

Students' Willingness to Communicate in English Through Virtual Classroom

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12/10/2020

Approved 4/12/2020

Keywords:

Students' willingness
Communicate in English
Virtual classroom

ABSTRACT

Abstract: The aim of this study is to describe students' willingness to communicate in English through virtual classroom during Covid-19 Pandemic. This study used descriptive qualitative research design, conducted at SMK Negeri 8 Malang. Data collection methods were obtained from students' responses on questionnaires and compiled with transcripts of the virtual interview result. The finding showed the students preferred to communicate in English written rather than English spoken.

INTRODUCTION

Online learning has been being conducted in all education levels since Indonesia was claimed becoming one of countries in the world infected Corona Virus-19 (Covid-19). It is imperative that students and teachers customize with new trend that they have to attend online learning instead of conventional one or face-to-face (FTF) in carrying out teaching and learning activities. It means that students as well as teachers are mostly dealing with the use of software applications web-based that may lead them to be more advanced in digital literacy constituted as one of the 21st century skills in the classrooms which become the most popular topic in education, especially in middle and high school classrooms.

The presence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) integrated appropriately in facilitating foreign language learning classes has been proved. (Nunan, 2004) says connecting the curriculum to real world tasks in this way prepares learners for the challenge of coping with language they hear and read in the real world outside the classroom. (Shahzad & Khan, 2010) stated this modern distance teaching and learning system is not a pure interactive system, but faster because all of teacher's tasks are managed by electronic and printed media. (Moore, M. G; Kearsley, 2011) suggested that teachers and students are at the same frequency on technology perspective is a fundamental rule for an effective methodology of distance learning. It implies that teachers are facing the challenge to be innovator as well as creator is very likely to come in real. To develop their professional, not only do they learn how to use hardware or software but also how it is used regarding to more effective pedagogy, content, and context.

Virtual classroom also concerns with carrying out asynchronous learning in which all instructions and discussions are done through chatting box among instructor and learners to keep discussion, even task assigning when live communication cannot be scheduled in time due to other commitments. (Hew, K. F; Cheung, W. S.,; Ng, 2010) noted several benefits. First, learners feel convenient in having high control over when they engage with course materials and activities. Second, LMS-based instruction is extremely structured, efficient, and secure management of assignments and grades. In addition, it evokes the learner-centered critical thinking mode in well-structured LMS discussion boards. Table 1 shows the strengths and the weaknesses of online and blended learning modes, portrayed by Merrill (2009).

Table1. Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of Online and Blended Learning Modes

Delivery Mode	Strengths	Weaknesses
Asynchronous (LMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learner access independent of time and place• Organization of content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of spontaneous interaction• Lack of immediate feedback (low engagement)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking in discussion forums (high efficiency) 	
Synchronous (LVC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner access independent of place • Some F2F presence (audio and video) • Permanence (can be recorded) • Classroom-type technology (Higher engagement than LMS, lower than F2F) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires meeting at same time • Depends on learners' installed base of computer equipment and connection • Requires skill to run meetings (Lower efficiency vs. LMS, higher efficiency vs. F2F)
Blended Learning (F2F + LMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner access partially independent of time and place • Technology aids to support live meetings • F2F allows for personal responses and relations (High engagement, high effectiveness) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can lead to excessive work for learners and instructor • Still requires on-campus participation (Low efficiency)
Blended Online Learning (LMS + LVC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner access independent of place • Adds presence vs. LMS • Spontaneous thinking in LVC • Critical thinking on LMS discussion forums (more engaging than LMS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partially dependent on time • Susceptible to technical difficulties • Needs an event producer • May reinforce direct instruction methods (Less efficient than LMS)

Apart from these findings, (Comer, D. R; Lenaghan, 2012) argue asynchronous LMS-based instruction also has some weaknesses such as lack of social and personal engagement, presence of impersonal LMS-based learning environment and unsatisfying mood felt by the instructors owing to delayed response from learners. In perspective of eLearning, asynchronous online instruction with very significantly efficient in effectiveness of instructional dimension is at least equal to FTF although it remains a challenge in the dimension of learner and instructor engagement

