

The Effect of Learners' Self-directed Study on Willingness to Communicate

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Abstract—Self-directed study is a crucial need for learners to emphasize its central role in language education. Fostering and improving students' ability to take initiative in their learning is considered crucial, for achieving success in both their present and future careers. In addition, recognizing the significance of being open to communication and willingness to communicate (WTC) works as a measure of learning, which can lead to attitudes, among students. This paper aims at finding out the relationship and the effect of learners' self-directed motivation on WTC by answering the following questions. Is there any relationship between self-direction and WTC? Does self-direction have a positive impact on willingness? The paper examines WTC with 3rd grade students in the English Department, from the College of Basic Education at Salahaddin University-Erbil for the academic year 2022–2023. The participants are (60) students. The paper was conducted through a quantitative method. The data have been collected by a questionnaire and the tool adopted for analyzing the data is a Statistical Package for the Social Science. It is concluded that the most common factors that influence on students' WTC are motivation, reliance, and anxiety about making mistakes and challenging situations. Another concluding point is that students were unwilling to utilize only English while expressing an idea or discussing a matter with classmates or teachers. Moreover, students referred to linguistic factors represented as indicative of their preference for taking more foreign courses and feeling comfortable in the classroom.

Keywords—Communication, English as a foreign language learners, Language learning, Self-directed studies, Willingness to communicate

I. INTRODUCTION

It is commonly assumed that communication and self-study are identified to have a contradictory role in students' educational life. Nowadays, the concept of students being part of and taking responsibility for their own learning process may function as an obstacle and affect their desire to communicate. Furthermore, one of the most important ideas that might seem relevant to learners' self-directed study is Willingness to Communicate (WTC) which was first developed for L1 by McCroskey and Baer in 1985. However, WTC is now emerging as a concept used for assessing learners' L1 and L2 communication (Richmond and Roach, 1992). In addition, the ultimate goal of foreign language education should be to create and foster WTC in students to achieve the social and political goals of the subject (Khaki, 2013).

In particular, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners differ in their WTC in response to reflecting diverse communication behaviors. Certain individuals consistently engage in communication, with people while remaining silent with others. The level of participation varies as some individuals take the initiative to speak while others only

respond when prompted. The WTC depends on the context. It is influenced by both the situation and the person one is communicating with. To measure this willingness, we can utilize McCroskeys WTC Scale, which focuses on four communication contexts; speaking, meetings, small groups, and interactions, with friends. In addition, it considers three types of receivers; strangers, acquaintances, and friends (Maniupspika, 2018).

Self-directed study is defined by Auliana and Hadijah (2022) as a process that will enable the individual to gain a better understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses. Through it, students are able to move beyond just experiencing to understanding; they become aware of themselves and how they approach practice in a conscious manner. According to Harini et al. (2023), self-directed learning empowers students to engage in self-reflection, fostering the development of creativity by supporting learning to their individual needs. This approach leads to greater achievements, a more comprehensive understanding, and the ability to focus and refine their learning. In addition, self-directed learners have control over their learning process, allowing flexibility in

choosing pace and location. Given its adaptability to the current technological and cultural landscape, this strategy is well-suited for contemporary students. Moreover, emotional engagement enables self-directed learners to monitor and adjust their learning effectively (Odanga, 2018).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. WTC

Communication is the procedure that empowers people to commerce knowledge and ideas. It is essentially crucial for expanding human relationships. The main aim of a second language is to have accurate oral communication between individuals with diverse cultural background. WTC is one of the factors that affect speaking (Yashima, 2002).

According to Kang (2005), WTC is the communication process in a particular situation that may be affected by various factors, including the interlocutors, topic, and context, among other possible factors. In contrast, in its most basic sense, MacIntyre and Catherine (1996) states that it is considered to be a stable disposition toward communicating when given the freedom to do so. It means that a person who is willing to communicate is often not hindered by obstacles.

In situations where people communicate in a language, it is common for individuals to feel unsure, about participating in conversations even if they have the skills to express themselves effectively. It is believed that several factors can influence learners' hesitation in this aspect (Dörnyei, 2005). Moreover, Oveisi and Nosratinia (2019) reported that it has been pointed out that factors, including cognitive, metacognitive, and personality traits, influence a person's WTC. The importance of aspects, in the process of learning a language is highlighted. One such aspect is the concept of resilience which can contribute to the development of communication readiness and speaking skills. Resilience in the context of teaching and learning foreign languages refers to an individuals' ability to overcome challenges and adapt to their surroundings. In a setting, it pertains to students' capacity to effectively handle setbacks, difficulties, adversity, and pressure. In addition, Başöz and Erten (2019) elaborate on various aspects, revealing that changes in second language WTC (L2 WTC) can be observed during interactions between non-native speakers and native speaker tutors. The study indicates that WTC is sensitive to moment-to-moment fluctuations and identifies conversational context, interlocutors, and topics as significant situational factors influencing L2 WTC.

