

Ethiopian EFL Students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and the Factors Associated with it in Oral Communicative English Classes

Disposición a comunicarse (WTC) de los estudiantes etíopes de inglés como lengua extranjera y factores asociados a ella en las clases de inglés comunicativo oral

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Abstract

Communication, particularly verbal communication, is central to the development of a desired competence in a second or foreign language. Approaches such as communicative language teaching (CLT) in second language acquisition emphasize practical use of the target language for effective learning/acquisition. However, despite the necessity of using a target language to learn it, it has been a common phenomenon to observe most learners exhibiting passiveness, reticence, and unwillingness to participate in oral communicative opportunities in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. This study therefore explored EFL students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in oral communicative English classes together with the factors underlying it in the Ethiopian higher education context. To this end, primary quantitative data were collected from a randomly selected sample of 450 EFL students taking oral communicative English courses followed by qualitative data from a sample of fifteen students selected again randomly to triangulate the results from the quantitative data. The results revealed that the target students had in general a low level of WTC in oral communicative English classes, and their WTC was affected by both psychological and contextual factors such as self-confidence, motivation, personality, language learning orientation and classroom environments. The findings indicate that EFL students' WTC is a crucial component to increase students' participation in oral communicative English classes by raising their self-confidence, motivation and awareness of language learning orientations, coupled with facilitating the language learning environment. It is therefore suggested that WTC needs to be given special consideration while designing and preparing ELT materials, and during instructions as well.

Keywords: Classroom Environment; Ethiopian EFL Students' Willingness to communicate (WTC), Motivation; Personality; Self-confidence

Resumen

La comunicación, particularmente la comunicación verbal, es fundamental para el desarrollo de una competencia deseada en una segunda lengua o lengua extranjera. Enfoques como la enseñanza comunicativa de lenguas (CLT por sus siglas en inglés) en la adquisición de segundas lenguas enfatizan el uso práctico de la lengua meta para un aprendizaje/adquisición efectivos. Sin embargo, a pesar de la necesidad de utilizar la lengua meta para aprenderla, es un fenómeno común observar que la mayoría de los estudiantes muestran pasividad, reticencia y falta de disposición para participar en oportunidades de comunicación oral en clases de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL por sus siglas en inglés). Por lo tanto, este estudio exploró la disposición de los estudiantes de EFL para comunicarse (WTC, por sus siglas en inglés) en clases de comunicación oral en inglés, junto con los factores subyacentes a esta disposición en el contexto de la educación superior en Etiopía. Para ello, se recolectaron datos cuantitativos primarios de una muestra aleatoria de 450 estudiantes de EFL que tomaban cursos de comunicación oral en inglés, seguidos de datos cualitativos de una muestra de quince estudiantes seleccionados nuevamente al azar para triangular los resultados de los datos cuantitativos. Los resultados revelaron que los estudiantes objetivo, en general, tenían un bajo nivel de WTC en las clases de comunicación oral en inglés, y su WTC se veía afectada tanto por factores psicológicos como contextuales, tales como la autoconfianza, la motivación, la personalidad, la orientación hacia

el aprendizaje de idiomas y los entornos de clase. Los hallazgos indican que la WTC de los estudiantes de EFL es un componente crucial para aumentar la participación de los estudiantes en clases de comunicación oral en inglés, al incrementar su autoconfianza, motivación y conciencia sobre las orientaciones de aprendizaje de idiomas, junto con la facilitación del entorno de aprendizaje. Por lo tanto, se sugiere que la WTC reciba una consideración especial al diseñar y preparar materiales de enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera, así como durante las instrucciones.

Palabras clave: Entorno de clase; Disposición de los estudiantes etíopes de EFL para comunicarse (WTC); Motivación; Personalidad; Autoconfianza

Resumo

A comunicação, particularmente a comunicação verbal, é fundamental para o desenvolvimento de uma competência desejada em uma segunda língua ou língua estrangeira. Abordagens como o ensino comunicativo de línguas (CLT, sigla em inglês) na aquisição de segundas línguas enfatizam o uso prático da língua-alvo para uma aprendizagem/aquisição eficaz. No entanto, apesar da necessidade de utilizar a língua-alvo para aprendê-la, é comum observar que a maioria dos alunos demonstra passividade, reticência e falta de disposição para participar de oportunidades de comunicação oral em aulas de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL, sigla em inglês). Portanto, este estudo explorou a disposição dos estudantes de EFL em se comunicar (WTC, sigla em inglês) em aulas de comunicação oral em inglês, juntamente com os fatores subjacentes a essa disposição no contexto da educação superior na Etiópia. Para isso, foram coletados dados quantitativos primários de uma amostra aleatória de 450 estudantes de EFL que cursavam aulas de comunicação oral em inglês, seguidos de dados qualitativos de uma amostra de quinze estudantes selecionados novamente ao acaso para triangular os resultados dos dados quantitativos. Os resultados revelaram que os estudantes-alvo, em geral, apresentavam um baixo nível de WTC nas aulas de comunicação oral em inglês, e sua WTC era afetada por fatores psicológicos e contextuais, como autoconfiança, motivação, personalidade, orientação para a aprendizagem de idiomas e ambientes de sala de aula. As descobertas indicam que a WTC dos estudantes de EFL é um componente crucial para aumentar a participação dos alunos nas aulas de comunicação oral em inglês, ao aumentar sua autoconfiança, motivação e conscientização sobre as orientações de aprendizagem de idiomas, juntamente com a facilitação do ambiente de aprendizagem. Portanto, sugere-se que a WTC receba uma consideração especial ao projetar e preparar materiais de ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira, bem como durante as instruções.

Palavras-chave: Ambiente de sala de aula; Disposição dos estudantes etíopes de EFL para se comunicar (WTC); Motivação; Personalidade; Autoconfiança

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Introduction

Language is the naturally endowed and uniquely distinguishing trait that sets human beings apart from other primates (Dawson & Phelan, 2016; Sapir, 1921). It is the most essential and significant natural tool that links and holds people together, serves as a vehicle of socio-cultural integration, facilitates cognitive and interpersonal developments, and so on. Above all, it serves as the most effective and efficient means of intra- and intercultural communications between and among individuals, groups and societies/communities.

