

Perceptions of Situational Factors of Willingness to Communicate Inside and Outside the Classroom: Thai EFL First-Year University Students' Reflections

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ABSTRACT

Background: Although previous studies have reported WTC variables in the EFL context, limited studies have investigated learners' perceptions of WTC outside the classroom. In addition, insights into learners' perceptions from qualitative data have rarely been presented in this study area.

Purpose: This study investigated the perceptions of willingness to communicate (WTC) of Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) first-year university students. It focused on their perceptions of situational factors of WTC inside and outside the classroom. Also, it investigated the reasons behind the perceptions.

Methods: As a mixed-method study, a questionnaire adapted from Baghaei's (2013) and Peng and Woodrow's (2010) was used to collect quantitative data, while reflective reports and semi-structured interviews were used to reveal explanations for the quantitative data.

Results: The present study found that the students were more willing to speak outside the classroom than inside the classroom. Interlocutors were significant factors affecting WTC both inside and outside the classroom. Also, speaking topics that are suitable for students' perceived level of proficiency but still pose a challenge for their language development have the potential to increase WTC in the classroom. At the same time, a stimulating environment was powerful for WTC outside the classroom due to a lack of an English-speaking environment in the EFL context. The qualitative data revealed that foreign language anxiety concerning the interlocutor's competence, familiarity with the interlocutor, and language classroom experiences, as well as social support from friends, were the rationale behind the impact of the situational factors.

Conclusion: Teachers can apply the results of this present study to enhance WTC in the classroom and increase students' opportunities to speak inside and outside the classroom through pedagogical support.

KEYWORDS

willingness to communicate (WTC), perceptions, situational variables, Thai EFL context, students' reflections

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INTRODUCTION

Student reticence to speak in the English language classroom has been reported as one of the most common classroom problems. It can be considered a normal phenomenon, especially in Asian contexts such as Japan (Donald, 2010; Talandis & Stout, 2015), China (Li & Liu, 2011; Zhang & Head, 2010), Taiwan (Chang, 2011), Hong Kong (Jackson, 2002), Iran (Doqaruni, 2015; Riasati, 2014), and Thailand (Pattapong, 2015).

Recent studies have suggested that silence in the classroom may contribute to the development in language learning as it might be considered as space for "attentive listening, thinking, and reformulating ideas" (Harumi, 2020, p. 39) and as a way to "keep the classroom dynamics in harmony" (Chung, 2021, p.79). However, encouraging language output in the classroom is still essential since only language input may not be sufficient for learners to produce clear and communicative language, which is



the aim of language learning and communication (Birkner, 2021).

The problem of reticence seems to deteriorate in EFL contexts in which English is learned and used mainly in the classroom, and opportunities to communicate in English are rare. Research on willingness to communicate (WTC) has investigated the reasons behind this phenomenon. Widely-referenced WTC models, such as those of MacIntyre & Charos (1996) and MacIntyre et al. (1998), as well as the findings of studies on WTC in various EFL contexts, have highlighted the intertwined state of variables affecting WTC. However, few studies have reported WTC outside the classroom from learners' perspectives, especially in the Thai context. Considering the context when adopting a teaching idea or suggestion is essential because a sound methodology is one that is suited to the context (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). In addition, having a better understanding of the teaching context, especially the learners and situational variables, can fill the gap between educational research and practice (Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010). For this reason, investigating learners' perceptions of situational factors of WTC both inside and outside the classroom may shed light on a potentially more effective way to deal with the problem of reticence and unwillingness to speak.

The present study aimed to address the research gap by answering the following questions:

- (1) What are the Thai first-year university EFL learners' perceived WTC inside and outside the classroom and their perceptions of WTC according to the four constructs (receivers, topics, task types, and speaking environment)?
- (2) What are the rationales behind those perceptions?

LITERATURE REVIEW

L2 Use and Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

WTC is defined as the probability of taking opportunities to initiate conversations (McCroskey, 1992). Studies on WTC initially focused on L1 communication. The literature on L1 WTC highlights personality traits as significant factors of WTC (MacIntyre, 2007). Regarding L2 WTC, however, it is found that personality traits affect L2 WTC, albeit indirectly (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). This is also demonstrated in MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) definition of L2 WTC, where they describe it as a state of readiness to engage in conversation with particular individuals or groups using a second language (L2) (p. 547).

While the concept of WTC initially centred on L1 communication and highlighted personality traits as significant factors (MacIntyre, 2007), the understanding of L2 WTC reveals a more complex interplay of variables, as demonstrated in

MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) six-layered model. MacIntyre et al. (1998) integrated linguistic, communicative, and social psychological variables affecting L2 WTC into a six-layered model with twelve constructs. On the first layer, at the bottom, are intergroup climate and personality, which are the most remote influences. On the second layer are intergroup attitudes, social situations, and communicative competence. The third layer is composed of motivation and self-confidence. The fourth layer illustrates the most immediate influences on WTC: the desire to communicate with a specific person and state communicative self-confidence to that person. Above this, WTC is posited as the most immediate influence on communicative behaviours (L2 use). It was hypothesised that these variables influence WTC, which, in turn, predicts L2 use. This construct shows that situational factors such as interlocutors exert more influence on L2 communication than trait-like factors such as personality. This accords with many empirical studies such as Yashima (2002) and Clément et al. (2003). This model was widely used as the basic conceptualisation for later related studies such as Pattapong (2015) and Peng and Woodrow (2010), confirming the vital contribution of situational factors.

