



The role of Situational and Cultural Variables on Kurdish EFL Learners' Willingness to Communicate in English

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Abstract

Willingness to communicate (henceforth, WTC) is an individual's preparedness to voluntarily communicate with a particular individual or individuals in a specific context, using the target language. The present mixed-method study investigates Kurdish EFL learners' WTC in English in the learning environment, particularly the role of situational and cultural variables. This study set out to identify the variables which foster or impede learners' WTC in English so that language teachers can promote or control the variables within the classroom to optimize learners' WTC in English. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from 3rd year English majors employing a semi-structured questionnaire and an observation scheme. Analysis of data demonstrated that situational, cultural, psychological, and linguistic variables influenced learners' WTC in the learning environment. Findings lend support to the complex nature of WTC as an array of variables was found to underlie learners' WTC in English. Finally, the findings gave rise to pedagogical suggestions for language educators, with particular reference to the implications of teaching Kurdish students in an EFL classroom environment.

Keywords: Willingness to communicate (WTC), Situational Variables, Cultural Variables, EFL learners.

1. Introduction

This paper is a part of an MA thesis conducted at the University of Duhok, College of Languages, and College of Basic Education, English Departments. In the present era, one of the essential aims of 21st century language teaching is to prepare learners who can communicate effectively and meaningfully in the target language both inside and outside the classroom (Baran-Łucarz, and Klimas, p.27). As a consequence, how to encourage language learners to utilize the language and simultaneously learn it through communication has caught the attention of researchers in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language learning (FLL). The growing emphasis on the importance of authentic communication in language learning possibly led to the emergence of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in a second language (L2) as indicated by Kang (2005, p.278). MacIntyre et al. (1998, p.547) introduced WTC to L2 as an individual's preparedness to voluntarily communicate with a particular individual or individuals in a specific context, using the target language. The importance of WTC arises from the role it plays in language learning as higher WTC among learners converts into increased opportunity for language practice and authentic usage (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p.547).

Regarding the overt value of communication in language learning, it is essential to investigate whether learners communicate in the target language when provided with an opportunity and what fosters or impedes their interaction with one another, which is a primary concern of WTC. In relation to the Kurdish context, English is considered the most important foreign language that is learned in classrooms. Nonetheless, in most EFL classrooms in Kurdistan, it is common to see students reluctant to use English. Presumably, the lack of



communication in English may have a negative impact on learners, prohibiting them from obtaining a good level of English proficiency.

Therefore, the present study aims at investigating the influence of situational and Cultural variables in Kurdish EFL learners' WTC in English in the learning environment. It also aims to find out other variables that affect Kurdish students' WTC in English. By answering the research questions this study will reveal the variables which are pertinent to participants in the context of Kurdistan. Once the variables which impede and foster learners' WTC in English are identified, language teachers can promote the variables within the classroom to optimize learners' WTC in English. In addition, syllabus designers will be conscious of learners' needs in order to create an adequate syllabus for learners of English. To outreach the study aims, the present study endeavours to find answers to the following overarching questions formulated for this study:

Question 1: What is the role of situational variables in Kurdish EFL learners' WTC in English?

Question 2: What is the role of cultural variables in Kurdish EFL learners' WTC in English?

Question 3: What other Variables have a role in Kurdish EFL learners' WTC in English?

2. Literature Review

This section provides a review of the WTC concept, the variables influencing it, and previous studies conducted on learners WTC in the target language.