Humans acquire language as a native or mother tongue naturally in the early or formative years of development as a result of interaction with their environment such as the family; or as a second/foreign language during late childhood, adolescence or adulthood through different ways such as instruction, immersion, and the like. The need for learning especially a second/foreign language stands out prominent due to the various driving forces such as social, economic, cultural and political reasons (Aronin, 2015; de Zarobe & de Zarobe, 2015).

The current second language acquisition (SLA) research and pedagogy in general, and English language teaching (ELT) in particular, attach a great deal of importance to oral communications or interactions in the classrooms to help EFL learners develop communicative competence in the target language. Larsen-Freeman (2007) stresses that language learning occurs in using the target language (TL), not in learning it first and using it later or vice versa. The two processes, using and learning the language, are inseparable. Swain (2000) also points out that “language use and language learning can co-occur” and “it is language use [that] mediate[s] language learning” (p. 97). But for the ‘using’ to occur, there should certainly be the willingness, the willingness to communicate orally or use the language to learn it. Willingness is thus a necessary precondition for EFL learners to participate in authentic oral communications.

However, despite the pressing need for a well-developed communicative competence in the English language in the current globalized world, and the necessity of interactions (trying to talk) to develop the needed competence in it, most EFL students rather exhibit passiveness, reluctance, reticence and unwillingness to actively engage in oral communicative opportunities inside the classroom. On the other hand, scholars such as Skehan (1989, p. 48) stress that “learners have to talk in order to learn”, which is indisputably a prerequisite for the successful development of the needed competence in the target (English) language. Most of the students, however, seem to lack the basic energy that motivates them to initiate talks and keep it going on to help them improve their oral communicative skills. Literature in the area, in general, indicate that students’ dearth of desire to actively participate in EFL oral communicative situations is associated with their Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Dornyei & Ryan, 2015; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Nazari & Allahyar, 2012; Shumin, 2002; Tsui, 1996).

L2 learners' WTC is a contextually triggered psychological state of an individual's communicative readiness and is an immediate antecedent to the actual communication behavior (Henry et al., 2024). Driven therefore by such L2 learners' communication behavior (where some are willing and others are unwilling to participate in oral communicative activities when the opportunities arise), numerous studies were carried out to explore L2 learners' WTC and the factors associated with it. However, most of the studies were limited to and carried out in the Western and Asian contexts, such as the USA, Canada, Japan, Korea, Turkey, and China (Cameron, 2013; Ma et al., 2023). The prominent figures in the area (MacIntyre et al., 1998), for instance, developed a comprehensive heuristic model based on Canadian French as second language learners to describe and explain L2 learners' WTC. However, little is known about L2 learners' WTC in other areas such as Africa (Ma et al., 2023) though there are significant cultural/contextual variations. Among these areas is found the Ethiopian higher education context. Hitherto, little is known specifically about Ethiopian higher education EFL students' WTC and the factors that contribute to the students' overall WTC. In addition, it is not also clear to what extent the heuristic model describes and explains Ethiopian higher education EFL students' WTC in general.

Wen and Clément (2003) argue that the heuristic model is developed based on the research studies mainly conducted in the Western (Canadian Anglophone students learning French as a second language) context, which is quite different from the non-western EFL contexts such as Ethiopia. The model thus needs to be tested in other contexts such as learning English as a foreign language (EFL), where there is usually no immediate linguistic need for everyday usage of the language. Hence, this situation also suggests the need for further studies to verify the model in the non-western EFL contexts.

In addition, as discussed below in the literature review section, there are inconsistencies among the findings of previous studies with regard to the factors underlying L2 learners' WTC in a specific context. The incongruities among the findings of the previous studies might be due to the environmental or contextual variations in which each study was undertaken. These inconsistencies unarguably lead to the need to carry out further investigation in the areas where little/none has been explored so far.

A review of the literature on the topic (Ethiopian EFL students' WTC) found only a single study that was carried out by Welesilassie and Nikolov (2024). The researchers studied the connection among EFL learners' motivational self-system, willingness to communicate, and self-assessed proficiency at a preparatory high school in Ethiopia. In their study, the researchers identified self-assessed English proficiency as having "statistically significant positive predictive effects on L2WTC within and outside the classroom" (p. 1). They also reported the ideal L2 self as having no significant effect on the target students' WTC outside the classroom. No other study is however found that attempted to explore EFL students' WTC.

The current study is thus triggered by the inconsistencies among the findings of previous studies that might be due to contextual variations, and the limitations with the heuristic model as it was developed in the Western (Canadian Anglophone students learning French as a second language) context where little is known about its effectiveness in the other non-western contexts such as Ethiopian EFL context. In addition, the scarcity of studies about EFL students' WTC in the Ethiopian educational context, despite the crucial importance of L2 learners' WTC, has also urged the need for the conception of the current study. The current study, therefore, aimed to explore EFL students' WTC and the factors underlying it in the Ethiopian higher education context based on MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) heuristic model.

Objectives of the Study

As already mentioned, the current study aimed to explore first-year undergraduate EFL students' willingness to communicate (WTC) orally and the factors associated with it in oral communicative English classes in three selected public universities in Ethiopia. To this end, it focused on answering the following specific research questions.

