



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNER VARIABLES AND MALAYSIAN  
STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN THE ESL  
CLASSROOM***

**KOGGILA CHANDRA SEGAR**

**FBMK 2018 23**



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By

**KOGGILA CHANDRA SEGAR**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts**

**June 2018**

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Abstract of thesis is presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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**KOGGILA CHANDRA SEGAR**

**June 2018**

**Chairman : Ramiza Binti Darmi, PhD**  
**Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication**

The four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are all interconnected. Proficiency in each skill is needed to become an efficient communicator. Furthermore, the ability to communicate fluently provides speaker with various benefits. This dissertation evaluates the willingness to communicate (WTC) in English Language among Malaysian students. WTC is the most basic orientation towards communication. Almost anyone is likely to respond to a direct question, but many will not continue or initiate interaction. This study is conducted in the light of a previously laid down theory, WTC of McCroskey & Richmond (1987). The research is tested in five different dimensions, namely, opportunity to communicate with foreigner, teachers, language competency, gender and age groups. The study is conducted in Linton University College, Mantin, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. A total of 15 degree and 88 non degree Malaysian students are selected using a simple random sampling technique. McCroskey's (1992) & MacIntyre's (1998) questionnaires are referred to in designing the questionnaire for the purpose of this study, which are then analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. Whereas, a structured face-to-face interview is conducted to acquire a better comprehension on the study. Accordingly, a thematic analysis is used to analyse the qualitative data. Thus, the current study adopts a mixed method with an explanatory design. The opportunity to communicate with foreign learners shows a positive outcome on this study. However, teachers and language competency tend to decrease Malaysian students' WTC. Although, female students' level of WTC is higher than the male students, there is no significant difference. The outcome of this research, aims at encouraging educators to come up with effective teaching approaches to increase learners' WTC in English language and to attract more international students to enrol in Malaysian universities. To date, the WTC construct has not been widely tested in a Malaysian context. Hence, the current study is a significant addition to the context of Malaysian students' WTC.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

**HUBUNGAN ANTARA PEMBOLEHUBAH PEMBELAJARAN DAN  
KESEDIAAN PELAJAR MALAYSIA UNTUK BERKOMUNIKASI DALAM  
KELAS BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA**

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Kemahiran berbahasa seperti mendengar, bertutur, membaca dan menulis adalah saling melengkapi untuk menjadi seorang yang fasih. Disertasi ini, bertujuan untuk menilai tahap kesediaan pelajar di Malaysia untuk berkomunikasi dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Berdasarkan kajian yang dijalankan ini yang berasaskan dari teori oleh McCroskey & Richmond (1987), terdapat lima pengkelasan iaitu pelajar luar negara, guru-guru, tahap penguasaan bahasa, jantina dan kumpulan umur. Kajian ini telah dijalankan di Kolej Universiti Linton, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia di mana 15 pelajar bukan ijazah dan 88 pelajar ijazah dipilih secara rawak menggunakan teknik persampelan rawak. Borang soal selidik yang direka merujuk kepada McCroskey (1992) & MacIntyre, (1998) dilaraskan mengikut tujuan kajian, dan dianalisis menggunakan SPSS versi 21.0. Sesi temubual turut dijalankan untuk mendapatkan kefahaman lebih lanjut mengenai kajian ini. Oleh itu “thematic analysis” digunakan sebagai cara menganalisa data kualitatif. Kajian ini dijalankan secara “mix method” dengan penjelasan yang lanjut. Ruang untuk berkomunikasi dengan pelajar dari luar negara telah memberi impak yang positif kepada pelajar Malaysia. Walaubagaimanapun, faktor guru dan penguasaan bahasa telah memberi impak kepada penurunan tahap keupayaan dalam penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan pelajar. Walaupun tahap penguasaan pelajar wanita lebih tinggi dari pelajar lelaki, tetapi tiada perbezaan yang khusus. Hasil daripada kajian menunjukkan bahawa barisan pendidik haruslah didedahkan kepada kaedah pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang lebih efektif untuk meningkatkan tahap penguasaan pelajar dalam berbahasa dan berkomunikasi dalam Bahasa Inggeris, dan juga menarik minat lebih ramai pelajar luar negara untuk menyambung pengajian di universiti-universiti Malaysia. Hingga kini, kebolehan dan keupayaan berbahasa Inggeris (WTC) masih belum diimplementasi secara meluas dan menyeluruh ke dalam sistem pendidikan negara. Oleh itu, kajian semasa adalah untuk penambahbaikan ke atas kajian sebelumnya dalam konteks kebolehan dan keupayaan berbahasa Inggeris (WTC) di kalangan pelajar di Malaysia.

