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Motivation and Willingness to Communicate in English amongst ESL Engineering Pre-university Students in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate (WTC) in English and motivation towards the WTC in English amongst pre-university Engineering students. The instruments used to investigate the motivation and the WTC in English and the correlation between motivation and WTC in English were administered amongst 109 respondents. There was a significant relationship between the variables. The multivariate regression results implied that 48.8% of WTC variance could be predicted from the motivation to communicate in English. The study provided important implications concerning the extension of the corpus of knowledge and pedagogical enhancement.

Keywords: Motivation to communicate, Willingness to communicate, Engineering students

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1.0 Introduction

With English taking the position as an international language in a developing country like Malaysia, its graduates need to attain a specific English language competency level to boost their employability in the global workforce. The Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) also highlighted the need to enhance students' English language proficiency to address employers' concerns in the private and government sectors. However, not all Malaysian students are adequately competent to function in English-related tasks. There has been a notable decline in English language standards among students in recent years (Shuib, 2013; Shuib, 2015; Ganapathy et al., 2016; Rozina et al., 2017; Mahalingam, 2017). Nor et al. (2019) claimed that a large number of Malaysian students are still unable to master the English language proficiently despite having learned the English language for at least 11 years. This is confirmed by the Malaysian Education Blueprint, which asserts that students' operational proficiency is below par. The government has made numerous efforts to tackle the issue. However, poor English communication skills among graduates are still a significant problem, which is further amplified during their job interviews. When employers hire new employees, one of the requirements is the latter's willingness to communicate in English and their potential to do so proficiently.

Willingness to communicate (WTC) highlights that if learners of a second language have a high level of WTC, the consistent use of the language will increase their level of proficiency. Khazaei, Zadeh, and Ketabi (2012) defined willingness to communicate (WTC) as a person's intention to initiate a conversation and readiness to get involved in discourses regardless of the situation he or she is in.

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Classroom learning is an optimum environment that could cultivate student participation and decrease passivity (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010).

One factor that influences WTC is motivation, precisely motivation to communicate. Fauziah and Nita Fauzee (2002) discovered that the lack of motivation contributes to low English language achievement among students. This displays the crucial role motivation plays in the learning process and academic success. Dörnyei (2001) claimed that, without motivation, even a goal-driven individual would eventually fail to succeed even with the most significant abilities, appropriate curricula, and good knowledge. Gardner and Lambert (1959) developed a method focusing specifically on the second language (L2) motivation. The distinction between integrative motivation and instrumental motivation was made. The former focuses on the positive attitudes toward the target language group, while the latter refers to factors that influence language learning, such as obtaining social recognition or better career prospects.

Motivation and willingness to communicate are two crucial variables for students to communicate successfully in English. Self-confidence is an imperative factor influencing students' willingness to speak; hence, both are believed to be critical factors. Thus, it is important to investigate the factors that lead to the deterioration of communicating proficiently in English. The current study embarks on measuring the statistical relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate in English amongst ESL learners at a Malaysian public university. In the same way, based on the potential relationship, a conceptual framework is constructed in which motivation to communicate is positioned as the independent variable while willingness to communicate as the dependent variable of the study.

1.1 Willingness to Communicate

The concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) refers to the inclination of an individual to initiate communication when free to do so (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). It is often considered the main reason for using L2, which indicates that language students willing to communicate in English would look for opportunities to communicate in the target language (Yu, Li, & Gou, 2011). Several studies were carried out to investigate factors that influence L2 learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) hypothesized that someone's willingness to communicate in a second or foreign language is influenced by the social, affective, cognitive, and situational variables. Similarly, Ahmed and Mogana (2016) stated that cultural and individual factors influenced Malaysian trainee teachers on their WTC in English considerably.

On the other hand, several other studies have examined the relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate. Gardner, Smythe, Clément, & Gliskman (1976), who studied the effects of integrative motivation towards the frequency of second language use in the classroom, found a significant relationship between motivation and second language use. Further analysis showed that integrative motivation tends to contribute to the increased number of second language use. Yousef, Hazri, and Nordin (2013) indicated a significant relationship between language learning communication strategies and students' motivation, self-perceived communication competence, and their WTC in English. Thus, further analysis revealed that learning communication strategies contributed directly to Malaysian ESL students' motivation, self-perceived communication competence, and WTC in English.

