses of students who have fear when speaking English.

Excerpt #S5

Sometimes for me personally, electronic media really helps me, so for friends, for example, I don't know English, so I use Google Translate, but on Google Translate there is still some non-standard English vocabulary, and there when I translate in learning, I am still afraid that there will be mistakes such as inaccurate English or when I say the English do not match the correct pronunciation from there, I think I have to deepen a lot of vocabulary.

Excerpt #S6

Because at my school, especially in English lessons, I don't use electronic media. What's wrong with me having my own media that my teacher gives me, usually shows it on the projector and we are rarely asked to look for it in eBooks, but for example we are given the same assignment, the teacher is directed to use the English that has been learned. But I myself have fear when the answers I write do not match the teacher's explanation because sometimes I understand the material, sometimes I don't understand the material.

The interview above reveals that in general many of them have a fear of English communication. In general, the teachers have good English so that sometimes the students are afraid to communicate in English in class. Among the six participants involved in this study, one of them argued that they were afraid to speak English in class when it was not in accordance with the material they were getting (S6). This shows that students have a fear of English which they have not mastered. This supports the argument put forward by one student (S5) that students have fear when speaking English. In other words, students are afraid to speak English because they are afraid of making mistakes in pronunciation and also the vocabulary that is not suitable for the sentences that are spoken.

In the following interview, one participant (S2) who studied at a vocational high school had a fear that was not so severe that he was able to communicate in English in his class. The explanation below is the result of interviews with Masters students.

Excerpt #S2

Because when using electronic media most are in English so to be able to understand what devices are in that technology, we must be able to speak English and I don't have an excessive fear of not communicating in English as long as I can I will communicate in English without fear of being wrong and errors in pronunciation and writing.

From the interview, it appears that the students have a fear of English communication. In general, the main objective of teaching English at the vocational high schools is to encourage students how they actively communicate in English in the classroom without having to be afraid of what mistakes they have made. However, the students are still mostly afraid of English communication. Furthermore, S2 argues

that you should not be afraid in communicating in English, you still have to communicate in English, even though your pronunciation and writing are not good. In conclusion, this section has informed that most students of the vocational high schools mostly still have fear in communication so that the teacher's task in the class is to provide them with entertainment or jokes so that their fear will decrease so they will naturally try to communicate in English.

3.1.3. Teachers' teaching styles

This section discusses the teaching style of the teacher in the classroom. Some students argue, especially students at the vocational high schools, is a factor that influences their willingness to speak English in class because teachers are also a factor in student success in learning English because students are shaped by the way their teachers teach so that it is very influential when students will continue their studies in college. The following opinion provides the teacher's attitude towards his students in the process of teaching and learning English in the classroom

Excerpt #S2

Because among friends there are those who understand English so it's easier to use Indonesian if English is a bit complicated then explain clearly to your own friends. Because I also still lack vocabulary so that vocabulary affects me in speaking English so it is difficult for me to explain it in English not to mention the teacher who teaches full English so I don't understand at all what the teacher is talking about.

Excerpt #S4

Sometimes the problem is that the SDGs are also not always discussed in class, but my teacher always discusses almost similar material about the SDGs, which I really like.

The interview excerpts portrayed that the teacher's teaching style factor is very important because it can make the class saturated and can make the class livelier and the students excited, so this factor of the teacher's teaching style becomes very important for students to determine their future after graduating from vocational high schools.

Interestingly, there was one student (S3) who shared the belief that the teacher's teaching style was not a determining factor in a student's success in communicating in English in class. The following are the results of our interview with S3.

Excerpt #S3

The 17 SDGS points were never discussed in English class, so I never spoke English when talking about it like that. Moreover, the English teacher, when giving English lessons, I tried to mix the languages between English and Indonesian. From the two experiments, the teacher's teaching style did not affect me. but it is I who influence myself if I study hard then I get success and vice versa.

From the interview answers, it may have informed that the teacher's teaching style as the main influencer in the teaching and learning process in English classes prefers to use English, especially when speaking almost during class hours the teacher often speaks full English rather than a mix of languages. The students' responses indicated that the teacher's teaching style is an important factor in English communication. In addition, one of the students also encouraged their classmates to

study hard because the teacher's teaching factors did not affect their success in speaking English (S3). This is one way to get teachers to create a teaching style so students don't get bored or bored when learning English, therefore, students become more fluid in receiving English material from their teacher. Familiarize students to learn English independently or in groups and this is a solution to prevent students from getting bored or bored in the use and activities of everyday English.

3.1.4. Vocabulary Provision

The study also reveals that vocabulary has been the most-cited pro. Interestingly, the data in this section reveals many problems that students experience in English communication, one of which is vocabulary. This section presents relevant data obtained from interviews that investigated vocabulary as a factor affecting their English communication.

Excerpt #S2

To be able to vary the data, the problem is that if we tend to use language, such as only using Indonesian, it's a little less interesting, so most of us use English when asking questions related to problems which can later be used as references and also vocabulary is the most important thing in asking questions because we have to according to the context of the sentence in question.

Excerpt #S6

Of course in class you must use English when you are learning English, why because there I really like English, if we are fluent we are very proud, so in class it is a moment, if it is used to speak English because there will train how is our language our English skills are like that with my friends I have to speak English even though sometimes it still goes wrong like that, but of course we still talk as much as we can like that but I also try to increase my vocabulary so that my English is getting better and better nice to hear so that my interlocutor will be interested in speaking English with me.

