

Exploring Willingness to Communicate among Master's Students Majoring in English Education: What Makes it Different?

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: EFL, grammar-based method, graduate students, oral communication, Willingness to Communicate (WTC) DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v9i2.1817 How to cite: Nurfitriana, L., Basthomi, Y., El Khoiri, N. (2024). Exploring Willingness to Communicate among Master's Students Majoring in English Education: What Makes it Different?. <i>Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics</i>, 9(2), 407-424	<i>This study investigates the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among Indonesian master's students in an English Education program, addressing a significant gap in the literature that has traditionally focused on high school and undergraduate levels. Understanding WTC at the graduate level is crucial, as these students are often expected to demonstrate advanced language skills and effective communication in professional contexts. By focusing on graduate students, this research aims to explore the level of WTC among Indonesian master's students majoring in English education and the factors that influence it. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from students at a public university in East Java using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that these students exhibit a high level of WTC, largely driven by self-confidence, low anxiety, and strong motivation. The study highlights the significant role of early language learning experiences and supportive learning environments in shaping WTC. Despite its contributions, limitations include a small sample size and a short data collection period, which may impact the generalizability. The implications of this research suggest the need for more tailored pedagogical strategies that enhance communicative confidence in advanced language learners, with recommendations for future research focusing on larger, longitudinal studies.</i>

1. Introduction

The study of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) has gained considerable attention in the field of applied linguistics and education, with numerous studies exploring its manifestation across different educational levels. Prevailing research has predominantly focused on high

school and undergraduate students, examining how various factors such as anxiety, self-esteem, and motivational orientations impact WTC. For instance, studies have consistently demonstrated that high levels of language anxiety and low self-confidence can significantly hinder students' willingness to engage in communication (Bai, 2023; Darasawang & Reinders, 2021). In contrast, students with high motivation and supportive social environments are generally more willing to communicate (Mulyaningsih & Murtafi'ah, 2022; Zhang et al., 2018). These previous studies have provided valuable insights into the general factors influencing WTC and have highlighted the importance of creating supportive learning environments to enhance students' communicative engagement.

Moreover, recent studies have begun to explore WTC in more diverse contexts, including the impact of cultural background and language proficiency on communication behavior. For example, Ma et al. (2022) found that cultural norms and expectations can shape students' WTC. Particularly in foreign language settings where social and linguistic expectations differ from those in their native language environments (Ratri et al., 2024). Additionally, a complex multilingual environment can greatly influence parents' choices in managing home language practices with their children (Rosyida, Mr et al., 2023). These studies emphasize the complexity of WTC as a construct that is influenced by both individual and contextual factors, suggesting that WTC cannot be fully understood without considering the broader cultural and educational context in which it occurs.

The concept of WTC has been extensively explored in various educational contexts, particularly at the high school and undergraduate levels. Researchers have long recognized the pivotal role of WTC in shaping students' communicative competence, influencing not only their language proficiency but also their overall academic success (Rezaee & Ghanbarpoor, 2022). At these levels, WTC is often influenced by a myriad of factors such as anxiety (Abulhajja et al., 2024; Bai, 2023; Özalp & Merç, 2022; Qian & Yuan, 2022), self-confidence (Amirzadi & Vibulphol, 2023; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021; Ubaid et al., 2022), motivation (Abulhajja et al., 2024; Lee & Drajeti, 2019; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Pavelescu, 2023; Yu, 2019), and the learning environment (Azwar et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2019; Mulyaningsih & Murtafi'ah, 2022), which collectively determine a student's readiness to engage in communication, particularly in a second and foreign language. However, the dynamics of WTC may undergo significant changes as learners progress to higher levels of education, where the academic and social contexts become more complex and demanding. This growing body of literature underscores the need for further research that considers these contextual variables, particularly in underexplored settings such as graduate education, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of WTC.

