

Testing a model of L2 communication among Iranian EFL learners: A path analysis framework

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Abstract

Using willingness to communicate (WTC) and socio-educational models as a framework, the present study aimed at examining WTC in English and its underlying variables in a sample of 372 Iranian non-English major EFL learners. The data were collected through self-reported questionnaires. Path analysis framework using the Amos Program with maximum likelihood estimation was also utilized to examine the hypothesized model and the potential relationships between the variables. The final model showed a very good fit to the data. The results of structural equation modeling revealed that self-perceived communication competence (SPCC), international posture and motivation were significant predictors of L2WTC. The findings also showed that L2 communication anxiety (CA), motivation, personality trait of agreeableness and teacher immediacy could exert indirect effects on L2WTC. Furthermore, each of teacher immediacy and agreeableness variables predicted both international posture and CA among the EFL learners. Following these findings, potential factors affecting learners WTC should receive sufficient attention by teachers, administrators and learners alike. By adopting more immediacy behaviors, EFL teachers can also establish relaxing and supportive classroom climate and lower the learners' affective filter. In such an atmosphere learners are more emotionally secured, suffer less communication apprehension, perceive themselves to be more proficient and motivated, obtain promoted international posture by forming realistic attitudes toward different cultures, and consequently become more willing to communicate in English.

Keywords: Agreeableness, international posture, L2 communication anxiety, motivation, self-perceived communication competence, teacher immediacy, willingness to communicate in English

Introduction

Since the advent of communicative approaches to second language pedagogy, enhancing communicative competence has been underscored instead of merely having mastery over the structural elements of language (Savignon, 2000). As Ellis (2008) argued, these L2 instruction approaches are based on the hypothesis that L2 communicative competence is developed through performance and information exchange. MacIntyre and Charos (1996) also

believed that the primary reason for language learning is defined in terms of communication.

Furthermore, considering the importance of communicative competence in language education, MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) advanced a heuristic model of communication to delineate the concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) and several factors which might affect WTC in L2 context. Based on its

original conceptualization (see McCroskey & Baer, 1985), they defined WTC as “a readiness to enter into discourse, at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2” (p. 547). In this model WTC was deemed a situational variable which could be affected by various linguistic, communicative, affective - cognitive, contextual- social variables. Further, MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed that the main objective of second/foreign language learning should be to “engender in language students the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness actually to communicate in them” (p. 547). Since this pioneering work of MacIntyre et al., L2WTC has been studied extensively in different English as a second language (ESL) contexts (e.g., Cao & Philp, 2006; Clément, Baker & MacIntyre, 2003; MacIntyre, Babin & Clément, 1999; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003; Peng, 2007, to name a few).

Nevertheless, WTC has been mostly examined in second language context in which there is constant linguistic exposure to and direct contact with the L2 society (Fallah, 2014). And it has not been given enough scholarly attention in EFL context, where students mostly learn English as an academically mandatory subject, and there are few immediate linguistic requirements for them to use English in daily life (see Cetinkaya, 2005). As such, to shed further light on the concept of WTC in EFL context, it would be crucial to examine Iranian EFL learners’ willingness to communicate in English along with other variables related to English communication.

In short, based on MacIntyre’s (1994) WTC mode and Gardner’s (1985) socio-educational model, the present study set out

to test a model of L2 communication by examining the potential connections among L2WTC, motivation, perceived communication confidence, international posture, communication anxiety, teacher immediacy and personality trait of agreeableness among non-English major EFL learners.

Literature review

This section includes a review of the related literature on communicative, affective-cognitive, contextual and personality variables which according to previous research (see MacIntyre et al., 1998) can affect language learners’ WTC.

Communicative variables

Two communicative factors, namely self-perceived communication competence (SPCC) and communication apprehension (CA) have been extensively examined in both empirical and conceptualization studies concerning WTC. Based on studies conducted on WTC, McCroskey (1997) argued that SPCC and CA tend to make significant contribution to prediction of WTC.

SPCC refers to the feeling that one has the ability to communicate effectively at a particular point (MacIntyre et al., 1998). McCroskey and McCroskey (1986) argued that most of the decisions people make regarding communication are inspired by self-perceived competence rather than actual competence i. e. the perception of being able to perform a communication task can outweigh actual, objectively defined competence in inspiring a willingness to initiate communication. McCroskey and Richmond (1987) found that SPCC positively affected general attitude toward communication, self-esteem, argumentativeness, willingness to communicate, and sociability. Further, the findings of several studies (McCroskey &

Richmond, 1990; MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre, Babin, & Clément, 1999; Yashima, 2002) have unanimously shown that perceived competence is the strongest predictor of L2WTC. Learners who perceived themselves as competent communicators are usually more willing to communicate.

Language anxiety is also defined by Gardner and MacIntyre (1993, p. 5) as “the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient”. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) believed that foreign language anxiety consists of three constituents, namely test anxiety, communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation.

