

# Impact of English Instruction Amount on Omani Students' Willingness to Communicate in English

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## Abstract

This study examined the role of English instruction on students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in Oman's English foreign language (EFL) context. WTC in a second language (L2) is a multi-faceted construct that integrates psychological, linguistic, and communicative variables to describe, explain, and predict students' communicative behaviour in an L2. This quantitative study employed a survey to assess L2 WTC key variables of informants from Year 1 (116) and Year 4 (88) English major students in higher education. A t-test analysis revealed that Year 4 students had higher WTC in English than Year 1 students, and they also had less communication anxiety than Year 1 students. Conversely, Year 1 students had higher self-perceived communication competence and tended to communicate more frequently than Year 4 students. They also tended to be more motivated than Year 4 students and had higher positive attitudes toward their learning situation, English-speaking community, and interest in foreign language learning. Surprisingly, the data revealed no significant differences in all those variables between Year 1 and Year 4 students.

**Keywords:** Arab culture, EFL learning, motivation, Omani EFL learners, willingness to communicate.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the ultimate goals of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is to use the lingua franca in an increasingly globalised world. Indeed, Crystal (2003) states that the number of users of English as non-native speakers is roughly three times that of native speakers of English.

Although Arabic is Oman's native and official language, English as the lingua franca is increasingly emphasised. It is the language of communication among professionals in higher education institutions, hospitals, airports, and most national and international companies. English is the only official foreign language (FL) in Oman and receives significant political, economic, and legislative support (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). Omani students learn English from Grade 1 at primary schools, and most programs are taught in English in higher education institutions. Importantly, students believe that being proficient in English will help them find better job opportunities. However, despite apparent enthusiasm for English, it is also common to find Omani EFL learners unwilling to communicate in English when given a chance.

Previous research showed that a low willingness to communicate (WTC) in English could be attributed to various situational and cultural variables. Dörnyei (2005) stated that WTC in the second language (L2) is "a means and an end at the same time" (p.210). As a result, the concept of WTC has recently been incorporated in the second language (L2) acquisition theory and used to explain aspects of second/foreign language (L2/FL) learning and communication. The L2 WTC model integrated social, psychological, linguistic, situational, and communicative factors (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001) and personality traits (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). However, the indirect influence of the amount of English instruction on L2 WTC through motivation and communication competence needs further investigation to better understand its impact on students' WTC in the L2. Thus, this study focuses on the effect of L2 linguistic ability on students WTC in EFL, which has been less researched than other variables affecting L2 WTC.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although WTC in the second language (L2) originated from L1 research, it has been conceptualised

as a situational variable, not a trait-like one. The L2 is related to use in particular contexts and with a specific type of interlocutor. MacIntyre *et al.*, (1998) were quite clear that L2 WTC is different from L1 WTC. In addition to its context-sensitive nature, WTC in the L2 relates to both verbal and written communication, whereas L1 WTC refers only to verbal communication. The L2 WTC was thus defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2" (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998, p. 547).

MacIntyre *et al.*, (1998) developed a comprehensive L2 WTC model that integrated psychological, linguistic and communicative variables to describe, explain, and predict L2 communication and acquisition. According to the model, all social, affective, cognitive, and situational variables affect students' L2 WTC, which indicates their actual use of L2 and second language acquisition. MacIntyre *et al.*, (1998) based their model on research and theory from various domains and integrated previous research in linguistics, communication, and language learning. In their study, the potential interrelations of these domains were clearly stated. However, this comprehensive model of L2 WTC was based on research principally conducted in the Western world.

Previous research found that self-perceived communicative competence and communication anxiety were the most significant and direct variables affecting learners' WTC in L2 (Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima *et al.*, 2004). The motivation was also found to exert direct influence on L2 WTC (Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre *et al.*, 2002; Peng, 2007a, 2007b), or to affect WTC indirectly through communication anxiety and self-perceived communication competence (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002; Yashima *et al.*, 2004). International posture, which includes an interest in international affairs, willingness to travel overseas and so forth, correlates with L2 WTC in Japanese EFL settings (Yashima, 2002; Yashima *et al.*, 2004). Studies also indicate that the L2 WTC construct can be related to other variables such as gender (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre *et al.*, 2002), social support (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001) and personality traits (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996).