Graduate-level education, particularly for students pursuing a master's degree in English education, introduces a new set of challenges and opportunities that could fundamentally alter students' willingness to communicate. Unlike their undergraduate counterparts, these graduate students are often expected to engage in more sophisticated academic discourse, not only in their classrooms but also in professional and research settings (Deiniatur & Cahyono, 2024; Jonathans et al., 2024). This shift requires a higher level of linguistic and communicative competence, as well as a deeper engagement with both the theoretical and practical aspects of language teaching and learning. Additionally, the pressure to contribute original ideas and participate in scholarly debates can either enhance or inhibit a graduate student's WTC, depending on their individual experiences, perceptions, and the support

systems available to them. Therefore, understanding the specific level of WTC among English education graduate students becomes crucial in addressing their academic needs and challenges.

The complexity of WTC at the graduate level is further compounded by the diverse backgrounds and experiences students bring to their studies. Graduate students in English education often come with prior teaching experience, varying levels of exposure to academic research, and differing motivations for pursuing advanced degrees. These factors can significantly influence their WTC, as students may either feel more confident and motivated to communicate or, conversely, experience heightened anxiety and self-doubt in high-stakes academic environments. The interaction between these personal and contextual factors presents a unique landscape for exploring how WTC manifests at this level, making it essential to consider the specific challenges and expectations faced by graduate students.

Moreover, the graduate environment itself plays a critical role in shaping WTC. The expectations placed on students to engage in independent research, collaborate with peers and faculty, and contribute to academic discourse can create opportunities and obstacles to effective communication. For instance, the need to present research at conferences or publish in academic journals may enhance students' motivation to communicate, yet the pressure to meet high standards of academic rigor can also lead to increased communication apprehension. Understanding how these institutional and social dynamics influence WTC among graduate students in English education is vital for developing strategies that support their academic and professional growth.

While previous research has laid a strong foundation for understanding WTC at tertiary levels (Freiermuth & Ito, 2020; Mulyaningsih & Murtafi'ah, 2022; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021; Ubaid et al., 2022), there is a notable gap in the literature when it comes to examining how WTC manifests among graduate students in English education programs. These students are at a unique crossroads, where the expectations of academic rigor and professional readiness intersect with the demands of becoming future educators. This study seeks to fill this gap by addressing two central research questions:

1. What is the level of WTC among Indonesian master's students majoring in English education?
2. What factors influence the WTC among Indonesian master's students majoring in English education?

By answering these questions, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of WTC in advanced educational contexts and offer insights that could inform teaching practices and curriculum design in graduate-level English education programs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Foreign Language and WTC

The interplay between foreign language acquisition and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) has been a focal point in second language research, highlighting the intricate relationship between language proficiency and communicative readiness. WTC is fundamentally defined as the propensity to engage in communication when the opportunity arises (MacIntyre et al., 1998) and its significance becomes particularly pronounced in the context of foreign language

learning. Foreign language learners often grapple with various emotional and cognitive factors influencing their WTC, such as anxiety, self-perceived competence, and motivation (Shirvan et al., 2019; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021; Mulyaningsih & Murtafi'ah, 2022; Amirzadi & Vibulphol, 2023). Research has shown that learners' willingness to communicate in a foreign language is closely linked to their comfort level with the language, which is influenced by factors like language communicative competence (Grant, 2020; Zhou et al., 2020), and the supportive or intimidating nature of the learning environment (Lee et al., 2019; Mulyaningsih & Murtafi'ah, 2022). The concept of WTC has evolved to encompass not just the willingness to communicate in general but also the specific contexts of language use, such as formal classroom settings and informal social interactions.

Furthermore, the impact of foreign language learning on WTC extends beyond individual proficiency to encompass broader educational and cultural factors. In non-English-speaking countries, where English is often learned as a foreign language, students may experience varying degrees of WTC based on their exposure to English outside the academic setting. For example, students in countries where English is not widely used in daily life may exhibit limited opportunities to practice and interact in English (Khotimah et al., 2024; Santoso et al., 2024; Widiati et al., 2023). Conversely, students immersed in environments where English is actively used, such as through media or international interactions, may develop higher WTC. This dynamic underscores the importance of considering both language proficiency and the contextual factors that affect foreign language learners' willingness to communicate, providing a comprehensive understanding of how WTC is shaped by both internal and external influences.