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Thank you.

Koggila Chandra Segar

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MOE	Malaysian Ministry of Education
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
L2	Second Language
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
WTC	Willingness to Communicate
L1	First Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
FOBA	Faculty of Business and Accounting
ELC	English Language Centre
FOET	Faculty of Engineering and Technology
AAVA	Academy of Applied and Visual Arts
FOBE	Faculty of Built Environment
Manglish	Mixing Malay and English Language
Chinglish	Mixing Chinese and English Language
Tanglish	Mixing Tamil and English language
R1	Respondent 1
R2	Respondent 2
R3	Respondent 3
R4	Respondent 4

## CHAPTER 1

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

English language is still the dominant language of the world, as it is widely spoken and written by people across the globe. The Malaysian Times (2012) reported that, “English has a wider distribution compared to other spoken languages. It is an official language in 52 countries” (p.1). In today’s world, it is essential for one to have the competency to communicate in English language for it is a must to enter any global workforce. Notably, almost 50% of information on the Internet is generated in English language. In recognition to the importance of English language, Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) is serious to enhance students’ level of language proficiency (Afterschool Higher Education Advisor, 2015).

The goal of many methods and approaches of second language acquisition (SLA) is to pave the ways students communicate in the target language (Mehrgan, 2013). Since the advent of communicative and conversational approaches to second language (L2) pedagogy, communication has been accentuated not only as an indispensable process but also as the goal of SLA, where it was further proven that, for many students, language learning means to be able to speak the target language (Fallah, 2013). This argument is also supported by Dornyei’s (2005) that the aim of language learning is to enhance the students’ communicative competence.

Swain & Lapkin (2002) suggested that language should be learned through meaningful and interactive communication. In other words, language use and language learning can co-occur. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach which emphasizes communication as the means and ultimate goal of education. CLT has developed authentic teaching methodology in which, students are given a real life topic which interests them, in order to enhance their speaking skills.

It is undeniable that students’ active participation in class is of great importance in language learning. For this reason, MacIntyre (1998) emphasizes on the importance of promoting students’ Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in L2 (Cao, 2011). The importance of WTC arises from the role of interaction in language development (Molberg, 2010). Furthermore, Kang (2005) states that more interaction causes more language development and learning.

The improvement of communicative competence among English language learners’ has become the focus of linguistic pedagogical interest around the world (Kang, 2014). Moreover, MacIntyre (2007) maintains that, the choice to start communication in an L2 is one of the primary facilitators of language use, and as such, may be an important

predictor of language survival. Keeping in mind the practical purposes of English language on the whole, the younger generation should not only possess the competency of the language, but also be willing to speak in the target language. It has been proposed that pedagogic goals should be to increase students' L2 WTC as to facilitate language learning (Peng, 2007).

## **1.2 Background of Research**

WTC in L2, is a specialized area of research (Mehrgan, 2013). The concept of WTC was developed by McCroskey and associates (MacIntyre, Babin & Clement, 1999). McCroskey (1997) developed the initial WTC construct based on three major studies which interpreted WTC as a "trait-like" predisposition. The first research was based on Burgoon (1976), in which he defined the unwillingness to communicate construct as a global communication construct representing the predisposition of a chronic tendency to avoid and/or devalue oral communication. The study looked at two factors, approach-avoidance and reward as to determine an individual's participation in communication. The second study was based on Mortensen (1977), who found that the amount of communication for an individual across different communication situations were consistent. Accordingly, the researchers named this consistency predisposition towards verbal behaviour and developed a scale as well. The scale was developed to measure the global predisposition characteristics. The final study was based on McCroskey and Richmond's (1982) study on shyness. The scale of shyness was used to measure the amount of talk, individuals typically engaged in. The outcome clearly portrayed that, shyness could be considered as a valid predictor of the communication behaviour.

McCroskey and Richmond (1990) maintain that people show regularity in their level of WTC across situations. Therefore, they defined it as a personality trait. MacIntyre (1998) argues that, unlike the personality trait of the first language (L1) WTC, WTC in L2 should be treated as a situational variable and an environmental factor, which could potentially influence the students' communicative behaviour. It should be susceptible to change across situations. Accordingly, he further defines L2 WTC as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (p. 547). It is known that the variables such as gender, attitude and anxiety have major roles in WTC. Dornyei (2003) highlights that competence in L2 may not be enough. He adds that, learners need to be not only able to communicate but also show WTC in L2.

