

# Factors Affecting EFL Students' Willingness to Communicate in Speaking Classes at the Vietnamese Tertiary Level

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**Abstract**— Researchers have identified that “willingness to communicate” (WTC) construct plays an important role in second and foreign language (L2) teaching and learning. Although many studies on WTC have been conducted worldwide, it seems to be a nascent term in the Vietnamese context. The present study was conducted at a private university in Ho Chi Minh City-Vietnam (henceforth called PU). The study aims to investigate the students' WTC in EFL speaking classes; explore factors that influence their WTC; and propose strategies to motivate them to communicate in speaking classes. 195 first-year English-major students and 5 native English speaking teachers (NESTs) were invited to participate in this study. Data was gathered through the employment of three instruments including questionnaire surveys, semi-structured interviews, and class observations. The findings of the study revealed that a large number of PU students had a low level of WTC in English. Moreover, it was disclosed that students' WTC was affected by both individual as well as situational factors. Lastly, several vital strategies were put forward to help enhance the students' WTC. Based on the findings of this study, some pedagogical implications for stakeholders were provided. **Keywords**— Willingness to communicate; situational factors; individual factors; EFL speaking classes, Vietnamese context.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Being able to speak English inside and outside the classroom is of vital importance for EFL students (Baker & Westrup, 2003). Those who speak English well can have greater chance for better education, find good jobs, and get promotion. Nevertheless, according to Brown and Yule (1983), oral language production is often considered as one of the most difficult aspects of language learning. MacIntyre, Dornyei, Clément and Noels (1998) also state that it is students' reluctance to speak L2 when they have opportunities in classrooms relating to the term of WTC which plays a key role in L2 learning. The major goal of L2 teaching should be to encourage WTC among students because if they have a

high level of WTC, it then leads them to increased opportunities for practice in L2 and authentic language use. That students need to have WTC before they enter into the process of L2 interaction is considered as an important prerequisite for practicing communication (ibid). Lack of willingness may not result in effective interaction and language production. To achieve the goal of stimulating students to use L2, it is important to understand what demotivates students in English speaking classes. Therefore, the growth of research into L2 WTC construct has become the attentive theme of language researchers around the world in the last decades.

English as a foreign language (EFL) has been widely taught in Vietnam as a compulsory subject from primary schools to tertiary institutions to meet the high demand of English proficiency needed for national economic growth. In the context of Vietnamese higher education, English communicative competence is now considered as a golden key to successful integration into the world as well as the final objective of language learning. Nonetheless, oral communicative competence of EFL students in Vietnam is far from the expectation at the time students have completed university education (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2016). The assumption about the weak English skills of a majority of university graduates in Vietnam has been existed for long. It may be assumed that the current English training program in higher education has not met the students' requirements. Therefore, according to Tran (2013), reconsidering the focus of language teaching in non-specialized universities and creating more interactive activities have become one of the urgent targets in language education.

It is necessary to equip students with sufficient L2 competence so that they can integrate better into the world. Therefore, how to better students' oral language acquisition process and help them master English communicative competence becomes vital and top priority for students at the Vietnamese tertiary level. It has been assumed that EFL students are affected by several factors which prevent them from communicating efficiently in English classrooms. Mohammad (2012)

states that those factors are task types, topics for discussion, interlocutors, teachers, class atmosphere, personality and self-perceived speaking ability. Therefore, finding out the major factors restricting EFL students' WTC at the Vietnamese tertiary is of vital importance. Despite the rich findings from previous studies worldwide, few studies on WTC have been conducted at the Vietnamese tertiary level so far. Especially, no literature has been found at PU in terms of English majored students' WTC in English speaking classes. For the above-mentioned reasons, it is believed that there is an urgent need to examine this construct in the Vietnamese context, especially in the PU context.

## II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The current study aims to investigate factors that affect English-majored students' WTC in speaking classes. More specifically, it attempts to gain some insights into the first-year English majored students' behavior toward WTC, explore factors that might influence their WTC in their practice in classrooms, and find out what strategies that may motivate them to speak English.

## III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent are the students willing to speak in speaking classes?
2. What factors affect students' WTC in speaking classes?
3. What strategies can be used to motivate students' WTC in speaking classes?

## IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Since WTC is a comprehensive concept that involves psychological, linguistic, and communication variables, it is believed that the current study is significant at theoretical, methodological, and practical level. More specifically, it is expected that the findings of the study will shed more light on the current trends of learning English speaking skills of tertiary students, and expand understanding of L2 learning and communication, especially because of a very limited number of studies conducted to test WTC in the Vietnamese context. What is more, the study addresses the current methodological gap in L2 research in the context by inviting both teachers and students to participate in a mixed methods research. It allows stakeholders a better understanding of the interconnected complexities of factors that hinder the students' WTC in learning English speaking skill which in turn enables this study to address the issue of strategies which motivate students to talk.

Lastly, this study may help EFL students to enhance their speaking skills and reduce their passivity in learning, and support both teachers and students in overcoming the issue of negative factors hindering students' speaking skills.

## V. BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 5.1. Definitions and Concepts of Willingness to Communicate

Literature shows that researchers have given several definitions of WTC. According to McCroskey and Richmond (1990), WTC is a tendency of personality-based, trait-like features which are relatively consistent across a variety of communication contexts and types of receivers; or MacIntyre et al. (1998) state that WTC is a 'readiness to enter into the discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2' and is believed to be associated with factors such as students' personality and motivation, as well as societal variables. It refers to an integration of multifaceted constructs such as psychological, linguistic, educational and communicative dimensions of language (MacIntyre, Burns, & Jessome, 2011). Another definition is proposed by Kang (2005). Accordingly, WTC is an individual's behavior and tendency towards actively communicative act in some specific situations, which can vary according to topics, tasks, interlocutor(s), and other potential situational variables. Therefore, the concept of WTC involves students' decision whether they choose or not to use L2 to speak. This construct promotes the process of language acquisition which optimizes the advantage of speaking opportunities in language learning (Skehan, 1991). According to the above-mentioned definitions, obviously WTC is associated with factors relating to both students themselves and the situations in which they are studying. Those factors certainly either promote or hinder students' performance in EFL speaking classes.

### 5.2. Factors Affecting Students' "Willingness to Speak"

Researchers have identified two types of variables that are considered to have influences on students' WTC. They are psychological variables including L2 self-confidence, perceived communicative competence, L2 learning anxiety, L2 learning motivation, and personality; and contextual or situational variables including teachers' roles or attitudes, task types, topics, classroom atmosphere, and interlocutors.

#### 5.2.1 Psychological Variables

*L2 Self-Confidence:* Researchers have affirmed that L2 self-confidence has a variety of influences on students' WTC. For example, it constitutes anxiety and states perceived competence (MacIntyre et al., 1998); it is recognized as the strongest predictors of WTC among individual variables (Clément, Baker & MacIntyre, 2003);

and it has a strong effect on students' L2 WTC (Kim, 2004); Cetinkaya, 2005).

*Perceived Communication Competence:* In terms of perceived communication competence, MacIntyre et al. (1998) state that students' perceived communicative competence can be considered as their perception toward the ability to speak L2 with other L2 users. L2 students who perceive themselves to be poor or good communicators tend to have less or more WTC. Obviously, students' perceived communication competence is directly related to WTC. According to Baker and MacIntyre (2000) individuals' actual ability is not the key, but how they perceive their communication competence determines WTC.

*L2 Learning Anxiety:* With regard to L2 learning anxiety, several factors are identified such as trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation specific anxiety (MacIntyre, & Gardner, 1991). Speaking activities usually provoke anxiety among students in L2 classes. Speaking anxiety inhibits and prevents students from mastering their oral skills. Baker and MacIntyre (2000) found that language-use anxiety, positive or negative past communication experiences are among the major factors that determine students' reported WTC level. Oral communication anxiety has been found to have effects on students' perception of their competence to communicate, thus affecting their WTC (McCroskey & Baer, 1985), and high levels of anxiety negatively affect L2 performance and acquisition (Liu & Jackson, 2009).

*Students' Motivation:* Regarding motivation, it is defined as the extent to which students strive to acquire the language because of the desire to do so and the satisfaction derived from it (Gardner, 1985). It can bring L2 proficiency through communication with other members of a group (Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1994). Teachers and their teaching strategies may decide whether their students are motivated or demotivated. Teachers can create basic motivational conditions, generate, maintain and protect student motivation, and encourage positive self-evaluation, which has a direct effect on attitudes toward L2 learning context (ibid). Low motivation may lead to unwillingness to communicate.