2.2 Factors Associated with WTC

A multitude of factors has been identified as influencing WTC, reflecting the complex interplay between individual attributes and contextual elements. Key factors include linguistic competence, self-confidence, and motivation, each of which plays a crucial role in determining a student's willingness to communicate. Linguistic competence, which encompasses language proficiency and fluency, is a fundamental determinant of WTC; students who perceive themselves as more competent in a foreign language are generally more willing to engage in communication (Sato, 2020). Self-confidence, often shaped by past experiences and feedback from peers and instructors, also significantly affects WTC. Students with higher self-confidence are more likely to participate actively in communication (Sharifi & Hamzavi, 2021), as they feel more secure in their ability to effectively convey their thoughts and ideas. Motivation is another critical factor influencing WTC. It drives a student's desire to communicate in a foreign language. Students who are intrinsically motivated often exhibit a higher WTC because their engagement in communication is driven by a genuine interest and passion for the language itself (Zhang et al., 2018). Furthermore, as noted by Nabila et al. (2022), students who possess greater motivation tend to achieve more success compared to those with lower levels of motivation.

In addition to these individual factors, contextual elements such as the importance of early learning experiences and the learning environment play a significant role in shaping WTC. Learners who had a grammar-focused early education often find it unhelpful for enhancing oral communication skills, as it can obstruct spontaneity in speech (Alam et al., 2022). The learning environment, as Alam et al. (2022) found, that students often struggle with

interaction due to discomfort with their classmates. Therefore, supportive and encouraging learning environment, where students feel valued and supported, can enhance their willingness to communicate (Freiermuth & Ito, 2020). Conversely, a high-pressure or judgmental environment may inhibit WTC by increasing anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Lee, 2020). Understanding these factors and their interplay is essential for developing strategies to enhance WTC, particularly in educational settings where effective communication is crucial for academic and professional success.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design using a case study method to explore the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among Indonesian master's students in English Education at a public university in East Java. To address the research questions more effectively, a mixed-method design was conducted, as previous studies often relied solely on either quantitative or qualitative methods. By integrating both, the research benefits from the strengths of each: quantitative data offers an overview of the research problem, providing a broad understanding of WTC levels, while qualitative data delves deeper, exploring participants' experiences and perspectives to explain the statistical findings more comprehensively (Ivankova et al., 2006). The case study approach is particularly suited for this research as it allows for an in-depth examination of individual experiences within their specific context (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Focusing on a small, purposively selected group of students, the study aims to provide detailed insights into how their experiences and academic environment influence their WTC. The case study method facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives, enabling the exploration of nuanced factors that affect their communicative readiness in an advanced educational setting.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study were master's students enrolled in the English Education program of the 2023 cohort at a public university in East Java. Six students were selected from three different classes of the cohort to join the interview process. The selection criteria of these six students were based on their undergraduate major, which is either English Language Education (ELE) or English Literature (EL), graduated from their undergraduate (bachelor's) programs within the last two years (keep their experiences with English current and relevant), and their willingness to participate in the study. This purposeful sampling strategy ensures that the participants' experiences are relevant to understanding WTC within the specific context of advanced English education. By focusing on this group, the study aims to capture a range of perspectives and experiences that reflect the broader dynamics of WTC among graduate students in this field.

To protect the privacy of the participants, the study ensures that all data collected are kept anonymous and confidential. Participants are assigned pseudonyms, and any identifying information is removed from the data. Participants are informed of these measures and provide informed consent before participating in the study.

3.3 Instruments

The study utilizes two instruments to collect data: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire is a four-point Likert scale questionnaire (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree), which contains 21 questions under three categories (self-confidence, anxiety, and motivation). It is designed to measure the participants' level of WTC. These questionnaire items were adopted and adapted from Idzni & Setiawan (2021). It includes items that assess their willingness to engage in communication in an academic context. This quantitative tool provides a baseline measurement of WTC, allowing an understanding of the participants' communicative readiness. All students in the English Education program of the 2023 cohort at a public university in East Java participated in filling out this questionnaire.