Studies have consistently demonstrated the association of anxiety with foreign language learning and performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; MacIntyre, 1995; Saito & Samimy, 1996; Samimy & Radin, 1994; MacIntyre, Noels, & Clément, 1997; Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999). Clément, Dörnyei and Noels (1994) stated that, compared to their highly anxious peers, students who are less anxious over speaking in English think positively about their language proficiency, and they are interested in increasing their contact with English.

MacIntyre et al. (1997) also argued that L2 learners’ perception of L2 competence can be affected by level of language anxiety so that L2 learners who are more anxious about communicating in L2 tend to perceive their actual L2 competence more negatively and lower than that rated by neutral observers. Furthermore, research has revealed an inverse relationship between L2WTC and anxiety i. e. the more students are anxious, the more reluctant they are to enter into L2 conversations (e.g., Gardner & MacIntyre,

1993; Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre & Clément, 1996).

Affective variables

Motivation and international posture are two major affective-cognitive variables which have proven to be theoretically and empirically related to WTC.

Motivation as a major individual factor can significantly affect language learning success (Dörnyei, 2005). According to Dörnyei, motivation inspires L2 learning and it can be a stimulating and encouraging force to endure the long and rather tiresome learning course. Without adequate motivation, even learners with the most exceptional abilities can hardly achieve long-term goals.

In his socio-educational model of L2 acquisition Gardner (1985) mentioned that when we discuss the motivation to learn a second language, we should take into account both cultural context and educational setting, which are named as integrativeness and attitudes toward the learning situation, respectively. Attitudes towards the language situation include attitudes towards the language course, the textbooks, the language teacher and the school environment. Integrativeness is conceptualized as a real enthusiasm for pursuing the second language education with the hope of becoming psychologically closer with the target language community (Gardner, 1985). Research has shown that attitudes on the learning situation and integrativeness exert the greatest impact on motivation, which in turn affect language achievement (Gardner, 2007; Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996) and higher levels of integrativeness and motivation engender more interaction among learners (Cetinkaya, 2005).

However, due to the different nature of EFL context in which there is little or no immediate contact with English native speakers, some scholars (e.g., Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994; Clément & Kruidenier, 1983) believe that Gardner's socioeducational model is not as much relevant to this context as it is to ESL context. Connected to this, Yashima (2002) advanced "international posture" concept as an orientation close to integrative orientation. This concept represents components such as interest in foreign or international affairs, enthusiasm for going abroad for study or work purposes, willingness to speak with intercultural peers and non-ethnocentric stance on different cultural issues (Yashima, 2002). Empirically, it has been shown that international posture can positively affect L2WTC (Cetinkaya, 2005; Yashima, 2002).

Teacher immediacy

Another factor which can exert significant effect on learners' communication including their WTC is the contextual variable of teacher immediacy (Wen & Clement, 2003).

The construct of immediacy was introduced by Mehrabian (1967) who defined it as the communication behaviors which improve psychological and physical closeness with others. Utilizing approach-avoidance theory, Mehrabian (1971) stated that individuals are attracted toward people and things they are interested in and think of highly. Furthermore, Andersen (1979) believed that immediacy behaviors play an important functional role in communication by conveying positive attitudes of the sender to the receiver.

Immediacy behaviors are divided into two kinds, nonverbal and verbal. Nonverbal immediacy indicates behaviors like positive use of gestures, smiling, vocal variety, eye contact, a relaxed body position and forward

body lean. Verbal immediacy includes verbal behaviors such as using humor and using "we" and "our" in class (Frymier, 1993).

Teacher immediacy is then conceptualized as communication behaviors that reduce the perceived distance between teacher and students (Andersen, 1979). Anderson argued that immediacy behaviors convey teacher warmth and positive emotions, indicate accessibility and approach for communication, and enhances physiological arousal in learners. The concept of teacher immediacy has received substantial attention in the instructional context. It has been found to positively affect students. Verbal and nonverbal immediacy were correlated with increased affective learning (Anderson, 1979; Gorham, 1988). Along the same line, positive associations were noticed between teacher immediacy and learners' motivation (Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1993). Carrell and Menzel's (1998) findings revealed that the teacher's verbal immediacy behavior was positively connected to learners' inclination to speak in class in a liberal arts context.

However, teacher immediacy has not been given sufficient scholarly attention in the TESOL field. There are only a few studies reported in the existent literature.

In a qualitative study Hsu (2005), for example, explored learners' perception of how the immediate relationship influences their WTC. The findings indicated significant relationships between teacher immediacy and the learners' L2WTC. In another study Yu (2009) found that teacher immediacy negatively affected communication apprehension and positively impacted self-perceived communication competence. However, the findings showed that teacher immediacy could affect L2WTC

only through the mediation of communication competence and anxiety.