*Students' Personality:* Another factor needs to be mentioned is personality. Literature shows that personality has been seen as an important part of WTC theory in communicating both in first and second languages. Personality refers to individual factors affecting student's WTC. McCroskey and Richmond (1990) stated that introversion and extraversion personality traits can be seen as influential indicators of WTC. Liu (2005) stated that personality as an important reason behind students' unwillingness to communicate, and that some students are shy and introverted and thus

tend to keep quiet in classes. They try to avoid communicating with others as they are less sociable, introspective, and do not want to be involved in communication. On the contrary, Elwood (2011) stated that students with personality traits such as flexibility, extroversion, sociability, and confidence tend to have a higher L2 WTC. They are more likely to be willing to communicate; therefore, they are identified as the ones who enjoy being involved in communication.

### 5.2.2 Situational Variables

Situational variables are another set of factors that appear to have influences on students' WTC. These variables indicate that students have the desire to speak with a specific person on a particular occasion. These factors are identified as the effect of task types, topics, interlocutor, classroom atmosphere, teacher's role etc. (Kang, 2005; Peng, 2014).

*Effect of Task Types:* Tasks are defined as the learning activities organized in a class targeted at either structural knowledge or communicative ability (Peng, 2014). Task types are considered as noticeable factors having influence on students' degree of WTC. Student's L2 WTC can be changed depending on the nature of the task, level of difficulty and the time allowed for completing the task (Pattapong, 2010).

*Effect of Topics:* Students may be willing to communicate with their fellow students in English if they are exposed to familiar topics to discuss and thus increasing their practice opportunities. Topic familiarity, topic interest, and topic preparation are the essential features that can enhance students' linguistic self-confidence, which in turn increases students' WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Similarly, Kang (2005) contends that some particular topics may foster an eagerness for students to engage in discussing, that is, they feel the need to talk about a topic because it is intrinsically and instrumentally interesting to them. On the contrary, lack of knowledge about a topic and its appropriate register result in their avoidance of communication (ibid). It has been widely investigated and confirmed that by choosing topics of students' interests, teachers can have a greater effect on their WTC (Xie, 2010).

*Teacher role:* Researchers have indicated that such factors created by teachers as classroom procedures, teaching styles, verbal and non-verbal behavior can create strong impact on students' perceived competence, anxiety, motivation and WTC in the L2 classroom (Pattapong, 2010; MacIntyre et al., 2011; Peng, 2014). Teachers' behavior involves actions in class including giving clear explanations, feedback or encouragement, providing opportunities for students to talk. Teachers' characteristics refer to teachers' personality, including

whether a teacher is friendly and relaxed or unfriendly. All may contribute a great deal to students' L2 WTC.

*Classroom atmosphere:* The classroom atmosphere can either facilitate or hinder students' participation. The classroom atmosphere is defined as the emotion, mood, or climate created and enjoyed by the class group, which shows involvement and participation of all members in class. According to researchers (Pattapong, 2010; Peng, 2014; Suksawas, 2011), a friendly classroom atmosphere helps promote L2 WTC; while a silent and boring atmosphere demotivates it. Findings of studies found that students' L2 WTC could be higher in a cooperative working atmosphere in which all students in specific groups are allowed to participate equally and share their ideas in learning activities (Suksawas, 2011).

### 5.3 Strategies to Motivate Students to Participate in Speaking Classes

Making students talk is really a great challenge for EFL teachers in speaking classes. The case is especially true for Asian students who seem to be passive, quiet, shy and unwilling to talk in the classroom (Liu, 2005). That is why motivating strategies are considered as a remedy and it is the EFL teacher whose role is of vital importance. Whether or not the students are willing to speak in class depends on the teacher's teaching styles, attitudes and behavior towards their students. For example, the teacher can encourage students to speak by helping them establish positive attitudes towards speaking errors (Truscott & Hsu, 2008); to enhance students' WTC, the teacher needs to emphasize the fact that classroom environment is the best place students can use L2; the teacher's proper behavior to students is as one of the useful techniques (Ur, 2000); teachers should design a variety of real-life activities centered on their students and create a relaxing learning atmosphere to help students express themselves; giving more right to students to discuss topics, focusing more on their students'

knowledge (Zarrinabadi, 2014); the practicality and authenticity of communication tasks are the successful keys to WTC (MacIntyre, Babin & Clement, 1999); classroom arrangement which encourages cooperative activity like pair and group work can bring learning effectiveness to students (Wright, 2005); another key strategy that teachers should pay attention to is to provide meaningful feedback to attract students' attention when they are speaking. It is also considered as one of the best ways of helping students activate their knowledge, thus encouraging them to communicate in class (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994); Kang (2005) also suggests that teachers should create a supportive environment for students to feel free to participate in the classroom. Obviously, the teacher plays the most important role in the enhancement of students' WTC.