In addition to the questionnaire, six selected students participated in the semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into how the participants' experiences influence their WTC. The interviews are guided by a set of open-ended questions that explore the participants' personal experiences, challenges, and perceptions related to communication in their academic and social environments. This qualitative tool allows for a more nuanced understanding of the factors affecting WTC, reflecting the participants' individual contexts and experiences.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in this study follows a systematic approach to ensure a thorough examination of both quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire responses are analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the overall level of WTC among the participants. This analysis provides a quantitative overview of the participants' communicative readiness, which serves as a foundation for interpreting the qualitative data.

The semi-structured interview data are transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, following the stages outlined by Miles & Huberman (2014). This involves coding the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the participants' experiences and their impact on WTC. Thematic analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of the qualitative data, providing insights into how various factors influence WTC from the participants' perspectives.

Several strategies are employed to ensure the study's trustworthiness. First, data triangulation is used by combining quantitative data from the questionnaire with qualitative data from the interviews, enhancing the validity of the findings. Member checking is also implemented, where participants review their interview transcripts to confirm the accuracy of the data and interpretations.

4. Results

4.1. Level of WTC among Indonesian Master's Students Majoring in English Education

Table 1 shows the results of the Likert-scale questionnaire on the level of master English department students' WTC.

Table 1. The Master English Department Students' WTC Level

Level of WTC					
No	Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I am willing to share my opinion in class	-	-	66.7%	33.3%
2	I am ready to give a presentation in class	-	-	83.3%	16.7%
3	I am willing to ask my lecturer or to repeat what she or he said	-	-	100%	-
4	I am willing to ask my lecturer when I do not understand something	-	-	100%	-
5	When given the opportunity to speak freely in English, I am willing	-	-	100%	-
6	When in group discussion, I am willing to communicate in English	-	-	83.3%	16.7%
7	I am willing to casually talk in English with my friends	-	16.7%	50%	33.3%
8	When I speak English, I am afraid that my lecturer will laugh at me	16.7%	66.7%	16.7%	-
9	When I speak English, I am afraid that my classmates will laugh at me	16.7%	66.7%	16.7%	-
10	If my lecturer asked me a question in English, I would become nervous	16.7%	50%	33.3%	-
11	I would feel uneasy speaking English in front of my lecturers and classmates	16.7%	66.7%	16.7%	-
12	When I have to speak English in front of the class, I get nervous and confused	16.7%	33.3%	50%	-
13	When my friends ask me a question in English, I get nervous and confused	16.7%	66.7%	16.7%	-
14	I stuttering whenever invited to speak English	16.7%	66.7%	16.7%	-
15	I always look forward to discussion activities where I can freely share my thoughts in English	-	16.7%	50%	33.3%
16	Learning English is delightful	-	-	50%	50%
17	I enjoy learning English so far	-	-	66.7%	33.3%
18	I am having a great time learning English	-	-	66.7%	33.3%
19	It is challenging yet fun to have discussions in English	-	16.7%	66.7%	16.7%
20	My lectures motivated me to learn English more	-	-	50%	50%
21	I eagerly hone my English speaking skill	-	-	50%	50%

Table 1 presents detailed responses to the questionnaire items that measure different aspects of WTC. The majority of participants demonstrated a strong willingness to engage in communication across a range of activities. For instance, 66.7% of students agreed, and 33.3% strongly agreed that they were willing to share their opinions in class, while 83.3% agreed and 16.7% strongly agreed that they were ready to give a presentation in class. This

indicates that master English education students are generally confident and prepared to participate in both structured and informal communication tasks.

Furthermore, all students (100%) were willing to ask their lecturer for clarification or repeat information if needed, suggesting a high level of proactive engagement in academic settings. Similarly, when given the opportunity to speak freely in English, 100% of students expressed their willingness, highlighting their readiness to communicate in less formal contexts. However, some responses indicated areas where students experienced more challenges. For example, 16.7% of students disagreed, and 66.7% agreed that they were afraid of being laughed at by their lecturers when speaking English, and similar concerns were expressed about their classmates. This suggests that despite high overall WTC, there are lingering concerns related to perceived judgment from others.

