

INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN THE 2013 CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: In a language class, encouraging students' willingness to communicate (WTC) using the target language is essential, as it is a good signal whether or not the language has been successfully acquired. Given the importance of students' willingness to communicate in English class, the 2013 national education curriculum promotes students' oral communication skills, including in foreign languages, particularly English. The present study aims at investigating students' WTC in English classes. It examines the patterns of WTC patterns employed by Indonesian students in class. Drawing from close observation on two English classes at a junior high school in Aceh Timur, findings reveal that different task types lead to different patterns of WTC. It pedagogically implies the need to provide varied tasks and activities in order to increase students' engagement and varieties of their WTC patterns.

Keywords: willingness to communicate, students' WTC, WTC patterns, 2013 curriculum

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Promoting learners' communicative competence in language classroom is central in modern second language (L2) pedagogy. Consequently, learners' engagement in classroom interaction is essential. Although many studies have found that Asian learners tend to have minimal involvement in classroom participation, they in fact have a positive attitude towards the importance of classroom oral participation (Zhou, 2015). It implies that even low achievers still expect to have opportunities to practice the target language orally.

Pedagogically, it implies the need for teachers to develop various tasks and activities to stimulate learners' willingness to participate in classroom interaction.

The concept of WTC has developed throughout time as reflected in the literature. McCroskey and Baer (1985) initially suggested the construction of WTC in the first language context as "the personality orientation which explains why one person will communicate and another will not under identical or virtually identical situational constraints" (p.3). By suggesting WTC as a personal trait, McCroskey and Baer (1985) eliminate the role of situational variables which shape learners' WTC. The concept has been further developed in the context of foreign language teaching. MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels (1998) defined WTC in L2 as "a readiness to enter into discourse at particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (p.547). A person's WTC in second or foreign language context may be affected by various factors, such as communicative competence, language proficiency, and language anxiety (MacIntyre et al., 1998). So, even though the opportunity to involve in communication may evolve in the moment, the willingness to participate in communication will not necessarily happen as there are different factors that might come into play. Furthermore, WTC is not only expressed through verbal, but also non-verbal communication. To illustrate, when a teacher asks a question, some students will raise their hands to get opportunity to answer the question. This situation is a sign of students' confidence and willingness to contribute to the classroom interaction stimulated by the teacher. According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), although only one student will have a chance to verbalize the answer, the others who raise their hands are considered to have high WTC in English. Oxford (1997) further expands WTC in the classroom context as "a students' intention to interact with each other in the target language, given the choice to do so" (p.449). This definition suggests that students' participation is categorized as their WTC in English class when they participate without waiting for the teacher to call upon their names. Specifically, students' WTC occurs when students propose an answer for open questions, or express an idea or opinion about an issue when they are not obliged to do so.

WTC in EFL context has been extensively discussed in recent years. Numerous studies have found that WTC are subjected to many variables. In classroom environment, several factors that influence students' WTC include, but not limited to, teacher factors, task factors, and interlocutor factors. Teacher

factors include, among others, teacher's attitude and involvement (see Cao, 2011; Cao & Philp, 2006; Zarrinabadi, 2014), teacher's strategy (see Lee & Ng, 2010), and teacher's teaching methods (see Zacharias, 2014). Moreover, task orientation (see Peng & Woodrow, 2010) and task types (see Khatibi & Zakeri, 2014) are also influential in students' WTC. In addition, interlocutor factors play a major influence on second and foreign language WTC (see Kang, 2005). As a matter of fact, those factors mentioned above are crucial in shaping students' WTC. When teachers show a supportive attitude and promote a clear instruction for the task, students will likely be more willing to participate in classroom activities. Moreover, students will also be more willing to share their ideas as they feel less pressure to talk to those peers they are familiar with.