Pawlak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2015) carried out a study in the Japanese EFL context and showed that the size of the class played a major role in influencing students' WTC in English when it comes to the learning of English. The results of the class observations showed that the WTC of learners decreased as the class size increased. Besides topic relevance, anxiety, perception of teacher participation, and difficulty of the task were the other factors that significantly contributed to learners' knowledge transfer inside the classroom, and all had an impact on their WTC during class time. In another

study by Zarrinabadi (2014), several factors were identified as influential in learners' WTC in English. These factors include the time teachers spend waiting for learners, the extent of error correction, and the level of support provided. In addition, the type of task, the topic of discussion, and the seating arrangement were found to have a significant impact on learners' readiness to communicate in the classroom.

B. Self-directed Studies

Education has evolved into self-direction due to the role change of learners from passive participants to consumers and the reaction against behaviorism. Despite Yevs Chalon's claim to be the father of self-direction, Holec has been credited with starting the debate about self-direction in language learning by introducing the term autonomy. The concept is self-direction by learners. Learning should be student-driven, and students should possess processes, like evaluation, that used to belong to teachers (Chamani et al., 2023).

According to Auliana and Hadijah (2022), the self-directed learning process empowers individuals to comprehend their strengths and weaknesses, moving beyond mere experience to a conscious understanding. This approach fosters self-awareness, enabling students to reflect on their approaches to practice. The self-directed learning style supports creativity by tailoring learning processes to individual needs. Consequently, students engaging in self-directed learning achieve greater accomplishments, a more extensive understanding, and the ability to focus and refine their learning.

Students who participate in self-directed learning have autonomy over their learning journey, allowing them to set their own pace and choose preferred learning locations. Given its adaptability to contemporary technological and cultural contexts, this approach is well-suited for today's students, fostering a positive anticipation of future learning. Developing and enhancing self-direction are crucial to ensuring the success of learners (Azeez, 2023).

The factors that have influence on self-directed studies are indicated by Al-Faris (2023) that are gender, cultural diversity, learning strategy belief of the idea, and a person's attitude toward it.

III. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

A. Research Questions and Hypothesis

Research question

This paper aims at finding out answers to the following questions:

1. Is there any relationship between self-direction and WTC?
2. Is self-direction has a positive impact on willingness?

Hypothesis

1. There is a direct correlation between self-direction and communication
2. WTC increases the level of learners' self-direction in the learning process.

B. Population and Sample

The paper examines WTC of 3rd-grade students in the English Department, from the College of Basic Education at Salahaddin University-Erbil for the academic year 2022–2023. The population was (60) students from a total (70) including both male and female. The participants were selected randomly.

C. Data Collection

The data has been collected quantitatively through a questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into three parts first part is general information about the participants. The second part is about WTC which includes (10) close-ended scale items. Items (1-2) are for motivation and task type, topic context is (3), public speaking and diversity is (4), reliance is (5), class environment and size are (6), error correction and linguistic factors are (7,8), topic discussion is (9), and anxiety making mistakes and challenges is (10).

Furthermore, the third part of the self-directed study consists of (10) close-ended scale items. Items (1–2) are for personal characteristics and self-confidence, activities outside the class are (3), interest in the topic is (4–7), self-confidence is (5), anxiety is (6), Linguistic factor is (8–9), and the classroom environment is (10). The tool adopted for analyzing the data is a statistical package for social science (SPSS).

The rating scale of the analysis in the questionnaire is numerical 1 – strongly agree, 2 – agree, 3 – neutral, 4 – disagree, and 5 – strongly disagree. Hence, the mean between 1 and 5 is 3. It means 3 is neutral, then more than 3 is positive, and <2 is negative.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. Introductory Notes

This part is devoted to present the process of data analysis of the present study. The data are collected by namely a questionnaire. The analysis of the questionnaire is done by SPSS and Sample responses have been calculated and then the results are transformed to percentages in the bar chart below.

The first part of the questionnaire was devoted to general information about the participants. The information is presented in the (Fig. 1) below.

The figure depicts a comparison between males and females in terms of age and experience in self-directed studies. It is evident that the majority of the participants of the study are males, aged 20–22, with an average amount of experience between 1 and 3 years. As follows, there are equal numbers of male and female participants with a 1–5-year experience level. It was found that the lowest group of participants was females between the ages of 26–28 with a minimum of 1 year’s experience.

(Fig. 2) represents the statistical mean score of WTC. In the response to the items of “1, 10, and 4” have the highest mean score. It was agreed by more than one-third of the resonance that motivation, reliance, and anxiety about making mistakes and challenging situations were the most efficient effects of WTC.

As for items “6 and 7,” the resonance supported class environment size and teacher correction tend not to have much effect on students’ WTC since their behavior will not be affected by large classes and teacher correction.

According to item “2,” students are confident and feel comfortable in working on various tasks in the English language. In addition, it was determined that item “3” gained equal importance as well as being able to comprehend and communicate everything totally in English regarding a variety of topics and contexts.