MacIntyre (1998) challenged the "trait-like" view of WTC asserting that there are situational variables that can influence WTC in general. Keeping in mind WTC as a situational construct, previous researchers have studied how it is influenced by situational variables such as contextual variables and social support (MacIntyre, 2001), the frequency and quality of L2 contact (Clement, Baker & MacIntyre, 2003) as well as interactions and conversational context (Kang, 2005). All the above studies have given concrete evidence that WTC is affected, to a large extent, by situational variables.

The construct of WTC was studied as an independent background variable (Dornyei, 2002). Further research into WTC has also been conducted in Japan (Hashimoto, 2002),



China (Peng, 2007), Turkey (Bektas-Cetinkaya, 2009) and Iran (Baghaei, 2012). However, during the early two decades, the focus of research on WTC has been mainly in the Western context, especially the US and Canada (Huseyin, Mehmet & Jafar, 2015).

Since its inception, the concept of WTC has been investigated from a variety of different perspectives. For example, in their search for the status of WTC within kids, learning Persian as their L1, Birjandi and Amiri (2011) produced a modified version of WTC based on guidelines from McCroskey and Richmond (1985) and came to a conclusion that WTC should be regarded as both a social characteristic and a personality factor that underlies the process of L1 development in children. Peng (2007) found the potential relationship between learners' WTC and their motivation. She concluded that while motivation strongly predicted WTC, participants' attitudes toward learning were not found to be a strong predictor of individuals' WTC. Zarrinabadi and Abdi (2011) gathered information about learners' WTC inside and outside-the-classroom, and found that participants' WTC outside the classroom correlated more with their level of language proficiency

### **1.3 Research Problem**

When given a chance to communicate in English language, certain people speak up, while others remain silent. The main research problem of the current study is similar to MacIntyre (2007) in which he questioned, "Why is it that even after studying a language for many years, some L2 learners will not turn into L2 speakers?" (p.564). This question still seems to be an unanswered puzzle in the Malaysian context. English language is a compulsory language in Malaysia which is learnt since the pre-school and also considered as a L2. Despite this fact, why is that Malaysian students are still not completely willing to communicate in English language? Based on the researcher's observation, in a classroom context, Malaysian students tend to avoid any communication in English language, take little interest in participating in English language classes and worse still, make fun of peers who try to initiate a conversation in the English language. Students seem to have less awareness of the significance of mastering the target language. Majority of them realise the consequence of this issue at an extremely late stage, when they remain unemployed after graduation. What could be the reasons for this commonly seen scenario in Malaysia?

Kang (2005) in her study mentioned that, students prefer to communicate in their mother language. The interference of mother tongue has been widely studied in the context of language learning. Malaysia's multinational society has even led to the famous mixed languages such as "Manglish", "Chinglish" and "Tanglish". In this case, is the social background of the learner influencing their WTC in English language?

With reference to the Malaysian Philosophy of Education (2014), "Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner"<sup>1</sup> (p.1). An experienced learner who is unwilling to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.moe.gov.my/index.php/en/dasar/falsafah-pendidikan-kebangsaan>

communicate might show both high motivation for learning and high anxiety in communicating (MacIntyre, 2007). Although students' overall achievement is good in English language, their low confidence level to initiate communication in the language, questions our standard. Speaking is considered the most important skill in learning. This is because all the other learning skills are known to be integrated from speaking. Regardless of their proficiency level, students portray unwillingness to communicate in English language. The ministry of education has implemented several strategies in improving Malaysian students English language competency. Despite that, is there still a huge gap in our syllabus?

Moreover, students in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom might learn the target language as a compulsory subject in school. It might not be compulsory for them to communicate in English language outside the classroom. This might lead to L2 students not feeling confident enough to initiate communication in public. However, in recent decades, the aim of teaching English has shifted from the mastery of structure to the ability to use language for communicative purposes (Alemi, Tajeddin & Mesbah, 2013). The aim of learning English language is not just as an additional language but also to meaningfully use the language. Are the Malaysian students aware of this?