Situational WTC

WTC as a situational construct views situational variables as more powerful than individual variables (Kang, 2005). In the FL context, situational WTC has been increasingly highlighted probably because situational variables tend to significantly affect FL learners more than individuals' personality. According to MacIntyre et al. (1998) and MacIntyre et al. (1999), FL learners may experience more language anxiety due to the unfamiliarity of the culture and the language and have a lower level of proficiency due to their limited exposure. These differences highlight the importance of considering the unique context of FL learning when studying WTC and emphasise the potential of increasing FL WTC through situational variables. In addition, paying attention to situational variables is likely to promote WTC more efficiently because the situational WTC can drive a decision to initiate a conversation, while trait WTC tends to only push individuals to find a chance to communicate (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005).

In accordance with situational antecedents in the L2 WTC model of MacIntyre et al. (1998), situational factors such as social environment, the task, and the communication partner are significant to FL WTC. Previous studies have shown that the interlocutor's characteristics such as familiarity with the interlocutors and the interlocutors' cooperation (Pawlak et al., 2016; Riasati, 2012) affect WTC. Focusing on WTC in the classroom, teacher support, student cohesiveness, and task orientation are found to directly influence individuals' factors i.e., communication confidence, motivation, and learner beliefs (Aomr et al., 2020; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Weda et al., 2021). Teacher support encompasses the ways in which the teacher assists, offers encouragement, demon-

strates trust, builds relationships, and shows interest in their students (Dorman et al., 2006). Teachers' influence on WTC was also reported in terms of their attitude and teaching style (Zarrinabadi, 2014). Student cohesiveness refers to the level of mutual acquaintance, assistance, and support among students, while task orientation refers to the emphasis placed on finishing tasks and maintaining focus on the topic at hand (Dorman et al., 2006). These situational variables can result in FL classroom anxiety, which can be the strongest predictor of WTC in FL classrooms (Barrios & Acosta-Manzano, 2021; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018) and also WTC outside the classroom (Lee & Hsieh, 2019).

While the significance of situational factors in FL WTC has been well-documented, particularly within classroom settings, it is essential to examine how these factors manifest in the specific context of Thai EFL learners, where the interplay of situational elements may differ from those in other FL contexts. Current research on WTC in the Thai EFL context has predominantly focused on classroom settings, with studies emphasizing the significance of interlocutors, interest in the topic, and other classroom-related factors. However, limited attention has been given to WTC outside the classroom, and the impact of situational factors in this context remains largely unexplored. So far, WTC research relating to situational factors in the Thai EFL context has been mostly restricted to WTC in the classroom. For example, through WTC questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, Karnchanachari (2019) explored WTC in the classroom in Thai and international programs. The study reported that interlocutors and interest in the topic were essential for WTC. Similarly, Pattapong (2010) explored factors affecting university students' WTC in the classroom and reported the effects of interlocutors, classroom management, and tasks on WTC. According to the study, familiarity with classmates played an essential role in WTC. For students with high WTC, the English competence of the interlocutor was another vital factor. It was reported that learners were more willing to talk with friends of a higher level of English competence because they valued corrective feedback from those peers. Although WTC outside the classroom has been explored in many studies in other FL contexts (i.e., Iran (Baghaei, 2013), Turkey (Basoz & Erten, 2018), Belgium (Denies et al., 2015)), research on WTC in the Thai context to date has not yet investigated WTC outside the classroom. Among the limited studies on WTC outside the classroom, social support and teacher teaching style have been found to be significant factors (Tanaka, 2007; MacIntyre et al., 2001). MacIntyre et al. (2001) studied L2 French immersion students and reported social support, especially from friends, as an important factor.

METHOD

This article presents an investigation into the WTC of first-year students at a university in Thailand. The data col-

lection extended over a full 16-week term and followed a mixed-method design, combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject (Creswell et al., 2011).