Rashidi and Mahmoudi Kia (2014) investigated the relationship between teachers communicative behavior and EFL learners motivation and involvement in their language learning. The results revealed that teachers' immediacy behaviors were significantly and positively correlated with learners' willingness to talk.

Finally, Nabi Karimi, Shabani, and Hosseini's (2012) study showed that teacher immediacy was significantly associated with EFL learners' willingness to engage in interaction and meaning negotiation with their teachers.

Thus, as an attempt to bridge the current gap and enrich the literature, the present study sought to explore teacher immediacy in the context of L2WTC.

Personality

Though research on the role of personality in L2 achievement is admittedly slim, it seems that the personality of the language learner would exert some effect on the process of L2 acquisition (MacIntyre, Clément, & Noels, 2007). Personality and anxiety have been linked to speaking ability (Campbell & Rushton, 1978; Dewaele & Furnham, 1999). MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) argued that people of different personality types approach language learning opportunities such as in-class activities and real-life encounters of intercultural communication in different ways.

The Big Five model as developed by Goldberg (1993) is a personality model that covers five basic and independent personality traits:

- Introversion/Extraversion
- Intellect/Sophistication

- Pleasantness/Agreeableness
- Emotional Stability
- Conscientiousness/Dependability

Goldberg (1992) utilized bipolar inventory to describe and measure these five personality traits. For example, the pleasantness/agreeableness dimension, which is tested in the current study, is typified through a sequence from selfish, uncooperative and unkind to unselfish, cooperative and kind.

In MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) model, personality is at the base of the pyramid, and is thought to play a significant role in shaping the person's communication pattern. MacIntyre and Charos's (1996) findings, for example, revealed that, personality traits of openness to experience and extraversion exerted indirect effects on L2WTC through the mediation SPCC and CA, respectively. Further, despite the premise that personality factors would influence L2 WTC indirectly, agreeableness proved to be directly associated with WTC.

The initial hypothesized model

Using willingness to communicate (WTC) and socio-educational models as a framework, the initially hypothesized model of the current study was formed by three latent variables (international posture, teacher immediacy and motivation) and four observed variables (SPCC, CA, WTC and personality trait of agreeableness). The links among these variables are schematically represented in Fig. 1.

In line with previous research (e.g., Christophel, 1990; Christophel & Gorham, 1995) a direct positive path between teacher immediacy and motivation was proposed. Based on Wen and Clément's (2003) study, a negative path was also drawn between teacher immediacy and CA and a positive

direct path between teacher immediacy and SPCC. Furthermore, based on Yu's (2009) findings and Wen and Clément's (2003) argument that teacher immediacy can exert potential impact on EFL learners' L2WTC, a direct positive path was drawn from teacher immediacy to learners' L2WTC.

Following MacIntyre (1994) and MacIntyre and Charos (1996), a direct negative path was hypothesized from CA to SPCC. Further, one positive path between SPCC and WTC was expected (e.g., Baker & MacIntyre, 2003; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Yu, 2009).

The two expected positive paths from motivation and international posture to L2WTC paralleled previous research (Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Yashima, 2002). A positive path from motivation to L2WTC was also anticipated based on Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) and MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) pyramid model of L2WTC. As for the agreeableness personality trait, Clement (1980) argued that those who are pleasant and agreeable are more interested in interacting positively with L2 speakers. The most probable variable to be affected by this trait is integrativeness (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Further, Yashima (2002) argued that integrativeness can be represented and

epitomized by international posture in EFL context. Therefore, a positive path is proposed from agreeableness to international posture.

The hypothesized negative path from agreeableness to communication anxiety is also supported by previous research in personality and behavioral psychology. For example, it was shown that highly agreeable individuals automatically engaged in emotion regulation processes when exposed to unpleasant stimuli (Jensen-Campbell, Rosselli, Workman, Santisi, Rios & Bojan, 2002). Tobin and Graziano's (2011) findings also revealed a significant relation between agreeableness and negative affect regulation in young learners. Finally, in response to MacIntyre and Charos's (1996) call, a positive path from agreeableness to L2WTC was hypothesized and re-examined.

In short, the following research questions were addressed to provide answer to the objectives of the study:

Q 1: Is the proposed model of L2 communication (Figure 1) appropriate for the Iranian EFL learners?

Q 2: Can the independent variables significantly predict dependant variables including L2WTC among the EFL learners?