As the most popular foreign language in Indonesia, English is taught as a mandatory subject in Indonesian secondary school curriculum. It does not necessarily mean, however, that students have sufficient speaking skills in English to enable them to communicate in English. In response to this, the 2013 national curriculum for the teaching of English in schools has been focused on promoting students' communicative competence (Sahiruddin, 2013). Involving some changes in instructional design and teaching approach, the 2013 curriculum is expected to facilitate learners to be more engaged in classroom communication. In classroom contexts, the most significant point is changing the teaching approach from a traditional teacher-centered classroom toward a student-centered one. The teachers move away from their old role as the information center to a facilitator in students' learning process. To be more specific, the 2013 curriculum focuses on learners' active and interactive learning, in which they will go through some steps including observing, questioning, associating, experimenting, and networking. These steps are expected to stimulate students' critical thinking and, in turn, improve their language skills. Given the fact that the 2013 curriculum has been focused on promoting students' activeness and communicative competence, it is assumed that the curriculum implementation will improve students' participation in classroom activities, especially in oral communication.

As noted earlier, the initial concept of WTC refers to a tendency to involve in communication when an individual has the options to do it or not. In fact, communication can take place through different forms, such as spoken and written. However, improving students' oral speaking skill should be set as one of the essential goals in second language education (Cao, 2012; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément & Donovan, 2003; MacIntyre et al., 1998). For this reason, the

current study only focused on face-to-face communication, specifically, in terms of talking in the target language.

Very few studies have been carried out on students' WTC in Indonesian EFL classroom, especially how the students engage in their EFL classes under the 2013 curriculum implementation. As such, more information about whether the present curriculum may meet the goals to promote students' engagement, especially in oral communication, is needed. Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' WTC in the 2013 curriculum, specifically in what patterns the students applied the WTC in their English classroom. Moreover, the study can also contribute to further efforts of the teacher to enhance students' WTC in EFL class, as it will help the teacher to then prepare activities that may trigger students' participation.

METHOD

The present study was carried out with 68 11th graders from three classes and their two English teachers, at one public senior high school located in Aceh Timur, Indonesia. The school was selected based on the criteria that the focal curriculum has been implemented for at least one academic year, to ensure that both teachers and students are familiar with the instruction. Besides, the school was a pilot project school, appointed by the education authorities, to implement the curriculum once it was firstly launched in 2013. The student participants ranged in age from 15 to 17 years old, and had learned English for eight to ten years on average prior to the data collection. In terms of English proficiency, the students have done a self-evaluation and the result showed that it varied from average to good. As for the teacher participants, both of them had taught English for at least ten years, including teaching English using the 2013 curriculum for more than two years.

The study was a naturalistic study. In such a design, the researcher merely observes the class in its regular circumstances; the researcher does not make any intervention or participate in any way in classroom activities (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). I clearly stated to the teacher participants prior to my observation that they did not need to make any changes in their pedagogical goals and teaching approach. In the duration of nine weeks, I came to each class five times to do the observations and record the classroom activities using a video camera. The lessons lasted three hours each week, and ten video-clips were gathered by the end of the observations. However, I selected three videos

to be transcribed verbatim and analyzed further. These selected videos recorded intensive interaction between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves during classes. I excluded the seven others because they did not show meaningful interaction involving students' WTC. In these, the teacher only gave an instruction for doing a task in the beginning of the class and spent the rest of the class time letting students finish the work, with barely any meaningful interaction.

I did not use any observational protocols to categorize students' WTC patterns found during the observation. Instead, I deployed a coding scheme to do so. The coding scheme applied in this study was adapted from Cao and Philp (2006) with some necessary changes and additions to fit the present study need. This scheme recognizes the following patterns: (Pattern 1) volunteering answers to the teacher's questions, (Pattern 2) asking the teacher a question, (Pattern 3) presenting one's own opinion in the class, (Pattern 4) volunteering participation in class activities, (Pattern 5) giving comments or questions in response to peer's ideas, and (Pattern 6) helping peers to recall difficult or forgotten words. I organized the data gathered from the selected videos and their transcriptions. I identified and categorized the discourses related to students' responses based on the language used. The first category is English-only and English-mixed utterances. The second one is Indonesian-only utterances. I only analyzed the first category using the coding scheme. Finally, I calculated the frequency of the appearance of each pattern.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

This study examined students' WTC in EFL classes under the 2013 curriculum implementation, specifically the pattern students applied to indicate their WTC. As mentioned earlier, a coding scheme adopted from Cao and Philp's study (2006) was applied as a foundation to identify students' WTC patterns.

