

Passive to Active: A Review of the Impact of Selective Teaching Methods On the Construct of Willingness to Communicate in EFL Contexts

Dr. Nesreen Mohammed

nesreen@sawauniversity.edu.iq

Department of English Language, College of Education, Sawa University,
Almuthanna, Iraq

Abstract

The Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is nowadays considered the prime antecedent of the second language acquisition (SLA), as well as a key goal in the pedagogy of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Although it is true that much interest has been proposed to an individual learner variable, such as anxiety, motivation, and personality traits, pedagogical interventions, especially to the instructional methodology and classroom practices, are a relevant area of concern to the empirical investigation. The systematic review combines theoretical approaches within the theoretical perspectives, especially MacIntyre Heuristic Model and Dynamic Systems Theory, to ask questions to the intersection of instructional practices and L2 WTC. A review of modern literature suggests that pedagogical practices are among the environment determinants, either inhibiting or promoting WTC. Empirical links between a paradigmatic shift in favor of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and integration of digital modalities, including Flipped Classroom, and improved WTC, allegedly by alleviating cognitive load and affective obstacles, are empirically related. The results highlight the pedagogical need of promoting the development of learner agency, scaffolding, and non-threatening corrective feedback to develop a communicatively supportive classroom environment. There are empirically-based recommendations included which EFL teachers aiming at maximizing WTC may use.

Keywords: Willingness to Communicate (WTC), EFL, Task-Based Language Teaching, Flipped Classroom, Dynamic Systems Theory.

من السلبية إلى الإيجابية: مراجعة تأثير أساليب التعليم الانتقائية على مفهوم الرغبة في التواصل في سياقات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

د. نسرين محمد

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية، جامعة ساوة، المثنى، العراق

المخلص

تُعتبر الرغبة في التواصل (WTC) اليوم المقدمة الأساسية لاكتساب اللغة الثانية (SLA)، بالإضافة إلى كونها هدفاً رئيسياً في بيداغوجيا تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL). وعلى الرغم من أنه من الصحيح أن هناك اهتماماً كبيراً بمتغيرات المتعلم الفردية، مثل القلق والدافع وخصائص الشخصية، فإن التدخلات البيداغوجية، لا سيما المتعلقة بالأسلوب التدريسي وممارسات الفصل الدراسي، تُعد منطقة ذات أهمية للتحقيق التجريبي. يجمع الاستعراض المنهجي بين الأساليب النظرية في المنظورات النظرية، وخاصة نموذج مكينتاير الاستدلالي ونظرية الأنظمة الديناميكية، لطرح أسئلة حول تقاطع الممارسات التدريسية و WTC للغة الثانية. يشير استعراض الأدبيات الحديثة إلى أن الممارسات البيداغوجية تُعتبر من المحددات البيئية، إما التي تعيق أو تعزز WTC. توجد روابط تجريبية بين التحول النمطي لصالح تدريس اللغة القائم على المهام (TBLT) ودمج الوسائط الرقمية، بما في ذلك الفصل المقلوب، وتحسين

WTC، حيث يُزعم أنها تخفف من الحمل المعرفي والعقبات العاطفية. تسلط النتائج الضوء على الحاجة البيداغوجية لتعزيز تطوير قدرة المتعلم على التحكم، والدعم، والتغذية الراجعة التصحيحية غير المهددة، لتطوير بيئة صافية داعمة للتواصل. هناك توصيات قائمة على الأدلة التجريبية يمكن لمعلمي EFL استخدامه بهدف زيادة WTC.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرغبة في التواصل (WTC)، تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL)، تدريس اللغة القائم على المهام، الفصل المقلوب، نظرية الأنظمة الديناميكية.

Introduction

In the realms of the second language acquisition (SLA), the ultimate goal of language learning is not restricted to the factual acquisition of grammatical skills but constitutes the ability and the desire to use the language in real communicative situations. In spite of an intensive level of formal training, even after many years of learning of the English language as a foreign language (EFL), a significant percentage of learners are still exhibiting reservation in the classroom setting, and the tendency has been attributed by many scholars to cultural constraints or personal personality traits. MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998), on their turn, re-framed this issue by introducing such construct as (WTC), which entails a willingness to talk to a certain person or people at a specific moment, using a L2 (p. 547).

For EFL learners, who often do not encounter many chances for practicing speaking the target language outside of class, the classroom is often the only place where they can do so. As a result, the methods and techniques that teachers use to teach are not just ways to get information across; they are also factors in the environment that affect how ready the learner is to speak.

