# EFL STUDENTS' WTC EXPERIENCES THROUGH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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# **ABSTRACT**

EFL students are highly demanded both to engage and to involve intensively in classroom interaction in order to massively practice communication skill in English. In this case, EFL students can supportively participate in Willingness to Communicate (WTC) through the implementation of project-based learning. Given to this recent attention, this research investigates students' WTC experiences during project completion. Qualitative research method with thematic analysis approach was applied and four eligible participants with specific criteria were chosen to answer the semi-structure interview. The emerging data were classified to importing two themes; conversational setting and particular interlocutors. Results reveal students' higher WTC only occurred at the classroom under the lecturer's surveillance, they tend to discuss with Bahasa during completing project outside the classroom. It implies that the implementation of project-based learning only offers situation-based activity to create the dynamic interaction among EFL students. The more systematic stages of project-based learning need to develop to promote higher WTC in EFL context.

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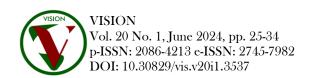
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# INTRODUCTION

To interact with the increasingly globalized world, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students nowadays need to complete the big effort to hone their communication skills in English fluently. In order to become communicatively competent, EFL learners need to increase their willingness to communicate (WTC). studies report that WTC have demonstrated the critical function that WTC plays in a huge engagement with the communicative activities and it absolutely leads to the greater language attainment that can from the second language acquisition process and a high degree of WTC (Khatib and Nourzadeh 2014; Brown 2014; MacIntyre et al. 2001). It is crucial for teachers to comprehend why some students are eager to talk in their second language and look for opportunities to do so, while others shy away from L2 communication activities. A survey of the literature showed that individual variances in WTC varied (Zhang, 2024). A few examples of variables that may have a good or negative impact on target language learning are language anxiety, motivation, willingness to communicate (WTC), and boredom (e.g. Dornyei, 2002; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012;

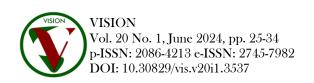
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Mystkowska and Pawlak, 2017). Through WTC, meaningful communication involves students participating to interact with specific themes in specific contexts where language acquisition is directly related with two key components: social and cognitive factors (Halupka et all, 2018). One theory in the field of second language learning (L2) holds that WTC is a critical factor in determining L2 communicative behavior, which in turn promotes L2 competency (Mystkowska and Pawlak, 2017). The aspect of WTC of the students consists of motivation, self-assurance, and anxiety related to learning a foreign language in which they are closely linked to the psychological aspect of WTC (Dewaele, 2018). On the other hand, the socio-environmental and situational elements of the learning process, which include teachers/lecturers/instructors (Mystkowska and Pawlak, 2017, conversational partners (Lee and Hsieh, 2019), discourse subjects (Fadhiilah, 2019), and cooperative peers (Zarei and Ahangari, 2019), are intertwined with the dynamic and contextual aspects of WTC. Simultaneously, it recognizes that it is subject to change based on situational cues, which include other people, educational approaches, and themes (MacIntyre and Wang, 2021). WTC is essential to language learning because of its close relationship to students' propensity to actively seek out opportunities for communication and participate in interactive conversations (Cao and Philp, 2006). The existing WTC research focuses on ESL context resulting the gap the perspectives of WTC intermediate language learners in Indonesian EFL context. Returning the report of WTC activities conducted by Indonesian EFL students, classroom situation the primary component of WTC for EFL students (Lubis, 2023). Hence, this further research is required explore both perceptions and experiences EFL learners' activities specifically completing the project as a new insight of WTC.

# LITERATURE REVIEW Willingness to Communicate

The term "WTC" was first used in the context of L1 communication to describe the certain factors affecting the speakers may prefer to remain silent when they are given the option to talk, but it quickly gained relevance in foreign language (L2) instruction as well (Halupka et all, 2018). However, L2 communication involves a number of intergroup difficulties, social and political ramifications, and other factors that are typically less prominent in L1 use, so L2 WTC cannot be simply viewed as a manifestation of L1 WTC (MacIntyre et al. 1998, 546). WTC is composed of five basic forces, namely; recognizing English language learners (ELs) as human beings; making sure EL students are knowledgeable about the subjects; guaranteeing EL students have linguistic comprehension; providing a variety of interactions; and establishing a supportive social support system (Shen & Byfield, 2019). It indicates that students have plenty of people to discuss with, they are more likely to participate completely in the particular conversation, and this is related to their English competence. Theoretically, the important factor influencing a person's L2 WTC is their motivation. According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), temporary and persistent elements influence the decision to commence communication as a motivational activity. In the fourth layer of their pyramid model of L2 WTC, they encapsulated motivation as a predictor of WTC, claiming that intergroup and interpersonal motivation constitute the affective and social components of the variable of motivation to communicate. Willingness to Communicate (WTC) refers to an individual's willingness to communicate in a secondary language (L2) with specific people or groups (MacIntyre et al, 1998). When the students are given the freedom to choose, it can also be seen as a long-term tendency to engage in speech (King, 2009)]. According to MacIntyre and Vincze (2017) WTC as a complete