In perspective of learning and teaching languages, previous online learning studies provide various results on students' WTC in the target language use. (Sheldon, 2008) conducted a survey on 172 tertiary students in the USA and found that students who are more willing to communicate in a real life show the same way in online environment. Freiermuth, M; Jarrell, (2006) examined the relationship between motivation and WTC of 36 female Japanese students and revealed that most of them would prefer to do online chat rather than argue in F2F discussion. They feel more comfortable to communicate in online environment due to less face-threatening. Unlike Thailand students, Reinders, H; Wattana (2015) found high students show their willingness to speak English more easily while playing games in computer because they feel not being assessed by the teacher. Chotipaktanasook, N; Reinders, (2016) use Instagram as a channel for sharing ideas, feelings, and thoughts of their students. The result shows that online chat can elevate the students' confidence and motivation to use the target language, leading to their higher level of WTC L2 in use. In addition, Alwi (2015) notes Malaysian engineering students produced more language in text chat than F2F. Overall, these studies do clarify the same way to convey their thoughts during online learning in written format to elaborate their WTC in English rather than with synchronous or asynchronous voice or video chat. Obviously, the online learning increased the students' WTC in English due to less face-threatening than F2F, physical meeting in traditional classroom.

The concept of WTC is based on the fact that some learners are eager to speak aloud while some others are safe in quiet. McCroskey, J.C; Baer, (1985) illustrate WTC as the probability of engaging in communication spontaneously with stable propensity to talk in any situations, seemingly a personality trait as the determinant variable rather than situation-based in influencing the individual's level of WTC. In short, MacIntyre, P.D; Dörnyei, Z; Clément, R; Noel, (1998) illustrate a particular level of individual's readiness to

get into conversation at a certain time with specific person or persons as WTC. Kang, (2005) also explains WTC in L2 as readiness to communicate with variation, according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context.

Compared to WTC in L1, variables influencing WTC in L2 are more complex. MacIntyre, P.D; Dörnyei, Z; Clément, R; Noel, (1998) state a person's personality, level of self-confidence, motivation for speaking L2 and attitude towards L2 community, social situation and environment where the communication takes place are the potential variables influencing on WTC in the L2 as developed and presented by (MacIntyre, P.D; Dörnyei, Z; Clément, R; Noel, 1998) on the following figure of the WTC construction.

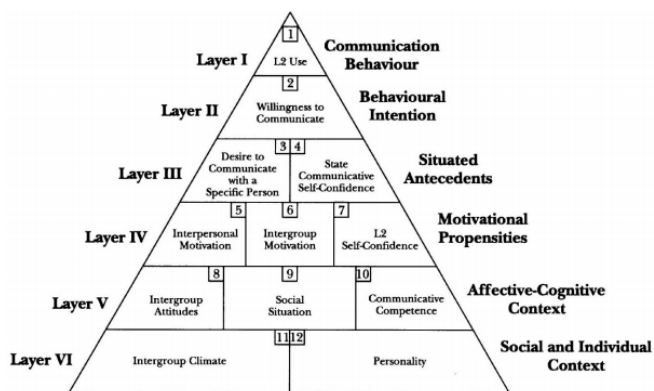


Figure 1 Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (MacIntyre, et al., 1998)

The first three layers exhibit situation-specific influences on WTC at a given moment in time, and the second three layers exhibit stable, permanent influences on the process. Bringing up self-confidence to let students talk intensely is the priority to build their WTC in L2 use, because many researches show that most of Asian learners of English Foreign Language (EFL) are passive, quiet, shy, and unwilling to answer questions delivered by teachers. To do so, (Xie, 2020) asserts choosing topics based on learner's interests and creating attractive atmosphere of learning or far from being stressful and over supervising toward classroom interaction will increase students' participation in the classroom discourse. Even if, there are a few students raising their hand, it shows a non-verbal WTC comes up.

