

**WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN  
ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE ONLINE  
CLASSROOMS: FACTORS, INFLUENCES,  
INITIATIVES**

**ANNA LYNN ABU BAKAR**



**UMS**  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

**FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH  
2022**

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**ANNA LYNN ABU BAKAR**



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2022**

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the materials in this thesis is my own except for quotations, excerpts, equations, summaries, and references, which have been duly acknowledged.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The English language is seen as an important medium of communication amongst the community especially in higher institutions in Malaysia and also in the working world. Graduates are seen as having lack of communication skills in English, leading to unemployability upon graduation. Hence, a lot of effort has been put in to produce students who are competent in communicating effectively in different social and professional context. The Ministry of Education has made a lot of initiatives to improve students' proficiency in English. This study looks into students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in a digital setting among pre-university students in a local university. Multimethods approach was employed in this study involving 321 participants. Self-administered questionnaire, 12 classroom observations and focus group interview involving 25 participants were used in this study. The information gleaned from the questionnaire was subjected to statistical analysis, the data gleaned from classroom observations were subjected to inter-rater reliability analysis, and the information gleaned from interviews was subjected to thematic analysis. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between motivation, self-confidence and language anxiety with students' WTC. However, there is no significant relationship between grit and students' WTC. The findings of the study also discovered that students' WTC were very much influenced by their mood and the role of English language instructors' (ELIs) in class. Among the significant themes that was discovered from the interview was students' fear, environment and people which influence students' WTC in English. However, in order to overcome these challenges, there are 6 main speaking initiatives that were employed by the students which are reading English books, listening to English songs, watching movies, writing, doing research from the internet and drilling. The findings of this study hope to shed some light to stakeholders, syllabus makers as well as ELIs on the factors that should be taken into consideration in the teaching and learning methods in order to ensure students' WTC in English.

## **ABSTRAK**

### **KESEDIAAN BERKOMUNIKASI DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS DALAM BILIK DARJAH DALAM TALIAN BAHASA KEDUA: FAKTOR, PENGARUH, INISIATIF**

Bahasa Inggeris dilihat sebagai media komunikasi yang penting antara masyarakat terutamanya di institusi tinggi di Malaysia dan juga di dunia pekerjaan. Graduan dilihat kekurangan kemahiran berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggeris sehingga menyebabkan pengangguran setelah tamat pengajian. Oleh itu, banyak usaha telah dilakukan untuk menghasilkan pelajar yang cekap berkomunikasi dengan berkesan dalam konteks sosial dan viactorviicivil yang berbeza. Kementerian Pendidikan telah membuat banyak inisiatif untuk meningkatkan penguasaan pelajar dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian ini melihat kesediaan untuk berkomunikasi (WTC) para pelajar dalam suasana digital di kalangan pelajar pra-universiti di viactorviicvi tempatan. Pendekatan pelbagai kaedah digunakan dalam kajian ini yang melibatkan 321 peserta. Soal selidik yang dikendalikan sendiri, 12 pemerhatian bilik darjah dan temu bual kumpulan viacto yang melibatkan 25 orang peserta digunakan dalam kajian ini. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara motivasi, keyakinan diri dan kegelisahan bahasa dengan WTC pelajar. Maklumat yang diperoleh daripada soal selidik adalah tertakluk kepada analisis viactorviic, data yang diperoleh daripada pemerhatian bilik darjah tertakluk kepada analisis kebolehpercayaan antara penilai, dan maklumat yang diperoleh daripada temu bual tertakluk kepada analisis tematik. Walau bagaimanapun, tidak ada hubungan yang ketara antara azam dan WTC pelajar. Hasil kajian juga mendapati bahawa WTC pelajar sangat dipengaruhi oleh emosi mereka dan peranan pengajar bahasa Inggeris (ELI) di kelas. Antara tema penting yang didapati dari temu bual itu adalah ketakutan pelajar, persekitaran dan orang luar yang mempengaruhi WTC pelajar dalam bahasa Inggeris. Namun, untuk mengatasi cabaran ini, terdapat enam strategi percakapan utama yang digunakan oleh pelajar iaitu membaca buku Bahasa Inggeris, mendengar lagu, menonton filem, menulis, membuat penyelidikan dari internet dan latihan tubi dalam pemahaman Bahasa Inggeris. Penemuan kajian ini berharap dapat memberi penerangan yang lebih jelas kepada pemegang kepentingan, pembuat sukatan pelajaran dan ELI mengenai viactor-faktor yang harus dipertimbangkan dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran untuk memastikan WTC pelajar dalam bahasa Inggeris.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>MOE</b>	- Ministry of Education
<b>CEFR</b>	- Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
<b>ESL</b>	- English as a Second Language
<b>EFL</b>	- English as a Foreign Language
<b>WTC</b>	- Willingness to Communicate
<b>SPM</b>	- Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
<b>ELSQ</b>	- English Language Standards and Quality Council
<b>ELTC</b>	- English Language Teaching Centre
<b>L1</b>	- First Language
<b>L2</b>	- Second Language
<b>ELSOC</b>	- The English Language Standards and Quality Council
<b>MEB</b>	- Malaysian Education Blueprint
<b>HLIs</b>	- Higher Learning Institutions
<b>ELIs</b>	- English Language Instructors



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

English is widely known as a lingua franca or 'world language' and is widely used by people across the globe, officially and personally. According to Thirusanku and Melor Md. Yunus (2012), English is an official language in 52 countries and has a wider distribution compared to other spoken languages. Where English is spoken as a second language, English is seen as an important and usually the official language but not the main language of the countries. The example for countries where English is spoken as a second language are India, the Philippines, Nigeria and Malaysia. These countries are ex-colonies of the United Kingdom or the United States.