The data in this section reveals that most students when speaking English, they prefer correct English which is not mistaken in the placement of the vocabulary being discussed so they need to practice and memorize as much vocabulary as possible to make their interlocutors interesting to communicate with them.

3.2. Discussion

With the rapid growth of the English language, students are required to be able to speak English actively. The development of English in the vocational high school settings has also become a significant concern as the students are taught and trained to work professionally upon graduating from vocational schools. From the interview analysis, our research unpacks multiple reasons why the vocational high school students were reluctant to communicate in English.

First, the students have less confidence in speaking English. Language attitudes have an important role because they can shape the effectiveness of language use (Dewaele et al., 2022). From these findings, we found that students have a lack of confidence in English communication. The findings of this study are in line with previous research (Alimorad & Farahmand, 2021) regarding students' lack of confidence in English communication. These results indicate that one of the factors that influence the willingness to communicate in English in vocational high school contexts is a lack of self-confidence. Through this perspective and belief, students are

reluctant to communicate in English in class. In addition, the teachers must make the class come alive so that the students' self-confidence returns so that they want to speak English, especially during class activities. Whereas one of the students responded that self-confidence must arise so that we can communicate in English even though it is still wrong. Therefore, these students have few opportunities to be active in English class. As a result, through his belief, he begins to feel confident that he must be able to set an example for his friends or provide motivation for his friends so that the confidence will return to his friends that the class becomes fun.

The second theme focuses on the presence of fear. This second theme focuses on students' fear of English communication. Based on the results of the interviews, most students also have a fear of English communication because they lack vocabulary or are afraid of saying the wrong word. Through the students' English communication skills, it is hoped that students will be able to communicate without having to be afraid of being wrong. In addition, students must also know English as a medium of communication to be considered in applying to universities, companies, and industry and offices. Of course, through this responsibility, a student's identity needs to be shown so this fear must be faced. In other words, the teacher as the main factor supporting students to overcome the fear they face. In addition, even though students face fear, a teacher must also provide motivation to students so that they want to communicate in English without having to be afraid or nervous. Teachers can see their English fears such as writing articles in English, public speaking in front of the class and other speaking and writing activities (Dalle, 2022).

Interestingly, besides the lack of self-confidence and the fear factor, there is also a factor from the teacher's teaching style. Some students are also affected by the teacher's teaching style. It is in line with previous work (see Darasawang & Reinders, 2021), revealing that the teacher's teaching style in class is able to influence students' willingness to communicate in English in class because the teacher is the medium of student communication in class. Practically speaking, even though students are affected by the teacher's teaching style they still have to be active in English communication in the classroom. Even if English is not the first or second language in developing countries, it is not impossible to have monolingual teaching practice in a classroom environment. While the teacher must change his teaching style so that students feel more active and not bored in English communication, ethically there is no problem because the teacher's job is indeed to give the best according to the teacher's version because there is a teacher who is able to make the class atmosphere lively there is also the class to be bored so that there are students who are active and non-active in English class. In addition, teachers must also be able to understand what students feel so that more active communication can arise between each other. Language and body gestures that are easy to understand will make it easier for students to catch the teacher's explanation (Fajri & Alimin, 2021).

Furthermore, of these three factors there is another factor that influences the willingness of vocational high school students in English communication, namely vocabulary. While the vocabulary itself has problems that are often experienced by students of vocational high schools. When asked to speak English in front of the class, there are still many students who are nervous because of the lack of memorized vocabulary. Apart from that, there were also some students who immediately spoke

actively because these students memorized a lot of vocabulary. Willingness to speak English required vocabulary, clear pronunciation of letters, and mastery of grammar (Henry & MacIntyre, 2021). That is the reason why some students are still not fluent in speaking English, there are those who are fluent, it all depends on how they master English. In other words, there must be support from outside in the form of relatives, friends or friends who understand English. Therefore, the data above reveals that vocabulary is also a factor influencing the communication of vocational high school students. However, there are also some students who think that vocabulary is not difficult so they can be active in English communication in class. The English dictionary is also a supporting factor for students who are still having difficulty with vocabulary. We rarely encounter the use of English dictionaries because of the increasingly rapid technology so that students will find it easier to use Google translate without having to know or memorize vocabulary one by one. Once again, many students are still affected in vocabulary because of a lack of memorized vocabulary considering this is a sophisticated era. The entry of sophisticated technology in the current era also makes students lazy to learn, let alone learn about English. However, discipline, way of thinking, and being on time are practices that still exist among the students. Interestingly, students who are already active in English still use thick printed dictionaries to learn English. This finding reveals that all students realize that vocabulary is very important. Students also have to keep learning and memorizing English vocabulary and this applies to all students, both active and non-active. But they also seem to ignore the importance of their vocabulary for learning English. In conclusion, we conclude that the vocabulary must be uniquely created to get the attention of the students whether the vocabulary is made like a song or a tune they like so that students will remember the vocabulary more easily.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to find out what hinders Indonesian vocational high school students' willingness to communicate in English. The results of the analysis reveal that students encountered four factors that negatively influence their willingness to communicate in English, including 1) lack of self-confidence, 2) presence of fear, 3) teacher's teaching style, and 4) vocabulary provision. Findings of this study signal the need for incorporating rich and varied out-of-class English communications to support students' English communication skills. Such a recommendation should be enacted as an additional pedagogy for input in English language learning for vocational high school students, wherein they need to use English actively either spoken or written for occupational purposes.

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