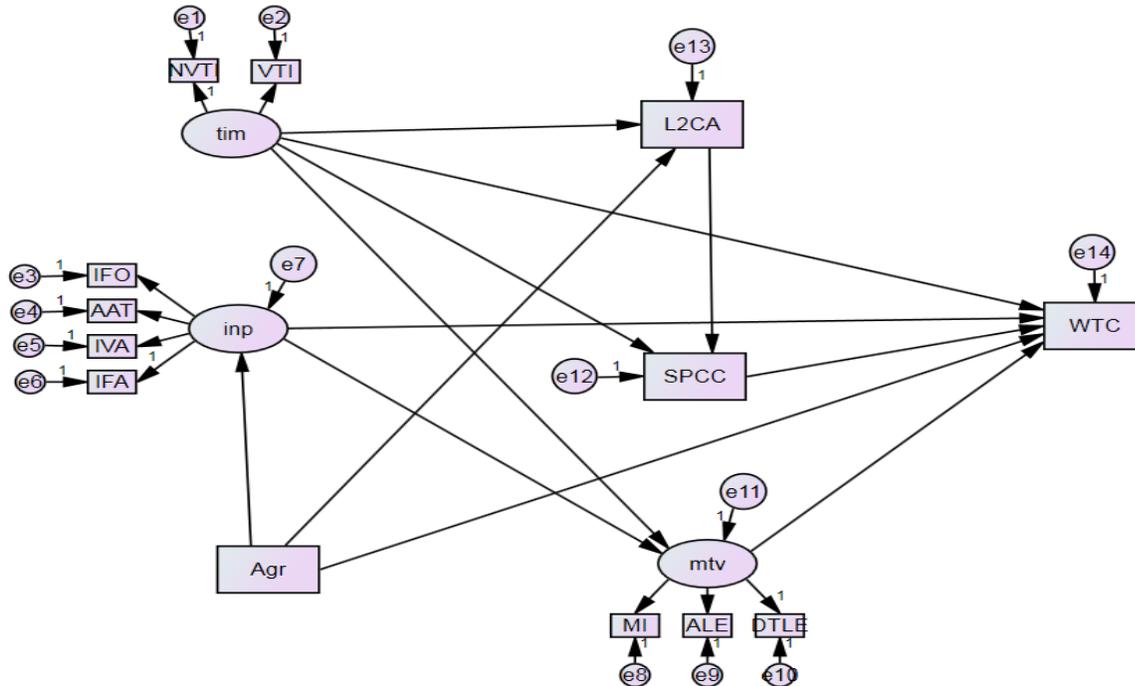


Fig 1: The proposed L2WTC model

Note: L2WTC = willingness to communicate in L2; con = L2 self-confidence; SPCC = self-perceived communicative competence; LCA = L2 communication anxiety; Agr = agreeableness; inp = international posture; IFO = interest in foreign affairs; IVA = interest in international vocation/activities; AAT = approach/avoidance tendency; IFO = intercultural friendship orientation in English learning; mtv = L2 motivation; MI: motivation intensity; ALE: attitude toward learning English; DTLE: desire to learn English; tim: teacher immediacy

Method

Participants

For the purpose of this study, 398 Iranian non-English major undergraduate students were recruited randomly from Colleges of Humanities, Natural Resources, Engineering, Agriculture, Veterinarian and Basic Sciences at the University of Zabol. Out of these, 372 participants (about 93.5 % return rate) completed the questionnaires. They aged between 18 and 34 years (M = 19.13, SD = 1.69). One hundred seventy three students were male (46.5 %), and 199 (53.5 %) were female. They were freshmen who had just studied English as a foreign language for 7 consecutive years in junior high school and high school. They were all taking General English as a compulsory university course prior to their ESP courses.

Procedure

Before the data collection, the researchers obtained approval from 8 EFL professors. Then, the questionnaires were distributed in twelve classes within 2 weeks in the middle of winter semester. The participants completed the Persian versions of the questionnaires in their classes.

Prior to administering the questionnaires, language learners were all informed of the objective of the research and the time to fill in the questionnaires (about 25 minutes). They were assured that their participation would be voluntary and anonymous and at no cost to their academic evaluation.

Measures

The required data were collected through the following ten questionnaires. These questionnaires have been utilized extensively in EFL settings (e.g., Cetinkaya, 2005; Fallah, 2014; Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004; Yu, 2009). The original English questionnaires were translated into Farsi in the present study.

Willingness to communicate

EFL learners' WTC in English was tested through twelve items from McCroskey (1992) in terms of contexts of communication (group discussions, public speaking, interpersonal conversations and talking in meetings) and types of receivers (strangers, acquaintances, and friends). The participants chose the amount (0% - 100%) that they would be willing to communicate in each situation. Scores were the sum of the points that the respondents achieved based on the WTC scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$). Sample item is "I am willing to talk in a small group of strangers in English".

Self-perceived communication competence (SPCC)

McCroskey and McCroskey's (1988) 12-item questionnaire was utilized to gauge the learners' self-perceived communication competence. Like the WTC scale, the items in the SPCC scale refer to 4 basic communication contexts and three types of receivers. Participants appraised their communication competence on a 0-100 scale. (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$). Sample item is "I can Talk in English in a large meeting among strangers".