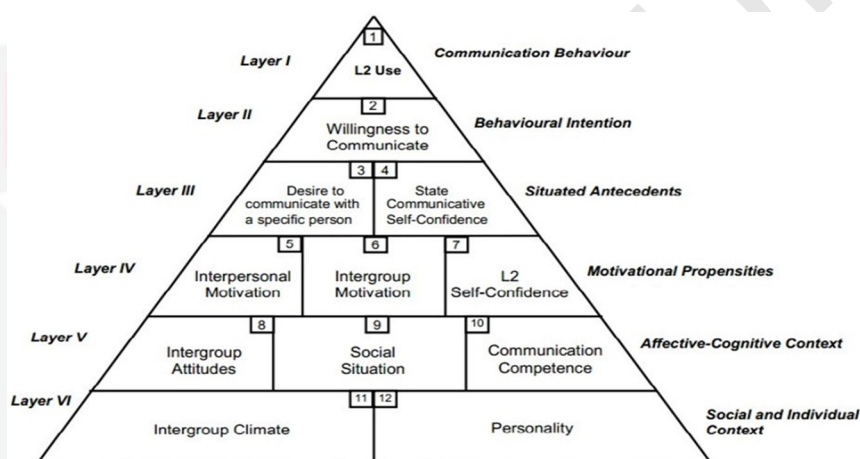
Recently, several reports on teachers' proficiency is also seen in the Malaysian newspapers and social media. Star Online (2016) reported that, 15,000 English teachers are not proficient enough to teach the subject (p.1). Moreover, Nurul Hayati (2011), also conducted an extensive study on Malaysian teachers who use Malay language to teach English language in the classroom. Are the teachers to be blamed for Malaysian students' unwillingness to communicate in English language or is the Ministry of Education at fault for recruiting unqualified teachers?

This phenomena is not only famous in the Malaysian context. Notably, students of different nationalities possess different level of WTC in English language. Peng (2006) has clearly mentioned that, Chinese students are often viewed as inactive in participating in classroom communication due to low level of WTC. The study further found that, Chinese students prefer to communicate in their mother tongue compared to students of other nationalities. Ayedoun, Hayashi and Seta (2015) who studied on the Japanese students reported that, although more attention is being given to speaking by emphasizing on the importance of communicative skills in English, most university students cannot speak English language adequately, even after studying it for six years in secondary school. How could we possibly bring some changes to the L2 students' WTC?

Despite all the issues mentioned above, to date, the WTC construct has not been widely tested in a Malaysian context. Recently, a research on Code-Switching and WTC was conducted between Iranian and Malaysian dyads during performing collaborative writing tasks (Yasin Yazdi & Abu Bakar, 2014). The study found that, "while resorting to L1 and WTC with the researcher was next to nothing in Malaysian dyads, the Iranians had a considerably higher tendency towards using their own language and referring to the researcher for language-related help" (p.1).

Thus, there is a need to study the construct of WTC in the Malaysian context to find the factors which constrain and promote Malaysian students WTC in English language. This study would be conducted in a Malaysian international university to examine the WTC in English language among Malaysian students. Keeping in mind all the above issues, this study would focus on the influence of learner variables namely, opportunity to communicate with foreign learners, characteristics of teachers, language competency, gender and age group among Malaysian students WTC in English language.

### 1.3.1 Theoretical Framework



**Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework of WTC**  
(Source: MacIntyre, 1998)

In the adaptation of WTC to the L2 situation, MacIntyre (1998) proposed a conceptual “pyramid” model (Figure 1), designed to account for individual differences in the decision to initiate L2 communication.

The heuristic model of WTC shows the contributing factors which could cause potential influences in initiating L2 communication. The theoretical model has a total of twelve constructs. The first three layers portray situational influence on WTC at a given moment in time. The other three layers signify enduring influences on L2 communication process. Therefore, from the top to the bottom, the layers represent a move from the most immediate, situation-based contexts to the more stable, enduring influences on L2 communication situations.

The social and individual context at the base of the model has the most significance. The particular layer shows the communication between the individual and the society. The intergroup climate in which individuals progress is referred as the societal context. According to Clement (1986), the societal context, creates the opportunity to learn and use of the L2. Gardner and Clement (1990), commented that, thorough intergroup

relations entail the learning of a L2 and its subsequent use; whereas, inferior intergroup relations may distort the motivation, reduce the tendency to learn and communicate in the L2. On the other hand, the individual context shows the interlocutor's natural characteristics which directly relate to their communication behaviour. Personality traits such as extrovertness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience can determine the degree of L2 learning and the WTC in that target language (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996).