The first studies that attempted to measure WTC paid much attention to more or less trait-like variables, including introversion. But with recent research, the focus has been shifted to situational determinants. The current review aims at closing the gap between rational and practical learning theories through the following research question: how are certain teaching methods with their strategies and techniques influence WTC of the learners of English as Foreign Language (EFL)?

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of understanding the way by which teaching methods affect WTC and its level in EFL settings, this review depend on three major theoretical paradigms.

MacIntyre's Heuristic Model of WTC

The basic model that mainly contributed to the development of this review is the pyramid model that has been put forward by MacIntyre et. al. (1998). This model conceptualizes WTC into lower and upper strata: the former levels are the enduring and dispositional factors (i.e., personality traits) and the latter level consists of situational factors (i.e., the visualization of the desire to communicate with a specific interlocutor and temporary self-confidence). These top-level factors are mostly the focus of instructional interventions. The situational sign involves utilizing a specific pedagogical method that can reduce anxiety and

improve state self-congruence improving the activation of WTC (MacIntyre, 2007).

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT)

The sociocultural theory by Vygotsky assumes that learning is socially mediated. Approaches to teaching typically act as scaffolds where in the context of WTC medially allow the social interaction to occur. The cognitive task of speaking can be shared well, using techniques that promote interactions between peers as working within the zone of proximal development (ZPD). A teaching approach that is based on a new approach where the focus is on socializing rather than testing the students re-aligns the social space in a manner such that it creates an orientation to WTC (Cao and Philp, 2006).

Dynamic Systems Theory (DST)

The recent studies (Larsen-, Freeman, 2016, MacIntyre, Legatto, 2011) conceptualize WTC as dynamic and vary on a moment-to-moment basis, as opposed to a fixed trait. A learner can be warmed-up with a high level of WTC and show lower WTC in a grammar practice. This viewpoint confirms the importance of specific approaches (micro-interventions) as opposed to generic, generalized measures.

Methodology of the Review

This review uses a systematic methodology to provide an overview and synthesize the available study concerning the effects of instructional strategies on learner engagement. To ensure reliability of the used resources in this article, the narrative review methodology was used. The study of the connection between pedagogy and WTC included an extensive search of data in reliable databases such as ERIC and Google Scholar. The search strategy encompassed the use of combinations of the keywords like WTC, EFL, Teaching Methods, Task-Based Learning, Flipped Classroom, and Teacher Immediacy which allowed identifying the relevant literature. Strict inclusion criteria were applied and achieve analysis and quality of review. The chosen publications had to be a peer-reviewed journal article or book chapter published since 1998 and specifically addressing the relationship between pedagogy and WTC and in English. After the selection, the derived literature has been analyzed and sorted into three major thematic groups: Traditional versus Modern Approaches, Digital Interventions, and Teacher Interaction Styles. These clusters offer the analytical scheme of the further discussion of findings.

Literature Review

Accuracy or Fluency: A Methodological Shift

Traditional instructional techniques, especially Grammar Translation Method (GTM) have traditionally suppressed the emergence of WTC. The most common focus on language accuracy and systematic error correction, as well as teacher control, in GTM teaching, will give a tendency to increase the occurrence of the negative predictor of WTC, i.e. Language Anxiety (Fallah, 2014). As a result, learners in these environments tend to experience verbal

communication as a form of performance that has to be rated, but not as a tool of communication. On the other hand, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) lays focus on the learner. Empirical studies indicate that CLT situations, where meaning is more important than form, have a significant effect of stimulating WTC. Using mistakes and facilitating fluency, CLT eliminates the fear of negative assessment, thus providing a psychological safety net that would stimulate people to engage in speaking (Oz et al., 2015).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

One approach has been reported in literature as a very effective way of building WTC and that is Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as it systematizes learning based on accomplishment of substantial tasks as opposed to studying linguistic forms in isolation. This strategy will improve WTC by creating an understandable communicative use and thus, encouraging the learners to speak so that they can resolve problems and not just use grammar. This mechanism is effective according to Peng (2014) who states that TBLT enhances WTC through the development of collaborative environments. In addition, Riasati (2012) suggests that in case students are asked to work in pairs to accomplish some activities like information-gap activities, the formal hierarchical structure will be broken in the classroom, and a model of peers to peers will emerge, which will reduce anxiety to a large extent and stimulate participation.