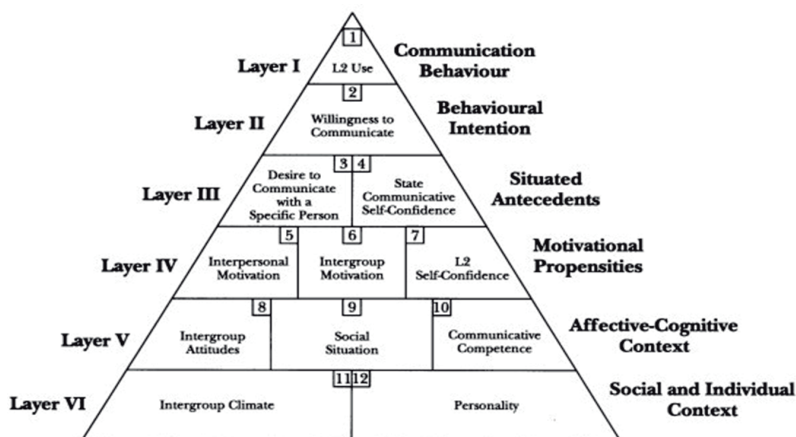
1. What is the current state (tendency) of first-year EFL students' willingness to communicate orally in oral communicative English classes in the three public universities?
2. What factors contribute to the target students' current state of willingness to communicate orally in oral communicative English classes in the three public universities?

Literature Review

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is a relatively new construct in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) (MacIntyre et al., 1998). It is an ID (individual difference) variable that attempts to account for the reason why some students avoid communication, especially oral communications, in a second/foreign language learning while they have the opportunity to practice it (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The pioneering figures in the area MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 547), define it as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons using a L2". Building on (MacIntyre et al., 1998) definition Kang (2005) elaborates L2 WTC as an "individual's volitional inclination toward actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables" (p. 291). Currently, a second/foreign language learners' WTC is in general viewed as "the degree to which an individual is disposed toward talking, given the choice to speak or not to speak (Ayers-Glassey & MacIntyre, 2019).

MacIntyre et al. (1998) developed a general and comprehensive heuristic model to describe, explain and predict L2 learners' WTC. The model incorporates a range of linguistic, social, communicative, psychological and other potential variables that might influence L2 learners' WTC. It, in general, consists of six layers divided into two groups: the immediate state-level situational variables and the distal trait-level enduring variables as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Macintyre et al.'s (1998) Situational Heuristic Model



The first three layers of the model (I – III) refer to the immediate situation-specific or transient variables. They include such variables as desire to speak to a specific person, knowledge of the topic, etc., and depend on the specific context in which a person functions at a given time. The next three layers (IV-VI) discuss those distal variables with enduring influence on learners' L2 WTC and include interpersonal relations, learners' personalities, etc. They represent relatively stable, long-term properties of the environment or persons that apply to almost any situation.

Following the introduction of Macintyre et al.'s (1998) appealing and comprehensive heuristic model, several studies were conducted by different researchers in different areas mostly in the Western and Asian contexts with the intention of examining the comprehensiveness of the model in addressing the issue of L2 learners' WTC in different cultural settings, and at the same time to identify additional culture-specific variables, if any. The studies identified several factors associated with the respective study area L2 learners' WTC. The findings are not, however, consistent. For instance, some of the studies conducted by Cetinkaya (2005), Kim (2004), MacIntyre and Baker (2003), MacIntyre et al. (2001), Yashima (2002) and Yashima et al. (2004) identified communication anxiety and self-perceived communicative competence as the prominent predictors of ESL/EFL students' WTC.

Likewise, studies by Dörnyei and Kormos (2000), Hashimoto (2002), Lahuerta (2014) and MacIntyre et al. (2001) identified motivation and attitudes as the most influencing factors of the students' WTC. Among the focus of motivation are found such variables as the effect of integrative motivation (Hashimoto, 2002; Peng, 2007), attitude (Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004), motivational intensity (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Pattapong, 2010; Peng, 2014; Peng & Woodrow, 2010) and language learning orientations (Zarrinabadi & Abdi, 2011). Moreover, the studies by Cameron (2013), Cetinkaya (2005), Elwood (2011), Fallah (2014), Peng (2007) and Fu et al. (2012) identified that personality is the most influencing factor of L2 learners' WTC.

On the other hand, the studies conducted by Baghaei et al. (2012), Barjesteh et al. (2012), Cao and Philp (2006), Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2014), Riasati (2012) and Riazi and Riasati (2008) concluded that the contextual/environmental factors such as group size, student cohesion, topic familiarity, task type and teacher support are the most influencing factors of students' WTC. Kang (2005) and Zarrinabadi (2014) specifically emphasized teachers' crucial role to create a supportive environment for students to be willing to participate in class and negotiate meaning. Familiar topics and manageable task types are also mentioned among the most influential contextual factors that may facilitate or debilitate the learners' WTC (Kang, 2005; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Wen & Clément, 2003; Zarrinabadi, 2014).

The analysis of the results of the previous studies and the review of related literature, in general, indicates that there are divergences among the studies concerning the factors influencing EFL students' WTC in oral communication. While some of the studies (Cao, 2009; Cetinkaya, 2005; Hashimoto, 2002; Kim, 2004; Lahuerta, 2014; Liu, 2005; Liu & Jackson, 2009; Peng, 2014; Yashima et al., 2004) indicate that the trait-level individual factors such as self-confidence, motivation, personality, attitude, and the like are the most influencing factors of students' WTC, other studies such as Bernales (2016), Cao and Philp (2006), Kang (2005), Léger and Storch (2009) and Suksawas (2011) underscore the contextual/situational variables such as classroom environment, social and cultural orientation, L1 reliance and the like as the most influencing factors of L2 learners' WTC. These inconsistencies together with other factors urge the need to carry out further studies in little/none explored areas such as Ethiopia.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The current study primarily followed the quantitative research approach and combined the descriptive and correlational research designs. The descriptive design was used to describe the current state (tendency) of EFL students' WTC while the correlational design was used to explore the relationships between the factors (self-

confidence, motivation, personality, language learning orientation, and classroom environment) and the students' WTC. In addition, the qualitative (interviews) data were also used to triangulate the results obtained through the quantitative data.