The second layer from the bottom, affective and cognitive context of L2 communication, is considered to be another influential factor. This factor involves intergroup attitude, social situation and communicative competence. A significant intention for an individual to learn a L2 has been known as the desire to mix and identify with the members of a L2 community (Gardner, 1985). Contrastively, a fear of assimilation and losing one's identity may be a strong drive to avoid learning or using a L2 (Clément & Kruidenier, 1985). In short, internal motivation to learn the target language would result in higher WTC in the L2. Social situation is another predictor of L2 communication. Prior experience in a similar social situation may positively or negatively influence one's WTC in the L2. Positive experience increases the individual's confidence to initiate conversation in the target language with the L2 community. Communicative competence is an obvious factor influencing WTC. It varies in the context of actual or perceived competence of L2.

The next layer which is labelled motivational propensities is described as consistent individual difference traits present in many situations (MacIntyre, 1998). It involves interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation and self-confidence. The relationship one has with the target language and its L2 community is known as interpersonal relationship in this context. Intergroup motivation is simply the attitudes and relations between individuals representative of language-related groups (MacIntyre, 1998). Communicative competence in the second layer from bottom directly influences the self-confidence in L2.

All the above contexts are directly related to the following layer, which is called situated antecedents. This variable is drawn in the light of communication with a specific person and state communicative self-confidence. Personal interest to communicate with a specific person who belongs to the L2 community would definitely stimulate an individual to expertise the target language. State communicative self-confidence is affected by two parameters, namely, perceived competence and lack of anxiety (Clément, 1986).

The next layer of the pyramid is the individual's behavioural intention. WTC is a result of all the variables stated above. It can be defined as a predisposition to speak in the second language at a particular time (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). An individual's WTC is said to directly reflect their L2 use, which entails the top most layer of the pyramid model.

The communication behaviour of the L2 learner is studied in the top most layer of the model. WTC entails a greater likelihood of using a L2 (MacIntyre, 1998). In other words, the higher the WTC, the more one would involve in the actual L2 use.

### 1.3.2 Conceptual Framework

The main construct of this research is to study the WTC among Malaysian students. In order to attain the results, the research tests five different variables, namely, opportunity to communicate with foreign learners, characteristics of teachers, language competency, gender and age group. The data collected from the five different dimensions will determine the Malaysian students' WTC in English language.

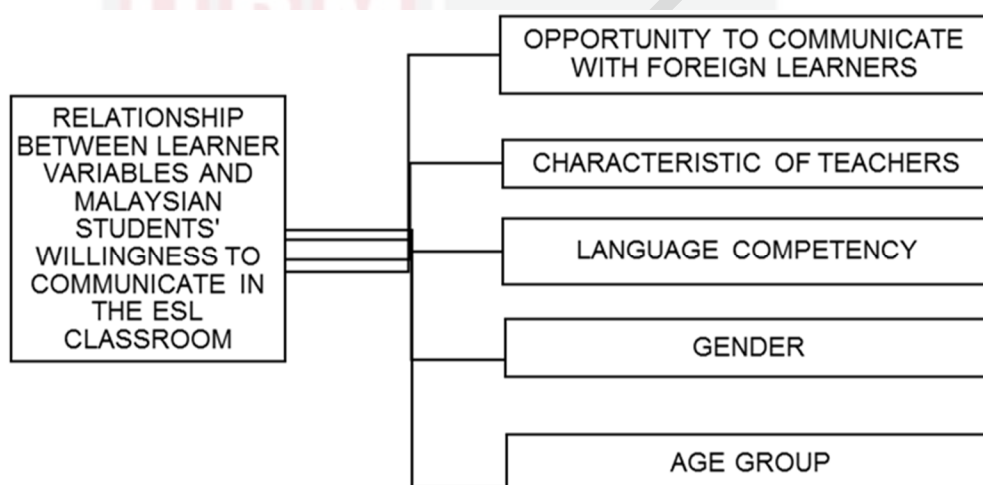


Figure 2: The Conceptual Framework of the Current Study

Figure 2 shows the conceptual framework of the current research. The conceptual framework of this study is carefully built in relation to the proposed pyramid model of MacIntyre, 1998. The first variable, opportunity to communicate with foreign learners, directly relates to the factor of interpersonal relationship in the third layer (from the bottom) of the pyramid model. English language as an international language is widely used as the medium of communication between the Malaysian and foreign students. When encountering a foreign student, which is common in a tertiary level education, Malaysian students are left with no choice but to use English language to communicate. Such a communication behaviour might eventually enhance Malaysian students' overall WTC. The L2 learners in such a scenario may need to frequently use the target language in actual context which, may increase the comfort level and self-confidence in using the L2.