Participants

Forty-six first-year English majors (38 female, 8 male) enrolled in a speaking-focused course voluntarily participated in this study. According to their English scores on the Ordinary National Education Test (O-NET), which is used for university admission in Thailand, all participants could be considered at a low level of proficiency. They aged between 17 and 19 years old and averaged over ten years of learning English in the national education system prior to university admission. Since this research collected the data for a full 16-week term, which might intrude on the privacy and time of the participants, convenience sampling and volunteer sampling were adopted. The participants were drawn from the course that consisted of a single class, with no additional tutorial sessions. To implement convenience sampling, the questionnaires were distributed to all students enrolled in the course during their regular class time. Data collection took place on days when the majority of students were expected to be present, minimising potential selection bias. They received brief information about the study and the consent form during the first hour of the course. After four weeks of data collection, four out of the 50 students withdrew from the study due to personal reasons, leaving 46 students who voluntarily participated. With convenience sampling, the sample lacks clear generalisability. However, it can be useful for demonstrating the credibility of relationships among variables (Clark, 2017). To minimise the disadvantages of convenience sampling, homogenous convenience sampling in the frame of sociodemographic factors (i.e., Thai first-year university students of low English proficiency) could be used to create clearer generalisability when compared to conventional convenience sampling (Jager et al., 2017). The independent-sample t-test result indicated no significant difference between the WTC of male and female participants in the contexts of inside the classroom ($t(44) = 0.36, p = .724$) and outside the classroom ($t(44) = -2.20, p = .653$). The participants were informed about the aims of the study, the tasks they would be expected to perform, the potential consequences of participating in the research, the extent to which answers would be confidential, their right to withdraw from the study at any point, and their right to have any questions about the procedures answered (Cohen et al., 2000).

Instruments

Three data sources were adopted to investigate students' perceptions of WTC inside and outside the classroom: questionnaires investigating WTC inside and outside the classroom, reflective reports investigating topics being discussed and obstacles to speaking inside and outside the classroom,

and semi-structured interviews exploring information gleaned from the questionnaire and the reflective reports.

The questionnaire had two main parts. The first part was designed to measure WTC in the classroom in 10 situations, categorised by three receivers (teachers, close friends, and the whole class) and three task types (one-turn, probably more than one-turn, and more than one-turn conversations). The second part focused on WTC outside the classroom in 13 situations with five receivers (native speakers, non-native speakers, friends, teachers, and self). The WTC scale was taken from Baghaei's (2013) and Peng and Woodrow's (2010) studies, with slight modifications for this present study. The two scales are proposed to better fit with FL contexts since limited contact with native speakers of the target language in a foreign language learning environment contributes to differences in WTC compared to an L2 WTC context (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000). The 10-item WTC scale of Peng and Woodrow (2010) focuses on the classroom environment captured by the teacher, learners, and tasks ($\alpha = .88$). Proposed to investigate FL WTC both inside and outside the classroom, the scale of Baghaei (2013) is a 22-item scale with three subscales categorised by communication with three receivers – native speakers, foreign non-native speakers, and classmates/instructors (a correlation of 0.39 with an integrative English language proficiency test, the separation reliability of 0.99). Nine items (Items 12,13, and Items 16-22) of Baghaei's (2013) scale were deleted as they repeated those in Peng and Woodrow's (2010) and some of the items in Baghaei's scale were not included (Item 6 and Item 13 involving the experiences of foreigners) as they were found to not influence WTC (Baghaei, 2013).

The questionnaire was translated into Thai by a professional translator for a better understanding of the participants who were of low English proficiency. To enhance the validity of the questionnaire, the translated version was reviewed by three ELT professionals (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014; Sudina, 2023). Their feedback was communicated to the translator who made the necessary revisions. After that, the questionnaire was piloted and revised. A reliability analysis was carried out on the WTC scale modified for this present study. Cronbach's alpha showed the questionnaire reached acceptable reliability, with $\alpha = 0.83$ (WTC in the classroom) and $\alpha = 0.93$ (WTC outside the classroom).

Instead of using a 6-point Likert scale and a 2-point agree/disagree scale as in Peng and Woodrow (2010) and Baghaei (2013) respectively, a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was used to measure the participants' WTC inside and outside the classroom. As this present study focuses on the students' perceptions, it is important to provide participants with an option to express neutrality rather than forcing them to choose a positive or negative response. In this context, odd-numbered Likert scales (such as 5-point or 7-point scales) are often preferred because they provide a middle or neutral option. By doing so, participants

who do not perceive something as strictly positive or negative can select the neutral option and accurately reflect their true perception (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011). Compared to a 7 or 11-point scale, the use of a 5-point rating scale may lead to more thoughtful and differentiated responses, which can result in higher-quality data. (Revilla et al., 2014).

Apart from the questionnaire, a self-reflective report was used to collect the data. With ten open-ended questions, the report was intended to collect additional data about the students' speaking problems inside and outside the classroom. The items in the report, developed especially for this study, focused on speaking problems and WTC perceptions. The self-reported records were expected to reveal more in-depth information in the context of the speaking. It was evaluated by three ELT professionals and edited before use. To develop a fuller understanding of perceptions about WTC, six participants were invited to individual semi-structured interviews at the end of the term. To roughly group the participants according to WTC scores for the interviews, the mean scores were categorised into three groups: 4.00-5.00, 3.00-4.00, and below 3.00 since there is no one-size-fits-all approach to interpreting Likert scale data and the method of interpretation can be based on the purpose of using the data (Todd, 2011). This made for six interviewees in total. All interview questions were translated into Thai to avoid misunderstandings between the interviewers and the interviewees.