Communication anxiety (CA)

This was measured by twelve items used by Yashima (2002). The respondents indicated the percentage of time that they would feel anxious engaging in a special activity. Similar to the WTC and SPCC scales, it

includes 12 permutations (four situations, three receiver groups) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). Sample item is "I feel anxious while talking in English to a stranger".

Teacher immediacy

The immediacy behavior scale comprised items tapping on teacher verbal (20 items, Gorham, 1988, Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$.) and nonverbal (14 items, Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987, Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) immediacy behaviors. Respondents indicated whether or not their teachers exhibited such behaviors and their incidence of use on a range from "one" (rarely) to "four" (very often). Sample item is "my teacher uses a variety of vocal expressions when talking to the class".

Agreeableness measure

Two items from The Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003) were used. The authors reported TIPI is a reliable and valid measure of personality. The test begins with the stem "I see myself as:" followed by pairs of two-trait descriptors, which respondents assess on a 7-point likert scale varying from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$). Sample item is "I am sympathetic and warm".

Motivation

The 30-item Motivation scale with three constituents (Motivational Intensity, Attitudes toward Learning English and Desire to Learn English) was originally developed by Gardner (1985) as part of the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery. Each component was measured by 10 multiple items. (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$, 86 and 87 for MI, DLE and ALE, respectively). Sample item is "I plan to learn as much English as possible".

International posture

The participants' international posture was measured through Yashima's (2002)

questionnaire. The questionnaire included four sub-scales, namely Intercultural Friendship Orientation (4 items, sample: “*studying English will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people*”), Approach-Avoidance Tendency (7 items, sample: “*I try to avoid talking with foreigners if I can*”), Interest in International Vocation/Activities (5 items, sample: “*I want to live in a foreign country*”) and Interest in Foreign Affairs (2 items, sample: “*I often read and watch news about foreign countries*”). The participants marked the amount to which they agreed with each item on a 7-point scale by marking a number between 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree). The reliability estimates (Cronbach’s α) were .75, .79, .71 and .66 for the four scales respectively.

Results and discussion

Pearson correlations were used to examine the relationships between continuous variables. Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, and correlation matrix between the variables. Furthermore, to answer the research questions, as to whether the proposed model is appropriate for the Iranian EFL learners and whether the independent variables can predict dependant variables including L2WTC, Structural Equation Modeling was conducted through AMOS 20. This analysis allows for testing complex hypotheses and examining the relationship between one or more independent variables and one or more dependant variables. In addition, this approach examines the direct, indirect and total effects of the links among the model variables.

In the present study, model estimation was conducted using maximum likelihood (ML) estimation. As shown in Figure 1, the proposed model was tested and the results indicated that the goodness-of-fit measures for the base model were as follows:

goodness-of-fit (GFI) index = .94, adjusted goodness-of-fit (AGFI) index = .90, comparative fit index (CFI) = .92, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .07, and Chi-Square = 153.01 (57 df), $p < .001$ which show an unacceptable good fit for the base model. To have a very good fit model, RMSEA should be smaller than .05, CFI, GFI and AGFI should indicate values higher than .90, and p value should be higher than .05. Thus, model modifications were conducted to improve the model.

First, the four non-significant paths (the path from agreeableness to L2WTC and the 3 paths from teacher immediacy to L2WTC, SPCC and motivation) were deleted. The goodness-of-fit measures were reanalyzed for the revised model. They were not completely acceptable yet: GFI = .94, AGFI = .91, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .07 and Chi-Square = 156.65 (61 df), $p < .001$.

Post hoc model modifications were then conducted in order to improve model fit. The significant chi-square test for the modified model indicated that further variance could be accounted for in case new paths were drawn. Contrary to the confirmatory approach followed till now, drawing additional paths, as MacCallum, Roznowski, and Necowitz, (1992) stated, is an exploratory procedure. These paths should be considered as data driven, and serve as potential avenues for future research (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996).

Based on the highest modification index (MI), additional paths were added, one at a time, till the model showed a good fit. The additional paths were as follows: immediacy \rightarrow IP and motivation \rightarrow SPCC. (see Table 2). The model was tested. As shown in Table 2, all the selected model fit indices show very good levels (GFI = .96, AGFI = .94, CFI =

.97, RMSEA = .03) except for the chi-square which was significant ($\chi^2 = 88.83$ (59 df), $p < .01$) due to the relatively large sample size. However, a conventional way of dealing with this sample-size impact on the Model Chi-Square is the relative/normed chi-square (χ^2/df) which in our study

displays a value below the acceptable level of 2 (see Hooper et al., 2008; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Therefore, it can be concluded that the final measurement model have a very good fit to the data, and it can be deemed an appropriate communication model for the Iranian EFL context.