Figure 1 shows the comparison between the occurrence of English-only and English-mixed utterances and Indonesian-only utterances in the observed classes.

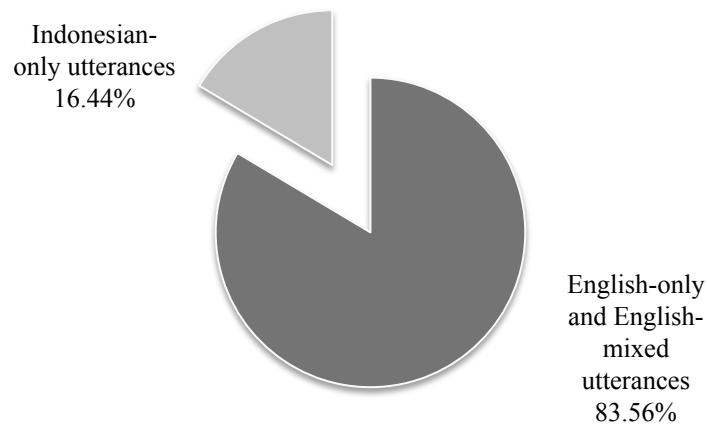


Figure 1. Students' Oral Responses Based on Language Used

As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of students' utterances in English was higher than the Indonesian utterances they produced for the total oral responses in the observed classes. During the classroom interactions observed, only 16.44% of the total students' oral responses were delivered using Indonesian. Most of the time, the students tried their best to express themselves using the target language, although at times they had to combine both English and Indonesian to produce oral responses. This finding suggests that the students were confident enough to use the target language. They were willing to communicate and were eager to participate in classroom communication using English. However, considering that students' WTC was only found in three out of ten sessions under observation, this finding provokes questioning why the other seven did not trigger the students to be engaged in any communicative interaction using the target language. The finding can be used as a reflection for the teacher to provide tasks and exercises that could trigger and foster more meaningful interaction for the students to practice the target language.

The frequency of WTC patterns that occurred during the classroom observations is presented in Figure 2.

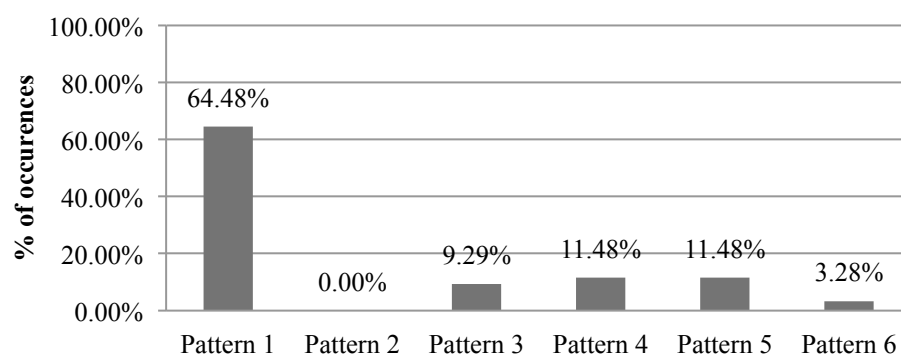


Figure 2. The Frequency of WTC Patterns in the Observed Classes

It appears from Figure 2 that the pattern of *volunteering answer to the teacher's questions* was the most frequent pattern (64.48%). This pattern was identified when a student responded to teacher's question which was addressed to the whole class. Such responses were either a simple and short answer, or a long answer containing opinions or reasons. The following excerpts are provided to further illustrate this pattern.

Excerpt 1 (Class A, Offering Product or Services)

- 01 T: Well, today we're going to continue our lesson. We have discussed about this topic last week, this is about what?
- 02 Ss: Offering.
- 03 T: Yes. What is offering?
- 04 Ss: Penawaran[offering].
- 05 T: Yes, expression of offering. But we're not going to focus on expression of offering help, but offering of? Offering of what?
- 06 Ss: Goods and services.