From the foregoing, it is evident that WTC in the L2 is a complex phenomenon, combining communicative, linguistic, and social-psychological factors rather than a simple display of linguistic competence or communicative competence. It has been identified by Dörnyei and colleagues (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006) as an important component of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory, and calls have been made to incorporate the notion in second language pedagogy (Kang, 2005). Several studies have examined

the impact of contextual variables such as the content of conversation, type of context and type of interlocutor (Al-Amrani, 2019; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2018; Peng, 2014), cultural and sociohistorical factors (Al-Murtadha & Feryok, 2017), psychological variables, including motivation, anxiety, and perceived communication competence (Kadi & Madini, 2019; Shirvan *et al.*, 2019). The amount of English instruction is a possible variable that influences students' WTC in the L2, which requires an in-depth study.

### 2.1 Purpose of the current study

This study examines the effect of the academic year level on EFL learners' WTC in English. It attempts to answer the following research question: how does the amount of English instruction, as reflected in specific academic years (Year 1 and Year 4), influence students' attitudes toward their perceptions of L2 WTC key variables?

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Participants

Participants for this study were female volunteers from First Year (116) and Fourth Year (88) students. Collecting data from these two levels allowed the potential influence of the amount of English instruction, as reflected in the academic year (Year 1 and Year 4), on key variables related to L2 WTC to be assessed. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 27, and their first language was Arabic.

### 3.2 Research Design and instrument

In this study, learners' WTC was examined through a questionnaire (Questionnaire A) that assessed the key variables affecting their WTC in English. The study took place in regularly scheduled English classes during semester 1 of the academic year at the university. Questionnaire A was administered to Year 1 and Year 4 students and used in this study as the main instrument to measure learners' L2 WTC. The questionnaire was initially translated by fourth-year students majoring in Arabic-English translation; these students otherwise did not participate in the study. The researcher then revised and validated by a certified Arabic-English translator.

A questionnaire was designed to gather data about participants' background information and measures related to communication and affective variables. The communication variables consisted of WTC in English, self-perceived communication competence, communication anxiety, and frequency of communication. Measures related to affective variables included the scales of motivation, integrativeness, instrumental orientation, and attitudes toward the learning situation. Most items in the questionnaire were used and tested by previous researchers (Al-Amrani & Harrington, 2020; Clément *et al.*, 2003; Kang, 2005; Kim, 2004; Yashima, 2002; Yashima *et al.*, 2004).

Before the data collection, ethical research permission was secured. Then, the purpose and procedures of conducting the study were explained to students before they were invited to complete the questionnaire. The data were collected at a private university in Oman.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The internal consistency of the items within the instrument was used to estimate the reliability of scales. Communication variables consisted of willingness to communicate (WTC), self-perceived communication competence (SPCC), communication

anxiety (CA), and frequency of communication (FC). Affective variables were motivation, attitude toward the learning situations, integrativeness, and instrumental orientation.

Table 1 shows that all scales used in the study had acceptable internal consistency reliabilities as almost all exceeded Cronbach's  $\alpha \geq 0.70$ . It is assumed that scales of motivation, attitude toward learning situation, integrativeness, and instrumental orientation had lower reliability because they had fewer items than other scales.

**Table 1: Internal Consistency Reliabilities of the Scales Used in the Study**

Variables	Cronbach's $\alpha$	No of Items
WTC in English	0.93	20
SPCC in English	0.93	12
CA in English	0.90	12
FC in English	0.86	12
Motivation to communicate in English	0.71	3
Attitude toward English learning situations	0.73	2
Integrativeness: Orientation and attitude	0.70	3
Instrumental orientation	0.82	2

## 4. FINDINGS

The study assessed whether academic years (Year 1 and 4) influence university students' attitudes and perceptions toward their communication and affective variables for EFL learners in an Arab setting. T-test analyses were used to measure the effect of different schooling years on the communication variables (WTC, SPCC, CA and FC) and affective variables (motivation, attitude toward the learning situations, integrativeness, and instrumental

orientation). Statistical analysis software SPSS version 19 was used to analyse the first and second research questions.

### 4.1 WTC by academic years

The data reveals that Year 4 students' WTC was higher overall than Year 1 students in most situations, although the difference was not statistically significant (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Students' WTC by Academic Years (Year 1/ Year 4)**