Procedure

The study was conducted during a 16-week term. The questionnaires were distributed to the students on the first day of the course and collected on the same day at a time of the students' choosing. The course was in the second term of the academic year and all of the participants had experiences of speaking English inside and outside the classroom from two compulsory speaking courses they enrolled in the first term. The instructions for the reflective reports were also given on that day. The students were told to record the problems related to speaking English they faced inside and outside the classroom and to submit a self-reflective report every four weeks throughout the term. The semi-structured interviews, based on the questionnaire results and the reflective reports, took place at the end of the term. Each interview, which was conducted in Thai and audio recorded, lasted about 40-60 minutes.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using SPSS Version 16. The mean score of each item and subscale were obtained to show the degree of WTC in each situation, focusing on different variables. T-tests and one-way ANOVAs were applied to test whether the difference in the mean scores of each variable was significant. The qualitative data obtained from the interviews and the

reflective reports were analysed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying themes and searching for commonalities and relationships. It was useful for reducing data while preserving the context (Mills et al., 2010). To enhance the credibility of the research, this study used triangulation from different data sources and member-checking, in which the participants were asked to verify the interpretation of the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the descriptive statistics will be reported to answer the first research question, followed by the qualitative data to answer the second research question.

RQ1: How do Thai first-year university EFL students perceive their willingness to communicate (WTC) inside and outside the classroom, considering different factors?

Table 1 shows the WTC scores inside the classroom (the details of all items can be found in the Appendix). The data indicated that the participants were the most willing to speak when asking close friends the meaning of an English word (Item 2; $M= 4.35$, $SD= 0.73$). The second rank was when talking to close friends about a personal topic (Item 1; $M= 4.29$, $SD=0.80$) and talking to close friends about how to say an English phrase (Item 3; $M= 4.29$, $SD= 0.74$). They were the least willing to speak when doing a role-play in front of the class without notes (Item 7; $M= 3.60$, $SD= 0.93$). Table 1 also shows the frequency of each option on the Likert scale

(strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree).

In accordance with the mean score, half of the participants (50%) chose 'strongly agree' to 'I am willing to ask my close friends in English the meaning of an English word' (Item 2). Another item that most of them (50%) were strongly willing to speak was when talking to their close friends in English about a personal topic' (Item 1). The fewest number of responses of 'strongly agree' (14.6%) was 'doing a role-play in English without notes at their desk with their close friends on topics like ordering food' (Item 9). Interestingly, this is not in line with the lowest mean score, which was 'doing a role-play standing in front of the class without notes' (Item 7). It might be roughly assumed here that speaking partners (close friends in Item 9 and the class in Item 7), speaking topics (a personal topic in Item 1, the meaning of a word in Item 2, and other more challenging subjects like ordering food in Item 9) and task types (asking a simple question in Items 1 and 2, and doing a role-play without notes in Item 9) played an important role. The mean scores of these subscales (receivers, speaking topics, task types) are illustrated in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, the participants' WTC when speaking with their close friends ($M= 4.07$, $SD= 0.84$) was higher than when speaking with the class ($M= 3.68$, $SD= 0.88$) and with teachers ($M=3.87$, $SD= 0.85$). A repeated measures ANOVA with a Sphericity correction determined that mean WTC scores differed significantly across the three subscales of interlocutors, $F(2, 90) = 6.91$, $p<0.005$. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated a significant difference in WTC between speaking with close friends ($M= 4.07$, $SD= .838$) and speaking with the class ($M=$

Table 1

Willingness to Communicate in the Classroom

Item	Mean	SD	Percentage of responses				
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	4.29	0.80	50	29.2	20.8	0	0
2	4.35	0.73	50	35.4	14.6	0	0
3	4.29	0.74	43.8	43.8	10.4	2.1	0
4	4.02	0.76	29.2	43.8	27.1	0	0
5	3.71	0.92	22.9	33.3	35.4	8.3	0
6	3.73	0.84	18.8	41.7	33.3	6.3	0
7	3.60	0.93	25.0	22.9	45.8	6.3	0
8	3.71	0.85	18.8	41.7	31.3	8.3	0
9	3.63	0.79	14.6	37.5	43.8	4.2	0
10	3.81	0.89	22.9	43.8	25.0	8.3	0
Total	3.91						

Table 2*WTC Scores in the Classroom with the Subscales*

Item	Receivers	Mean	SD
1-3, 9,10	Close friends	4.07	0.84
4, 5	Teachers	3.87	0.85
6-8	Class	3.68	0.88
Item	Topics	Mean	SD
1-4	One-turn	4.24	0.76
5-6	Probably more than one turn	3.72	0.88
7-10	More than one turn	3.68	0.87
Item	Task types	Mean	SD
7, 9	Without notes	3.62	0.86
8, 10	With notes	3.76	0.88

3.68, $SD = .878$), $p < 0.001$. It can be assumed here that talking to more familiar people resulted in a higher level of WTC. The impact of interlocutors is supported by the pyramid model of MacIntyre et al. (1998) and other studies such as those by Karnchanachari (2019) and Liu and Jackson (2008). The influence can be described by the feeling of security and less anxiety (Barjesteh et al., 2012; Kang, 2005).