2.1 The concept of WTC

The concept of WTC originated in the field of communication to account for individual differences of communication behaviour in the first language (L1) by McCroskey and Richmond (1987, p. 129). WTC in L1 was defined as the probability of engaging in communication when free to do so, and viewed as a stable unchanging personality variable; that is, if one has a low WTC the communication behavior of that individual will be relatively stable in different situations with different interlocutors. At a later time, MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 546) conceptualized WTC with reference to L2 in the field of SLA. The impetus to investigate WTC came from the realization that even though learners possessed a high level of communicative competence, they avoided entering communication situation in the L2. Dörnyei (2005, p. 207) postulated that there is a 'barrier' between having the ability to communicate and putting that ability into practice, and that barrier is WTC. MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 546) argued that WTC in L2 is different from WTC in L1, the situation is more complex with regard to L2 use, because here the level of one's L2 proficiency, and particularly that of the individual's L2 communicative competence, is an additional powerful modifying variable. Additionally, using the L2 holds a number of social and political implications in the L2 context. Therefore, they hypothesized WTC as a situated construct that includes both state and trait characteristics, and have defined the concept as the individual's "readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre, et al., 1998, p. 547). The authors proposed a pyramid model, which according to Dörnyei (2005, p. 207) encompasses "a combination of a number of psychological, linguistic, and contextual variables" that have an influence on WTC in L2 (see to Fig. 1). The shape of the model illustrates the proximal and distal variables which have potential influence on an individual's WTC in an L2; the variables close to the top and L2 use are related to specific features of the communication situation, whereas the variables further are stable, and serve as the foundation for L2 use. The first three layers represent transient influences on WTC which are situation-dependent. Whereas, the last three include variables which have a stable influence on it. According to MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 547) the situational variables were more transient and related to the situation the learners found themselves in, and how they act depends on the situation while the enduring variables entailed



long-lasting properties of the individual or the context. In essence, WTC entails the intention to initiate communication behaviour, and that behavioural intention is often predictive of actual behaviour.

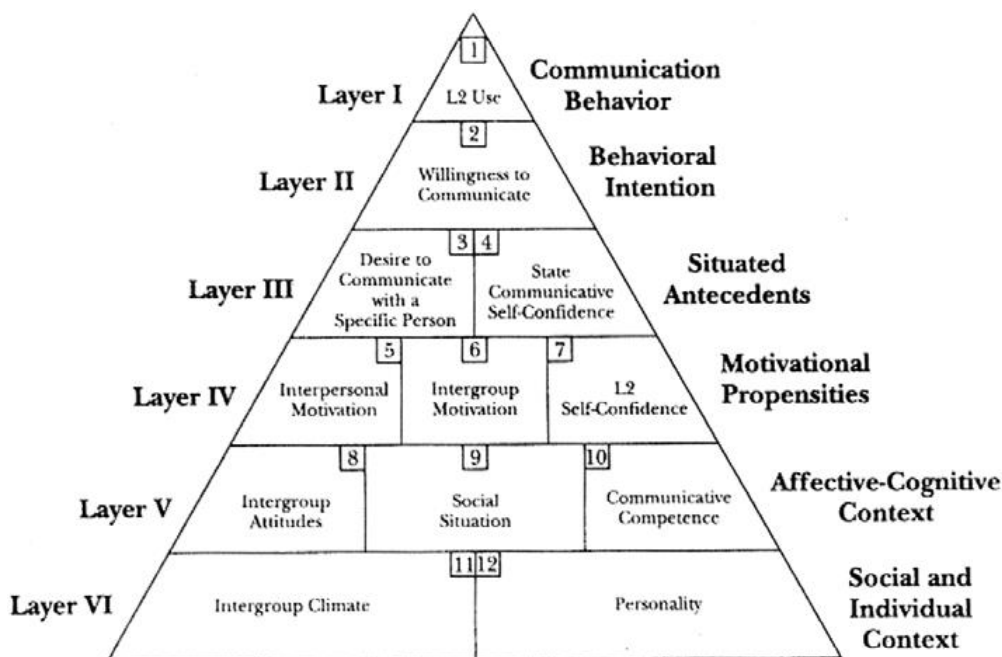


Fig. 1: Heuristic model of variables influencing WTC

Following the publication of WTC model in SLA, researchers were concerned with identifying various antecedents of WTC to form a comprehensible picture of how psychological factors interrelated and influenced the learners’ stable tendency to communicate in an L2 or trait WTC. A number of studies have carried out research to examine L2 WTC in relation to various ID variables such as anxiety, perceived confidence, attitudes and motivation (e.g., MacIntyre and Charos, 1996).

2.2 Situational Variables’ influence on WTC

In 2005, employing a qualitative method in a real-life context, Kang investigated the situational nature of WTC. The findings of her study demonstrated that WTC is dynamic and is subject to fluctuate under the influence of situational variables that affect the individual’s psychological condition. Consequently, Kang (2005, p.291) defined situational WTC in L2 as “An individual’s volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables”. The situational variables attracted the attention of researchers due to their transient influence on WTC which can be to some extent, influenced by pedagogical methods. Given the importance of the classroom in EFL contexts, as the only opportunity for learners to use the target language, researchers hoped to identify the variables that influence learners’ WTC in EFL classrooms. Researchers have found that situational variables as interlocutor, topic, tasks, the teacher, interactional context, and classroom atmosphere (e.g., Cao and Philp, 2006; Pattapong, 2010; Peng, 2012) influenced learners WTC in the target language.