Table 1: interrelationship between the variables (n = 372)

Variables	M / SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. L2WTC	46.47 / 30.40	1.00												
2. SPCC	56.45 / 31.93	.41**	1.00											
3. CA	44.25 / 26.77	-.08	-.30**	1.00										
4.VTI	62.57 / 7.44	.14**	.08	-.19**	1.00									
5. NVTI	48.57 / 6.28	.06	-.01	-.10*	.34**	1.00								
6. IFO	22.24 / 4.57	.34**	.15**	-.07	.27**	.17**	1.00							
7. AAT	36.14 / 7.32	.40**	.22**	-.16**	.32**	.20**	.66**	1.00						
8. IVA	24.91 / 6.84	.26**	.22**	-.16**	.06	.03	.34**	.34**	1.00					
9. IFA	9.25 / 2.74	.19**	.06	-.05	.18**	.03	.33**	.30**	.29**	1.00				
10. MI	22.38 / 7.16	.27**	.21**	-.13**	.19**	.07	.27**	.32**	.12*	.18**	1.00			
11. ALE	47.82 / 11.16	.36**	.19**	-.06	.22**	.12*	.49**	.57**	.26**	.28**	.38*	1.00		
12. DTLE	21.91 / 5.12	.42**	.25**	-.15**	.26**	.10*	.50**	.60**	.33**	.33*	.47**	.73**	1.00	
13. Agr	9.53 / 1.99	.12*	.00	.16**	.09	.08	.17**	.20**	-.01	.03	.07	.13*	.06	1.00

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2: Step-by-Step Modification Process of the Structural Model

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA
Base Model	153.01 (p < .001)	57	2.68	.94	.90	.92	.07
Revision 1: Deleting insignificant Paths	156.65 (p < .001)	61	2.56	.94	.91	.92	.07
Revision 2: Adding Teacher immediacy → international posture	109.515 (p < .001)	60	1.825	.95	.93	.96	.05
Revision 3: Adding Motivation → SPCC	88.83 (p < .01)	59	1.50	.96	.94	.97	.03

In the structural equation model, significant paths were obtained leading from SPCC, motivation and international posture to their anticipated destination of L2WTC. L2CA had a direct path to SPCC, while immediacy had a direct path to L2CA. Also direct paths were found leading from international posture to motivation, from agreeableness to international posture and L2CA, and from L2CA to SPCC. As for the data driven paths, two significant paths indicated the impacts of motivation and immediacy on SPCC and international posture, respectively. The paths were all found to be significant at least at the level of .05. Thus, it can be safely said that all the independent variables could significantly predict the dependant variables in the final model.

The significant path ($p < .001$, $c.r. = 6.85$) showing the effect of SPCC on WTC confirms the results obtained in previous studies (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990; MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre, Babin, & Clément, 1999; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Yashima, 2002; Yu, 2009). The strength of this impact on WTC also parallels the findings of these studies suggesting that SPCC exerts the highest effect on L2WTC. This indicates that, irrespective of one's real proficiency, simply deeming oneself able to communicate can influence the willingness or intention to get engaged in communication. The significant effect ($p <$

$.001$, $c.r. = - 5.63$) of L2CA on SPCC was also supported by previous research (MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Yu, 2009).

The significant effect ($p < .05$, $c.r. = 2.17$) of motivation on L2WTC in the present study is basically in accordance with MacIntyre and Clément's (1996) and MacIntyre et al.'s (2003) findings indicating significant impact of motivation on L2WTC in Canada. Along the same line, Peng (2007) found that motivation can significantly predict L2WTC among Chinese EFL learners. However, this finding was in contrast with Ghonsooly et al. (2012), Yashima (2002), Kim (2004) and Yu (2009), who did not find a significant path leading from motivation to L2WTC. A plausible explanation for the finding of the present study might be Peng's (2007, p. 48) argument that "in an EFL context, motivation is an important impetus in stimulating learners to persevere in both L2 learning and possibly L2 communication". In addition, motivation assuages the effects of some individual and situational shortcomings and act as a vigorous driving force in language learning (Dörnyei, 2005). Yashima (2002) also stated that high levels of motivation encourage perseverance among L2 learners, which can in turn boost their proficiency, confidence and eventually their willingness to communicate.