## VI RESEARCH METHODS

### 6.1 Sample and Sampling Procedures

Two cohorts of participants were invited to take part in the current study. The first cohort included five native English speaking teachers (NESTs) who have been teaching English at PU for more than two years. The second cohort consisted of 200 first-year English-major students who were studying speaking skill with the 5 native speaking teachers. To select the teacher sample, convenience sampling was employed because only five native speaking teachers were working at PU at that time and to select the student sample for the survey questionnaire and interview, random sampling was employed. 200 students were selected from 8 classes which were having speaking classes at the time the study was conducted. However, when the validity of the questionnaire result was checked, 5 of them were invalid. As the result, the total of the questionnaire respondents were 195 and 12 out of 195 were selected for the interview. The table below shows demographic information about the respondents.

Table.1: Demographic Information of the Participants

Instruments	Participants	N = 200	Age	Gender
Interview	Native English speaking teachers	05	28-40	2 females
				3 males
Observation	Native English speaking teachers	05	28-40	2 females
				3 males
Interview	First-year English majored students	12 (out of 195)	19-20	7 females
				5 males
Survey questionnaire	First-year English majored students	195	19-20	159 females
				36 males

### 6.2 Data Collection Procedures

To collect data for the current study, three instruments including closed-ended questionnaire,

classroom observations and interviews were used. Data gathered from these instruments was cross-validated to increase the level of quality and validity. Firstly, a survey

questionnaire was employed. It was designed based on literature of WTC theory and adapted from WTC model of MacIntyre et al. (1998) and Kang (2005). The questionnaire consisted of three sections consisting of 31 items and employed a five-point Likert scale. The first section was used to gather data about the extent to which the students are willing to communicate. This section consisted of 10 items and employed five-point Likert scales: Never (N), Rarely (R), Sometimes (S), Often (O), and Always (A); the second section consisting of 13 items was used to explore the main factors affecting their WTC; and the third section consisting of 8 items was used to explore useful strategies to motivate students to talk in their speaking class. Both sections employed five-point Likert scales: Strongly Disagree (SD); Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA). Secondly, semi-structured interviews including 10 questions for the students, and another 10 for the teachers were conducted with 12 students and 5 NESTs. The questions for the interview were all designed to maximize the consistency of the data and gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of EFL students' WTC in English at PU. Thirdly, five class observations were conducted to investigate the current level of students' WTC and tendency toward learning speaking skill in English. Therefore, students' WTC was checked. To serve

this aim, the observation was focused on class activities, students' involvement, attitudes, performance, or interaction.

### 6.3 Data Analysis Procedures

Data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively by using SPSS, version 20. Basic statistical descriptions such as percentages (%), means (M) and standard deviations (St. D) were used to analyze the participants' responses to address the research questions. Descriptive statistics were used to find out the highest or lowest level of WTC of the first-year English majored students at PU. Regarding data collected from the interviews and class observations, "content analysis" was employed. The data were transcribed and analyzed thematically. Each participant was assigned the code T for the teachers, i.e. T1...T5 and S for the students, i.e. S1-S12; and each class was assigned the code CL, i.e. CL1- CL5.

## VII RESULTS OF THE STUDY

### 7.1 Results of RQ1

RQ1 attempted to explore the extent to which the first-year English-majored students are willing to communicate in speaking classes. Table 2 below displays the data reflecting the extent of students' WTC in learning speaking skills at PU.

Table.2: The Extent of Students' WTC

Item No	Contents	N	Mean	St. D
1	Volunteering to speak or answer the teacher's questions	195	1.92	0.760
2	Expecting the teacher to ask more	195	2.62	0.999
3	Having idea but don't dare to answer	195	3.01	1.030
4	Just listening and keeping silent	195	3.08	1.093
5	Avoiding seeing the teacher's face	195	2.39	0.949
6	Wishing not to be called	195	2.79	0.890
7	Being afraid of being called to speak	195	2.71	1.012
8	Expecting to work individually	195	2.62	1.089
9	Expecting to participate actively in group work	195	3.81	1.065
10	Expecting to participate actively in pair work	195	3.63	1.042

Data displayed in Table 2 revealed that most of the students never or rarely volunteered to speak or answer the teacher's questions (item 1) with  $M=1.92$ ; over half of them never or rarely expected the teacher to ask them more questions (item 2) with  $M=2.62$ ; nearly half of them had ideas but did not dare to answer the teacher's questions (item 3) with  $M=3.01$ ; and nearly half of them often or always just listened or kept silent when the teacher raised questions (item 4) with  $M=3.08$ .