Participants and Study Setting

A sample of 450 first-year undergraduate EFL students from three public universities in Ethiopia (Werabe, Wachemo and Welkite Universities) taking oral communicative English courses were selected proportionally using a random sampling technique. Of the 450 students, 243 (54%) students were male while the remaining 207 (46%) were female. The participants' age ranges from 18 to 22. In addition, a sample of fifteen students was again selected randomly from the same sample for the qualitative data collected through interviews. Table 1 presents a summary of the participants' demographic data, the setting and context of the study.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic data, Setting and Context of the study

ParticipantsFirst-year EFL students of three public universities in Ethiopia			
Gender	Male	243	54%
	Female	207	46%
	Total	450	100%
Setting	Werabe University, Wachemo University and Welkite University		
Context	Oral Communicative English Classes		

Instruments

Two types of questionnaires, WTC questionnaire and Factor questionnaires, were adapted from different noted researchers in the area. Seliger and Shohamy (1989) underscore the advantage of adapting/adopting well-established (ready-made) instruments over developing a new one, indicating that their validity and reliability are already tested and confirmed through different studies and by different researchers. Similarly, Krosnick and Presser (2010) also strongly advise researchers to review questionnaire items from earlier surveys before writing their own. According to these scholars, consulting previous surveys instead of starting from scratch is essentially helpful to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the new survey scale to be developed.

Accordingly, in the current study, the WTC questionnaire was thus adapted from MacIntyre et al. (2001) and Pattapong (2010) while the factor questionnaires were adapted from different distinguished researchers such as McCroskey and McCroskey (2013) and Khatib and Nourzadeh (2015) –Self-Perceived Communicative Competence–, Ryan (2009) –Communication Anxiety, Language Learning orientation and Desire to Learn English–, Yashima (2002) –Attitude toward Learning English and Motivational Intensity–, Goldberg (1992) –Personality: Introversion/Extroversion– and Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2016) –Classroom Environment: student cohesion, teacher support, topic familiarity and task orientation–. The WTC questionnaire was a five-point (never willing to always willing) Likert-type scale. Similarly, the factors questionnaires were also five-point (strongly disagree to strongly agree) Likert-type scales. The questionnaires consisted of the student-participants' background information and the items of each scale. Table 2 presents details of each research instrument together with the pilot-tested internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) of each scale.

Table 2 . Details of Research Instruments

	Variables	Scales	No. of Items	Internal Consistency	Adapted from
1	Students' WTC	Willingness to Communicate (WTC)	19	0.82	McCroskey and Richmond (1991) and Pattapong (2010)
2	Factors Associated with the students' WTC	Self-Confidence (Self-Perceived Communicative Competence: SPCC, Communication Anxiety: CA)	10	0.89	McCroskey and McCroskey and Khatib and Nourzadeh (2015)
			7	0.87	Ryan (2009)
		Motivation (Desire to Learn English, Attitude toward Learning English, Motivational Intensity)	15	0.81	Ryan (2009)
		Personality (Introversion/Extroversion)	9	0,86	Goldberg (1992)
		Language Learning Orientations (Job/Career, Travel, Knowledge)	9	0,78	Ryan (2009)
		Classroom Environment (Task orientation, Topic Familiarity, Student Cohesion, Teacher Support)	11	0.83	Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2016)
		Total Items	80		

In addition to the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were also used to collect qualitative data to triangulate the results from the questionnaire's data. A sample of 15 students was thus randomly selected from the respondents of the questionnaire and used for the qualitative data. The semi-structured interview questions were prepared based on and in line with the concepts that each item of the questionnaires refers to.

Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to analyze the quantitative data from the questionnaires. The descriptive analysis (mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum) was used to explore and describe the variables of the study while the inferential statistics (t-test and multiple regression analysis) were used to test differences, measure and predict the relationships between the dependent and independent variables of the study. In addition, the qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis.

Results and Findings

Students' Level of WTC

The first research question explored the extent to which EFL students were willing to communicate orally in communicative English classes. The data for the WTC questionnaire were analyzed based on Jackson and Liu (2008) full-score strategy as there is no universally agreed upon or well-established norm in the literature (published research) about the computation and interpretation of the level of L2 learners' WTC scale data (Peng, 2014). According to Jackson and Liu (2008), comparing the mean of the observed scores with that of the full score is a good strategy for computing and interpreting the summated score of univariate data such as the WTC scale. Accordingly, the researchers suggest, as a rule of thumb, interpreting the scores more than 80% of the full score as high WTC, within the range of 60% to 80% as moderate, and below 60% as low WTC.

Thus, following Jackson and Liu (2008) full score practice, the minimum and maximum full scores of the WTC scale of the current study were 19 and 95 respectively with an average of 57. Table 3 below shows the descriptive statistics of the summated score.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Summated score (N=450)

Scale	Type	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.
WTC Scale	Observed Score	27.00	81.00	48.13	11.21
	Full Score	19.00	95.00	57.00	

The observed scores, however, ranged between 27 and 81 including the two extremes with a mean of 48.13. As can be seen clearly, the observed mean (48.13) was below 60% (57) of the full score. According to Jackson and Liu (2008), the mean of the summated score with more than 80% of the full score was regarded as high, between the range of 60% and 80% as moderate, and below 60% as low. Results of analysis of the data however revealed that the average of the observed score (48.13, 50.6%) is far below the lowest level of moderate WTC (57, 60% of the full score). It can therefore be concluded that EFL students had in general a low level of willingness to communicate orally in oral communicative English classes.

The difference between the observed mean and the mean of the full score was also further examined to see whether the difference was statistically significant or not. Table 4 below shows the output of a one-sample t-test analysis.

Before running the t-test analysis, however, Shapiro-Wilk's normality test (Ho, 2014) was applied to see the distribution of the summated-score data as the t-test requires an assumption of a relatively normal distribution of the data. The Shapiro-Wilk test assumes normality when the significance level is greater than 0.05. Thus, as it can be seen from the table below, the distribution of the summated score of the WTC scale data is relatively normal as the Shapiro-Wilk test sig. is greater than 0.05 (sig. 0.635 > 0.05).

Table 4. Normality Test of the Summated score (N=450)

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Summated score of WTC scale	0.053	450	0.240*	0.990	450	0.635

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Following the normality test, the analysis of the one-sample t-test result of the WTC summated score indicates that the difference was statistically significant at $t(df = 449) = -11.446, p = 0.000$ as it can be seen from Table 5 below. The mean value of

the observed summated score thus reveals that the respondents can in general be described by having a low level of WTC in oral communicative English classes.