The findings show that master English department students at a public university in East Java had a high level of WTC. This can be seen from the questionnaire responses, which show that students had high self-confidence, low levels of anxiety, and high motivation, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Master of Graduate English Department Students' WTC Level

Category	Level
Self-confidence	High
Anxiety	Low
Motivation	High

The study's findings indicate that three key factors—self-confidence, anxiety, and motivation play significant roles in shaping the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among the master's students in the English Education program. As summarized in Table 2, the levels of self-confidence and motivation are reported to be high, while the level of anxiety is notably low among the participants.

Self-confidence emerged as a crucial factor contributing to the high WTC observed among the students. A high level of self-confidence suggests that students feel capable of expressing their ideas and engaging in communication without undue fear of making mistakes or facing judgment. This confidence likely stems from their advanced proficiency in English and their accumulated experience in both academic and practical communication contexts. The students' confidence is reflected in their willingness to participate actively in class discussions, give presentations, and ask questions when they do not understand something. These behaviors indicate that the students trust their ability to communicate effectively in English, which in turn encourages more frequent and meaningful participation in various communicative situations.

Conversely, the low level of anxiety reported by the students is a positive indicator of their WTC. Anxiety often hinders effective communication, as it can lead to nervousness, confusion, and a reluctance to engage in conversations, especially in a foreign language. However, the low anxiety levels among these students suggest that they feel relatively at ease when using English, both in academic settings and in more casual interactions. This reduced anxiety may be attributed to their familiarity with the language and the supportive learning environment provided by their program. With lower levels of anxiety, students are

more likely to take risks in communication, such as volunteering to speak in class or initiating conversations with peers and lecturers. This sense of comfort and security when using English is critical to fostering a strong WTC.

Motivation is another key factor that significantly influences the students' WTC. The high motivation levels reported by the students indicate a strong desire to improve their English skills and actively participate in communicative activities. This motivation may be driven by both intrinsic factors, such as a genuine interest in the English language and its culture, and extrinsic factors, such as the recognition of the importance of English proficiency for academic and professional success. Highly motivated students are more likely to seek out opportunities to practice English, engage in discussions, and participate in class activities. This enthusiasm for learning and using English contributes to a higher WTC, as motivated students are more willing to overcome potential barriers to communication.

4.2. The Factors Influence the WTC among Indonesian Master's Students Majoring in English Education

The semi-structured interviews revealed that various personal and educational experiences significantly influenced the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) of Indonesian master's students in an English Education program. The participants' responses highlighted five key areas: previous experiences, grammar-based learning methods, the learning environment, interaction with classmates, and early practice of English communication.

4.2.1 Previous Experience

Previous experiences played a pivotal role in shaping students' WTC. Many participants emphasized how early exposure to English through language immersion programs, interactions with native speakers, and international travel contributed to their confidence in using the language. For example, Nadi described a progression of language learning from kindergarten through higher education, noting that the frequency of speaking in English during his undergraduate studies was a turning point in his comfort with the language,

"Since when I was in kindergarten, my parents took me to an English course. I learned some vocabulary by singing a song and playing games. Then, when I was in Elementary school, I joined another English course, but I focused only on the structure/grammar. I also joined a bilingual classroom program in junior high school. However, I think the turning point in which I felt more comfortable using English was when I took my undergraduate study since the frequency of speaking in English was higher than before." (Nadi, Interview)

Similarly, Fisa shared how interacting with both local and native English speakers during her university years enhanced her communication skills,

"I've communicated in English with many people, including friends and lecturers in class interaction of the most. Moreover, I've ever talked to a native speaker when he came to my university for a guest lecture." (Fisa, Interview)

While Afi credited her experience abroad in Saudi Arabia with significantly improving her practical use of English in real-life situations,