Regarding whether the students avoided seeing the teacher's face, over half of them tended to do so ( $M=2.3$ ). More surprisingly, about three-fourths of them wished not to be called in speaking classes (item 6) with

$M=2.79$ . That might be because those students were also afraid of being called (item 7) with  $M=2.71$ . It is also the reason why over half of the students expected to work individually (item 8) with  $M=2.62$ ; and about half of them rarely or sometimes expected to work in pairs or groups (items 9 and 10) with  $M=2.77$  and  $2.69$  respectively.

The above findings from the survey questionnaire revealed that about half of the students were not willing to communicate in speaking classes. These findings were consistent with those from the interviews. Among 12 students interviewed, most of them expressed that they rarely volunteered to speak in speaking classes. For example, S1 expressed:

“...I like to speak English. However, I rarely volunteer to speak.” When my teacher asks English questions, because I do not know how to answer, even when I have some ideas in my mind, I don’t dare to speak out....”

S2, having similar opinion, expressed:

“...when my teacher asks a question that I do not know, I wish he does not call me. In fact, at that time, I just listen and keep silent....”

Or S5 expressed:

“...I do not like to be called to speak individually because I usually feel nervous when speaking in front of class....”

Regarding this issue, four out of five teachers said that passivity and silence existed among students in their speaking classes. For example T1 expressed:

“.....the students need to be more active in class speaking activities.....”;

Or T4 claimed about the situation:

“...when I raise a question, they often react reluctantly”, and that “.....they need extra incentive to be motivated .....”

In order to verify the students’ and teachers’ opinions, five classroom observations were conducted. The observations were done in May 2018. It was semester 2 of the academic year, so all the first-year classes were having “Listening and Speaking 2” level and studying with the textbook “*Real Listening and Speaking 3 by Miles Craven*”. The students were studying Unit 4 “*I’d like a refund, please*”. It could be seen that the tasks and activities in the textbook are designed to be more communicative, which encourages the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching. Through the classroom observations, it was noticed that all of the five observed classes showed a general picture of lacking WTC. For example, an observation conducted in CL1, it was found that just a few students performed their speaking with outstanding confidence compared to the rest of the class. Moreover, it appeared that those competent students could respond to the teacher’s questions actively many times during the class section. Below is an activity:

“After introducing the vocabulary and phrases relating to shopping, the teacher divided the board into two columns: “what phrases a shop owner should say and ‘what phrases a customer uses’”. Then, she asked the whole class: ‘Who can volunteer to give the answer?’ Some students in the front row raised hands, but the majority of the class kept silent. At that time, three students who volunteered were called to give the answers. After a while, another question was posed by the teacher, this time, the same students raised hands and spoke again.”

Another situation in CL4 may show the students’ passivity in their learning. They tended to avoid being asked to contribute their ideas.

“When the teacher randomly nominated two students sitting at the back of the class, who seemed to be very quiet and were keeping silent for most of the class time. The teacher asked the question “how does the shop keeper solve the problem of being complained by a customer who comes to her clothes shop to exchange the faulty shirt?” It was noticed that both students stood up reluctantly and tried to give the answer to the question.

Based on the findings of study, it was evident that many students were rather passive in their speaking classes. Thus, those students were happy to be safe and not many of them wished to be challenged by their teacher. From that viewpoint, the reaction of those passive students indicated that they had little or even no involvement in the speaking activity. It is tantamount to the fact that the extent of WTC of the students was not very high.

**7.2 Results of RQ2**

RQ2 attempted to explore major factors affecting students’ WTC in speaking classes. As mentioned above, two types of factors affecting the students’ WTC were measured.

**Individual Factors**

Table.3: Individual Factors Affecting Students’ WTC

Item No	Factors	N	Mean	St. D
1	Lacking English language proficiency	195	3.74	0.900
2	Lacking confidence in speaking abilities	195	3.54	1.024
3	Being hesitant because of uncertainty of the answers	195	3.53	0.898
4	Being afraid of making mistakes and losing face	195	3.42	1.003
5	Getting nervous or embarrassed when being asked a question	195	3.33	0.961
6	Feeling shy when volunteering to speak in front of the class	195	3.19	1.132
7	Caring about grading evaluation	195	3.30	1.410

Data displayed in Table 3 reflects the individual factors that affected the students' WTC in learning speaking skills at PU. The findings revealed that a set of factors relating to individuals had impact on the students' WTC. It was evident that nearly three-fourths of the student agreed that lack of English language proficiency, and lack of confidence in speaking affected their WTC most (item 1 and 2) with  $M=3.74$  and  $M= 3.54$  respectively. Over half of the students agreed that they were hesitant because of uncertainty of the answers (item 3) with  $M=3.53$ . Item 4 with  $M=3.42$  shows that about half of the students were afraid of making mistakes and losing face. Nearly the same number of the students (item 5) was nervous and embarrassed in speaking classes with  $M=3.33$ . Nonetheless, only about one-third of the students agreed that they were too shy to volunteer to speak or that they cared about their grade (items 6 and 7) with  $M=3.19$  and  $3.30$  respectively.