construct that includes affective, socio-psychological, linguistic, and communicative aspects. the idea that Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is best understood as a two-dimensional construct that combines the learner's situational dispositions and lasting qualities

L2 WTC study has largely been framed by the theoretical model in a pyramid-shaped structure proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998) to characterize the construct of L2 WTC. The top three layers in this model are seen as more dynamic, situation-specific influences on L2 WTC. These layers include an actual L2 use, a behavioral goal for L2 communication, and the desire to interact with a particular individual. Additionally, the factors that support English language learners include their involvement in a particular situation that involves multiple factors, such as security, interlocutor, classroom dynamics, learner beliefs, classroom environment, and teacher credibility (Kang, 2005; Peng, 2012; Peng & Woodrow, 2010).

Mystkowska and Pawlak (2015) looked into how learners' readiness to speak changed in a conversation course, they came to the conclusion that WTC is dynamic and that a variety of circumstances, including subject matter, preparation time, collaboration, acquaintance with the participants, the chance to share one's thoughts, proficiency with necessary vocabulary, and individual aspects, might affect it. Bai (2023) stated that building relationship with students through the use of effective teaching tactics like praise and positive feedback helps encourage their WTC in learning English (Bai, 2023; Zarinnabadi, 2014). Alemneh and Gebrie (2014) project-based approach to teaching, which helps students improve their speaking abilities.

# **Project-based Learning**

In recent classroom setting, project-based learning (PBL) is becoming more and more popular because of its capacity to develop students' intrinsic motivation in addition to their academic success (Chen, 2019; Hung, 2012). PBL is an educational strategy that emphasizes students' active participation in relevant and real-world projects, has changed dramatically over time and has a huge impact to the development of students' creative thinking. Originally, PBL can be found in the educational theories of John Dewey, who promoted "learning by doing," in the early 20th century. PBL is a dynamic teaching method where students actively investigate issues and difficulties from the real world, learning more deeply as a result of their exploration. Typically, there are four steps in this process: choosing the project theme, creating the theme on your own, optimizing the results, and providing a thorough summary and review. Beyond just increasing teaching effectiveness, PBL has many other advantages. Perhaps most significantly, it fosters students' creative thinking, which raises the caliber and efficacy of their learning. The investigation of adaptation of project-based learning is one main area of attention in many educational situations including its integration across disciplines (Jaime, 2014; Stentoft, 2019). and its use in online learning environments (Ching and Hsu, 2013; Koh, 2010; Lin, 2018). The effects of PBL on students, including how they perceive the framework, how they behave, and how they acquire their skills (Boardman and Hovland, 2022; Demir and Onal, 2021: Lubis, 2020; Lubis, 2019).

# **METHOD**

This research applied qualitative research method with case study and thematic analysis approach (Cresswell, 2016) to examine WTC insight experienced by Indonesian EFL students with semi-structured interviews. In this case, four eligible subjects of the research coming from Universitas Muslim Nusantara (UMN) Al-Washliyah, Medan, Indonesia were selected with the

criteria; a) more than 2 years English learning experiences b) more than two times owning the experience of completing English project task with the implementation of Project-based Learning (PBL) c) having different duties during project completion (2 students as the leaders, 2 students as the members). The length of time spent learning English and classroom involvement are decided as the participants' criteria as displayed in table 1.

**Participants** English **Project Completion** Duties in the Learning Project experiences P1 2 Years ≥ 2 times Leader P2 2 Years ≥ 2 times Member Leader **P**3 ≥ 2 Years ≥ 2 times P4 ≥ 2 Years ≥ 2 times Member

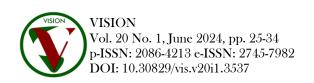
**Tabel 1. Participants' Background Information** 

Semi-structured interviews are employed as the data collection technique. In order to investigate the potential activity of EFL students carrying out WTC practices through project completion, there are four primary questions posed based on the indicators stated by (Shen & Byfield, 2019), namely; knowledgeable about the subjects, guaranteeing EL students have linguistic comprehension, providing a variety of interactions, and establishing a supportive social support system. The interviewer questions in this research also used follow-up questions to obtain more detailed information.

#### FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The studies of WTC reported that the level of students' WTC becomes a significant component in achieving the success of English language learning (Ellis 2015; Grant, 2018). In the context of WTC, both psychological variables such as self-confidence and desire, and contextual variables such as; interlocutor, topic and conversational context play an extremely powerful impact toward students' WTC (Kang, 2005; Peng, 2014; Syed, 2020). In this research, WTC in Indonesian EFL context reveals a distinct path of WTC experienced by Indonesian EFL students. Each of the students have followed the project completion through the approach of project-based learning and lecturer's guidance and supervision. According to the interview, this study discovered two major themes in total emerging data: 1) conversational settings 2) particular interlocutors.

Conversational setting influences students' WTC since their familiarity toward the context of the topic they are talking can reduce the anxiety and shyness (Kang, 2005), as well as it contributes to the trait-like variables; L2 motivation, L2 anxiety, and L2 learner' self-perceived communication competence (MacIntyre and Charos 1996). This research shows that Indonesian EFL students feel comfortable when they complete the project due to a lot of opportunity to converse in English in a conversational situation. In this case, the Moreover, interlocutor as contextual variable becomes major predictor of students' WTC (Cao & Philp, 2006; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). The higher desire of students to communicate depends on the



familiarity of their interlocutor (Amiryousefi, 2016) in which the students are more enjoyable to their mates who have the same interest.

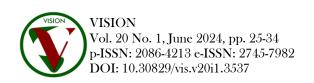
According to the interview of Indonesian EFL students' WTC, this study discovered two major themes in total emerging data: 1) conversational settings 2) particular interlocutors. EFL students' perceptions is successfully achieved after the participants are set into project group with their own roles of the group and the lecturer creates the interactive atmosphere during project completion.

# **Conversational Settings**

In general, EFL students are regarded as foreign students who do not actively use English in daily social life. The circumstances of EFL context leads to the challenging faced by Indonesian EFL students since several students tend to be shy, reluctant and unwilling. Based on the result of interview, EFL students who commonly encounter the lack of opportunities to participate in dynamic interaction using English actively feel fortunate involving in project task. It is believed that the implementation of project based-learning allows the certain platform to let the students to practice their communication skill during project completion. One interviewee P1 reported that: "(I) really like join my group to complete this project because I can more explore my English communication skill through delivering the ideas freely, I also direct my teammate to any details we need, my lecturer guide and supervise me to speak English in each process we have been through" P1 is the third semester EFL student who actively learn English for more than three years, her interest in English is clearly seen from her participation in any teamwork and she never skip the chance to speak English. Similarly, another interviewee P3 stated that: "(I) thank to my lecturer who systematically design this project plan because it is the real platform to engage in certain situation with my classmates, we have the same purposes to complete this project as well as we can, I think I speak English more often because I am a leader in this project, I must organize everything and I enjoy even though I am nervous, my grammar is not really good.

However, a bit different response coming from the interviewee P2 and P4 who are responsible as the member of project group. P2 told us that she had to struggle finishing the project because her willingness to communicate in English is not quite high, but she had tried her best to make this project running well, the project offers the communicative setting in English because her lecturer assigned the not only completing the project correctly but using English both outside and inside the classroom for finishing the project. Moreover, interviewee P4 recognized her English speaking skill through this project, she said that: (I) can imagine my willingness to communicate is getting better, I have never thought that I speak English a lot here because I rarely speak English because of my fear of doing mistake, my lecturer always supports me to communicate what I am thinking based on my duties as graphic designer in this project, so I can speak what I am going to do, I speak each process of designing the poster, yet, the hesitation is always coming up, my anxiety is popping up when I need specific lexical to support my explanation.

These interviewees' responses suggest that project task offers the huge opportunities for Indonesian EFL students to will to communicate in English in conversational setting during project completion. From the perspectives of P1 and P3, their duties as the leader of the group allow them to have higher WTC because they organize all the detail and they have to coordinate with teams and lecturers. From perspective P2 and P4, they remain shy and anxious to speak in



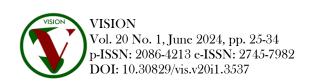
English with specific lexical but they can follow each process under the support from the leader and the lecture. Both sides ended up willing to communicate without feeling afraid of judgement about each other and enjoying the conversational setting during project progress.