Teachers on the other hand, are the immediate members of society that L2 learners face on a frequent basis. The teacher's traits and their classroom strategies are part of social



situation of the affective cognitive context in the pyramid model. The positive social support from teachers is important to encourage the L2 learners to use the target language in an effective manner. Insufficient support from the teachers may negatively influence L2 learners WTC.

The third dimension of this research studies the language competency. This factor is similar to communication competency which is part of affective cognitive context of the pyramid model. Although, one might have strong actual competency in L2, it might not be the predictor of WTC. An individual with high perceived competency naturally possess less anxiety and more self-confidence to initiate a conversation in L2.

The gender and age group are tested in the current study in accordance to MacIntyre's, (1998) pyramid model which also includes, personality and desire to communicate with a specific person. One's gender and age group is a natural variable which portrays their personality. This would in another words, influence their desire to communicate with a specific person. Studying the learners' biological trait would give the study a better exposure of the learners' communication behaviour in actual situation.

The current research is conducted in light of the previous studies, in order to get an in depth understanding of Malaysian students' WTC in English language. Minimal number of research has been conducted in the WTC construct in the Malaysian context to date. The variables are selected carefully in relation to the Malaysian education system to increase the reliability and validity of this study.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research questions are presented below:

- (a) How does the opportunity to communicate with foreign learners influence Malaysian students' willingness to communicate in English language?
- (b) How do the teachers' characteristics influence Malaysian students' willingness to communicate in English language?
- (c) How does the language competency influence Malaysian students' willingness to communicate in English language?
- (d) How does the gender influence Malaysian students' willingness to communicate in English language?
- (e) How does the age group influence Malaysian students' willingness to communicate in English language?

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The study addresses the following objectives:

- (a) To study the influence of opportunity to communicate with foreign learners on Malaysian students' willingness to communicate in English language.

- (b) To determine the influence of teachers characteristics on Malaysian students' willingness to communicate in English language.
- (c) To find out the influence of language competency on Malaysian students' willingness to communicate in English language.
- (d) To analyse the influence of gender on Malaysian students' willingness to communicate in English language.
- (e) To evaluate the influence of age groups on Malaysian students' willingness to communicate in English language.

## 1.6 Significance of Research

This research would encourage educators all over the nation to come up with techniques to increase WTC in English language of L2 students. There are various methodologies which could be incorporated in the classroom to motivate students to speak in the target language. Most schools are seen not to give too much focus on learners' speaking skills. This research would make teachers realize the importance of incorporating all four skills in learning, as to develop the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner.

Students of many countries face difficulties communicating in English language. A good example of this are students from China. They show high level of reluctance to communicate in English language. It has been proposed that the cultural values inherited from Confucianism are the predominant force influencing students' L2 WTC (Wen & Clément, 2003). Due to the above reasons, there is a high probability for local universities to attract more international students. Receiving higher number of international students would directly contribute to our economy. Besides, we would also gain opportunity to increase local universities' ranking.

It is clearly evident that many fresh graduates suffer unemployment. The very reason for this is the poor academic quality of graduates. The Rakyat Post (2014) reported that, "Complaints of fresh jobseekers with poor English language competency, lacking interpersonal and problem-solving skills and displaying a poor work attitude, among others, are commonly heard"<sup>2</sup> (p.1). They lack confidence to communicate in English language in public. Such habit is definitely not healthy for any organisation. The output of this research would be extremely significant to the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHe) in the process of overcoming such negativity.

Past researches conducted on students' WTC in English language focused mainly on students of a particular country rather than highlighting the intensity or the theoretical ground of the matter in itself. For instance, Peng (2007) carried out a study on Chinese students' WTC in English language. Such studies cannot be generalized to meet students' issue in general. This research would aid us in understanding Malaysian students' WTC in English language.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.therakyatpost.com/allsides/2014/02/17/fresh-graduates-are-generally-unprepared-for-the-workplace-something-is-lacking/>

On the other hand, 90% of previous researchers have opted to conduct a quantitative research by utilizing WTC scale adapted from MacIntyre, Baker, Clement and Conrod (2001). In order to have a better understanding of the second objective, an interview would be conducted with the students, making this study a mixed method explanatory data collection rather than quantitative itself. Moreover, this study would be taken as a student oriented research, rather than collecting data from the educators herself. Keeping in mind the practical purposes of English language on the whole, the outcome of this research is expected to enlighten the stakeholders.