With regards to Malaysia, the English language has been given the status of a second official language next to Bahasa Melayu which is the official language of the country. However, this is argued by Wahi, O'Neill and Chapman (2011) that English language may not essentially be the second language for Malaysian students as it could be the first, second, foreign or even 'alien' to some students. This is determined by the locality of where the students live. Students from urban area for example have a wider exposure to the language compared to those who are staying in the rural area. They have a wider contact to the English language and may come from homes where English is used that leads to their competency in communicating in English (Gobel, Thang, Sidhu, Oon, & Chan, 2013). On the other hand, students who live in rural areas are most likely to be using their mother tongues as the medium of communication in the household. Compared to the students in the urban area, they have minimal or no contact to English outside of school and they are not in the environment where they are able to practice the language learnt in school.

Therefore, due to these restraints that students face, it is noted that, despite learning English for six years at elementary schools and five years in secondary school, Malaysian students' English oral competency level has always been an obstacle in securing success at university level as well as in job opportunities. It was also reported that one of the contributing factors why school leavers and graduates are unable to secure a good job is because of their poor command in English (Spawa & Hassan, 2013). This report is supported by a survey conducted by the Malaysian Government on Malaysian graduates of local universities where it was found that two out of three main reasons for the 60,000 Malaysian graduates failed to be employed are related to their proficiency in the English language. First, the graduates have poor English Language proficiency and second, they have poor oral communication skills in English (Rajeandram, 2016), which is influenced by their inter group communication in the classroom. This is further supported by Liu (2005) and Peng (2012) in their studies that students' reluctance to engage in activities involving authentic oral communication in L2 has been a major concern in both English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) context.

Students' reluctance in speaking English can be related to their unwillingness to communicate in the target language during the teaching and learning process. According to Kang (2005); *"Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is an individual's volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables"*. In other words, the speaker's willingness to communicate in a specific situation are affected by various factors such as the topic, their interest and the conversational context (Kang, 2005) they are in.

Thus, having a good command of English among undergraduate students is the key in the success of teaching and learning of English in the higher learning institutions of countries that are heavily populated by non-native speakers of English. Recognizing that English is an important language needed by the society in general, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) is determined to enhance students' competency in the language. Due to this, a lot of emphasis was given on the importance of the English language among undergraduate students. Mohd. Noh &

Abdullah (2019) stated that the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) took urgent action to enable students to become an all-rounded global citizen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which has led to the establishment of The English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC). This council was set up to produce a roadmap to address the fundamental problem faced by the young people of today to cope with the globalization era which requires them to have a good proficiency in the English language. Hence, MOE launched the English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap 2015-2025 which is a clear indication by the ministry to bring about a substantial improvement in the students' proficiency in the English language (Mohd. Don & Abdullah, 2019). It is a 10-year reform plan to develop an effective and proficient user of the English language.

The 10-year roadmap has brought a significant change by adopting Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which has led to changes in curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment (Mohd Noh & Abdullah, 2019). CEFR is an international standard that focuses on producing learners who can communicate and interact in any language, in this instance, English. In order to adopt CEFR in the education system, teachers are given CEFR-related training to familiarise themselves with the appropriate approaches in teaching and learning as well as learning materials. Teachers are evaluated and referenced against CEFR aspirational targets as they play an important role in the implementation of the reform and has to be at a certain skill level. This goes the same for teacher trainers to ensure that teachers are fully aware and familiar with the framework imposed.

Students on the other hand, are also impacted with the adoption of CEFR. Primary and secondary curriculum for English language has been aligned with CEFR in stages starting with Primary 1 and Form 1 in 2017 through the revised Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (KSSR) and new Secondary School Standard Curriculum (KSSM). Students from these 2 batches has sat for the English language paper in the national assessment that is aligned to CEFR in 2021 (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) and 2022 (Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Menengah) respectively. English language programmes in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) are also aligned with CEFR to ensure the continuity of the learning experience for secondary students (Senin & Tapsir, 2019).