Based on the discussions on motivation and willingness to communicate, this study aimed to achieve four research objectives. Firstly, we needed to find out the mean scores of motivation and the mean scores of willingness to communicate amongst ESL pre-university Engineering students in Malaysia. Next, we also aimed to identify any significant relationship between the respondents' motivation and willingness to communicate. Lastly, we wanted to determine the relative contribution of motivation to communicate as the independent variable towards the dependent variable of willingness to communicate amongst ESL pre-university Engineering students in Malaysia.

2.0 Methodology

In order to achieve the research objectives of this study, a quantitative procedure was employed for both data collection and analysis. A set of instruments used to investigate the independent variable of motivation and the dependent variable of willingness to communicate in English and the correlation between motivation and willingness to communicate in English was administered amongst 109 respondents. The items prepared for the first section were adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) to determine the level of motivation to communicate in English among the respondents involved. The items provided in the second section were adapted from McCroskey (1992), who has conducted numerous research on willingness to communicate (WTC).

To measure the reliability of the instruments, Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha was employed. The overall findings revealed that the instrument was reliable ($\alpha=.939$) and all of the eight dimensions used in the study; (Motivation: Motivational Intensity, Integrative Orientation, Instrumental Orientation, and English Courses Evaluation) and (Willingness: Interest to Communicate, Commitment to Communicate, Willingness to Engage and Confidence Level) also showed strong reliabilities. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis (denoted as r) was used to measure and interpret the relationship between the independent variable (motivation to communicate in English) and the dependent variable (willingness to communicate in English). Guildford's (1973) rule of thumb was used to determine the degree of strength in the relationship between the variables in the study. The Multiple Regression analysis (denoted as R^2) was applied to measure the amount of variance in the dependent variable of willingness to communicate in English, which accounted for the independent variable of motivation to communicate in English.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Motivation to Communicate in English

The first research objective was answered with the overall mean score of motivation to communicate in English amongst the respondents ($M=4.48$, $SD=.690$). The findings revealed that they agreed that they rated high motivation to communicate in English. This is consistent with the findings by Anjomshoa & Sadighi (2015), in which motivation is an imperative aspect of second language acquisition, but teachers find it challenging to teach in an environment where the second language learners do not have the desire to learn the language.

Table 1 below illustrates the mean scores for motivation to communicate in English amongst the respondents according to four dimensions. The dimension with the highest mean score was Instrumental Orientation, followed by Integrative Orientation and English Courses Evaluation, while the dimension with the lowest mean score was Motivational Intensity. However, the lowest mean score was still considered high since the mean score of 4.17 was above 3.50.

Table 1:
Descriptive Statistics of Mean Scores of Motivation to Communicate in English Dimensions amongst the Pre-university Engineering Students in Malaysia

Dimensions	Mean	SD
Dimension 1: Motivational Intensity	4.17	.767
Dimension 2: Integrative Orientation	4.72	.814
Dimension 3: Instrumental Orientation	4.98	.851
Dimension 4: English Courses Evaluation	4.38	.897
Overall Total	4.48	.690

*1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Slightly disagree, 4=Slightly agree, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree

Based on all twenty-one items within the four dimensions of motivation to communicate in English, the mean scores ranged from 3.64 to 5.21. The item with the highest mean score was from the Instrumental Orientation dimension with the mean score of $M=5.21$ and the standard deviation of $SD=.829$, indicating that, on average, the respondents agreed that communicating in English helps them to secure a reputable job. On the other hand, items with the lowest mean score were from the Motivational Intensity dimension, which indicates that the respondents agreed that they seek help from their lecturers when they encountered problems communicating in English class, ($M=3.58$, $SD=1.173$). Next, the item with the highest mean score from the Integrative Orientation dimension indicated that the respondents agreed that communicating in English allowed them to interact with many different English speakers, ($M=4.92$, $SD=.883$). Lastly, findings on the item with the highest mean score in English Courses Evaluation dimension was $M=4.68$ with $SD=.951$ signifying that on average, the respondents agreed that their English communication lessons were worth their time. Based on the findings, motivation to communicate in English is exceptionally high among the respondents when it is linked to having good career prospects, enjoying their English lessons and allowing them to interact effectively with other speakers of English.

3.2 Willingness to Communicate in English

The second research objective was answered with the overall mean score of willingness to communicate in English amongst the respondents ($M=4.39$, $SD=.672$). The findings revealed that they only slightly agreed that they rated high willingness to communicate in English. Nonetheless, the findings of the current study are still, to an extent, aligned with Moazzam (2014), which highlights that EFL learners have a high willingness to communicate in English. As the classroom is where the teaching and learning of English mainly occur, it is vital for EFL teachers to know that the best way to enhance WTC is by encouraging communication and interaction among students.