The findings of the interviews with the teachers and students were consistent with the above findings from the questionnaire. 9 out of 12 students who were interviewed expressed that several factors affected their WTC in their speaking classes. For example, the students expressed:

"....I assume that my English ability is not good enough to make me feel confident, so I do not want to speak in front of the class...."

(S5)" "..... I do not want to present my idea when I am not sure about the answer; I do not raise my hand even when I know the answer. I am reluctant to act because I am so afraid of making mistakes.... (S11)" ".....I do not often volunteer to speak; however, I believe that if the teacher asked me something within my knowledge, I could talk about it ....(S4)"; or "My major is English. However, whenever I intend to say something I know or have an idea about that, my heart starts beating fast. In many cases, I just wait for my teacher to call me to speak. Finally, I lose the chance to express my idea and practice speaking skills.....(S3).

The teachers also reflected these issues in their class. For example, some teachers expressed:

"One of the challenges I faced in teaching speaking generally is the lack of confidence among my students.....(T1)." "....the most difficult and challenging thing that I have to face when I teach English are the silence and the passivity of the students ....(T5); or ".....it depends on the groups; some are more vocal than others.....(T3)"

#### Situational Factors

Table.4: Situational Factors Affecting Students' WTC

Item No	Factors	N	Mean	St. D
1	Difficult tasks	195	3.27	0.992
2	Unfamiliar topics	195	3.02	1.086
3	Teachers' and friends' negative attitudes	195	3.07	1.102
4	Teacher's negative feedback	195	3.05	1.223
5	Teacher's severe error correction	195	2.99	1.267
6	Other students' silence	195	2.89	1.129

Data displayed in Table 4 reflects the situational factors that affected students' WTC in learning speaking skills at PU. The findings revealed that over half of the students perceived that their WTC was affected most by difficult tasks (item 1) and unfamiliar topics (item 2) with  $M=3.27$  and  $3.02$  respectively. Teachers' and friends' negative attitudes, feedback also had impact on about half of the students' WTC (items 3 and 4) with  $M= 3.07$  and  $3.05$  respectively. However, only about one-third of the students thought that teachers' severe error correction and other students' silence during pair or group work influenced their WTC (item 5 and 6) with  $M= 2.99$  and  $2.89$  respectively.

The findings of the interviews with students also revealed that some tasks were difficult for those who were less able students; and many topics in the textbook

were unfamiliar to them. For example, some students expressed:

"...if I have enough information about a topic, I really like to talk about it. But when I don't have any information I can't speak.....(S5)"; or "I think sometimes the task is a bit difficult for me, so I feel doubt about my idea. ...the teacher should choose suitable tasks for us. I'm no very good at speaking....(S1)"

#### 7.3 Results of Research Question 3

RQ3 attempted to discover strategies to motivate the students to communicate in English speaking classes. Table 4 below displays the data collected from the student questionnaire.

Table.4: Motivating Strategies

Item No	Strategies	N	Mean	St.D
1	Allocating enough time for students to prepare tasks before speaking	195	4.18	0.881
2	Allotting more time for pair work, group work or team work to let students have chance to talk	195	4.00	0.865
3	Encouraging students to speak in a friendly manner	195	4.17	0.758
4	Correcting mistakes in a positive way	195	4.12	0.857
5	Providing meaningful and considerate feedback to attract students' talking engagement	195	4.03	0.834
6	Arranging more practical, meaningful and authentic communication tasks	195	4.12	0.848
7	Arranging more interesting games, role play activities for students to take part in	195	4.02	0.886
8	Arranging a variety of activities	195	3.92	0.865

Data displayed in Table 4 revealed that most of the students agreed that the 8 above-proposed strategies are the most important and useful strategies that can help them to improve their English communication.