As for the subscale of topics, topics that did not require them to extend a conversation, such as asking about the meaning of an English word (Items 1-4; $M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.76$), gained the highest WTC scores. The WTC scores dropped when they probably needed to 'converse' such as when asking the teacher about the lesson and when expressing opinions (Items 5-6; $M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.88$) and when they indeed needed to talk more than one turn, such as when doing a role-play (Items 7-10; $M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.87$). This is in accordance with the WTC scores of each item, as shown in Table 1. With the same interlocutor (close friends), they were likely to be more willing to ask about the meaning of a word (one-turn conversation) (Item 2; $M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.73$) rather than doing a role-play (Item 9; $M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.79$ and Item 10; $M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.89$). Across the subscales of the topic as shown in Table 2, the results of a repeated measures ANOVA with a Sphericity correction indicated a significant effect of speaking topics on WTC in the classroom, $F(2, 90) = 24.43$, $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni correction showed that WTC when talking one turn ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.76$) was significantly higher than when engaging in a conversation that may require multiple turns ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.88$), $p < 0.001$, and also significantly higher than when talking more than one turn ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.87$, $p < 0.001$). This shows that although they were to speak with their close friends, their WTC tended to drop when they needed to talk in more than one turn or sentence.

Regarding task types, doing a role-play with notes received a higher mean score than doing a role-play without notes.

However, a paired t-test was conducted to compare the mean between the two subscales ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.86$; $M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.88$) and the results indicated no significant difference, $t(45) = -1.82$, $p > 0.05$. Whilst low-proficiency students are likely to use talk scripts during classroom-based speaking activities (Tantiwich & Sinwongswat, 2021), this present study found that their inclination to engage in verbal communication may not be exclusively determined by the deployment of such scripts. Rather, this willingness may be influenced by various factors, including but not limited to the conversation partners and the topics being discussed.

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of WTC scores outside the classroom (the details of the items can be found in the Appendix). A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare WTC in the classroom ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.53$) and outside the classroom ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.62$). The results indicated a significant difference in WTC inside and outside the classroom, $t(45) = 1.89$, $p < 0.05$. The reasons why the present study's participants had higher WTC outside the classroom were investigated in the interviews.

Considering the receiver subscales of WTC outside the classroom, they were most willing to speak with their friends and least willing to speak with strangers ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.77$ compared to $M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.85$ and $M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.84$, see Table 4). However, the repeated measures ANOVA with a Greenhouse-Geisser correction result indicated no significant difference in WTC with different receivers outside the classroom, $F(3.13, 140.74) = 2.11$, $p > 0.05$. This shows that although the factor of interlocutors played an essential role in WTC inside the classroom, its effect was not significant outside the classroom.

Whether the interlocutor was a native speaker or a non-native speaker did not matter. A paired t-test was conducted to compare the WTC scores for native and non-native speakers. The results indicated that there was no significant dif-

Table 3*Willingness to Communicate Outside the Classroom*

Item	Mean	SD	Percentage of responses				
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	4.10	0.86	37.5	39.6	18.8	4.2	0
2	3.69	0.81	14.6	45.8	33.3	6.3	0
3	4.17	0.78	39.6	37.5	22.9	0	0
4	3.98	0.98	39.6	25.0	29.2	6.3	0
5	4.42	0.68	52.1	37.5	10.4	0	0
6	3.98	0.84	29.2	43.8	22.9	4.2	0
7	3.75	0.86	22.9	33.3	39.6	4.2	0
8	4.25	0.70	39.6	45.8	14.6	0	0
9	3.94	1.02	37.5	29.2	22.9	10.4	0
10	4.38	0.61	43.8	50.0	6.3	0	0
11	4.27	0.77	45.8	35.4	18.8	0	0
12	4.08	0.85	35.4	41.7	18.8	4.2	0
13	4.23	0.91	45.8	37.5	12.5	2.1	2.1
Total	4.10						

Table 4*WTC Scores Outside the Classroom with the Subscales*

Item	Receivers	Mean	SD
1-5	Native speakers (strangers)	4.07	0.85
6-10	Non-native speakers (strangers)	4.06	0.84
11	Friends	4.27*	0.77
12	Teachers	4.08*	0.85
13	Self	4.23*	0.91
Item	Stimulation		
1, 2, 4, 6, 7	Without stimulation	4.00	0.89
3, 5, 8, 10	With stimulation	4.29	0.70

Note. *There was only one item in this subscale

ference in the WTC scores between speaking with native ($M=4.07$, $SD=0.85$) and non-native speakers ($M=4.06$, $SD=0.84$), $t(45)=0.28$, $p>0.05$. This shows that whether the interlocutor was a native speaker did not significantly affect their WTC. Regarding the speaking environment outside the classroom, the mean score of WTC in a stimulating environment ($M=4.29$, $SD=0.70$) was higher than WTC without any stimulus ($M=4.00$, $SD=0.89$), see Table 6. The paired t-test results indicated a significant difference in WTC outside the classroom with external stimulus (such as when a foreigner needs help) and without external stimulus (such as when only encountering a foreigner somewhere), $t(45)=-4.57$, $p<0.001$.