As illustrated in Excerpt 1, the teacher's questions were to check students' comprehension of the previous lesson. They were intended to prepare the students for the activities in the present session. For that purpose, the teacher only posed the typical closed-ended questions, which led to students' short and simple answers. The teacher posed the questions in the beginning of the session

to draw students' attention to the focal topic of the present session (see Excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2 (Class B, Expression of Opinion)

01 T: Okay, just now your friend asked me, what is it, Miss? (*holding a desk fan*) Apa ini? [What's this?] Do you know what is it?

02 Ss: Fan

03 Ss: Mini fan

04 T: Yes. This is a mini fan. And then? What is it?

05 S1: Untuk mendinginkan laptop [to cool down the laptop].

06 T: Okay, and then? Selain mini fan, apalagi? [Besides a mini fan, what else?]

07 S2: It's cute.

08 S3: It can make ... hmm,

As presented in Excerpt 2, the teacher started the session by giving a question to grab the students' attention. At that time, the lesson was about expressing opinion. Using a simple property: a fan, the teacher asked the students to guess the English term for the property and their opinion on its uses. Excerpt 2 shows students were eager to state their opinion about the property. Even several students had different thoughts due to their varied background knowledge. It thus suggests that students' involvement in class communication will likely increase when teacher relates the topic to students' daily lives.

Moreover, *volunteering participation in class activities* (Pattern 4) was found to be the second most frequent WTC pattern which appeared during the observation (11.48%). This pattern was observed mainly in interactive activities, such as student's presentation and group competitions.

Excerpt 3 (Class B, Expression of Opinion)

01 T: Ya, I think the video is much clear, ya. Sangat jelas ya. [It's really clear]. Very clear to show the expression. Sudah, mana? Siapa yang bisa tuliskan satu asking and giving opinion? [Well, who can write down one expression of asking and giving opinion which is used in the video?]

02 Ss: (*raising hand*) Kami, Miss. [We got that, Miss]

03 Ss: (*raising hand*) Miss! Miss!

04 T: You! (*Pointing out one student*) Write it on the whiteboard.

Excerpt 3 shows how the teacher invited the students to participate in the classroom activities by asking them questions about a video they had watched. Students' active engagement and interest in the discussion were shown in their

hand signals indicating their willingness to participate. Hand signals, such as raising hands, in fact, are expressions of WTC (McIntyre et al., 1998). The hand signal should be considered a non-verbal communicative event, as it indicates that students are willing to contribute an answer if given the chance.

Moreover, interactive and competitive activities can create a competing atmosphere among the students, as everyone wants to show their capability. In Excerpt 3, students worked in groups and were asked to write down as many expressions as they could note from the video. It thus triggered students' willingness to involve in the class activity and students' active participation will likely occur.

Pattern 5 (giving comments or questions in response to peer's ideas) was also found to have similar number of occurrences to the earlier pattern (11.48%). This pattern occurred mostly during the students' presentations, which were usually preceded by their peer's opinions or answers to the teacher's questions. Excerpt 4 is an example of this pattern.

Excerpt 4 (Class A, Offering Products or Services)

(Students start to perform, offering a body lotion)

01 S1: Are you sure your product is true?

02 S2: Hmm ...

03 S1: Maksudnya apakah produknya itu betul-betul bisa ... [I mean, is the product really able to ...]

04 S2: Oh, yes!

05 Ss: Are you sure? *(laughing)*

Excerpt 4 illustrates how the students were actively engaged in classroom communication when they were given the chance to do so. The excerpt above was situated in a group presentation in which the students had to promote a product or a service. The students were eager to question their peer's ideas as the topic was actually related to their personal experiences. This reveals that when students are familiar with the topic of the lesson in the class, they tend to be more willing to participate in classroom communication. It further indicates that students' self-confidence to contribute in communication can be fostered by using a topic familiar to the students (Cao & Philp, 2006).

The other pattern found during the observation was *presenting one's own opinion to the class* (Pattern 3). My data show that this pattern accounted for

9.29% of the total WTC events. This pattern was identified when students stated their opinion in purpose of giving answer to their peers' questions.