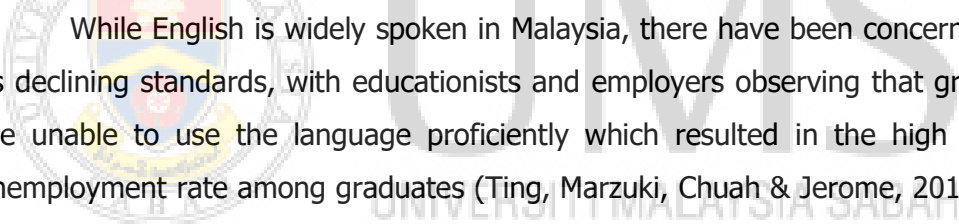
By aligning the system with an international standard, it is hoped to boost the level of education in the country. This is to not only produce a balanced individual but also graduate students who are able to communicate competently globally. This goes hand in hand with the Act 550 (Education Act, 1996) whereby the purpose of education is to enable the Malaysian society to have a command of knowledge, skills and values necessary in a world that is highly competitive and globalized that arises from the impact of rapid development in science, technology and information where the English language is the main source of information.

## **1.2 Background of Study**

According to a government survey conducted by the country's Economic Planning Unit in September 2005, a total of 250 graduates polled stated that they were unemployed because they had no job experience, had poor English language and communication skills. This thesis highlights the importance of English language and communication skills. The English language skills that cover specified areas of speaking, writing, listening and reading are the basic skills or core skills required for job entrance. In addition, the key skills of communication should also be the outcome of our higher education, alongside knowledge and subject specific skills. Thus, these two elements should go in tandem so that it might increase employment opportunities among graduates.

English has become a globally accepted language of communication and networking at this present time where more than 350 million people around the world use English as their first language (L1) and more than 430 million use English as a second language (Will, 2018). Furthermore, in an inaugural professorial lecture by Professor Ambigapathy Pandian (2006), it was indicated that English is the lingua franca of international commerce, science, engineering and technology sectors that provide higher income and job productivity. Therefore, employees who are involved in the industrial revolution 4.0 will not be able to participate effectively in global and local production of knowledge if they do not master the English language (Surya, 2021).

Apart from its status as a globally accepted language, English teaching and learning have further experienced unprecedented growth and usage with the advent of new media technologies and global communication. As today's process of teaching and learning changes, there are many aspects of the English language classroom that will have to undergo dramatic transformation. Students today are surrounded by information and opportunities affecting English language on what they learn and how they learn. All the developments stated above pose major challenges to teachers due to dynamic teaching and learning contexts change because of new technologies and the increasing diversities of people (Pandian, 2006). Furthermore, in ensuring the Malaysian government's support for the enhancement of English language proficiency and graduate employability, a new policy imposing that minimum pass in English language at tertiary level is compulsory for graduation purpose has been approved (Lee, 2014). This is to ensure the graduates are not only qualified in their field but also have the ability to communicate in English.



While English is widely spoken in Malaysia, there have been concerns about its declining standards, with educationists and employers observing that graduates are unable to use the language proficiently which resulted in the high level of unemployment rate among graduates (Ting, Marzuki, Chuah & Jerome, 2017). Ting stated that the high unemployment rate among graduates is often attributed to their lack of English proficiency and communication skills. The minister of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (Medac), Datuk Seri Dr. Wan Junaidi Jaafar, further corroborates this statement as he mentioned that lack of English proficiency has caused graduates to be less desired in the market (Hani, 2021).

In Malaysia, the English language is regarded as the second language after *Bahasa Melayu* which is the official language of the country. Students are required to learn the English language in their primary and secondary school; to further their studies in the tertiary level, they would need to acquire a minimum of band 2 in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) examination. However, for pre-university students, they are required a minimum of band 2 for admission into university.

In total, students would have undergone 11 years of English language learning; six years in primary school and five years in secondary school. Having gone through this, ideally, it is expected that they would be competent users of the language especially in terms of oral communication when continuing their studies to tertiary level. However, this may not always be the case. David, Thang, and Azman, (2015) argued that although Malaysian students have between 11 to 13 years of exposure to formal English lessons in schools, their command of the language is still far from satisfactory. This could probably be due to their unwillingness to speak the target language which then leads to their poor proficiency (Thang, Thing & Jaafar, 2011). Apart from that, some students might not be willing to communicate in English even though they are competent speakers of the language. This is probably because their WTC is dependent on the extent to which they are prepared to initiate communication when they have a choice and when they are willing to do so freely. With regards to WTC's model, MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, & Noels (1998) explained that students' willingness to communicate in the target language influences their level of proficiency. This is affirmed by Kang (2005) that when the use of the L2 increases, students' proficiency level will also develop, hence making them more likely to be willing to communicate in the target language. This suggests that there may be a significant correlation between students' willingness to communicate and their degree of English proficiency, which could affect their employability upon graduation.

A survey conducted by the Department of Statistic Malaysia in 2022, which found that the unemployment among the graduates becomes an issue, not only in Malaysia but also around the world, also discovered that the unemployment rate in Malaysia had increased 4.4 % in 2021. It was found that many graduates from local universities still lack aptitude, confidence and communication skills (Department of Statistic, 2022). Another astonishing discovery in 2016 revealed that more than 400,000 graduates were unemployed and most of them were Malays because they were unable to speak English (Pemandu, 2016). This was supported in The National Graduate Employability Blueprint 2012-2017 where it was postulated that prospective employers complained that 50% of graduate students lacked English communication skills. In a recent statistic reported by the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (Medac), 232,000 graduates nationwide were jobless and with the