Table 5. One-sample t-test Results of the WTC scale (N=450)

Test Value = 57						
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Summated Scores of WTC Scale	-11.446	449	.000	-7.24667	-8.4909	-6.0025

The findings from the qualitative (interview) data were also found to support the results of the quantitative (questionnaire) data analysis. Among the fifteen students interviewed, for instance, thirteen of them revealed that they rarely or never make speeches in English, ask their classmate or teacher different questions in English, respond to questions raised by the teacher in English, make discussions with groups in English, and give presentations in English during communicative English classes. Only two students responded saying “sometimes” to the above communicative situations. A student codenamed S13F, for instance, said the following when asked whether she makes speeches in front of the classes with or without notes.

No, I don't. First of all, there is no inviting situation for this. So, we don't most of the time participate voluntarily. We do that if there is a push. But sometimes I do it as it is also mandatory. It is a written text, not from my own oral words. I write it on a note and then deliver it.

Similarly, a student codenamed S3F said the following when asked whether she is willing to ask questions in English in communicative English classes.

Yes, sometimes when it becomes necessary. The point is that there is no tradition of asking and answering in English most of the time. Most of the time, we only hear what the teacher says in class. Then, we go to reading. Otherwise, there is no culture of asking most of the time.

The results and findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data sources in general revealed that the target students had a low level of willingness to communicate orally in oral communicative English classes.

Factors Affecting EFL Students' WTC

The second research question was concerned with identifying the major factors associated with and affecting the students' WTC. Two types of factors affecting the students' WTC were examined: the trait-level, psychological and the state-level, situational factors. The psychological factors embrace such factors as self-confidence as described by self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC) and Communication apprehension (CA); Motivation as described by Desire to learn English (DTE), Attitude toward learning English (ATLE) and Motivational Intensity (MI); Personality as described by introversion and extroversion (IE) and Language learning orientation as described by career/job, knowledge and travel. The situational factors comprise the Classroom Environment (CRE) described by teacher support, student cohesion, topic familiarity and task orientation.

To see the impacts of the psychological and situational factors on the students' WTC, multiple regression analysis (MRA) was employed. Before running the analysis, however, the data were first checked for the assumptions of Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA). MRA requires the assumptions that the data need to be relatively normally distributed; there should be a linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables; there should also be no multicollinearity (instability of regression coefficients); and no heteroscedasticity (the variance of the residuals must be constant across the predicted values) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Table 6 below presents a summary of the MRA assumptions.

Table 6. Summary of the MRA Assumptions

Assumptions	Measuring Unit	Self-confidence Motivation					PER	LLO	CRE
		SPCC	CA	DTE	ALTE	MI			
Normality	¹ Skewness and Kurtosis between -2 and +2	0.125	0.437	-0.436	-0.58	0.106	-0.07	-0.428	-0.039
		-0.467	-0.61	-0.286	0.107	-0.509	-0.079	-0.695	-0.146
Multicollinearity	² Tolerance > 0.1 or VIF <10	.622	.897	.590	.554	.930	.838	.629	.737
		1.607	1.115	1.694	1.805	1.075	1.193	1.591	1.357
Heteroscedasticity	Q-Q plots	The Q-Q plots for each independent variable are attached in the appendix							
Linearity	(Ho, 2014)								

1= Kunnan (1998); 2= Field (2014)

As can be seen from the above table, none of the assumptions was violated so the MRA analysis was carried out. The result of the MRA analysis was presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Factors Associated with and Affecting EFL Students' WTC (N=450)

Model Summary ^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.883a	.781	.768	3.77014

a. Predictors: (Constant), CRE, CA, MI, PER, LLO, DTE, SPCC, ATLE

b. Dependent Variable: WTC

As it can be seen from the model summary table, there is a strong association ($R^2 = 0.781$) between the predictors or independent variables (SPCC, CA, ATLE, DTE, MI, LLO, PER, CRE) and the dependent variable, EFL students' WTC in communicative English classes. The R^2 value gives the proportion of variance in the dependent variable accounted for by the set of independent variables that are included in the model. The model thus indicated that 78.1% of the changes in the EFL students' WTC are associated with the changes in the students' Self-confidence as described by self-perceived communicative confidence (SPCC) and communication or language anxiety (CA); Motivation as described by attitude towards learning English (ATLE), desire to learn English (DTE) and motivational intensity (MI); Personality as described by introversion and extroversion; Language learning orientation as described by career/job, knowledge and travel and Classroom environment (CRE) as described by teachers' feedback, student cohesion, task orientation and topic familiarity.

Both the psychological and situational factors were therefore found to be directly associated with and affecting EFL students' WTC in the communicative English classes. The personality-based psychological factors include self-confidence, motivation, personality, and language learning orientation while the situational factors are composed of the classroom environments such as student cohesion, teacher's feedback, topic familiarity, and task orientation.

The result of the MRA analysis was also further subjected to the statistical significance test to see whether the association between the dependent and independent variables was statistically significant or not. The ANOVA table below shows the statistical significance of the impacts of the independent variables (SPCC, CA, DTE, ATLE, MI, PER, LLO, and CRE) on the dependent variable, WTC.

Table 8. Statistical Significance of the Impacts

ANOVA ^a						
Model	Sum of Squares		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1983.632	7	283.376	2.969	.001 ^b
	Residual	863.743	56	95.456		
	Total	2847.375	64			

a. Dependent Variable: WTC

b. Predictors: (Constant), SPCC, CA, ATLE, DTE, MI, PER, LLO, CRE

The ANOVA table displayed above shows the statistical significance of the model in general. Accordingly, the model is found to be statistically significant at $F(2.969) = 283.376$, $p = 0.001$. This indicates that the independent variables (SPCC, CA, ATLE, DTE, MI, PER, LLO, CRE) play a significant role in predicting or explaining the dependent variable, EFL students WTC in communicative English classes.