Excerpt 5 (Class A, Offering Products or Services)

01 S1: Yes. Are you sure you can lose the corruption in this country?

02 S2: Yes. I am sure.

03 S1: How you can make that?

04 S2: Hmm, the corruption, hmm the corruptor must be, hmm, I give the corruption, hmm, I give the corruptor the ...

05 Ss: Punishment

06 S2: Hard punishment, like kill and throw to the sea.

In Excerpt 5, a student expressed his idea to respond to his peer's question. Given the fact that there is no single right answer in this context, the student had more confidence to state his opinion. The students tend to present their opinion when asked, especially when the question comes from their peers as they see each other as equal learning partners. This finding confirms that when a classroom activity can promote a meaningful interaction among students, WTC is likely to occur (Peng, 2012).

Only 3.28% of the total students' English responses were categorized as *helping peers to recall difficult or forgotten words* pattern. This pattern occurred when students helped their peers to translate forgotten or difficult words into English, as shown in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 6 (Class A, Offering Products or Services)

01 S1: Not the skin white, dia bikin lembut [it's not whitening the skin, it makes it smooth].

02 T: It can make the skin ...?

03 S2: White, lembut [smooth]

04 S3: Smooth.

05 S2: Yes, smooth.

As can be seen in Excerpt 6, a student assisted her peer to recall an English vocabulary item to express her idea. When the student mentioned the word in Indonesian, the teacher had implicitly asked for the English word because he was sure that the students had already learned the word (turn 02). Instead of directly asking the student to translate the word, the teacher asked a question on purpose to confirm the word to the class and it successfully

stimulated the other students to help her peer. Even though Pattern 6 was only identified in a small number of occurrences, the finding confirms that students are engaged in creating supportive learning environment by helping their peers to recall forgotten words.

Surprisingly, the pattern of *asking teacher a question* did not appear in the study. The students did ask questions to the teachers, albeit rarely. Yet, their questions were expressed in Indonesian, instead of English. The students mostly initiated the question to the teacher for the purpose of confirming their understanding about a task or unknown word, or confirming the teacher's utterances. It is understandable that students will use their mother tongue to ask these questions, as it is easier for them to deliver their message. On the other hand, this finding indicates that it is still difficult to have students initiate question in English to their teacher.

It can be concluded that the secondary school EFL students in this study have shown, to a certain degree, a willingness to communicate in their English classes. Furthermore, among six patterns identified, the pattern of *volunteering answers to the teacher's questions* occurred most frequently. The occurrences of the other WTC patterns such as *volunteering participation in class activities*, *giving comments or questions in response to peer's ideas*, *presenting one's own opinion to the class*, and *helping peers to recall difficult or forgotten words* emerged from the opportunity given to the students to practice oral language production in their English classes.

Discussion

My classroom observations have revealed that the students participating in my study use English in their EFL classes relatively confidently. This is partly evident in the low frequency of mother-tongue use during the learning sessions in class. Such is a signal that the students have high willingness to communicate using the target language. We can attribute this high WTC partly to the teachers' consistency in using the target language most of the time to communicate with the students in the classroom settings. The teachers did set an example of communication in the target language, which, in turn, triggered the students to emulate the model. The pedagogical implication of this finding is when a teacher is able to promote the use of target language through good modeling, students will be highly motivated to communicate in the target language. This result is in line with an earlier study conducted by Walsh

(2010), in which he concluded that teachers not only have to be able to select appropriate methodologies to be applied in their classes, but also have to master the ability to control the use of language in their classes.

Moreover, some patterns are identified as WTC patterns students applied in Indonesian secondary EFL class. Among others, the pattern of *volunteering answers to the teacher's questions* appeared most frequently. The 2013 curriculum requires teachers to position themselves as a facilitator and thus mostly use questions as guidance for students to discover the content and triggered further discussion, which was found, to a certain extent, in this study. This is consistent with Lee and Ng (2010) who concluded that a facilitator-oriented strategy is a form of scaffolding to promote students' participation.