Regarding time allotment to speaking activities or tasks, most of the students perceived that they needed more time for preparation for tasks (item 1) and for pair or group work (item 2) with  $M=4.18$  and  $4.00$  respectively, and that they desired to be encouraged to speak in a friendly manner by their teacher (item 3) with  $M=4.17$ . Teachers' mistake correction in a positive way and meaningful and considerate feedback to attract students' talking engagement were also considered as motivating strategies by most of the students (items 4 and 5) with  $M=4.12$  and  $4.03$  respectively. Similarly, arranging more practical, meaningful and authentic communication tasks (item 6), providing students with more interesting games, role play activities (item 7), and a variety of activities (item 8) for improving speaking skills were also expected by most of the students in order to motivate them to talk with  $M=4.12$ ,  $4.02$  and  $3.92$  respectively.

The findings of the student interviews also revealed that most of the students expected the teachers to employ all the 8 above-mentioned strategies for them to increase the WTC. For example, regarding time allotment to speaking activities, S10 expressed:

"...when I have time to prepare something before doing a task, I can speak more confidently. It also reduces my shyness or embarrassment...(S2)"; "...it is important for teachers to have friendly and positive attitudes toward their students. This can eliminate the inhibitive barrier in the class within one or two lessons... (S3)"

Regarding arranging group and pair work, and a variety of meaningful tasks, nearly all students being interviewed expressed the same perception. Below are some comments:

"...if we are asked to work in small group of three or four, we can share our opinions with one another...( S7); "...I think working in pair, especially with my friend, who sit next to me... is effective. Because I think that we have known each other knowledge, we can help build up our vocabulary...(S5)"

Regarding mistake correction techniques, 9 of out 12 students expressed their agreement on right and gentle feedback to encourage them to talk calmly and encouragingly. For example:

"...I think that if teachers give feedback to students' mistakes in a friendly way, they can motivate and encourage us to free to speak more.....(S7)"; "... as we always concern and worry about strong and unfriendly manners of feedback from teacher whenever we intend to speak .....(S6)".

## VIII. DISCUSSION

Regarding the extent of student' WTC in speaking classes, the findings of the study revealed that most of the students seemed to be less willing to communicate in EFL speaking classes. That means they have low level of WTC. The findings support much of the literature about Asian students, who are often considered to be shy and passive in EFL (Kim, 2004). These findings are in line with some conclusions of other Vietnamese researchers. For instance, Nguyen (2010) states in his research that Vietnamese students typically keep quiet in class and wait until called upon by the teacher instead of volunteering to answer questions. Partly, that might be affected by cultural features of Vietnam. Accordingly, for a long time students have been viewed as typically obedient, shy and unwilling to communicate directly with their teachers. Another issue arising in this case is that the first-year students have studied speaking skill with native speakers the first time. Many of them are from rural areas where English teaching and learning is assumed not to be as



good as in big cities. They almost have no chance to contact native speakers. Consequently, at university they may encounter problems in listening to their teachers. They may not understand the teachers' instructions; or they may be afraid that the teachers may not understand what they say. Consequently, their low level of WTC may lead to a failure at achieving the set goal of speaking modules. Obviously, the students can improve their speaking skill only when they seek opportunities for practice with high level of autonomy.

In terms of factors affecting their WTC, the findings of the study revealed that the students have experienced more problems relating to individual factors than the situational ones. One of the demotivating factors is low level of English proficiency. It might also be the reason why they are not very confident in speaking English. The issue might imply that before the students entered the university, they almost had no chance to practice speaking English at high school, or they might not be trained how to use communicative strategies. Those years of English classes at secondary and high school might be forced on those students, leading to external rather than internal motivation. They learned English because of requirements of the school. Mixed-ability classes may be another issue to be considered in this case. Usually, the less able students encounter more difficulties than the more able ones in EFL learning. The reason why this issue arises may fall into the implementation of the course. The students might not take a placement test or be placed in the right class level. This finding is consistent with MacIntyre et al.'s point of view (1998) that students' L2 proficiency has a significant effect on their WTC, and that low self-perceived linguistic proficiency could prevent students from venturing on speaking L2 in class (Liu & Jackson, 2008). What is more, students' passivity, shyness and embarrassment, and lack of confidence were also revealed. These issues might be considered to be quite common in EFL classrooms. The finding is in conformity with the finding of other previous studies in EFL contexts. Researchers view this issue as a "cultural stereotype" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The belief in unsound English competence might lead them to making mistakes while they are trying to produce oral language. They are fearful of teachers' or friends' negative comments or feedback when they make mistakes. They might not know that other students also make mistakes in foreign language classes. Students should know that learning a new language takes a long time because of the complexity of languages, especially learning English in a context like Vietnam. In order to get improvement gradually, according to Brown (2002), foreign language students have to take risks; that is to say, they have to

practice more listening, make opportunities to talk, be willing to make mistakes, and especially, make mistakes work for them.

