

FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' LEARNING AND ACQUISITION OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

English, which is defined as an international language, is used by more than two and a half billion people (Strevens, 1992) as a first, second, or foreign language for communication purposes. Consequently, the purpose of teaching English has shifted from the mastery of structure to the ability to use the language for communicative purposes. Thus, the issues of whether learners would communicate in English when they had the chance and what would affect their willingness to communicate gain importance. Recently, a "Willingness to Communicate" (WTC) model was developed by McIntyre et al. (1998) to explain and predict second language communication.

The objective of the present study was to examine whether college students who were learning English as a foreign language in the Indian context were willing to communicate when they had an opportunity and whether the WTC model explained the relations among social-psychological, linguistic and communication variables in this context. The present study was a hybrid design that combined both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures. First, a questionnaire was administered to 356 randomly selected college students in Country. Then, interviews were conducted with 15 randomly selected students who had already answered the questionnaire. The Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis was conducted to examine the interrelations among students' willingness to communicate in English, their language learning motivation, communication anxiety, perceived communication competence, attitude toward the international community, and personality. Qualitative interviews were utilized to extend and elaborate these quantitative results.

INTRODUCTION

English is used by more people than any other language on Earth.

—Strevens, 1992, p. 28 More than one and a half billion native and nonnative speakers use English all around the world as a first, second, or foreign language (Strevens, 1992). While one fourth of all English users are native speakers, the remaining majority use English as a second or foreign language to communicate with both native and nonnative speakers of English (Strevens, 1992). Two thirds of these nonnative speakers of the language have learned English in the past twenty years, and the number of people who use the English language continues to increase. Today, English is used in areas from diplomacy, international trade, and tourism to international media, air-traffic control, and technology. All these

suggest that English has become an international language that is used for communication among different nations and cultures (Alptekin, 2002; Norton, 1997; Smith, 1992; Strevens, 1992).

In the past, the aim of teaching English was the mastery of the structure of the language. However, in this age of communication, English seems to be playing a major role, and the purpose of teaching the language has shifted from the mastery of structure to the ability to use the language for communicative purposes. Thus, the communication aspect of teaching English has gained importance. Moreover, the ultimate goal of language learning is currently defined as "authentic communication between persons of different languages and cultural backgrounds" (McIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 2002, p. 559).

ENGLISH EDUCATION IN COUNTRY

Indian-American relations first started in the 1830s during the Ottoman Empire era. Although Americans founded a private school, Robert College in 1863, and English began being taught in public schools in 1908, during the Ottoman Empire period Arabic and Persian were the primary foreign languages (Dogancay-Aktuna, 1998).

In the 1980s, English became the dominant foreign language due to "increasing contact with the free market economies which brought into many new brands of products, new concepts and terminologies, and popular American culture and media" (Dogancay-Aktuna, 1998, p. 29). The English language influenced both our life and our language; the language borrowed words and concepts from English. Currently, Hindi is the official language of India and English is the dominant foreign language taught at schools and used mainly in international business and tourism.

In country, until 1997, English instruction started in the 6th grade in public junior high schools. However, with the new educational law passed in 1997, English instruction started in the 4th grade. Currently, in public schools, English is taught two hours a week in the 4th and the 5th grades and four hours a week in 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th grades. In private schools, English instruction starts as early as the kindergarten level, and students receive two or three times more English instruction compared to their counterparts in public schools. While private schools usually hire native speaker English teachers, the Ministry of National Education hires local teachers. Furthermore, in private schools since the medium of instruction is English (or another western language depending on the type of private school), students take their science and mathematics courses in English. On the other hand, students who pass a competitive selection test and are allowed to attend special public high schools such as Anatolian high schools receive one-year English-preparatory classes and after the preparatory year, they also take math and science classes in English.