Generally, the data indicated that the level of WTC outside the classroom was higher than WTC inside the classroom. Willingness to communicate in the classroom significantly varied according to interlocutors and speaking topics, but not whether speaking scripts were allowed, while the identities of interlocutors did not make a significant difference in WTC outside the classroom. Instead, a stimulating environment seemed to be an important influence on WTC outside the classroom. The following section will report the data from the reflective reports and interviews according to the emerging themes to answer the second research question and provide more insights into the questionnaire data.

RQ 2: What are the rationales behind those perceptions?

This section will report the data from the reflective reports and the interviews about the participants' perceptions of WTC inside and outside the classroom and the subscales in the questionnaire, i.e., interlocutors, speaking topics, task types, and a stimulating environment. The themes that emerged from the qualitative data are 'language anxiety', 'relevant topics', and 'stimulating environment'.

Foreign Language Anxiety

As discussed, the questionnaire data showed that the participants were more willing to speak outside the classroom than inside the classroom. When asked why they were more willing to talk outside the classroom, anxiety in the classroom emerged in their answers. The relationship between WTC and anxiety has also been reported in Jackson (2002) and Liu and Jackson (2008). According to the qualitative data of this present study, the anxiety was implied as a result of interlocutors' communicative competence, relationships with interlocutors and language classroom experience caused by teachers.

If the participants viewed their conversation partners as lacking in competence, they exhibited a reduced willingness to speak because they perceived conversations with such individuals as likely to cause anxiety and less beneficial for the enhancement of their own speaking proficiency. In the classroom context, their interlocutors were mostly their classmates, whom they perceived as not competent enough for their speaking development. Outside the classroom, however, they believed the probability of encountering individuals of greater competence, such as foreigners, was higher. They said:

"When talking with a friend in the classroom, they didn't know if my grammar was correct. I was afraid I'd remember a wrong model sentence from my friend. But outside the classroom, I can seek a chance to talk to foreigners who can correct me." (Interviewee 6)

"In the classroom, the interlocutor is usually the teacher or my classmate. They are non-native speakers. I'd prefer to talk with native speakers to get a decent accent in a learning setting like the classroom." (Interviewee 3)

"My friends didn't understand what I was saying, so they didn't say anything back." (Student 16, Report 3)

In the classroom setting, the participants preferred to converse with native speakers due to their perceived higher level of competence. However, this preference did not extend to outside of the classroom. When asked about the potential impact on their WTC outside of the classroom, Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 5 declined. They explained that within the classroom environment, they were more focused on speaking accurately and thus preferred interacting with a competent interlocutor. However, they expressed that outside of the classroom, any opportunity to engage in English conver-

sation with others would be greatly appreciated, no matter what their first language was.

Language anxiety also played a crucial role when the participants discussed a preference to talk to friends over strangers. This is because they considered the degree of intimacy with the interlocutor important. As student 26 revealed in Report 3, "I'm shy when speaking English with others who are not my friends." Student 36 elaborated on this point in Report 1, saying, "When I speak to my friends, it makes me relaxed and want to speak more." In the interview data, Interviewee 6 also pointed out, "I'd be more confident when I talked to my close friends."

Apart from interlocutors' competence and familiarity with interlocutors, negative classroom experience was also discussed in relation to classroom anxiety. As the interviewees said:

"In the classroom, I'm a bit anxious, but outside...it was like a chance for trial and error. In the classroom, I'm afraid I'd make mistakes."

When I was in high school, the teacher criticised me for not speaking correctly.

So, I don't dare to speak (in the classroom)." (Interviewee 1)

"Sometimes I felt embarrassed if I made mistakes. My English teachers used to scold my classmates when they made mistakes and I witnessed it with fear." (Interviewee 2)

The data above emphasises the influence of classmate competence and teacher competence on WTC in the classroom. Also, it pointed out that negative past experiences in the classroom and teacher-centred classroom, where the teacher primarily acts as an authority rather than a facilitator (Karnchanachari, 2019) can negatively affect WTC. Fear of negative evaluation, as found in this present study, is considered part of language learning anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). These components are classroom dynamics that teachers need to pay attention to (Mai & Fan, 2021).

Relevant Topics

In line with the questionnaire results indicating a significant effect of speaking topics on WTC inside the classroom, the reflective report results of the open-ended question "What have you talked about in the past few weeks?" showed that daily routines and study were the topics the participants talked about the most during the 16 weeks (31.6% and 30.6%, respectively). The third most popular topic was hobbies (30.3%). Interestingly, the fourth most discussed topic was not about personal matters but about what was happening in the country and the world (12.1%), such as the spread of COVID-19 and economic regression, which required a higher vocabulary level and could be considered more complex. Table 5 shows the list of subjects the participants chose to talk about.