The findings of the study also revealed that situational factors such as level of task difficulty, unfamiliarity of topics, teachers' manner and attitudes as well as techniques for correcting mistakes or giving feedback partly influence the students' WTC. It is evident that the factor that most affects the students' WTC is related to topics selected for speaking practice. Half of the students have negative perceptions of the topics because they are too difficult for or unfamiliar to them, leading to silence in speaking classes. This finding is consistent with Nguyen's (2010) finding that states where students are supposed to do something that is beyond their ability, they will naturally be unwilling to fulfill the task; and Kang's study (2005) discovered that students feel more secure while discussing a familiar topic. Naturally, when students discuss something which is suitable to their background knowledge they will feel more comfortable and confident to contribute to the discussion. This finding shows that the teachers may not pay much attention to individual differences during speaking classes.

Teachers may not create opportunities and employ different strategies for the students to express their ideas or opinions at their level of background. If teachers ignore this task, the less able students may not make progress or success in their learning. Without strategy training in class, students will hardly become more confident and autonomous in their learning. Strategies used to increase students' WTC, as the findings of the study revealed, undoubtedly, can support the students' learning. Learning should be facilitated through the application of such strategies or techniques as balancing the time allotted to both task preparation and performance; allotted time concerns the time provided for the students to perform the task and it can help them gain more confidence to talk; as a result, their WTC can be upgraded. Ellis (2005) states that students can perform oral tasks well without time pressure by giving them enough time to plan for and perform a task at the same time. Creating a friendly atmosphere is also very important as Zarrinabadi (2014) states that teachers may increase students' WTC by creating an atmosphere that is encouraging and supportive. Giving feedback and interacting with students in a positive and constructive way will certainly bring the students a lot of benefits. Different students have different needs, abilities and learning styles. As the students expected, teachers should arrange the class in a positive way, how to adapt the textbook, how to adjust the tasks, when to give feedback and many other strategies. That is because content and context are two important factors that determine students' level of willingness to communicate

in language classroom (Ellis, 2005). The findings of the study revealed that too much pressure may be placed on the native speakers. They have to follow the provided syllabus; or they are not familiar with large size classes; or even the teachers and the students may be quite different from each other in terms of culture and attitudes to learning. Needless to say, the teacher plays the most important role in the training and application of learning strategies to increase students' WTC in speaking classes; and more importantly, the more NESTs who teach English in Vietnamese universities understand about their students' culture, personality and preferences, the more they can support them in the improvement of their WTC.

### IX. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study revealed that around half of the EFL students appear to have low WTC in speaking classes. Although the students study with NESTs, it seems that those students need more care and attention from teachers. Their learning is affected by both personal and situational factors. These factors certainly hinder their speaking performance and are the major causes of their unwillingness to communicate in English speaking classes. In a context like Vietnam, because of culture, personal characteristics, and the learning environment, a number of issues need to be considered; and it is necessary to involve stakeholders in solutions to those issues. Regarding the implementation of the EFL speaking module, it is suggested that the syllabus designer pay more attention to a detailed syllabus. Objectives, learning outcomes and time allotment of the module should be clearly identified so that the NESTs can follow it easily and logically. The syllabus designer should do this task together with the NESTs so that they will know what to do during classes. What is more, if it is possible, students should be placed in a speaking class at their right level. By doing so, less able students will be more confident and will not be afraid of losing face when they work together with other students. Because of cultural differences, when NESTs work in an unfamiliar environment they may not have a good understanding of the students. It is advisable that they step by step learn more about Vietnamese culture and Vietnamese people, especially students' learning styles and preferences. They should be aware of the psychological hindrances that may prevent their students from WTC and take appropriate measures to address these issues. To build up their students' WTC, teachers should try various strategies in order to increase their students' interest and motivation to learn and use L2. At the same time, it can help remove the barriers which demotivate students' WTC, and make their students feel more confident and become more independent and autonomous in their learning. This, in turn, may result in greater use of the

target language by the students, leading to increased self-ratings of their English proficiency (Liu & Jackson, 2009), and thus increasing their WTC. However, only the teachers' part is not enough. It is required that students be active both inside and outside the classroom. Setting learning goals right at the beginning of a course, identifying learning styles and preferences, and taking risks in learning are very important for any EFL student. Practice will help students increase confidence and overcome anxiety in speaking English.

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