The findings obtained from the analysis of the qualitative (interview) data were also found to be supporting the results obtained from the analysis of the quantitative (questionnaire) data. When interviewed about their self-confidence, thirteen of the fifteen students indicated that they rarely participate in pair or group discussions, ask their peers or teachers different questions, comment on peers' and teachers' ideas, and make oral presentations due to mainly fear, vocabulary shortage and lack of confidence. This may indicate that students had problems with self-confidence when they had the opportunities to participate in oral communicative situations. This ultimately leads to the students' low level of WTC, revealing the impact of their self-confidence as described by low self-perceived communicative confidence and high communication anxiety.

For instance, when asked if he comments on peers' or teachers' ideas in English, a student-respondent codenamed S10M said the following.

No, I don't remember this kind of things. I have never commented. There was no opportunity to do that even. There was no inviting situation as well. Why? First, because I do not have the ability, I cannot do that. I do not comment before the class. But we comment outside the class in Amharic.

Similar to the self-perceived communicative confidence, the students' responses to the communication anxiety questions such as feeling fear/relaxed, uneasiness/discomfort or comfort while speaking and feeling nervous or at ease when thinking of speaking were mostly feeling fear, uneasiness or discomfort while speaking and being nervous when thinking of speaking.

A student-respondent codenamed S7F, for instance, said the following when asked about feeling nervousness when speaking or trying to speak.

Yes, there is a feeling of nervousness. Even, I lose the words I already knew when there is tension. I couldn't remember the word I knew. I rather prefer to write than to speak. There has never been attention to English starting from elementary school. I have been educated in Amharic. So, I feel nervousness. As much as I can, I try to memorize.

In addition to self-confidence, the students were also asked about their motivations to communicate orally in communicative English classes. They were asked such questions as their feelings towards the English language, whether they give special attention to their speaking skills, their wishes about being a good speaker, what to do if English were not given at schools, whether they keep on studying English after graduation and the like.

Despite wishing to be a good speaker of the language, the responses of almost all (fourteen of the fifteen) students, however, indicate that they do not like to pay attention to their speaking skills. Similarly, when asked what to do if English was not given at schools, the responses were 'nothing'. Their feelings toward the English language also appear to be not good as some are not interested in it; others perceive it as a difficult subject to study; and yet, a significant number of other respondents dislike the oral practices that the language requires.

A student-respondent codenamed S9M, for instance, said the following when asked if he gives special attention to speaking skills.

Most of the time we give attention to the writing skill. We spend much time on reading and writing. Not that much for the speaking skill. But I never thought of giving special attention to the speaking skill. So, I don't give special attention to it. I know that speaking is important.

Similar responses were also obtained from the analysis of the students' interviews for the other factors. The responses indicate that personality (being introverted or extroverted), language learning orientations (the purpose for which the students need to learn English) and the classroom environment (such as teacher support, student cohesion, task orientation and topic familiarity) had also strong impacts on the students' willingness to communicate orally in communicative English classes.

The analyses of both the quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) data obtained from the student-respondents, in general, revealed that several factors affect the students' willingness to communicate orally in communicative English classes. According to their responses, the lack of self-confidence to stand in front of the class and to speak in English in the presence of the teacher was one of the major factors affecting their WTC in communicative English classes. In addition, the fear of making mistakes and being nervous while trying to speak in English had also a strong

impact on their willingness to participate orally in communicative English classes. Their personality (being introverted or extroverted), the motivation they had to learn English, and the attitude they had toward the English language were also among the influencing factors of their WTC. The type of oral activities designed to be practiced in the class coupled with their level of familiarity was also mentioned by the students as the other factor impacting their WTC in communicative English classes.

Discussions

The current study was undertaken with the prime objectives of exploring first-year EFL students' willingness to communicate orally in communicative English classes in Ethiopian higher education context and the factors underlying it. Accordingly, the results and findings of the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that the target students had generally a low level of WTC in oral communicative English classes and their WTC was affected by several factors such as self-confidence, motivation, personality, language learning orientation and classroom environments. The results and the findings are further discussed in detail as follows.

Students' Level of WTC

As already mentioned, the target students' level of WTC in oral communicative English classes was found to be low in the current study. This indicates that the target students are less interested and less willing to participate in oral communicative English classes. It also indicates that they have little or no intention (desire) to initiate and make use of oral communication opportunities to improve their speaking skills in their communicative English classes.

The current finding is consistent with the findings of Kim (2004), Bergil (2016) and Peng Peng (2007). Kim (2004), who carried out a study to examine Korean students' WTC, came up with a finding and concluded that the Korean students had a low level of WTC in English language practices. In addition, Bergil (2016), in his study carried out on preparatory class students studying at Amasya University, Turkey, concluded that the university students had a low WTC in English despite its diverse effects on their overall speaking performances. Similar findings were also reported by Peng (2007) in her study of the Chinese students' L2 WTC.

Despite the similarities, the current result is also different from the findings of the studies by Bukhari et al. (2015), Karnchanachari (2019) and Liu and Jackson (2009). Bukhari et al. (2015), for instance, found a relatively high level of students' WTC in a quantitative study conducted on Pakistani undergraduate students' perception of their

willingness to initiate communication in English. Similarly, Karnchanachari (2019) also reported a relatively high level of students WTC among the Thai students in the international program, similar to the finding by Liu and Jackson (2009) where more than half of the students were reported to have positive attitudes toward speaking with others and more willing to communicate in English classes. The study by Karnchanachari (2019) on the would-be teachers of international students at Yuga University, Russia, has also shown that many learners were willing to speak English because they feel that it is beneficial for them.

The discrepancies observed in the above studies might be reasonably associated with the different contexts in which English is used. In some contexts, such as Thai and Pakistani, for instance, English is used as a second language parallel to their mother tongue so that people tend to use the language more often than in areas it is used as a foreign language (Rao, 1996). On the other hand, where English is used as a foreign language in, for instance, the Chinese and Korean contexts (Liu, 2002) including Ethiopia, and limited to only academic settings, the language is used much less frequently and as a result people tend to exhibit less interest or desire to communicate in the language.