Table 5
Speaking Topics Reported in the Self-Reflective Reports

Speaking topics	N	Percentage
Daily routines	72	31.6%
Study	71	30.6%
Hobbies	47	20.3%
News	28	12.1%
Love	4	1.7%
Weather	4	1.7%
Politics	3	1.2%
Dream jobs	2	0.8%

The reasons why they preferred to talk about simple topics like routines and studies were reflected in the reflective reports. They revealed that they would be more willing to communicate if the topics were relevant to their language proficiency and their content knowledge. They revealed:

"I'd rather talk about hobbies, movies, or things that don't require difficult vocab and grammar." (Student 33, Report 2)

"When I don't know about that topic, I don't know what to say, and it'd be the end of the conversation." (Interviewee 2)

In addition to assessing their proficiency with the topic, the participants also considered the potential benefits they could gain from engaging in conversations. Some of them were interested in a challenging topic, as they believed it would be beneficial for their language development. This is in line with the reflective report data which indicates a more complicated matter such as news and economics was ranked fourth among the most discussed topics. Interviewee 5 pointed out, "If that topic is useful for my development (of English), I'd love to talk." Also, Interviewee 6, who rated WTC higher on a situation relating to a more complicated topic like being a tour guide for a foreigner, stated "I'd be more willing to speak with a foreigner when offering help to be his tour guide for free because I think it's challenging." This could be interpreted as WTC according to the topic of interest since interest consists of both intrinsic emotions and value-related factors (Schiefele, 1991), which can enhance intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Previous research also highlights the impact of interest in the speaking topic on WTC (Peng, 2014; Riasati, 2012; Weda et al., 2021; Yashima et al., 2016). Unlike the previous research, the present study discovered that the topic also affected L2 WTC through a sense of achievement, as Interviewee 6 referred to it as a challenge. Although the participants were of low proficiency, they did not always want an easy task. Some of them might evaluate the value of the conversation based on a sense of improvement they could gain. This can be linked to the reasons behind their preference for interlocutors of higher proficiency.

Stimulating Environment

As discussed earlier, the questionnaire data indicated that WTC in a stimulating environment was higher than WTC without a stimulus. The reflective report and interview data explained the additional reasons behind this: no English-speaking environment and no pressure to speak. A lack of an English-speaking environment was not considered only from the perspective of the EFL environment, but also collaborative learning with their peers. They reflected on the reports about obstacles to speaking English:

"People around me don't speak English. I don't know who to talk with." (Student 32, Report 1)

"My friends speak Thai. There are only a few foreigners around here." (Student 9, Report 2)

"If I have a chance to speak (English), I will. But when I spoke English with my friends, they didn't cooperate." (Student 23, Report 3)

"With no forced circumstances, I won't dare to talk with a foreigner. I need a push. When my friends spoke English, I'd jump into the conversation." (Interviewee 2)

As can be seen here, it is about orientations for friendship that could drive the participants to speak outside the classroom and how the people around them, especially their friends, could support them by creating an English-speaking environment through collaborative learning. Although 'environment' has been widely discussed in previous research, most of them were related to the environment in the classroom (e.g., Mai & Fan, 2021; Peng, 2019). This present study showed that collaborative English speaking with friends was expected by learners both inside and outside the classroom, and was believed to enhance WTC. It is a form of social support (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The findings from the interview data and the reflective reports of this present study revealed insights into what social support EFL learners might expect outside the classroom.

Pedagogical Implications

This study indicated that the students would be more willing to communicate outside the classroom than inside the classroom, possibly due to foreign language anxiety relating to interlocutors and a lack of teacher support. They perceived the classroom as a setting with limited opportunities to talk with a competent speaker, and then they might end up talking with classmates of lower proficiency who could not help correct their speaking mistakes. This could lower their motivation to speak and WTC. Since talking to a more competent learner could increase WTC, teachers might consider mixing higher-level students into lower-level groups when doing classroom activities. However, to increase the frequency of L2 use outside the classroom, teachers may want to try to lessen their anxiety by first assigning them to talk to their friends in L2. This could enhance the social support that FL students expect outside the classroom. Then, once they feel more comfortable communicating, teachers

may assign them to speak to foreigners or someone they are less familiar with. This could be useful for simulating speaking in a broader range of situations where they cannot speak only with people they are close to.

To create a positive classroom environment, teachers may pay more attention to careful feedback on students' spoken language. This is because teacher feedback could deteriorate their willingness to speak, and different types of corrective feedback could affect students' WTC (Tavakoli & Zarrinabadi, 2018). With limited exposure to English in the EFL context, alternative ways of raising student awareness of their incorrect output might be considered. To increase the amount and quality of students' spoken output and reduce foreign language anxiety both inside and outside the classroom, teachers may integrate mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), especially automatic speech recognition (ASR), into classroom activities (Ahn & Lee, 2016). Previous studies, such as Jung (2011) and Evers and Chen (2022), have found that ASR can be useful for the fluency development of EFL learners through individualised feedback on pronunciation and the integration of peer feedback.

