Exploring the Factors that Influence WTC
－ INSIGHTS FROM A SHORT-TERM STUDY PROGRAMME IN SINGAPORE－

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This paper investigates the changes in willingness to communicate in a second language (L2 WTC) among seven students from Ariake National College of Technology who participated in a short-term study programme in Singapore. All participants are Japanese nationals whose mother tongue is Japanese. They participated in the study program as part of their second-year curriculum and had varying levels of prior experience in using English for communication. The research aims to assess the impact of the Singapore programme on their L2 WTC by comparing their communication willingness before and after the programme.

The author collected data using a questionnaire designed to measure WTC. This questionnaire was administered twice: before the participants left for Singapore and after their return. To gain deeper insights, the author also conducted interviews with all seven participants to explore the situational factors that are likely to have influenced any observed changes in their WTC.

By analysing the questionnaire data, the author found that WTC levels generally increased after the programme. The interviews revealed that the increase in WTC could be attributed to several factors, including successful communication experiences in real-life contexts, increased self-confidence, and motivation gained through interactions with English speakers during the programme. Interestingly, most of the participants reported that their very struggle to communicate effectively, or the awareness that their communication skills were inadequate made a notable contribution to an increase in their WTC. These experiences motivated them to improve their language abilities and engage more actively in communication. The author concludes that the combination of practical communication opportunities, a supportive environment, and even challenges or perceived failures during the program played significant roles in enhancing the participants' L2 WTC.

Introduction

This paper seeks to investigate the changes in willingness to communicate in a second language (hereafter, L2 WTC, or WTC for short) among seven second-year students of Ariake National College of Technology, focusing on their experiences before and after participating in a short-term study program in Singapore. The investigation proceeds by collecting and analysing data from these students. Theoretically, communication can be either oral or written. However, this paper confines itself to the former, that is, speaking.

This paper addresses two main questions. First, it examines whether and how the WTC levels of the participants changed after participating in the study programme, and clarifies what factors might explain such changes. A quantitative method is employed to answer this question. A questionnaire is distributed to the participants twice: first before their departure for Singapore and secondly after their return. The questionnaire measures their WTC levels. By comparing the pre- and post-programme data, the study aims to reveal the nature of any significant changes in WTC levels.

The second question this paper addresses concerns how situational factors influenced the participants' WTC during the Singapore programme. Recent WTC research suggests that situational factors, such as motivational, attitudinal, and environmental influences, play an important role in shaping WTC. The qualitative method of interviews is used to explore these influences. All seven

participants are interviewed after their return from Singapore to discuss their perceptions of the programme's impact. The interview questions are designed to uncover how specific experiences, including both successful communication and difficulties encountered in actual communication, contributed to changes in their WTC. Notably, the paper highlights that even the situations where communication did not go as smoothly as expected sometimes motivated students to engage more actively in communication in the future, thereby enhancing their WTC.

By combining the quantitative and qualitative methods, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how situational factors influence the formation of WTC. In the earlier stages of WTC research, situational factors were often overlooked, whereas recent studies tend to overconcentrate on them. This paper argues that such one-sided approaches are misguided and counterproductive. Instead, a balanced approach that takes multiple situational factors into account comprehensively is necessary to fully understand the dynamics of WTC.

Section 1 Literature review

In this section, I shall offer a brief review of some samples of the WTC literature relevant to this paper. I begin with those samples which deal with key concepts related to willingness to communicate (WTC), particularly its development in the context of second language (L2) learning. I then proceed to discuss situational factors, such as formal education, living abroad, and cultural influences, which are particularly relevant to Japanese learners of English. This review aims to provide a foundation for understanding how these factors contribute to changes in WTC. I intend to show how the questions posed for the present paper, focusing on changes in WTC before and after the short-term study program in Singapore, are linked to the accumulation of past research on WTC and its theoretical developments.