### **1.7 Limitations of Research**

A few assumptions and limitations may have influenced the results of this study. The researcher assumed that students were honest when filling out the questionnaire. As the students' language proficiency was at an average level, researcher assumed that they understood the items which appeared on the questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted to avoid any significant discrepancies in the above assumptions.

Another assumption was, the developed questionnaire provided the information needed for the research and has sufficient validity or reliability, as it was developed referring both McCroskey (1992) (alpha reliability estimates have ranged from .85 to well above .90.) and MacIntyre (1996) (alpha reliability estimates have ranged from .81 to .88).

The researcher understands that the sample of information collected by the questionnaire does not reflect the entire students' population. The questionnaire was only given to the students of Linton University College, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Only the Malaysian students were randomly chosen for the purpose of this study.

### **1.8 Definition of Terms**

Terms in this paper that need to be defined are those with multiple definitions and interpretations depending on particular situations. They are listed in alphabetical order and not of importance or as they appear in the paper.

**Age group** – According to the Oxford dictionary (2018), 'gender' is a number of people or things classed together as being of similar age. As the current study is conducted in a tertiary level, the age groups range from 17 – 25 and above. Donovan and MacIntyre (2004) have found that there is an interaction between age group and gender in the context of WTC.

**Characteristic** – The term 'characteristic' as a noun, is defined as a feature or quality belonging typically to a person, place, or thing and serving to identify them (Oxford dictionary, 2018). In the current study, the teachers' characteristics is categorized into their traits and classroom strategies. Past research identified the influence of teachers'



attitude, involvement, and teaching style on learners' WTC. (Cao, 2011; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre, 2011; Wen & Clement, 2003).

**Communicate** – In accordance to the Oxford dictionary (2016), the term 'communicate' is an action of saying something in order to convey information or to express a feeling. In other words, it means merely to have a conversation or reflect the ability to communicate. Kang (2005) reported that, learners with higher WTC will be more active learners who are more likely to utilize L2 in an authentic communication and they are more autonomous in extending their learning opportunities, such as by getting involved in language learning not only inside but also outside the classroom.

**Competency** – As stated in the Oxford dictionary (2018), 'competency' shows the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. The current study specifically looks at learners' language competency, in which, the researcher is looking at the ability of the students to meaningfully use the target language. Lahuerta (2014) indicated two different kinds of language competency; self-perceived and actual competency. The current study is looking at students' actual language competency.

**Gender** – The term 'gender' means either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones (Oxford dictionary, 2018). Rafek, Ramli, Iksan, Harith and Abas (2014) in their study indicated that female and male process their feeling and experiences differently which may lead to different level of communication apprehension.

**Teacher** – In reference to the Oxford dictionary (2018), 'teacher' is a person who teaches, especially in a school. For the purpose of this study, the term 'teacher' is used in reference to educators in general, regardless of the education level being taught. Zarrinabadi (2014) in her study further described a teacher as "the person who plays central role in pedagogy" (p.289).

**Willingness** – According to the Oxford dictionary (2016), 'willingness' is the quality or state of being prepared to do something. In short, it is also defined as 'readiness'. In this study, the focus of the term 'willingness' is defined as the intention to initiate communication, given a choice (Modirkhameneh & Firouzmand, 2014).

## **1.9 Summary**

This chapter has presented the introduction, background of research, research problem, research questions, research purpose, significance of research, limitations of research and the definitions of terms.

This research was carried out with the intention to study the WTC in English language among Malaysian students. The purpose of the study is to determine whether students

were willing to communicate in the target language. The variables used to conduct this study were, opportunity to communicate with foreign learners, teachers' characteristics, language competency, gender and age groups. The researcher went on to investigate whether Malaysian students were aware of the benefits English language has to offer. The research was conducted in an international university in Malaysia. The study has adopted a mixed mode explanatory design for better understanding of the research. The end result of this research will hopefully help practitioners in line with Malaysian National Philosophy of Education.



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