Flipped Classrooms and Gamification

The WTC environment has been unquestionably changed by the technological interventions that influenced the way in which learners approached the learning material and each other. The pedagogical redesign of the flipped classroom that shifts direct instruction to the pre-class video lectures to focus on in-class interaction has shown a significant increase in WTC among learners. According to empirical studies done by Zhang et al. (2020) and Ahmad & Al-Khanjari (2022), this improvement is based on the fact that pre-class preparation as a rehearsal increases the perceived competence of the learner before delving into classroom activities. In the same way, Reinders and Wattana (2014) stated that gamification leads to the WTC construct by placing the state of flow that suspends self-awareness and the internal monitor. In this mental condition, the desire to communicate is increased since the cognitive concentration head of the learner is redirected not to the fear of using the correct language but to the goal directly related to the task and winning the game.

Feedback and WTC

In the context of the teacher-learner interaction, certain micro-techniques related to the feedback impose a significant impact on the engagement of the learners. The importance of corrective feedback is emphasized by Zarrinabadi (2014), who assumes that explicit or harsh correction is likely to decrease WTC, but recasts, the implicit kind of correction, do not specifically interfere with the communicative flow and on the contrary promote further interaction. What is more, the management of the wait time as the prolonging of time reliable

between an inquiry by teachers and the expected answer by students has proved to be especially effective; as Vongsila and Reinders (2016) argued, the longer the time span between the inquiry and the expected response of students, the better the cognitive processing of the information, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of the otherwise hesitant student to participate in classes.

Discussion

The review synthesis is an indication of a clear correlation: instructional techniques preventing anxiety and increasing perceived competence are consistently mentioned with WTC.

Autonomy Role and Minimized Risk

Lessening of social risk is a commonality that common approaches to effective methodological approaches like TBLT, the Flipped Classroom, and Gamification share. The conventional pedagogical methods tend to make the classroom a stress-like situation where the verbal communication is associated with evaluation. On the other hand, methods placing emphasis on WTC reshapes the classroom to become a non-threatening environment whereby verbal participation is perceived as interactive and not critical.

Teacher Immediacy Mediation

The behavior or what is usually known as the immediacy of the teacher forms a very critical variable irrespective of the instructional approach used. Verbal, as well as non-verbal immediacy, both involving gestures like eye-contact and smiling and humor, respectively, have been systematically recorded to prove the direct positive relationship with WTC (Fallah, 2014; Sheybani, 2019). Immediacy increases makes the psychological distance between the educator and the learner less intensive, thus creating an atmosphere that is seen as less risky.

Educational Implications

This analysis outlines some practical implications on the use of EFL teachers who endeavor to increase learner engagement. It is recommended that teachers should use information-gap exercises that make lessons based on authentic communicative prerequisites and, therefore, force the students to communicate in order to access lost information. In order to achieve this goal, teachers can use a flipped classroom model where they can introduce the requisite vocabulary and concepts before the lesson and this will help reduce mental overload and help students become confident. The techniques of dyadic interaction like the so-called Think-Pair-Share should be used in the classroom process; students proved to be more willing to talk to the whole class after the process of rehearsing with a partner. Finally, the use of indirect types of feedback methods, such as recasts rather than direct correction, is highly important in fluency-type activities as it helps to maintain the student interest and foster the continuous production of the oral language.

Conclusion

The combination of theoretical frameworks and evidence on the empirical data in this review shows that the interaction between pedagogical strategies and WTC is not only dynamic, but also causes the traditional understanding of WTC as a predetermined trait of a personality. Although WTC is an internal psychological construct, there exists a significant interference with extrinsic pedagogical decisions. The frequent silence in EFL classrooms cannot be attributed to the somewhat natural passivity of the learners or even the cultural reservation; in fact, it is an understandable psychological reaction to the limitations of the accuracy-focused, teacher-focused learning. Replacing contexts which induce anxiety among learners with interaction-based, learner-centered approaches (such as TBLT, the Flipped Classroom, and Gamification) can help teachers to significantly reduce the affective filter and give students a communicative voice to make the EFL classroom more of a community of practice and less of an evaluative place, in which correctness of language is valued more than communication. Teachers are therefore tasked with the role of designing learning experiences that separate cognition and the social demand, a requirement that currently demands the consideration of the digital dimension. Specifically, the next generations of research should take the methodical look into whether the psychological safety provided by the immersive technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) and non-judgmental interactions with the Generative AI can serve as a long-term support of the face-to-face communication and, in the end, prove the willingness as the trait of the learner, rather than just as a condition of such communication.

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