1.1 History of WTC Research

Research on willingness to communicate began in the field of communication studies, focusing initially on understanding why some individuals are unwilling to communicate in their first language (L1). This concept

was later extended to second language (L2) learners. Early studies treated WTC as a stable, personality-based predisposition. However, with the introduction of dynamic models, WTC evolved into a context-dependent concept influenced by situational factors. In particular, MacIntyre *et al*. (1998) proposed a pyramid model that emphasized the layered and dynamic nature of WTC, integrating various influences, including linguistic competence, social roles, and intergroup attitudes. Notably, this model redefined WTC as readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a second language', highlighting its situational variability

1.2 Development of L2 WTC Research

Subsequent studies on L2 WTC showed that situational factors, such as motivational and attitudinal influences, did play a significant role in shaping WTC. For example, opportunities to engage with speakers of the target language, perceived communicative competence, and anxiety were identified as direct influences on L2 WTC. Additionally, the concept of international posture, introduced by Yashima (2002), gained attention as a key factor in enhancing Japanese learners' motivation and attitudes towards communication in English. This refers to a set of positive attitudes towards the international community, which encourages engagement in L2 communication.

1.3 Relevant Situational Factors

Since this paper focuses on several situational factors that are particularly relevant to the learning environments and experiences of the seven students from Ariake National College of Technology. I should explain what key factors are to be discussed. There are four significant factors:

1. Formal Education: the participants' prior experiences with English education within Japanese high schools and universities, including oral communication classes, which may have prepared them for communication during the programme. The study seeks to understand how this formal education influenced their WTC in the context of the program.

2. Experience Abroad: the effect of participating in

the Singapore study program, particularly how interactions with English speakers in real-life situations affected their confidence and WTC. This includes examining specific experiences, whether successful or challenging, that stood out during the programme and shaped their willingness to communicate.

3. Cultural and Social Influences: social or psychological factors unique to Japan that may have influenced the participants' communication behaviours during the program. This includes exploring whether any cultural barriers they experienced changed over the course of the programme.

4. Attitudes towards the International Community: the role of 'international posture' (Yashima, 2002), which refers to positive attitudes towards engaging with the international community, as a significant contributor to increased WTC. The study will investigate whether the participants' experiences in Singapore strengthened these attitudes and how this, in turn, influenced their willingness to communicate in English.

These factors will be examined through interviews conducted after the program to assess their impact on participants' WTC and to explore how these influences interacted to shape the observed changes in their communication willingness.

2.1 Methodologies

Data Collection Methods

Methods employed for data collection in this paper are of two kinds: quantitative and qualitative. First, I collected data by administering questionnaires to participants and obtaining responses from them. The questionnaire consisted of two parts, Part A and Part B.

- Part A: WTC Test
  Part A measured the participants' willingness to communicate (WTC) levels through 19 items adapted from the Japanese version of McCroskey's (1992) WTC scale. Participants were asked to rate their willingness to communicate in English on a scale from 0%

(never) to 100% (always) in various situations (e.g., one-on-one conversations, group discussions) and with different types of interlocutors (e.g., strangers, acquaintances, friends).

- Part B: Questions on Situational Factors
  Part B included simple questions about participants' experiences in English education, interactions during the study program, and attitudes toward the international community. These questions were designed to assess changes in situational factors influencing WTC before and after the study program.

The questionnaire was distributed twice: once before the short-term study program in Singapore and again after their return.

The second method employed was face-to-face interviews. After the study program, all seven participants were individually interviewed. No recordings were made, but notes were taken during the interviews. The interviews aimed to explore situational factors that influenced WTC changes, with a particular focus on the following key areas:

1. Formal Education: The influence of prior English education in Japan, including oral communication classes offered briefly during their first year of study.

2. Experiences in Singapore: The effect of real-life interactions with English speakers, including both successful and challenging communication experiences.

3. Cultural and Social Influences: The impact of cultural or psychological factors specific to Japan on their motivation to communicate during the programme.

4. Attitudes towards the International Community: The role of 'international posture' (Yashima, 2002) in shaping their attitudes and WTC.

These two methods complement each other. Taken together, they are expected to show the participants' levels of WTC, the influence of situational factors, and the mechanisms by which these factors interact to shape WTC.

2.2 Participants

The participants' ages ranged from 16 to 17, and they were all Japanese nationals whose mother tongue is Japanese. As for their educational background, the participants had received English education as part of their standard high school curriculum in Japan. Oral communication classes were included during their first year, but opportunities for speaking practice were very limited. None of the participants had previous experience studying abroad, and most had minimal exposure to natural spoken English.

In Singapore, the participants engaged in various cultural and linguistic activities conducted in English. This was the first overseas experience for many of them, providing unique opportunities to interact with English speakers in real-life situations.