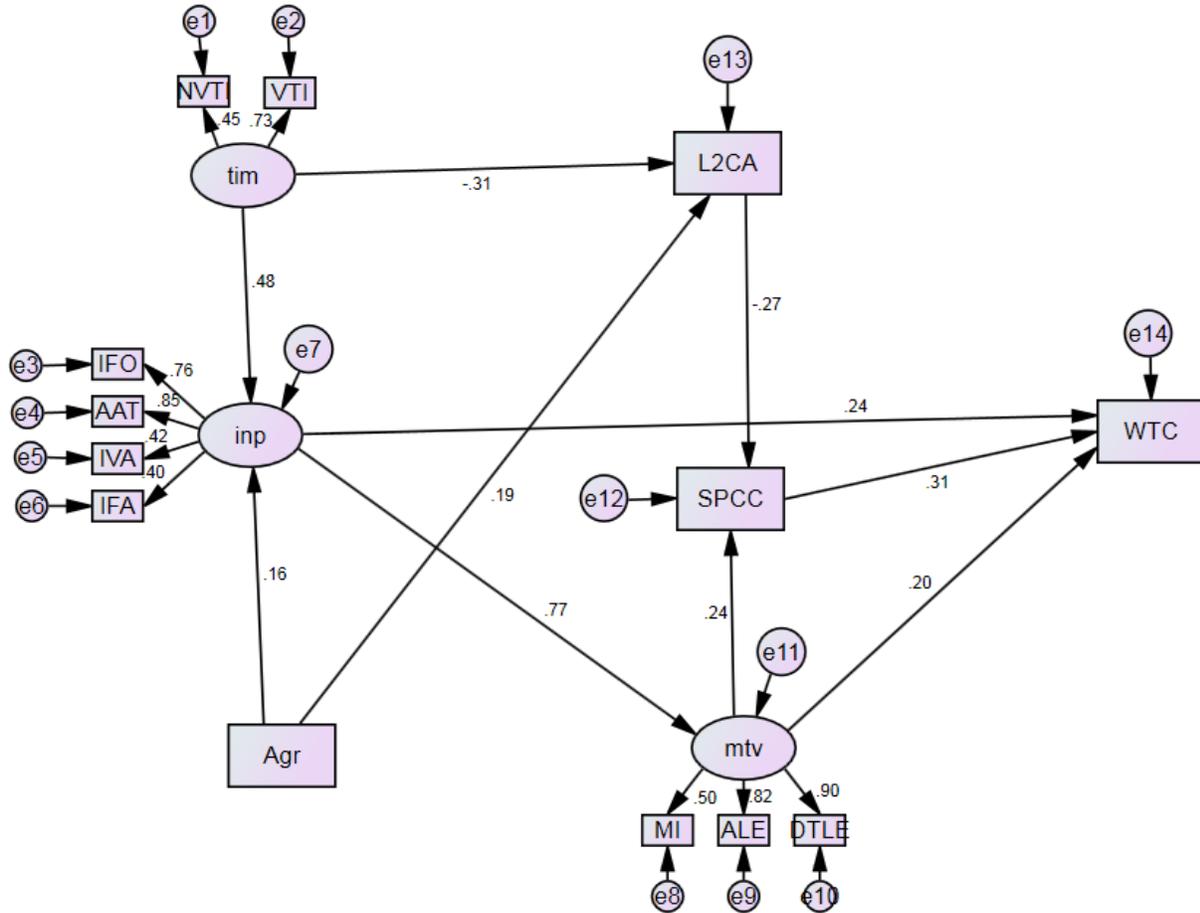


Fig 2: The final model

Interestingly, the role that motivation played was two-dimensional as it also contributed to L2WTC indirectly, through impacting the learners' SPCC. In other words, the role of Iranian EFL learners' motivation in increasing learners' L2WTC in English can be mediated by their perception of their own ability to communicate.

The results of this study also revealed a mildly significant path ($p < .05$, $c.r. = 2.54$) and a strong direct path ($p < .001$, $c.r. = 7.07$) from international posture to L2WTC and motivation respectively, suggesting that the more internationally aligned learners were, the more tendency they had to enter into communication and also the more

motivation they have to pursue their L2 education. This is basically supported by the socioeducational model in that attitudes affect motivation. In the present study attitude (international posture) covered the learners' attitudes toward international vocation or activities, intercultural communication, and foreign affairs.

Therefore, up to this point, it can be suggested that the willingness to enter into L2 communication in Iran is mainly determined by a combination of the EFL learners' motivation, perception of their L2 proficiency, and their attitudes and orientations toward the international community.

The results also revealed that teacher immediacy had a significant negative effect ($p < .001$, $c.r. = -4.05$) on EFL learners' L2CA. This corroborates Rodriguez, Plax, and Kearney's (1996) argument that immediate teachers facilitate interpersonal closeness and create warm and friendly atmosphere in the classroom through conveying positive attitudes, thereby reducing anxiety. Connected to this, Wen and Clement (2003) stated that teacher's dependability and affability make learners feel emotionally supported and less communicatively nervous. Therefore, in Iranian EFL context, where the teacher is the main authority in the classroom, teacher immediacy behaviors can be deemed an important emotional resource, under the auspices of which the learners can tackle communication apprehension. Put it into nutshell, learners feel happier and less stressed in classes with caring and affectionate teachers (Ellen & Michael, 1993).