#### **Particular Interlocutors**

WTC interviewees were concerned with their perceptions toward WTC experiences through implementing Project-based Learning. All interviewees reported that their team members of project play an important role to gain their WTC. P1 reported on comments about her experiences. "As the leader of the group, I really like all my team because they are very communicative and cooperative, we can discuss anything about the project". Likewise, P1 also stated that working with the ones who have the same purposes leads to the way we communicate, she always received the positive feedback from her teams such as talking freely without any hesitation at all, it is such progressive task given by our lecturer since we can speak English anytime both outside and inside the classroom for talking about the project. P2 told us that the situation of WTC during wrapping the project is such meaningful, the variation of interaction keeps occurring, she gets diverse comments, suggestions and input from her team members, they are very responsive with anything we discuss, they keep chatting any ideas in English without caring of doing grammar mistake, somehow, they have to mix Bahasa and English when they do not find the appropriate English lexical, it is the right moment to actively speak in English because they think that Indonesian EFL students only can speak with their classmates due to the demands they have.

Furthermore, Indonesian EFL students who are responsible as members of the project groups reveal the increase of WTC during the project completion. One of the interviewees expresses her excitement, P2 says; (I) enjoy working with the groups because our willingness to communicate is being moderate, I must say that my WTC is not really higher, I tend to remain silent because of being doubtful, I am not sure my English grammar, pronunciations, but I do not find the difficulties here, my teams are very supportive, and I am actually very welcome when they try to give error correction about my grammar, the only thing I like is I can express what I am thinking of because my support from my team. In the same vein, another interviewee also has the same ideas of WTC activity with the comfortable interlocutor, she says; at the beginning I am not really active to speak English in any group discussion because of anxiety, but this project is different, my groups show the equal opportunities to talking, I appreciate my friends who fully listened to me when I am talking without judgement, it is really impactful to me keep willing to communicate."

The finding of the research confirms the theories that interlocutor, topic and conversational context have the significant impact toward the desire and willingness to communicate (Kang, 2005; Peng, 2014; Syed, 2020). EFL students should be provided the authentic activity in order to create communicative EFL classroom situation (Amiryousefi, 2018). In brief, what this research can offer is to further explore EFL students' WTC that can be gained through the implementation of project-based learning. The activity of project-based learning gives much more opportunities for EFL students' communication in which the students are allowed to involve and to engage with other peers in any certain topics. Responding to the result of the research, EFL students are believed that they urgently need situation-based activity with the design of lesson plan systematically with communicate approach (Lubis, 2023). This finding of this study also confirms the previous reports of implementing project-based learning



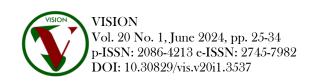
that EFL students' language skills, behaviors through real life EFL (Boardman and Hovland, 2022; Demir and Onal, 2021). The students can be more willing to communicate based on several criteria, understanding of subject, understanding of language use, offering diverse interaction and establishing nurturing social support (Shen & Byfield, 2019).

# CONCLUSIONS

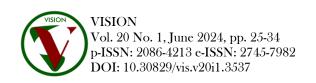
In brief, Willingness to Communicate contributes to the ultimate success of English language learning. EFL/ESL students are required to have the higher desires and willingness to involve in conversational contexts with any topics, any interlocutors, and any contexts. The students' WTC is set out based on the psychological variables such as self-confidence and desire, shyness, motivation and contextual variables such as; interlocutor, topic and conversational context. This current research presents a novel approach for comprehending WTC issue based on two aspects, namely; conversational setting and particular interlocutors, despite the fact that many studies have documented WTC experiences faced by EFL/ESL students. In this case, WTC activity in EFL context must be integrated with systematically design of lesson with relevant teaching approach. This current research presents a novel approach for comprehending WTC issue by setting out EFL students into group project in which the students have their own roles during the project completion. In this research, the students as the leader of the group are more willing to communicate than the students as the member of the groups. Finally, it is important for EFL lecturers to create interactively supporting platform with the authentic classroom activity to enhance the students' willingness to communicate.

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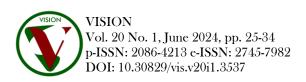
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