2.3 Research Questions

As explained in the Introduction, this paper addresses two main questions. The first question concerns how the levels of WTC among the seven participants changed before and after the short-term study programme, while the second relates to the ways in which relevant situational factors influenced these changes in WTC. To make these general questions more specific, I reformulate them as follows:

Research Questions 1
(1a) How did the levels of WTC among the seven participants change before and after the short-term study program in Singapore?
(1b) What specific factors contributed to the observed changes in WTC levels during the study program?

Research Questions 2
(2a) In what ways did situational factors, such as prior formal education, experiences in Singapore, and cultural or social influences, shape the participants' WTC during the study program?
(2b) Which situational factor, if any, played the most significant role in influencing the participants' WTC during the study programme?

These questions reflect the dual focus of this study. Questions (1a) and (1b) can be answered by analysing the

pre- and post-program questionnaire data to identify the changes in WTC levels and the potential contributing factors. Questions (2a) and (2b) require an in-depth examination of the data collected from the face-to-face interviews, alongside careful interpretation and analysis to understand the impact of situational factors.

3.1 Results of the Questionnaire

The data collected from the seven participants who answered the questionnaire are processed, and its results are now to be provided in a concise format. First, I provide the general contour of the data. The highest WTC score among all participants before the program was 55.26 (Participant J), and the lowest was 11.32 (Participant C). After the program, the highest WTC score was 65.26 (Participant J), and the lowest was 7.89 (Participant C). The changes in WTC scores for each participant are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Pre- and Post-WTC Scores and Changes

participants	A	B	C	D	E	F	J
pre-WTC	46.84211	13.15789	11.31579	40.52632	52.10526	21.05263	55.26316
post-WTC	56.03715	14.73684	7.894737	52.63158	59.47368	25.78947	65.26316
Increase of WTC	9.195046	1.578947	-3.42105	12.10526	7.368421	4.736842	10

There are several notable features of the data presented in Table 1. First, the table shows that there is a general increase in WTC levels among the participants after the program. Six out of the seven participants showed an increase in their WTC scores, while only one participant, Participant C, experienced a decrease (-3.42). This suggests that the short-term study programme in Singapore had a predominantly positive effect on the participants' willingness to communicate in English.

Second, the largest increase was observed in Participant D (+12.11), followed by Participant J (+10.00) and Participant A (+9.20). The average increase in WTC across all participants was approximately 5.95 points, reflecting a moderate positive impact of the programme.

Third, Participant C's decrease in WTC (-3.42) stands out as an exception. This result warrants further investigation to understand the reasons behind this decline, which could include situational factors or personal circumstances that differed from the other participants.

Next, let us consider specific observations and trends in the WTC changes. We will explore how these changes can be linked to situational factors, as identified in the

interview data, to better understand the mechanisms behind these results.

3.2 Results of the Interviews

The interview data reveal several key insights into the participants' experiences and the factors influencing their WTC. Their reflections and observations echo themes found in previous studies, but with notable distinctions.

Participants' Reflections on Communication
1. Realization of Challenges and English Proficiency
   The participants in this study frequently expressed that their communication in English did not go as smoothly as they had hoped. Several participants admitted that they realized their English proficiency was inadequate for certain real-life interactions. For example, one participant commented, 'I struggled to convey my thoughts clearly, and it made me aware of my vocabulary and grammatical limitations.' Another stated that 'Even though I could manage simple conversations, I found it difficult to participate in deeper discussions or express nuanced ideas.'
2. Overcoming the Emotional Hurdles of Communication
   Despite recognizing their linguistic limitations, the participants noted that their experience still encouraged them to communicate more. As one participant put it, 'I realized I didn't need perfect English to be understood. People were patient and willing to engage with me.' This sentiment lowered their emotional barriers to communication, even when the conversations didn't proceed as smoothly as they had hoped.

Link Between WTC and Self-Efficacy
The findings here challenge traditional understandings of WTC, which emphasize self-efficacy—the belief in one's ability to succeed—as a critical factor in increasing WTC. While self-efficacy has often been linked to WTC improvement, the participants in this study demonstrated a paradoxical pattern: their WTC scores increased despite their recognition of deficiencies in their

English proficiency. For example:
- Participant A noted that while he realized his spoken English was 'basic,' his interactions encouraged him to try harder in future conversations.
- Participant C, who experienced difficulties and even a slight decrease in WTC, mentioned that the program made him rethink his approach to learn English.

This divergence suggests that the act of facing real-life communication challenges—regardless of success—can still positively influence WTC by fostering resilience and lowering the psychological hurdle for communication.