The significant path ($p < .001$, $c.r. = 4.28$) from teacher immediacy to international posture is one of the data-driven paths of the present study. It suggests that the more EFL learners find their teachers physically and psychologically approachable, the more positive attitude they develop towards the international society. As Yashima (2002) argued, language learners' attitudes toward the international community are subject to change. As such, EFL teachers' verbal and non-verbal immediacy behaviors can be an invaluable asset in creating a supportive and non-threatening learning milieu for learners. Such an environment is conducive to the development of positive attitudes and views toward language learning and intercultural community among EFL learners. Since adding an additional path is deemed data-driven and exploratory, this path should to

be replicated and further examined along with the path from motivation to SPCC.

Given the strong effect of teacher immediacy on international posture, the unquestionable impact of international posture on the learners' motivation, and the mildly significant path leading from international posture to L2WTC, it appears that teacher immediacy exerts positive indirect effects on both learners' motivation and their L2WTC.

Furthermore, the significant path ($p < .01$, $c.r. = 2.77$) indicating the impact of agreeableness on international posture suggested that agreeable EFL learners tended to be more interested in foreign languages and international activities and affairs. Given the agreeable individuals' high social desirability, positive prosocial behaviors and friendly disposition (Graziano & Tobin, 2013), it is likely that they have more positive feelings and attitudes toward international community. This interpretation gains more credibility in the light of MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) notion that personality can affect the way a person reacts to foreign people and cultures.

Interestingly, agreeableness personality trait contributed to L2 communication anxiety ($p < .001$, $c.r. = 3.75$). This finding is in contrast with previous empirical studies on the regulatory function of agreeableness (e.g., Tobin & Graziano, 2011) though these are restricted in the realm of education, and almost rare in the EFL/ESL context altogether. The reason is due in part to the nature of English communication in Iran. Since Iran is an EFL context, occurrences of natural and social communication in English, especially in verbal mode, are quite scarce. Instead English communication, if any, occurs only for academic or pedantic, so to speak, purposes. Therefore, L2

communication, in most likelihood, is set up as a form of competition. If this line of reasoning is valid, then persons high in agreeableness perhaps do not care to participate or at least do it with an extra burden of carrying communication apprehension. This conjecture seems to gain more plausibility in the light of Graziano, Hair, and Finch's (1997) argument that highly agreeable individuals are interested in social harmony and, compared to their less-agreeable peers, they dislike conflicts and competitions. Connected to this, Ryckman, Thornton and Gold (2009) found that competition avoiders were pleasant, agreeable and acquiescent in their social interactions. An intriguing study (Bilalic, McLeod & Gobet, 2007) also showed that playing chess was not appealing to highly agreeable participants due to the competitive nature of chess where players endure constant confrontations.

Conclusion and implications

This study tested a model of L2WTC among Iranian EFL learners. The final model was an acceptable representation of the dataset regarding the evaluated variables. The results of structural equation modeling supported both the WTC model and the socio-educational model.

The findings indicated that L2WTC is a complex concept and obviously connected to different factors in EFL context. It was shown that SPCC, international posture and motivation were significant predictors of L2WTC. The indirect effects of CA and motivation on L2WTC were mediated by SPCC, and the roles of teacher immediacy and agreeableness in enhancing EFL learners' L2WTC were also mediated by international posture. Therefore, SPCC, international posture and motivation seemed to play a key role in understanding and improving L2 communication in the Iranian

EFL context. Further, while teacher immediacy significantly predicted international posture and CA, personality trait of agreeableness predicted international posture and communication apprehension among the EFL learners.

Based on these findings, it can be suggested that for more effectively enhancing EFL learners' willingness to communicate, teachers and learners as well should be more aware of the effect of affective and personal factors on learners' communication capacity including their WTC. They should try to assuage communication anxiety and improve learners' motivation and their beliefs and attitudes toward the international community.

Due to the ubiquitous existence of anxiety in EFL context, teachers should pay more attention to the way they treat their students particularly by adopting appropriate error correction ways in order to facilitate communication and should learn not to discourage them from speaking. Also based on the findings of the current study, in order to establish a welcoming, relaxing, and supportive classroom climate and to lower EFL learners' affective filter (Krashen, 1982), teachers can use immediacy behaviors. In such an atmosphere learners are more emotionally secured, suffer less communication apprehension, and perceive themselves to be more proficient and motivated and consequently more willing to communicate in English. In such an atmosphere teachers can also use miscellaneous materials and activities to engender EFL learners' enthusiasm for familiarizing themselves with different cultures, forming realistic attitudes toward those cultures, promoting their linguistic competence and eventually enjoying effective English communication (Cetinkaya, 2005).

Since the participants were a selected group of EFL learners from only one university, any generalization of the findings to other contexts should be done with caution. The data collection was done only through self-reported questionnaires. In order to obtain a more accurate estimate of the variables, future research should utilize qualitative methods such as interview and observation, too. It is also recommended that this study be replicated in different EFL contexts among learners with diverse cultural, educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

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