Item Description	Year 1	Year 4	t(202)	Sig
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Talk with an acquaintance in a café.	4.51 (2.49)	4.73 (2.70)	-0.60	0.55
Talk with a stranger on the bus.	3.87 (2.55)	4.43 (2.66)	-1.53	0.12
Speak in public to a group of strangers.	3.34 (2.60)	4.03 (2.71)	-1.84	0.07
Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.	5.54 (2.97)	5.36 (3.13)	0.41	0.68
Talk with a salesperson in a store.	6.24 (2.82)	6.82 (3.25)	-1.36	0.18
Speak in a large meeting of friends.	6.11 (3.04)	5.82 (2.93)	0.70	0.49
Talk with your previous teachers at the university.	6.55 (2.97)	6.50 (3.30)	0.11	0.91
Talk in a small group of strangers.	4.22 (2.69)	4.41 (2.48)	-0.50	0.62
Talk with a friend while standing in line.	6.22 (3.00)	5.33 (3.25)	2.02	0.05
Talk with a waiter/waitress.	5.82 (3.25)	6.40 (3.20)	-1.27	0.20
Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.	5.18 (2.90)	4.94 (2.89)	0.58	0.56
Talk with a stranger while standing in line.	3.63 (2.53)	3.73 (2.54)	-0.27	0.79
Talk with a shop clerk.	6.07 (3.04)	6.39 (3.22)	-0.72	0.47
Speak in public to a group of friends.	5.21 (2.85)	4.63 (2.68)	1.48	0.14
Talk in a small group of acquaintances.	5.91 (3.01)	5.13 (3.01)	1.83	0.07
Talk with a nurse in the clinic.	6.63 (2.97)	7.24 (2.93)	-1.46	0.15
Talk in a large meeting of strangers.	3.66 (2.55)	3.68 (2.42)	-0.08	0.94
Talk with a librarian	5.84 (2.76)	5.95 (3.09)	-0.27	0.79
Talk in a small group of friends.	6.37 (2.97)	5.95 (3.10)	0.97	0.33
20. Speak in public to a group of acquaintances.	5.17 (2.90)	4.50 (2.78)	1.70	0.10
Average	5.26 (2.84)	5.30 (2.91)		

#### 4.2 Self-perceived communication competence by academic years

As shown in Table 3, overall, Year 1 students felt slightly more competent to communicate in English

than Year 4 students, although the difference statistically was not significant.

**Table 3: Students' SPCC by Academic Years (Year 1/ Year 4)**

Item Description	Year 1	Year 4	t(202)	Sig
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
1. Speak in public to a group of strangers.	3.84 (2.45)	4.32 (2.47)	-1.39	0.17
2. Talk with an acquaintance.	6.92 (2.61)	6.67 (2.68)	0.71	0.48
3. Talk in a large meeting of friends.	6.22 (2.57)	6.10 (2.75)	0.30	0.76
4. Talk in a small group of strangers.	4.53 (2.43)	4.53 (2.48)	-0.02	0.98
Talk with a friend.	8.28 (2.59)	8.09 (2.86)	0.48	0.63
6. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.	5.81 (2.54)	5.30 (2.78)	1.38	0.17
7. Talk with a stranger.	4.75 (2.75)	5.07 (2.75)	-0.64	0.41
8. Speak in public to a group	5.63 (2.48)	5.41 (2.73)	0.82	0.55
9. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.	6.17 (2.61)	6.01 (2.72)	0.60	0.69
10. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.	4.19 (2.58)	4.30 (2.85)	-0.28	0.78
11. Talk in a small group of friends.	6.93 (2.71)	6.61 (2.84)	0.81	0.42
12. Speak in public to a group of acquaintances.	5.77 (2.83)	5.34 (2.74)	1.08	0.28
Average	5.75 (2.60)	5.65 (2.72)		

#### 4.3 Communication anxiety by academic years

Overall, Year 4 students tended to feel less anxious to communicate in English than Year 1

students (see Table 4). A t-test analysis revealed no significant differences in CA between Year 1 and Year 4 students.

**Table 4: Students' Communication Anxiety by Academic Years (Year 1/ Year 4)**

Item Description	Year 1	Year 4	t(202)	Sig
	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)		
1. Speak in public to a group of strangers.	6.02(3.18)	6.06(2.98)	-0.09	0.93
2. Talk with an acquaintance.	4.01(3.19)	3.80(2.59)	0.51	0.61
3. Talk in a large meeting of friends.	4.69(2.75)	4.49(2.64)	0.53	0.60
4. Talk in a small group of strangers.	5.68(3.10)	5.55(2.89)	0.32	0.75
Talk with a friend.	3.43(3.23)	3.33(3.05)	0.23	0.82
6. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.	5.24(2.80)	5.05(2.46)	0.52	0.60
7. Talk with a stranger.	6.09(3.24)	5.74(2.97)	0.79	0.43
8. Speak in public to a group	5.06(2.80)	4.43(2.80)	1.59	0.11
9. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.	4.24(2.71)	3.99(2.26)	0.71	0.48
10. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.	6.57(3.33)	6.15(3.01)	0.93	0.35
11. Talk in a small group of friends.	4.18(2.77)	3.76(2.56)	1.11	0.27
12. Speak in public to a group of acquaintances.	5.46(2.85)	4.94(2.72)	1.30	0.20
Average	5.06(3.00)	4.77(2.74)		

#### 4.4 Frequency of communication in English by academic years

Table 5 suggests that Year 4 students tended to communicate in English more frequently in some

situations, while Year 1 students communicated more regularly in others. The differences were not significant in all situations.