METHOD

This research focused on the phenomena of learning through virtual classrooms experienced by the twelfth-grade students of SMK Negeri 8 Malang. The researcher started by determining a study that promoted the current issues dealing with students' experience in the virtual classroom, especially in maintaining their WTC in English. By adopting purposive sampling technique, fifty students were selected to spread questionnaire sheets, which consisted of five statements explaining activities as triggers to encourage students to communicate in English. The Likert-type questionnaires were modified and validated by an English expert. They were uploaded in Google Form using a 1 to 5 range scale, denoting quantitative data that was essentially qualitative data when transcribed into descriptive qualitative data. The questionnaires were presented in closed-ended statements. Another instrument used was the interview guidance, which contained a list of questions that were posed to representative subjects, including the most active students, the average students, and the lowest-performing students. The interviews were conducted through live-virtual meetings using Zoom, immediately after the questionnaires had been collected from the subjects of this research. Video recordings were also taken during the interviews, and the researcher's field notes were equipped.

After administering the questionnaires and conducting the interviews, the raw data was analyzed using the interpretative analysis approach. This analysis involved working with the data, such as organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, transcribing and coding it, synthesizing the data, and identifying data patterns. To ensure the qualitative nature of this study, verification procedures were used to establish the trustworthiness of the qualitative data. The questionnaires proposed to the subjects of this study had previously been validated by an English expert. To employ triangulation, the researcher collected data from different sources to determine if the findings aligned across those sources (Mertens, 2005), including interviews, field notes, and documents. Another strategy the researcher employed was interviewee-checking, which involved giving participants the opportunity to confirm the transcriptions of what they had said during the virtual interview sessions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are five activities that are usually carried out regularly in order to build a specific condition that teacher and students get accustomed to communicating in English, either at Google-classroom considered as asynchronous learning by chatting in English or at Google-Meet as synchronous learning to promote students actively speaking in English.

Using Likert-scale with range from 1 to 5 in which 1 means never, 2 for sometimes, 3 for usually, 4 for most of the time, and 5 for always, Table 2 showed students activeness to maintain their WTC English.

Table 2. Activities to maintain WTC in English through virtual classroom

No	Activities	Mean	SD
1	Teacher promotes learning activities in English	4.10	0.74
2	Teacher fosters students to communicate in English as they are	3.74	0.96
3	Student raises a question/respond in English spoken	2.44	0.93
4	Student raises a question/respond in English written	3.04	1.05
5	Teacher provides comments on every assignment in English	4.30	0.93

The activity that teacher provides comments on every assignment most of the time in English is scored 4.30 ± 0.93 , followed by promoting learning activities in English initiated by teacher and fostering students to communicate in English were scored 4.10 ± 0.74 and 3.74 ± 0.96 respectively. It means that teacher showed the efforts to bring students involve actively in maintaining their WTC in English, either written or spoken

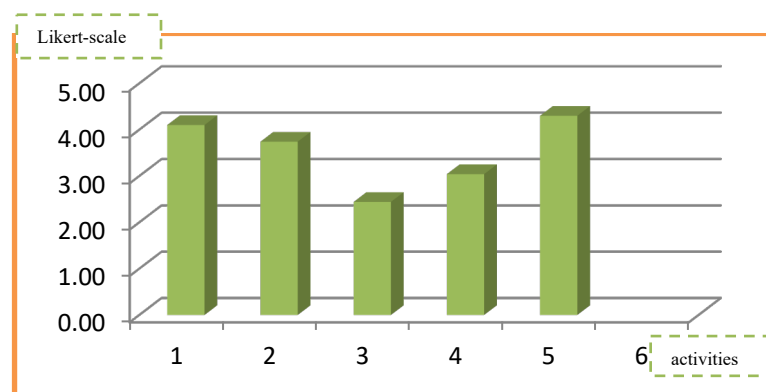


Figure 2 Frequency of activities perceived by students

However, students prefer using English written rather than English spoken. It was showed that score of responding interlocutor act in English written is higher than in English spoken, 3.04 ± 1.05 compared to 2.44 ± 0.93 .