Focusing on the dimensions of willingness to communicate in English, Table 2 illustrates the mean scores for willingness to communicate in English amongst the respondents.

Table 2:
Descriptive Statistics of Mean Scores of Willingness to Communicate in English Dimensions amongst the Pre-university Engineering Students in Malaysia

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD
Dimension 1: Interest to Communicate	109	4.61	.800
Dimension 2: Commitment to Communicate	109	4.62	.699
Dimension 3: Willingness to Engage	109	4.34	.697
Dimension 4: Confidence Level	109	4.03	.892
Overall Total	109	4.39	.672

*1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Slightly disagree, 4=Slightly agree, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree

There were altogether nineteen items asked under the four dimensions in which the mean scores ranged from 3.55 to 5.01. The item with the highest mean score was found under the Commitment to Communicate dimension, ($M=5.01$, $SD=1.023$), indicating that the respondents agreed that they think mistakes were the sign of learning. On the other hand, items with the lowest mean score were found under the Confidence Level dimension ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.167$), indicating that the respondents only slightly agreed that they were confident with their English communication skills.

The findings on the Interest to Communicate dimension implied that the item with the highest mean score showed that the respondents agreed that they were interested in communicating in English when the topic was interesting, ($M=4.87$, $SD=.963$). Next,

the findings on Commitment to Communicate dimension indicated that the item with the lowest mean score showed that the respondents only slightly agreed that they were committed to practise their English communication skills whenever they had English lessons (M=4.39, SD=.942).

Besides the above, the item with the highest mean score in the Willingness to Engage dimension indicated that the respondents agreed that they thought willingness to do preparation was the key for successful communication, (M=4.39, SD=.942). On the other hand, the item with the lowest mean score under this dimension indicated that the respondents only slightly agreed that they were willing to do class presentations in English on their own (M=3.82, SD=1.313). Lastly, the highest mean score on Confidence Level dimension (M=4.57 with SD=1.057) indicated that the respondents agreed that they felt comfortable communicating in English with their close friends.

3.3 Correlation

Table 3 below displays the answer to the third research objective, highlighting the findings on the statistical relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate in English amongst the respondents. The results of the Pearson Product-moment Correlation Coefficient showed that there was a moderately positive and significant relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate in English (r=.699, p<0.01).

Table 3:
Inferential Statistics of Correlations between Motivation and Willingness to Communicate in English amongst the Pre-university Engineering Students in Malaysia

		Motivation to Communicate in English	Willingness to Communicate in English
Motivation to Communicate in English	Pearson Correlation	1	.699
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	109	109
Willingness to Communicate in English	Pearson Correlation	.699	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	109	109

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

The findings are similar to a study by Hashimoto (2002), who found that motivation is correlated with WTC by using the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). It indicated that higher motivation somehow correlated to higher willingness to communicate. Hence, the findings of the current study revealed that if the motivation to communicate was English is high, their willingness to communicate in English amongst the pre-university Engineering students was high too.

Table 4 shows the statistical relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate in English dimensions amongst the respondents. Based on the individual dimension relationship analysis, the highest rating was between English Course Evaluation dimension and Confidence Level dimension (r=.678, p<0.01). The findings indicated that the higher the English Course Evaluation rating, the higher the Confidence Level rating. This means that in general, the respondents are more confident and willing to speak in English given that their English lessons are stimulating and worth their time, thus, signifying the importance of English lessons to be conducted in a very motivating and exciting manner. On the other hand, the relationship with the lowest rating was between the Instrumental Orientation dimension and Confidence Level dimension (r=.246, p<0.01).

Table 4:
Inferential Statistics of Correlations between Motivation and Willingness to Communicate in English Dimensions amongst the Pre-university Engineering Students in Malaysia

		Interest to communicate	Commitment to communicate	Willingness to engage	Confidence level
Motivational intensity	Pearson Correlation	.575	.511	.542	.675
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	109	109	109	109
Integrative orientation	Pearson Correlation	.510	.468	.428	.400
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	109	109	109	109
Instrumental orientation	Pearson Correlation	.450	.357	.348	.246
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.010
	N	109	109	109	109
English course evaluation	Pearson Correlation	.622	.460	.569	.678
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	109	109	109	109

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

3.4 Multiple Regression

Table 5 below presents the findings of the fourth research objective. Specifically, it shows the regression equation (F (1, 107) = 102.009,

$p < .000$), with R^2 of .488. Based on the responses, it was ascertained that the willingness to communicate in English was $1.342 + 0.680$ (motivation to communicate in English) (mean score) when the motivation to communicate in English was measured according to the mean score. This implied that 48.8% ($R^2 = .488$) of the variance in willingness to communicate in English could be predicted from the independent variable; motivation to communicate in English (based on Motivational Intensity, Integrative Orientation, Instrumental Orientation and English Courses Evaluation). It can be inferred that the remaining 51.2% was due to other factors that were not taken into considerations in this study.