In addition, the Ethiopian culture of classroom teaching-learning situations favors more of teacher-centeredness and emphasizes high attention to mental activity rather than verbal participation or activities of the students. The Western classroom contexts however tend to be student-centered and communication-oriented (Rao, 1996) and accentuates not only the academic achievement but also the social communicative competence as well (Liu, 2002). This may, therefore, be one of the potential reasons for the inconsistency of the finding of the current study with some of the previous studies.

Factors Affecting Students' Level of WTC

Concerning the factors affecting the target students' WTC, the findings of the study revealed that the students' WTC was affected by several individual (personality-based) and classroom (situational) factors. The factors were Self-confidence, Motivation, Personality, Language Learning Orientation and Classroom Environments.

Self-confidence constitutes self-perceived communicative confidence (SPCC) and communication anxiety (CA) (MacIntyre et al., 1998). This finding is generally consistent with previous findings such as those of Hashimoto (2002), Bektas-Cetinkaya (2009) and Yu (2008). The findings indicate that students who have low self-perception of their abilities to communicate in English experience a high degree of anxiety and hence they become less self-confident, leading them to exhibit a low level of willingness to communicate orally in communicative English classes. This idea was also reported by Nagy and Nikolov (2007) who indicated that the most common

reason for learners' unwillingness to speak in class was their low self-confidence to speak before other students in the class and having more anxiety when thinking to do so. As a result, the students prefer to remain silent than trying to get involved in oral communicative opportunities.

The other factor identified as affecting the students' WTC was motivation. Motivation was described by three sub-factors: the desire to learn English, attitude towards learning English and motivational intensity. This finding corresponds to the findings of the studies by Cameron (2020); Ghonsooly et al. (2012), Lahuerta (2014) and Tuyen and Loan (2019). Cameron (2020), for instance, claims that L2 learners' WTC is significantly affected by the attitude the learners have toward the target language. Ghonsooly et al. (2012), Lahuerta (2014) and Tuyen and Loan (2019) also claim that a higher level of motivational intensity and desire to learn English facilitate more willingness among the learners to interact.

Personality (Introversion/Extroversion) was the other factor identified as affecting the students' WTC in the present study. The finding indicates that while extroverted or outgoing students are more willing to participate in speaking activities, introverted or shy students are, however, affected by their shyness. As a result, they exhibit a low willingness to participate in oral communicative activities in the classroom. This finding is consistent with the findings of Cetinkaya (2005), Elwood (2011), McCroskey and Richmond (1990) and MacIntyre et al. (1998) who claim that EFL students with high personality traits of sociability, flexibility, extroversion and confidence exhibit a higher willingness to communicate than the students with a lower level of these traits in communicating orally in the target language.

Language learning orientation (LLO) is again the other variable identified as affecting the students' WTC in this study. According to the finding, the students' LLO, the purpose for which they are learning the language (job/career, travel, knowledge), significantly affects their WTC. This finding is in accordance with the findings of the studies by MacIntyre et al. (2001) and Waluyo (2020) that identified a positive correlation between the students' five orientations of language learning (travel, job-related, friendship with Francophones, personal knowledge, and school achievement) and their WTC in learning French as a second language in an immersion program.

The last factor identified as affecting the students' WTC was the contextual factor, the Classroom Environment. In addition to the psychological factors, as discussed above, the students' WTC was also affected by contextual/situational factors such as the classroom environments (CRE). In the present study, the CRE includes teachers' support, student cohesion, topic familiarity and task orientation. The study identified that teachers support, "the extent to which the teacher helps, supports, trusts, befriends, and is interested in the students" (Fatemi et al., 2016, p. 7) significantly affects the students' WTC. This is consistent with the finding of MacIntyre and Legatto (2011)

which indicates that teachers' support has the potential of affecting (increasing or decreasing) the students' WTC at any time.

Similarly, student cohesion, the intimacy or relationship that exists between and among peers or groups of students and the extent to which the students know, help, and support each other (Dorman et al., 2006) is also found affecting the students' WTC in this study. This means that while positive cohesion among the students fosters the students' WTC in the target language, lack of cohesion results in negative consequences lowering their WTC. This finding is consistent with the finding of Doe (2014) who states that "Language students may be less inclined to communicate when they lack a sense of affiliation with their peers" (p. 277). It was also similar to the findings of Wen and Clément (2003) who claim that students avoid communication in L2 when they feel that participation in L2 involves a potential threat of negative evaluation by their peers, groups, the whole classroom as well as their teachers.

The third contextual variable identified as affecting the students' WTC was topic familiarity: the specific point on which the L2 learners are interested or not interested to talk (Aubrey, 2011). Aubrey (2011) argues that topics that are interesting and personally relevant to EFL students enhance their WTC in oral communication significantly while topics that are not interesting may not encourage the students to participate. Studies conducted by several researchers (Cao, 2011; Riasati, 2012; Yashima et al., 2016) indicated that an interesting, familiar, useful and comprehensible topic increases L2 learners' WTC and hence keeps on their participation in conversations.

The last contextual variable identified as affecting the students' WTC was task orientation: the degree of emphasis or attention the L2 learners give to complete language-based activities and solve problems (Dorman et al., 2006). Aubrey (2011) states that while relevant and engaging speaking tasks encourage students to speak (WTC), irrelevant and non-engaging tasks discourage students to participate in speaking tasks resulting in poor WTC. Similarly, the findings of the studies by Cao (2009), MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) and Suksawas (2011) indicate that interesting, meaningful and communication-oriented tasks with a reasonable level of difficulty facilitate L2 learners WTC in EFL contexts.

Generally, as discussed in detail in the background section, the current study was framed within the framework of Macintyre et al.'s (1998) heuristic model. Accordingly, the results and findings of the current study confirm that some of the factors (both the trait and state-level factors) that were proposed by the heuristic model are able to describe and explain EFL students' WTC in the Ethiopian higher education context.