On the contrary, a dominant occurrence of Pattern 1 (i.e. *volunteering answers to the teacher's questions*) also indicates that to some extent, the teachers tend to dominate the initiation of classroom communication. However, the questioning strategy they employed in fact lead students to have some oral participation in the class, which confirms the findings by Matra (2014). On the other hand, it is interesting to see although teacher questions seem to work well to attract students' participation, a frequent occurrence of Pattern 1 can also be seen as students' passiveness as they mostly waited for the teacher's queries to respond to. The finding reveals that most of the questions the teachers used were display, which did not give much room for students to explore their language production. This leads to the same conclusion as that from studies conducted by Rivera (2010) and Suryati (2015), that teachers have to be very careful in applying the questioning strategy as over emphasis of display questions may offer lesser opportunity for students to practice the language in an authentic way.

In addition, the results also suggest that when teachers relate the topic to students' basic knowledge or own experiences, it will increase the students' self-confidence to participate in communication. The finding in current study showed that students feel more confident to volunteer their answers when there is no single right answer for the question, and everybody's opinion may differ. This is in line with Cao and Philp's (2006) study which concluded that students' greater familiarity with the topic will promote students' WTC in their English class. When the topic of classroom communication is related to students' life, or even personal experiences, they will be interested and thus, in turn, will contribute participation.

Meanwhile, the non-existence of Pattern 2 (i.e. asking teacher a question) in the observed classes indicates that one aspect of the scientific approach, supposedly applied in the 2013 curriculum, that is, students' questioning, was still a difficult thing for students in the English class. There might be some possible reasons for this. One explanation could be that they did not want to look stupid or did not pay enough attention to the teacher, which was the finding of a study by Pasassung (2003). Another reason might be that Asian students, in general, tend to display particular characteristics such as obedience to authority, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of losing face (Cao & Philp, 2006). Students are afraid that they will get negative evaluation from the teacher if they ask questions as it may be considered challenging the teacher. Lack of language proficiency is also reported as one contributing factor to low number of students' questions to the teacher (Cheng, 2000)

Finally, the finding implies that employing different tasks and activities would lead to various WTC patterns. It can be seen from the findings that the pattern of *giving comments or questions in response to peer's ideas* and *presenting one's own opinion to the class* mostly occurred during students' presentations (Excerpt 4 and 5), while the pattern of *volunteering participation in class activities* was found in competitive activities (Excerpt 3), and *volunteering answers to the teacher's questions* was found during the whole class discussions (Excerpt 1 and 2). This reveals that using interactive tasks and activities in EFL classes will promote student-student interaction, as it is consistent with Cao (2011), Khafidin (2013), and Peng (2012). Classroom activities which promote meaningful interactions among students, such as presentations and competitions, will encourage students to participate and thus, in turn, foster their WTC.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study set out to examine Indonesian secondary school students' WTC in their English classes. The findings show that the students participating in the study employed the target language for 84.47% of their oral responses in the classroom communication. In the students' oral responses in English, five patterns from six were identified, namely volunteering answers to the teacher's questions (64.48%), volunteering participation in classroom activities (11.48%), giving comments or questions in response to peer's ideas (11.48%), presenting one's own opinion to the class (9.29%), and helping peers

to recall difficult or forgotten words (2.74%). In contrast, the pattern of asking teacher a question was not found in the study.

It can be concluded that teachers' initiation in classroom communication still plays a major role that affects students' WTC patterns. The teachers observed in this study mostly used display questions to invite students to participate in classroom communication; as a result, students may only have few opportunities to express themselves in a more elaborate and authentic way. However, the occurrence of other patterns such as giving comments or questions in response to peer's ideas and presenting one's own opinion to the class, shows an example that using interactive and various activities led to improvement of students' WTC in English classes.

In order to improve students' WTC, as well as broaden the patterns of how students may apply their WTC, it is suggested that teachers consider reconstructing their strategies in promoting students' oral participation in the target language. Employing more referential questions rather than display questions and providing more interactive activities which encourage meaningful interaction among students should be taken into account by Indonesian ELT practitioners. In terms of further research, conducting a longer study may help to gather more data, as more communicative interactions will likely occur. It is also recommended that future research examine possible relations between students' WTC and the communication quality, including accuracy, fluency, and complexity in oral language production. Investigating the relationship between students' WTC and the quality of classroom communication may be another worthwhile direction in foreign language WTC research.

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