Cultural and Social Influences
As seen in previous studies, cultural and social influences continue to play a significant role. Participants reported that the supportive and patient attitudes of their Singaporean interlocutors made them feel less anxious about making mistakes. Moreover, the experience of using English in a predominantly English-speaking environment, even for a short time, helped them see communication as achievable rather than daunting. This aligns with findings in previous research but with the additional nuance that perceived failure also had a motivational effect.

Summary of Key Observations
1. Atypical Increase in WTC
   The most notable finding is the increase in WTC scores despite participants frequently citing their dissatisfaction with their communication performance. This suggests that, beyond self-efficacy, the experience of engaging in real-life communication—even imperfectly—plays a crucial role in increasing WTC.
2. Lowering of Emotional Barriers
   The realization that one does not need perfect English to communicate effectively led to a decrease in the participants' fear of failure and increased their willingness to try.
3. Cultural and Situational Impact
   The positive cultural and social environment in Singapore contributed significantly to lowering the hurdles for communication and motivating participants to improve their English skills.

This section highlights the paradoxical relationship

between self-efficacy, perceived proficiency, and WTC, emphasizing the importance of real-world communication experiences in fostering WTC, even when those experiences are not entirely successful.

4. Discussion on Situational Factors and WTC based on results

This section highlights the important features of the results presented above and provides a detailed discussion based on these findings.

Observation (1): The Impact of Formal Education

All participants had only limited exposure to English oral communication classes during their first year of study, which is typical in the Japanese educational system. These classes generally provided few opportunities for participants to apply what they had learned, and previous studies have suggested that such an environment rarely contributes positively to WTC. However, the results of this study indicate a different and notable phenomenon.

Specifically, participants discovered the joy and excitement of using English during the program, as they were presented with rare opportunities to engage in real-life communication. One participant commented, 'It was my first time being able to use the English I had learned in class, and it was so much fun.' This experience helped to elevate their WTC levels, showcasing a new mechanism for improving WTC that goes beyond the previously emphasized factors of 'sufficient practice' or 'self-efficacy.'

These findings suggest that even in a constrained educational environment, providing opportunities to apply limited classroom learning in real-life situations can significantly enhance WTC. This highlights the potential of Japanese formal education to contribute to WTC development when paired with practical application opportunities.

Observation (2): Engagement in Real-Life Communication

All participants recognized the importance of using English in real-life situations. Many admitted that communication during the program did not go as smoothly as they had expected, and they became keenly aware of their limited English proficiency. Nevertheless, the necessity of using English pushed them beyond their

comfort zones and motivated them to take on new challenges. This underscores that even short-term experiences can foster motivation, and the motivation remains whether or not participants have had long-term exposure to English-speaking environments.

Although participants acknowledged that they could not accumulate extensive successful communication experiences during the programme, they still managed to build confidence through the limited opportunities available. These small successes lowered their psychological barriers and contributed to their improved WTC.

Observation a (3): Changes in Perspective and Emotional Barriers

One significant finding was participants' realization that communication does not require perfect English. This shift in perspective helped to reduce communication anxiety, a result consistent with previous studies. One participant remarked, 'I realized that communication is not about perfection but about being understood.'

This realization had a stronger impact on WTC improvement than self-efficacy alone would have had. In this study, participants exhibited increased WTC scores despite acknowledging the challenges and limitations in their English proficiency. This suggests that engaging in real-life acts of communication, even if their English is imperfect, plays a critical role in reducing emotional barriers and enhancing WTC.

Observation (4): Anxiety and Relaxation

As observed in previous research, anxiety about making mistakes and being judged by others remains a major factor that hinders communication. Several participants noted feeling hesitant to speak English in Japan, due to fears of being evaluated by peers or teachers. However, the relaxed and supportive environment of the programme helped alleviate this anxiety. This shift allowed participants to enjoy communication, which became a strong motivator for further efforts to improve their WTC.

Observation (5): The Role of International Posture

International posture—defined as an interest in global communities and willingness to engage with it—was evident among many participants, though its influence varied. For example, one participant expressed interest in

international issues without linking it to a desire to practice or learn English, while another actively sought to improve his English communication skills to interact with people from diverse backgrounds.

Although international posture serves as a supplementary factor in motivating participants to communicate in English, it was not found to be a decisive factor in this study. Its influence was observed to a similar degree across participants and does not appear to explain significant differences in WTC levels.