Implications

The findings of the present study indicate that EFL students' WTC is a crucial concept that has a paramount contribution to the successful development of oral communicative skills in ESL/EFL. As Swain (2000) points out that "It is language use [that] mediate[s] language learning" (p. 97), students need to have the willingness to use that language and participate in oral communicative opportunities to improve their speaking skills. The findings thus imply that both students and particularly teachers need to pay special attention to the concept of WTC as it is an essential ingredient in the teaching-acquisition of oral communicative skills. The prominent figures in the area, MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 547), even argue that "The ultimate goal of the learning process should be to engender in language students the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness actually to communicate in them". EFL teachers need to, therefore, be more sensitive about the crucial roles they play in creating a more and attractive communicative atmosphere for the students in EFL classes and make them more interested and willing to initiate and maintain oral communicative opportunities by getting them actively engaged in the oral communicative activities.

To do this, as the findings indicate, teachers need to be aware of both the psychological and contextual (situational) factors that affect the students' WTC. As indicated by the findings, the students' WTC is the function of both the personality-based and contextual (situational) factors such as the students' self-confidence, motivation, personality, classroom environments and the like. It is therefore necessary for EFL teachers to pay special attention to the students' WTC and foster the enabling factors while circumventing the impeding ones in EFL oral communicative classes. In general, as students' WTC is identified as a predictor of speaking performance, EFL teachers need to identify all the possible ways through which the students' degree of WTC can be enhanced.

Conclusion

The findings of the current study revealed that EFL students had generally a low level of WTC - the desire or intention to initiate and make use of oral communication (speaking) opportunities. The students' WTC was found to be low as a result of the function of both the psychological and contextual/situational factors operating in combination. The psychological factors include self-confidence, motivation, personality and language learning orientations. The contextual or situational factors include those factors that exist in the classroom environment and influence the learners' degree of willingness to communicate orally. These include teacher support, students' cohesion, topic familiarity and task orientation. As understood from the students' interviews, self-confidence, personality, language learning orientations and teachers' support were found to be the most influencing factors of the target students' WTC.

The current study is an initial attempt of examining Ethiopian higher education EFL students' WTC in oral communicative English classes. It, therefore, contributes to the conceptualization of the WTC construct in the Ethiopian EFL setting and inform language educators about the diverse causes of the Ethiopian EFL students' WTC. Finally, it is important to note that, despite its contributions, the current study was delimited to selected public university settings in Ethiopia. Hence, as the concept is so crucial in EFL, it needs to be studied from other contexts such as primary and secondary schools and private institutions to have a broader understanding of Ethiopian EFL students' WTC.

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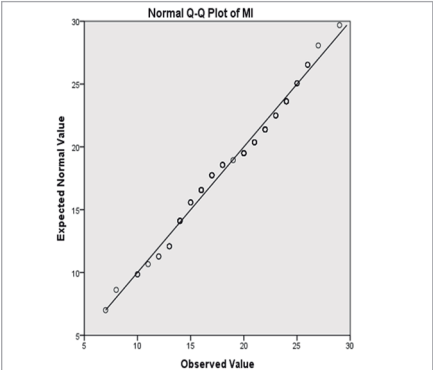
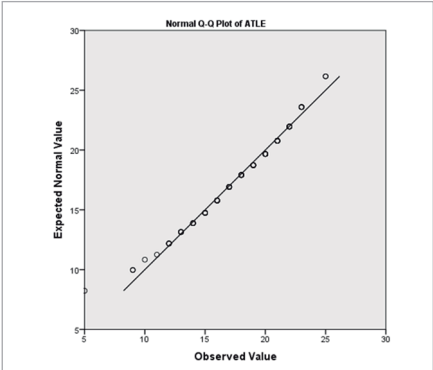
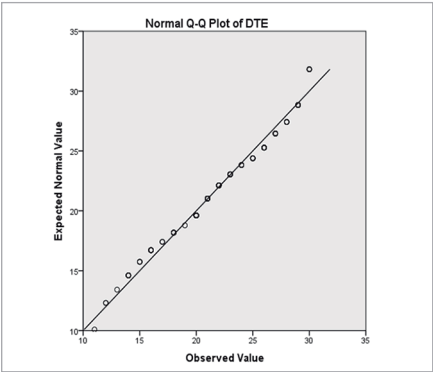
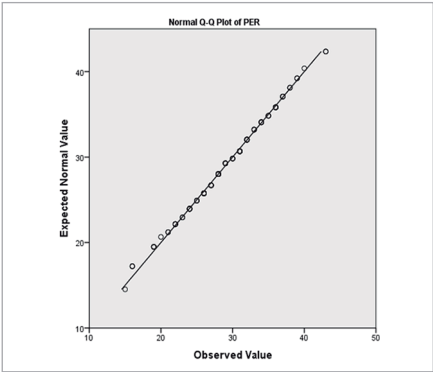
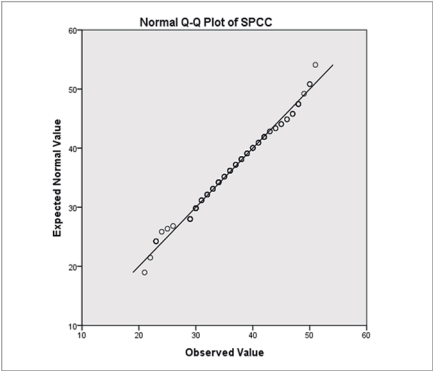
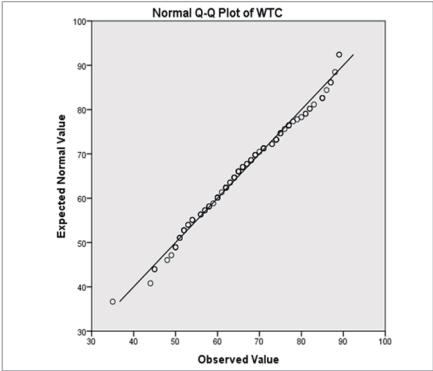
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Appendix

Heteroscedasticity Assumptions



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