"It was when I went to Saudi Arabia that using English helped a lot to communicate with lots of people, so it's easier for me to get what I want." (Afi, Interview)

These experiences not only improved their linguistic abilities but also boosted their cultural competence, which in turn increased their WTC. Nadi and Liza both noted that their prior experiences in learning and using English had a lasting impact on their current willingness to communicate. They expressed that these experiences provided them with a solid foundation and motivated them to continue improving their English skills,

"My previous experience in senior high school has influenced my willingness to communicate in English and continue learning it. It has been proven by the major I took in my undergraduate degree." (Nadi, Interview)

"I believe that my previous experience can influence my current willingness to communicate in English since I attempt to learn more to get a better understanding and knowledge based on all my previous experiences." (Liza, Interview)

This finding underscores the importance of diverse and meaningful language experiences in fostering a strong WTC, particularly in contexts where English is not the native language.

4.2.2 Grammar-Based Learning Method

The influence of grammar-based learning on WTC varied among the participants. Some students found that a strong grounding in grammar bolstered their confidence in communicating in English. For instance, Nadi viewed grammar as a fundamental skill that enhanced his confidence, knowing that his language use was accurate. She believed that a good command of grammar was essential for effective communication in a foreign language,

"Grammar has affected my confidence in using English in communication because I think it is a fundamental skill that EFL learners must have. It is good when I speak English, and I know that my grammar is good enough." (Nadi, Interview)

Conversely, other participants perceived grammar-based instruction as a hindrance to spontaneous communication. Afi noted that an excessive focus on grammatical correctness sometimes disrupted her thought process, making her hesitant to speak freely,

"Yes, indeed. Grammar unconsciously disrupts my ideas. Sometimes, correcting grammatical mistakes during speaking distracts my focus." (Afi, Interview)

Afi's sentiment was echoed by Likha, who preferred a more communicative approach emphasizing practical language use and interaction over the rote memorization of grammatical rules. Likha felt that such an approach better aligned with her learning style and allowed her to grasp material more effectively through practice,

"I don't think grammar-based learning is suitable for me. Because I prefer to use communicative learning method. I can easily understand the material or improve my skills by simultaneously practicing it." (Likha, Interview)

These contrasting views highlight the complex role that grammar instruction can play in language learning. While some students benefit from the confidence that comes with grammatical accuracy, others may feel constrained by the rigidity of grammar-focused teaching, leading to a decrease in their WTC. The findings suggest that a balanced approach

that integrates grammar instruction with communicative practice may be more effective in enhancing WTC among English learners.

4.2.3 Learning Environment

The learning environment was identified as a crucial factor influencing students' WTC. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of a supportive and interactive classroom atmosphere where they felt encouraged to express themselves without fear of judgment. Likha described her boarding school as a comfortable environment where she could practice English with her peers in a cooperative setting, which significantly boosted her WTC,

"As I mentioned before, the learning environment where I feel comfortable is my boarding school. Because here, I try to use the English simulator with my friends, and they are so cooperative." (Likha, Interview)

Similarly, Nadi expressed that her current classroom environment, where both students and the lecturer communicated in English, made her feel more comfortable and confident in using the language,

"I feel comfortable communicating in English in my classroom because I know all the students and the lecturer have to speak English as well. I somewhat need feedback when speaking English." (Nadi, Interview)

The significance of a non-judgmental and positive learning environment was further highlighted by Fisa, who preferred settings that focused on exchanging ideas rather than strictly adhering to grammar rules. She found that informal interactions, such as casual conversations and collaborative projects, provided a more natural and fluid context for communication, which aligned well with her training and capabilities,

"I feel most comfortable engaging in communication in English in environments where the focus is on exchanging ideas and fostering understanding rather than strict adherence to grammar rules or formality. Informal settings such as casual conversations, discussion forums, and collaborative projects allow for more fluid and natural communication, which aligns well with my training and capabilities." (Fisa, Interview)

Afi also appreciated environments that encouraged communication without the pressure of grammatical correctness, while still offering constructive feedback to help improve language skills,

"I like the environment where English is taught based on post-structural thought and where we do not need to be bothered by grammatical errors. However, this environment would give feedback at the end of the class." (Afi, Interview)

Overall, the findings suggest that a conducive learning environment, characterized by positive interactions and encouragement, plays a vital role in fostering students' WTC. Such environments not only reduce anxiety but also enhance motivation, making students more willing to participate in both formal and informal communicative activities.