Key Insight: Atypical Increases in WTC

The most striking finding of this study is the increase in WTC scores despite participants' acknowledgment of communication challenges and their perceived inadequacies in English proficiency. This result contrasts with traditional WTC models, which emphasize self-efficacy as a primary driver. Instead, the findings highlight the importance of real-world experiences and the emotional shifts that occur when participants realize that communication is achievable, even with linguistic imperfections.

This study reaffirms that successful communication experiences, however brief, can instill confidence, bring joy, and motivate further communication efforts. It also demonstrates that even short-term programmess can have a substantial impact on improving WTC when participants are given meaningful opportunities to engage in real-life communication.

Conclusion

I am now in a position to summarise the conclusions of the foregoing discussion. The first conclusion we should state concerns the overall improvement in WTC levels among the participants. This conclusion, drawn from the data collected by the questionnaire, can be stated in two parts. First, the WTC levels of all participants showed an increase after they completed the programme. This improvement is attributed to the participants' realisation that communication does not require perfect English, which reduced their language anxiety. Additionally, the practical opportunities to use English in real-life situations during the programme contributed significantly to this increase. Second, despite facing challenges in communication, participants experienced joy and

motivation through successful interactions, which served as a catalyst for their WTC improvement. These findings suggest that real-world communication opportunities, even in short-term programmes, can meaningfully enhance WTC.

Second, what conclusions can be drawn from the data collected by the interviews? The interviews provided valuable insights into the participants' experiences and highlighted the role of practical communication opportunities. Most participants noted that their prior educational experiences offered limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom. However, the short-term programme allowed them to apply their knowledge and discover the joy of using English in meaningful ways. The experience of overcoming initial language anxiety and successfully communicating, even imperfectly, lowered psychological barriers and fostered confidence. This newfound confidence and motivation were key factors driving the improvement in WTC.

There are at least two limitations to this research. First, the study did not measure the exact extent to which individual factors, such as successful communication experiences or reduced anxiety, contributed to the observed increase in WTC. Future research should employ more detailed questionnaires and in-depth interviews to clarify the impact of these factors. Second, the interviews were conducted with only a subset of participants (seven out of the total), which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Interviewing all participants would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms driving WTC improvement.

Finally, I should add that there are several pedagogical implications of the present study. First, practical communication opportunities should be intentionally integrated into educational settings. Students need environments where they can apply their English skills in real-world contexts, such as through role-playing activities, simulated scenarios, or online communication tools. Second, gradual learning environments should be designed to alleviate students' fear of making mistakes. Initial activities should focus on safe and supportive spaces, such as pair work or small group discussions, with progressive transitions to more challenging tasks. These measures can foster confidence and gradually enhance WTC, even in constrained educational environments.

This study has demonstrated that even short-term

programs can have a substantial impact on improving WTC by providing meaningful opportunities for real-life communication. While further research is necessary to address the limitations, the findings offer valuable insights into how practical application and supportive environments can drive WTC improvement in broader educational contexts.

Appendix: The questionnaire

This questionnaire is a WTC test designed to measure a participants' willingness to communicate in L2 (English).

This consists of 19 items or questions. This list of questions is an English translation of the set of Japanese questions presented in Hashimoto (2002). The translation is mine. Hashimoto made several changes to McCroskey's (1992) WTC items for her Japanese participants. This is intended to measure each participants' WTC in different contexts.

WTC test

Imagine that you live in an English-speaking country and face the following 19 situations. You have completely free choice of communicating or not communicating. Please indicate in the underlined space at the left the percentage of times you would choose to communicate in English in each type of situation. 0 % = never, 100 % = always.

___ 1. Talk with an acquaintance in an elevator.

___ 2. Talk with a stranger on the bus.

___ 3. Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of strangers.

___ 4. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.

___ 5. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of friends.

___ 6. Talk with a janitor/resident manager。

___ 7. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of strangers.

___ 8. Talk with a friend while standing in line.

___ 9. Talk with a waiter/waitress in a restaurant.

___ 10. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of acquaintances.

___ 11. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.

___ 12. Talk with a shop clerk.

___ 13. Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of friends.

___ 14. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of acquaintances.

___ 15. Talk with a garbage collector.

___ 16. Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of strangers.

___ 17. Talk with a librarian.

___ 18. Talk in a small group (about 5 people) of friends.

___ 19. Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of acquaintances.

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