In order to figure out how students maintain their WTC in English through VC, five activities which are considered relating to trigger students' activeness in English communication were proposed. The first activity "Teacher delivers learning instruction in English written at GC" is scored 4.10 ± 0.74 . This score is lower than the other one "Teacher provides comments on every assignment in English" which gained score 4.30 ± 0.93 . It indicates these triggers used to be performed during VC most of the time, implicitly students perceived their engagement in English communication more convenient when they conveyed their idea in English written. It can be seen from the participants' citation as follow:

"I think I maintain my communication in written better than spoken actually. I just like to read something better than to hear something. Because if you are hearing something you need a video about it like you need to explain quite literally everything in very detail about the thing you need to make simple. For me, spoken it's a little bit hard because sometime we can miscommunicate due to the improper pronunciation and that can cause

like (a) you know misunderstanding among the students. So I like writing, I know all what teacher means about this exam for example". (Participant 1)

"Communicate in Writing, Bu. I'm still confused how to speak fluently. It's my problem". (Participant 2)

"I like typing (written) better than speaking. When I wonder whether it is wrong, immediately I can delete and replace it into the correct one. Unlike if I have talk, I get embarrassed when I make a mistake. e.e.e.." (laughing). (Participant 3)

"I think writing, Ma'am. Because I can rewrite the false phrase if I think it's a little bit inappropriate, I mean it's better to do. I know... I know I want to speak but it's hard to do because it makes me anxious". (Participant 4)

"Usually I'm worried in pronunciation, grammatical structure, and it takes time for me to think a lot, especially how to translate Indonesia words into English." So I choose writing". (Participant 5)

In short, it can be implied that students feel safer to express their idea in written English which is considered as passive learner. Riasati, (2012) claims that a number of factors that contribute to willingness to communicate in the target language when learning a foreign language, and the contributing factors include task- type, topic of discussion, interlocutor, teacher, class atmosphere, personality and self-perceived speaking ability. In addition, Cao (2011) found that Asian students are more passive and reticent leading to unwilling to speak. Regarding to this experience, what English teacher provides to arouse students' WTC in VC through giving instruction using the targeted language and immediately feedback on their assignment is merely intended to encourage students to practice speaking, particularly in conference meeting using GMeet. According to Brown (2002), giving positive feedback may serve not only to increase motivation but also to build a supportive classroom climate and let students know how well they have performed, and Westwood (2008) asserts the feedback should be in descriptive praise such as well done, good job, and others to good performance. While for incorrect response, the teacher should immediately provide alternative accurate information in order to avoid disheartened feeling or misconception. Surprisingly, this recommendation has already been applied by teacher during VC and students recognize it. It is clearly performed in interview session as follow:

"Interviewer : Has ever your teacher given feedback on your assignment?"

"Participant 2 : Yes, she has.

"Interviewer : Did she/he say "it is wrong".

"Participant 2 : No. She/he just says "this word should be like this".

Moreover, another participant shows his willingness to participate in the discussion due to this conducive and communicative atmosphere. The following is his comment:

"I reply your question in English spoken event though there are some inappropriate words I deliver. At least, I have experience trying to speak up. Not just keep in silence". (Participant 3)

In short, the students feel that teacher provides English learning atmosphere well although they still look less confident to speak up. As a result, the other triggers to give information about how students maintain their WTC in VC are interwoven one to another. Through this experience, it is recommended teacher has to provide her/his role greater and more attractively during VC to keep students motivated to communicate in English confidently, whether in written or spoken.

CONCLUSION

According to the finding, it can be concluded that teacher still showed effort to create a particular atmosphere in which students can maintain their WTC. The fact showed that students prefer to communicate in English using written form due to their less confidence, fear to make mistakes in diction and misleading pronunciation that lead to misunderstanding about what they talked about.

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