4.2.4 Interaction with Classmates

Peer interaction was another significant factor influencing students' WTC. The participants highlighted the importance of collaborative activities, group discussions, and informal

socializing in English as valuable opportunities for language practice. Fisa described how engaging in various types of interactions, such as group discussions and pair activities, helped her practice speaking and listening skills in different contexts, which ultimately improved her overall language proficiency

"In my English class, I typically engage in various types of interactions, such as group discussions, pair activities, and casual conversations with my classmates. These interactions allow me to practice speaking, listening, and expressing myself in English in different contexts, which helps improve my language skills overall." (Fisa, Interview)

"Seeing my peers actively participate and contribute motivates me to do the same, leading to a more enjoyable and rewarding learning experience." (Fisa, Interview)

Nadi echoed Fisa sentiment, noting that group discussions in class provided a platform for critical thinking and enhanced English skills through active engagement,

"We often communicate in English when we have group discussions. Having questions and answers as well as pros and cons in a topic makes us more critical and enhances our English skills." (Nadi, Interview)

Liza and Likha both emphasized the motivational aspect of interacting with classmates who had strong speaking skills. Liza found that observing her peers' active participation inspired her to improve her own skills,

"When we have group discussions, we are very open to sharing ideas with each other in order to learn and solve the problem or issue through the discussion." (Liza, Interview)

"When I see my classmates who have very good speaking skills and then it motivates me to learn and practice more and more." (Liza, Interview)

While Likha noted that these interactions helped build her confidence and comfort in using English,

"It has a lot of impact. By interacting with my classmates I can build my confidence and feel comfortable always improving my English." (Likha, Interview)

The collaborative nature of these interactions not only improved linguistic competence but also fostered a sense of community and shared learning among the students, further enhancing their WTC.

4.2.5 Practicing at an Early Stage

The importance of early and consistent practice in developing WTC was strongly emphasized by the participants. Many students attributed their confidence in using English to early exposure and practice. Nadi, for instance, believed that practicing at an early age during critical developmental periods significantly influenced his confidence in using English,

"I do agree that practicing at an early age has affected our confidence in using English because there have been well known that it is a critical period. Moreover, my niece is really good at English because she has been learning English since she was a toddler." (Nadi, Interview)

Similarly, Liza noted that consistent practice from an early age was key to her success in learning English, as it allowed her to build confidence and proficiency over time,

"Because I believe that practice is the main key to success in learning a language, especially speaking. Therefore, deciding to practice from an early age is very useful for improving speaking skills. More practice leads to higher confidence that we have." (Liza, Interview)

Fisa also highlighted the role of early practice in boosting her WTC, stating that engaging in English communication from an early stage had given her more time to familiarize herself with the language. She also pointed to the benefits of communicative language approaches, such as group discussions and role-plays, in honing her speaking skills and nurturing a positive attitude toward English communication,

"Practicing English at an early stage has significantly boosted my confidence in communication now. By starting to use the language early on, I've had more time to familiarize myself." (Fisa, Interview)

"Based on my experiences, I find that engaging in conversational practice and interactive activities are most beneficial for developing my Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English. Activities such as group discussions, role-plays, debates, and language games provide opportunities to apply language skills in real-life situations and interact with others in a supportive environment." (Fisa, Interview)

These findings suggest that early exposure to and practice of English are crucial for developing strong WTC. Engaging in speaking activities and real-life communication scenarios from the outset helps students build confidence in their language abilities, making them more willing to communicate in English as they progress through their academic and professional careers.