In country, at some universities the medium of instruction is in English. However, the students who graduated from general public schools have only beginning level English

proficiency despite English instruction that they receive throughout junior and senior high school. Therefore, the students who pass the central university entrance examination and are placed at English-medium universities are required to take an English proficiency test. Depending on the results that students receive from the proficiency test, these students are either allowed to start their academic program or asked to take one-year English preparatory classes before taking their major area courses.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The construct "Willingness to Communicate" (WTC) was first used by McCroskey and his colleagues in relation to communication in the native language (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1990; Zakahi & McCroskey, 1989). McCroskey and Richmond (1990) treat WTC as a personality trait and define it as "variability in talking behavior". They argue that even though situational variables might affect one's willingness to communicate, individuals display similar WTC tendencies in various situations. Moreover, they identified introversion, self-esteem, communication competence, communication apprehension and cultural diversity as antecedents that lead to differences in WTC.

McCroskey and Richmond (1990) researched WTC in the native language not only in the USA but also in Sweden, Australia, Micronesia, and Puerto Rico. They conducted a comparative study and investigated the relations among WTC, communication apprehension, communication competence, and introversion in these countries. They found that the degree of WTC, communication apprehension, communication competence, and introversion differed among countries as well as the degree of relations among these variables. While American students were found to be more willing to communicate, Micronesian students were least willing. The Swedish students were reported to have the highest perceived language competence, while Micronesian students have the lowest. Similarly, the difference between Swedish and Micronesian students in terms of the association between WTC and perceived language competence was quite high. Thus, McCroskey and Richmond (1990) suggested that any kind of generalization should be done with reference to culture.

MacIntyre (1994) by using the data collected by McCroskey and his colleagues developed a structural model to explain the variance in WTC. He hypothesized that communication apprehension and perceived competence would be the causes of WTC when introversion would be related to both communication apprehension and perceived competence, and self-esteem would be related to communication apprehension. His model was significant and he managed to explain the sixty percent of the variance in WTC. The model suggests that people are willing to communicate when they are not apprehensive about communication and when they perceive themselves as capable of communicating effectively.

MacIntyre, Babin, and Clement (1999) conducted a study to examine the antecedents and consequences of WTC at both trait and state levels. In order to investigate the trait aspect of

WTC like self-perceived competence, communication apprehension, self-esteem, and big five personality traits, the authors gave questionnaires to college students. To explore the state aspect of willingness like anxiety, perceived competence, and communication tasks, the authors asked participants to complete four specific tasks and observed them in a laboratory setting.

The trait aspect of WTC had similar results with MacIntyre's (1994) previous study except this time in the structural model the path from communication apprehension to WTC was not significant. Instead the path from self-perceived competence to WTC was unexpectedly strong. Furthermore, self-perceived competence, and communicative apprehension were negatively correlated. Personality variables seemed to be related to self-esteem, perceived competence, and anxiety. Results indicate that extraverts are likely to feel less anxious, more competent about their communication ability, and have higher self-esteem.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study was a hybrid design, which combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches during the data collection and data analysis phases of the study (Creswell, 1994). However, it was "the dominant-less dominant design" (Creswell, 1994) in which the study was conducted within a quantitative paradigm with a small component of qualitative methods. The quantitative aspect of the study involved the statistical analysis of questionnaire results to (1) describe students' perception of their willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language, their motivation, communication anxiety, perceived communication competence, attitude toward the international community, personality; and (2) test the complex WTC model in context, whereas the qualitative aspect of the study involved the qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts to expand and elaborate the quantitative results.

The main reason to use a hybrid design was to gather more and better information by converging the results of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell, 1999). Results of the quantitative questionnaire were extended and elaborated by using qualitative semi-structured interviews. Interviews allowed the researcher to understand and illustrate the interconnected complexities of college students' willingness to communicate in English and the factors affecting this willingness. Thus, hybrid design provided a deeper insight in order to capture the complete picture of reality.

CONCLUSION

Results of the modified model indicated a good fit to the data and the researcher accepted this model as valid. According to the final model, these students' willingness to communicate in English was directly related to their attitude toward the international community and their linguistic self-confidence. These students' motivation to learn English and their personality in terms of being an introvert or extravert were indirectly related to their willingness to

communicate through their linguistic self-confidence. Finally, their attitude toward the international community was correlated with their being an introvert or extravert.

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