**Table 5: Students' Frequency of Communication by Academic Years (Year 1/ Year 4)**

Item Description	Year 1	Year 4	t(202)	Sig
	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)		
1. Speak in public to a group of strangers.	2.88(1.89)	2.95 (1.28)	-0.43	0.67
2. Talk with an acquaintance.	3.73(0.97)	3.55 (1.16)	1.25	0.21
3. Talk in a large meeting of friends.	3.44(0.97)	3.26 (1.13)	1.21	0.23
4. Talk in a small group of strangers.	2.95(1.28)	2.89 (1.13)	0.37	0.72
5. Talk with a friend.	4.29(0.94)	4.23 (1.03)	0.48	0.64
6. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.	3.18(0.90)	2.98 (1.07)	1.47	0.14
7. Talk with a stranger.	2.72(1.35)	2.89 (1.35)	-0.90	0.37

Item Description	Year 1	Year 4	t(202)	Sig
	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)		
8. Speak in public to a group	3.12(1.10)	2.99 (1.07)	0.86	0.39
9. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.	3.39(1.04)	3.25 (1.01)	0.95	0.34
10. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.	2.45(1.23)	2.63 (1.24)	-0.01	0.31
11. Talk in a small group of friends.	3.70(0.94)	3.84 (1.03)	-0.03	0.30
12. Speak in public to a group of acquaintances.	2.97(1.06)	2.97 (1.24)	0.05	0.96
Average	3.24(1.14)	3.20 (1.14)		

#### 4.5 Motivation by academic years

Table 6 shows that Year 1 students had higher motivation levels than Year 4 students. They also worked harder, had more desire, and a more positive

attitude toward learning English than Year 4 students. However, most of these differences were statistically not significant.

**Table 6: Students' Motivation by Academic Years (Year 1/ Year 4)**

Items Description	Year 1	Year 4	t(202)	Sig
	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)		
1. If I were to rate how hard I work at learning English, I would say that it is:	5.44 (1.31)	5.16(1.33)	1.50	0.13
2. If I were to rate my desire to learn English, I would say that it is:	6.45 (1.03)	6.41(0.98)	0.28	0.78
3. If I were to rate my attitude toward learning English, I would say that it is:	5.86(1.47)	5.85(1.26)	0.05	0.96
Average	5.92(0.40)	5.81(1.19)		

#### 4.6 Attitude toward learning situations by academic years

Year 1 students' attitude toward learning situations was more positive than Year 4 students (see

Table 7). The difference between Year 1 and Year 4 students' attitudes toward their English language courses was statistically significant  $t(202) = 0.01$ ,  $p = 2.43$ ,  $d = 0.34$ .

**Table 7: Students' Attitude toward Learning Situations by academic Years (Year 1/Year 4)**

Item Description	Year 1	Year 4	t(202)	Sig
	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)		
4. If I were to rate my attitude toward my English instructor, I would say that it is:	5.41 (1.38)	5.05 (1.48)	1.79	0.08
5. If I were to rate my attitude toward my English course, I would say that it is:	5.28 (1.41)	4.77 (1.59)	2.43	0.01
Average	5.35(1.40)	4.91(1.54)		

#### 4.7 Integrativeness by academic years

Year 1 students had a higher positive attitude toward the English speaking community and more

interest in foreign language learning than Year 4 students, as seen in Table 8. However, the difference was not statistically significant.

**Table 8: Students' Integrativeness by Academic Years (Year 1/ Year 4)**

Item Description	Year 1	Year 4	t (231)	Sig
	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)		
6. If I were to rate my feelings about learning English to interact with members of the English speaking community, I would say:	6.13 (1.19)	5.97 (1.23)	0.96	0.34
7. If I were to rate my interest in foreign languages, I would say:	5.34 (1.60)	5.33 (1.72)	0.03	0.98
8. If I were to rate my attitude toward members of the second language community.	5.59 (1.43)	5.39 (1.48)	0.98	0.33
Average	5.69(1.41)	5.56(1.48)		

#### 4.8 Instrumental motivation by academic years

Table 9 shows that Year 1 students had higher instrumental motivation to learn English than Year 4

students. However, the difference was not statistically significant.