As a final observation, it is noteworthy that the items on which respondents strongly disagreed were items “9, 5” have the lowest mean score indicates that students are unwilling to utilize only English when expressing an idea or discussing a matter with classmates or teachers. Furthermore, whether the respondent is willing to provide assistance to someone (stranger) or answer a question using English, which indicates that some respondents are not willing and these are not suitable and serve as an obstacle to their communication.

(Fig. 3) shows a statistical mean score of self-directed studies. Based on that, we can see the variability of items “8, 4, and 9” have the highest mean score of students referring to linguistic factors represented as indicative of their preference in taking more foreign courses and feeling comfortable in the classroom.

While, concerning item “6” interestingly, over half of the respondents indicated that anxiety about unprepared or unpredictable questions from their instructor negatively affected their ability to take control of their studies.

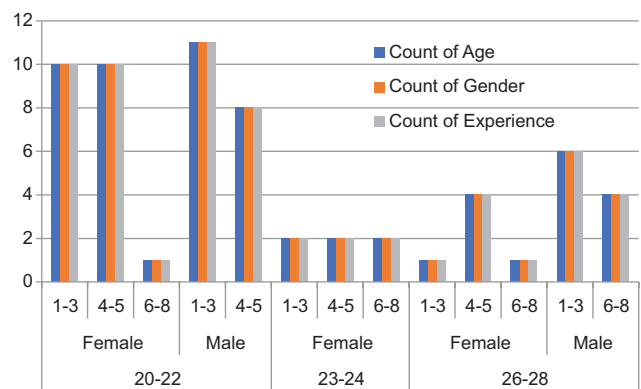


Fig. 1: Participants General Information.

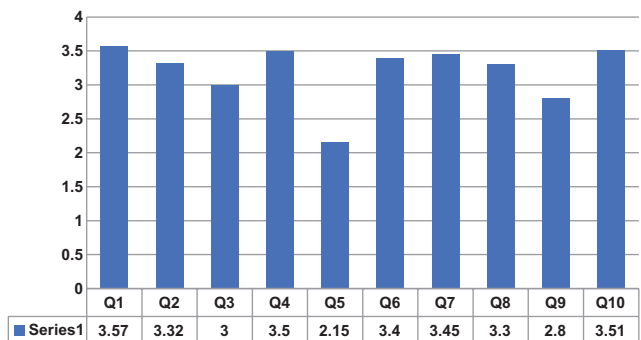


Fig. 2: Statistical Mean Score of WTC.

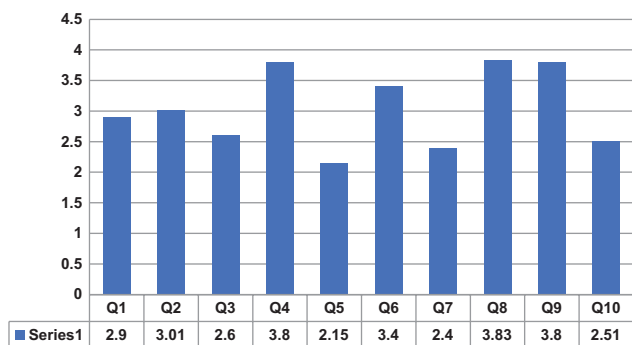


Fig. 3: Statistical Mean Score of Self-directed Studies.

TABLE I
CORRELATION BETWEEN WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AND
SELF-DIRECTED STUDY

Variables	IV	DV
Willingness to communicate		
Pearson correlation	1	0.285**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	100	100
Self-directed study		
Pearson correlation	0.285**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

According to the students, items “1 and 3” have a close average of mean scores of “2.9–2.6,” which indicates that they are confident about their future careers and their ability to conduct outside activities in English. Similarly, item “10” was rated equally important and was close to the mean score of “2.51,” as classroom environment, instructor role, methods, and materials all have a positive impact on self-directed learning.

Finally, one can notice that the items that the respondents strongly disagreed on are item “5” have the lowest mean score which is “2.1” it is believed that one of the major obstacles facing students in language classes is their fear of making mistakes. Students encounter difficulties and pressure to use only English to express an idea or have a discussion with friends/teachers in the classroom.

Based on the analysis, the correlation value between WTC and the student’s self-directed study was 0.285 as shown in Table I. This value indicates that WTC and student’s self-directed study have a low correlation. There is a weak correlation between the variables. In other words, according to the study, there is no relationship between self-direction and WTC, and self-direction has a weak impact on it.

V. CONCLUSION

The concluded points are primarily intended to serve as a link between the previous theoretical background of the paper and the practice part of it, the outcome of the analyzed data.

Having completed the paper and from interpreting the data collected, it is concluded that:

1. The most common factors that influence student’s WTC are motivation, reliance, and anxiety about making mistakes and challenging situations

2. Students prefer to utilize only English while expressing an idea or discussing a matter with classmates or teachers
3. Students referred to linguistic factors represent as indicative of their preference for taking more foreign courses and feeling comfortable in the classroom. In addition, the classroom environment, instructor role, methods, and materials all had a positive impact on self-directed learning
4. The major obstacle that prevents students to be self-directed learners is the fear of making mistakes in language classes.

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