Another finding of this present study was that speaking topics could play a pivotal role in students' WTC in relevance to their foreign language proficiency. To assign a speaking task appropriate for their proficiency yet still challenging enough for them to pursue the task, teachers might try incorporating scaffolding into challenging tasks. Scaffolding, which is assistance given by the teacher or more competent peer to guide learners to advance their skills within their level of capacity can be applied to the speaking classroom by guiding them with pre-task planning and comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985; Skehan, 1998; Wood et al., 1976). Also, scaffolding can be adopted as part of peer feedback to accommodate the need for social support found in this present study. Since familiarity with the interlocutor and stimulating environment could affect WTC, teachers may consider allowing them to select the speaking partner(s) themselves when giving students a speaking activity. When assigned to discuss a challenging topic with someone who makes them feel comfortable and supported by both the teacher and peers, it is more likely that they will be motivated to speak and, as a result, more willing to do so.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

The study was limited to 46 first-year university students in Thailand. Therefore, it was not possible to generalise the

findings to other university students in the same context or, especially, in different contexts. Despite this limitation, it is expected that the insights into WTC generated by this study might shed some light on WTC in other EFL contexts. Another limitation was that the study focused only on interlocutors, speaking topics, task types, and a stimulating environment. It did not cover various situational factors. For a more in-depth understanding of learners' perceptions of WTC, future research might explore other situational variables and add observational data to explore if learners' perceptions and actions match.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the students had WTC outside the classroom more than inside the classroom. This phenomenon could potentially be ascribed to foreign language anxiety stemming from perceptions of inadequately skilled conversation partners, the selection of topics unsuitable for their language proficiency, and negative assessments of the classroom environment overseen by the teacher. Interlocutors made a significant contribution to WTC, both inside and outside the classroom. They tended to consider the interlocutor's communicative competence rather than their race and nationality. Outside the classroom, a drive from their friends to create an English-speaking environment seems to be more prominent when compared to the classroom context. This could be because of a lack of English speakers in the EFL contexts. Although previous studies have revealed several possible factors affecting WTC, most of them focused on WTC inside the classroom. Among the limited studies of WTC outside the classroom, qualitative insights into learners' perceptions relating to WTC are rare. As expected, based on prior research, this present study found that the classroom can be a place that causes foreign language anxiety. With support from the teacher and peer, the students may successfully cope with the causes of reticence both in class and in real life, the frequency of L2 use could be increased, and the development of speaking skills would be promoted.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared.

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APPENDIX A

Table A

Questionnaire of Willingness to Communicate in the Classroom

Item	WTC situations	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	I am willing to talk to my close friends in English about a personal topic (such as their well-being, their family, etc.).					
2	I am willing to ask my close friends in English the meaning of an English word.					
3	I am willing to ask my close friends in English how to say an English phrase to express the thoughts in my mind.					
4	I am willing to ask my teachers in English how to pronounce a word in English.					
5	I am willing to ask my teachers in English when I don't understand the lesson they teach.					
6	I am willing to express my opinions or answer questions in English to the class.					
7	I am willing to do a role-play standing in front of the class in English (e.g., ordering food in a restaurant) without notes.					
8	I am willing to do a role-play standing in front of the class in English (e.g., ordering food in a restaurant) with notes.					
9	I am willing to do a role-play in English without notes at my desk, with my close friends (e.g., ordering food in a restaurant).					
10	I am willing to do a role-play in English with notes at my desk, with my close friends (e.g., ordering food in a restaurant).					

Table B

Questionnaire of Willingness to Communicate outside the Classroom

Item	WTC situations	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	If I encountered some native speakers of English in the street, restaurant, hotel etc., I hope an opportunity would arise and they would talk to me.					
2	If I encountered some native speakers of English in the street, restaurant, hotel etc., I would find an excuse to talk to them.					
3	If I encountered some native speakers of English who were facing problems in Thailand because of not knowing the Thai language, I would take advantage of this opportunity and would talk to them.					
4	I am willing to accompany some native speakers of English and be their tour guide for a day free of charge.					
5	If someone introduced me to a native-speaker of English, I would like to try my abilities in communicating with him/her in English.					
6	If I encountered some non-native speakers of English in the street, restaurant, hotel etc., I hope an opportunity would arise and they would talk to me.					

Item	WTC situations	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7	If I encountered some non-native speakers of English in the street, restaurant, hotel etc., I would find an excuse to talk to them.					
8	If I encountered some non-native speakers of English who were facing problems in Thailand because of not knowing the Thai language, I would take advantage of this opportunity and would talk to them.					
9	I am willing to accompany some non-native speakers of English and be their tour guide for a day free of charge.					
10.	If someone introduced me to a non-nativespeaker of English, I would like to try myabilities in communicating with him/her in English.					
11.	In order to practice my English, I am willing to talk in English with my friends outside the classroom.					
12.	In order to practice my English, I am willing to talk in English with my teachers outside the classroom.					
13.	In order to practice my English, I am willing to talk in English with myself outside the classroom.					