**Table 9: Students' Instrumental Motivation by Academic Years (Year 1/ Year 4)**

Item Description	Year 1	Year 4	T(231)	Sig
	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)		
9. If I were to rate how important it is for me to learn English for getting a good job, I would say:	6.55 (0.96)	6.49 (1.06)	0.47	0.64
10. If I were to rate how important it is for me to learn English for my future career, I would say:	6.55 (0.88)	6.55 (0.01)	0.14	0.89
Average	6.55(0.92)	6.52(0.54)		

## 5. DISCUSSION

The study examined whether the amount of English instruction, as reflected in the academic year (Year 1 vs Year 4), influenced students' attitudes and perceptions towards their communication variables. The question also examined the affective variables for EFL learners in an Arab setting. T-test analyses were used to measure the effect of different academic years on key variables related to L2 WTC. These variables were WTC in the L2, self-perceived communication competence, communication anxiety, frequency of communication, motivation, attitude toward learning situations, integrativeness, and instrumental orientation.

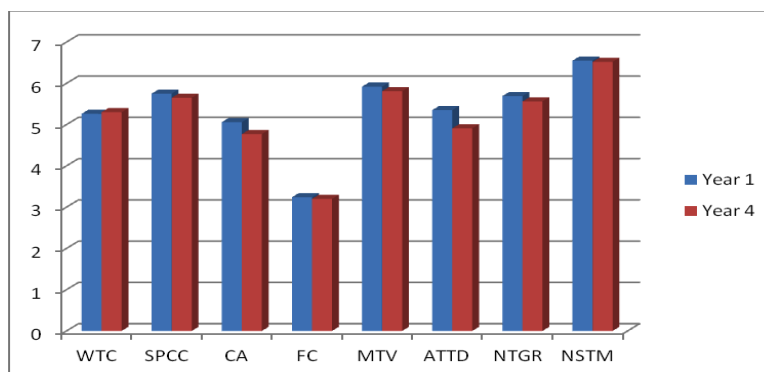
Overall, the data showed very few significant effects of the length of their university English learning experience on students' perceptions towards key variables related to L2 WTC. In general, Year 4 students had higher WTC in English than Year 1; however, the difference was insignificant in most situations. While Year 1 students felt more competent in English than Year 4 students in most situations, the difference was insignificant. Further, Year 4 students indicated lower communication anxiety and higher frequency of communication than Year 1 students, but the difference was not statistically significant.

One possible explanation of the non-significant influence of the amount of English instruction on students' WTC in the L2 is that communicative competence is located in layer V. This layer is two layers further down from the WTC layer in MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) L2 WTC model. Another possible explanation is that EFL students' cultural

values play a more significant role in their perception of their WTC in English than English instruction. This finding supported Wen and Clément's (2003) study of WTC in a Chinese EFL context revealed that students' cultural values were a dominant force in shaping their perception of English communication as a foreign language. Moreover, this finding supports Dornyei's (2005) result. It is possible to find EFL learners with a high level of communicative competence but tend to avoid entering into communicative situations in English. This can be because students' perception of their proficiency levels is low, and they experience high anxiety.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The study assessed whether the amount of English instruction as reflected in specific academic years (Year 1 vs Year 4) influenced university students' attitudes and perceptions toward their WTC key variables. Figure 1 shows that Year 4 students had higher WTC in English than Year 1 students, and they also had less communication anxiety than Year 1 students. Conversely, Year 1 students had higher self-perceived communication competence and tended to communicate more frequently than Year 4 students. They also tended to be more motivated than Year 4 students and had higher positive attitudes toward their learning situation, English-speaking community, and interest in foreign language learning. However, the data reveals that overall, students' academic year did not significantly affect learners' WTC and other communication and affective variables. However, A t-test analysis revealed no significant differences in all those variables between Year 1 and Year 4 students.



**Figure 1: WTC variables by academic year (Year 1 & Year 4)**

CA=communication anxiety; SPCC=self-perceived communication competence; WTC=willingness to communicate; FC=frequency of communication; MTV=motivation; NTGR=integrativeness; NSTM=instrumental orientation; ATTD=attitude toward learning situations

As pedagogical implications, teachers of EFL should be trained to engage students with English language contact and interaction beyond the classroom setting through enhancing traditional language classrooms with modern technologies, including the use of social media, chat rooms, and discussion forums where EFL students can communicate in English more comfortably, confidently, and more frequently (Al-Amrani, & Harrington, 2020). In addition, students should be equipped with communication strategies that could significantly enhance their WTC in EFL (Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh, 2014). They should also be trained to effectively use metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies along with social, affective strategies such as self-reinforcement and self-talk strategies that could help reduce learners' anxiety and cultivate personal motivation and a positive attitude (Al-Amrani, 2009).

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