5. Discussion

The findings from this study offer a unique perspective on the WTC among Indonesian master's students in an English Education program, expanding the existing body of research that has predominantly focused on high school and undergraduate students. One of the most striking aspects of this research is the significant impact of previous experiences on WTC. The participants highlighted how early exposure to English, whether through formal education or informal interactions, had a profound effect on their confidence and motivation to communicate in English. This aligns with previous studies, such as those by Alam et al. (2022) and Xiao & Qiu (2022), which emphasize the role of prior language learning experiences in shaping WTC. In particular, the findings indicate that students who engaged in practice at an early stage not only developed a foundational language skill set but also built confidence that carries into their graduate studies. However, the current study goes further by demonstrating that these experiences are not just formative but continue to influence WTC well into advanced stages of education. The findings suggest that for graduate students, these early experiences act as a foundation upon which further language proficiency and communicative confidence are built, underscoring the importance of consistent and meaningful language practice from an early age.

Furthermore, an unanticipated finding emerged regarding the participants' nuanced perceptions of grammar-based learning methods. While the literature often emphasizes the importance of grammar in language learning, with studies like Mai (2023) and Qaddumi & Smith (2024) advocating for a strong grammatical foundation to enhance WTC, our research reveals a more complex reality at the graduate level. Unlike the findings of Alam et al. (2022), which predominantly highlight the drawbacks of a rigid grammar focus, our study indicates that some participants recognized the confidence that grammatical knowledge can provide. They valued grammar as an essential tool for accuracy and clarity in communication, although they also noted that an excessive emphasis on grammar could stifle their communicative spontaneity. This unexpected result might be explained by the advanced linguistic stage of graduate students, who may prioritize fluency and the ability to engage in sophisticated discourse while still acknowledging the foundational role of grammar. This finding challenges the traditional emphasis on grammar in language instruction, suggesting that for advanced learners, a more balanced approach that integrates grammar with communicative practices might be more effective. This adds a new dimension to the understanding of WTC, indicating that the relationship between grammar and WTC is not linear but depends on the learner's stage and the specific communicative demands they face.

Finally, the influence of the learning environment on WTC is another critical finding of this study, with participants emphasizing the importance of supportive, interactive, and non-judgmental classroom settings. This aligns with previous research by Azwar et al. (2021) and Fan (2022), which identified the learning environment as a key factor in fostering WTC. Moreover, the findings highlight how students expressed a need for informal and engaging settings that promote interaction, allowing them to practice their communication skills without the fear of negative evaluation. However, the current study provides new insights by illustrating how these factors play out specifically in a graduate-level context. Unlike undergraduate students, who may still be developing their basic language skills, graduate students in this study sought environments where they could engage in more sophisticated and nuanced communication. The preference for informal settings, where ideas could be exchanged freely without the pressure of strict grammatical adherence, suggests that WTC at this level is closely tied to the opportunity to use English as a tool for effective communication. This finding underscores the importance of creating learning environments that cater to the specific needs of graduate students, fostering not just language proficiency but also the confidence to use English in complex, real-world scenarios.

6. Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insights into the WTC among Indonesian master's students in an English education program, demonstrating how various factors such as previous experiences, grammar-based learning methods, the learning environment, peer interaction, and early practice of English communication influence WTC. By focusing on graduate students, this research underscores the continuing influence of early language learning experiences and highlights the need for balanced instructional approaches that integrate both grammar and communicative practices. The relevance of these findings to WTC theory lies in their contribution to a deeper understanding of how advanced language learners navigate the challenges of using English in academic and professional settings, suggesting

that WTC is a dynamic construct that evolves with learners' linguistic and cognitive development.

However, the study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of only six participants from a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. This small sample size might not fully represent the diverse experiences and perspectives of Indonesian graduate students in English education programs across different institutions. Second, the short duration of the data collection period provides only a snapshot of the participants' WTC, potentially overlooking how WTC fluctuates over time due to changes in the learning environment or personal experiences. Future research should address these limitations by involving a larger and more diverse participant pool and conducting longitudinal studies that track the evolution of WTC over an extended period. Such studies could offer a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing WTC and provide more generalizable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to enhance communicative confidence in advanced language learners.

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