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.699	.488	.483	.483

a. Predictors: (Constant), Motivation to Communicate in English

b. Dependent Variable: Willingness to Communicate in English

Anova

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	23.790	1	23.790	102.009	.000
Residual	24.954	107	.233		
Total	48.744	108			

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.342	.305		4.399	.000
Motivation to Communicate in English	.680	.067	.699	10.100	.000

The findings revealed that the respondents generally rated high motivation and high willingness to communicate in English. Furthermore, the independent variable, motivation to communicate in English had a moderate, significant, and positive correlation with the dependent variable, willingness to communicate in English. Finally, the variance in willingness to communicate in English can be determined from the independent variable, the motivation to communicate in English. The findings are therefore, aligned with the findings in Peng's (2007) where WTC can be predicted from motivation, with motivation being the strongest predictor of L2 WTC among EFL Chinese learners. This study was conducted with the aim to bridge the gap of the scarcity of research that specifically investigates the statistical relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate in English. Consequently, the findings could suggest that students' willingness to communicate in English tend to be influenced by their motivation to communicate in English.

Based on the findings above, it is found that a few studies aligned with the current study, which includes one from Hashimoto (2002). He indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between the frequency in willingness to communicate in English and motivation. This translates to, students who had higher motivation for language learning were more willing to communicate in English. This signifies that willingness is correlated to motivation. Similarly, another study that was conducted on college students in Turkey by Cetinkaya (2005), indicated that motivation directly correlated with willingness to communicate in English, while a study in Japan by Yashima (2002) showed that motivation influenced willingness to communicate in English indirectly by lowering the anxiety level and perceived competence.

A study conducted by Moazzam (2014) revealed that the willingness to communicate could be influenced by four factors, namely anxiety, motivation, attitude, and interpersonal interaction. Nevertheless, no further studies were conducted to prove that motivation plays a vital role in encouraging students to be willing to communicate in English. Hence, the findings of this study could contribute to further knowledge and actions in the teaching and learning process, and at the same time instilling interest among students to use the language extensively when communicating in English.

4.0 Conclusion

Guided by four research objectives, the present study can illuminate evidence of empirical research conducted on a correlational-descriptive study using a quantitative method to explore both variables and the statistical relationship between motivation and the willingness to communicate in English amongst 109 ESL pre-university Engineering students in Selangor, Malaysia. It is found that there was a significant, positive, and moderate relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate in the English as a second language. Hence, a few crucial implications can be derived from the current study.

Firstly, the findings could help to extend the corpus of knowledge on motivation and willingness to communicate in the English language as an L2. Indeed, the statistical relationship between the two variables could enrich the knowledge of possible predictors that influence the willingness to communicate in English as L2 in the Malaysian HEIs setting.

Secondly, the exploration of the current study has revealed empirical findings between the two variables. When the level of motivation to communicate is high, willingness to communicate in the English language amongst the ESL respondents is also high. Thus, theoretical implications can be derived from the findings. Little has been studied or explored on the current relationship of the

variables under study in Malaysian HEIs. Most of these variables were mainly studied in isolation or conducted with numerous predictors. Thus, the independent variable, namely motivation to communicate, could highly be recommended as the antecedent to facilitate the dependent variable; willingness to communicate in the English language. Overall, the conceptual framework constructed and proposed at the beginning of the paper can be confirmed as one of the most effective teaching and learning models of English language teaching at foundation centres or any higher education institutions in Malaysia.

The findings could also lead to some pedagogical implications amongst instructional leaders or language lecturers. To increase the willingness to communicate in English among ESL students, lecturers need to insert the element of motivation as it is proven in the findings that there was a significant relationship between motivation and willingness to communicate in English. Thus, it is recommended that they equip and strengthen their knowledge concerning motivation as a teaching strategy in making ESL students willing to communicate and participate in their English language learning activities. Language learning and communication strategies in teaching can be developed for students to feel more motivated in speaking and participating while learning the language.

The current respondents only represent Engineering pre-university students. For further research, this study can be explored in several other areas. Future researchers could conduct similar studies with students from other universities, other study fields, and various races.

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