2.3 Cultural variables’ influence on WTC

Wen and Clement (2003, p. 19), who provided the first cultural conceptualization of WTC from a Chinese perspective, stressed that culture is an important predictor of WTC. They pointed out that after Chinese students form the WTC, their culture demands an



additional set of restraining forces, which are culturally conditioned and affect communication as the sense of responsibility to the collectivity, and submission to authority. Owing to this view, researchers investigated WTC in different contexts and found that the participants' culture influences their WTC. In the Thai context, Pattapong (2010, p. 70) examined the factors influencing Thai learners' WTC in English. The findings of her study illustrated that the participants' culture had an influence on their WTC, variables such as Kreng-jai(Thai phrase means consideration of others), Unity(complying with others), fear of negative evaluation, and teacher status were found to have a profound influence on Thai learners' WTC. Therefore, culture, although an enduring influence and not transient like situational variables, also deserves attention to explain the communication behavior of students.

2.4 The Kurdish context

In the Kurdish context, Kurdish learners are found to be silent, inhibited, and have speaking anxiety (Ahmed, 2016, p.99). The education in Kurdistan places the idea that the teacher is in charge of students' learning, students are used to memorizing the content of their textbooks, and solely depend on their teachers to provide them with knowledge. The traditional method of teaching and learning is still implemented by the majority of teachers in Kurdistan and this has a negative impact on learners to communicate and interact with their teacher and each other to facilitate English language learning (Mhamad, 2015). In Kurdistan, students are accustomed to passively listen to the lesson and only answer the teacher's questions. Sofi-Karim (2015, pp.23-24) argues that Kurdish people's communication in English is limited by the influence of cultural and religious beliefs of the society. Kurds are of a collectivist culture, collectivist culture has a negative effect on students' ideologies in terms of educational values, individual convictions, participation in class discussions, and teacher-student interactions. Furthermore, the Kurdish culture, is ought to limit communication and interaction between the two genders. Fortunately, upon entering universities the learners are expected to be more active and express their opinions in English in the language classrooms. Additionally, they are provided with chances of interaction with the opposite gender since students at colleges are mixed unlike most intermediate and preparatory schools in Kurdistan, where there are separate schools for males and females. Nevertheless, cultural norms may still affect learners' communication in English at the university level.

2.5 Previous studies

Cao and Philp (2006, p. 480) examined the variables underlying WTC. The subjects of their study were eight students from different language backgrounds enrolled in an intensive general English program at a university- based private language school in New Zealand. They collected the data by using a questionnaire, interviews and an observation scheme constructed for the study. The results of the study indicated that factors influencing their WTC were group size, familiarity with the interlocutor, and interlocutor's participation, topic, and self-confidence. Additionally, the results presented that there was a mismatch between learners' reported WTC and actual behaviour in the classroom. They confirmed the situational nature of WTC and how the instructional context can encourage or discourage learners to communicate. Similarly, Aydin (2017, p. 129) investigated the underlying factors of Turkish EFL learners WTC. The qualitative study employed an open-ended questionnaire filled by 17 university students, followed by semi-structured interviews and six journals collected from 5 students with different levels of WTC. Thematic analysis of the data illustrated that internal factor (the students' personality) and external factors (the teacher's behaviour-style-character, other students, classroom atmosphere, topic, activity type-variety-lack, materials and administration affected learners' WTC.



In another study, Lahuerta (2014, p.39) explored how WTC correlates with other individual differences as anxiety, self-perceived communicative competence and motivation. The subjects of her study were 195 undergraduates Spanish EFL learners. Utilizing a questionnaire and a standardized English test, she found the relationship between the ID variables and WTC. A regression analysis of the data illustrated that WTC correlates positively with motivation and self-perceived communicative competence, and negatively with anxiety.

Eddy-U (2015, p. 43) explored Chinese non-English majors' WTC in group tasks. The author endeavoured to explain learners' motivation for participation and non-participation during group tasks. Semi-structured focus group interviews with 25 students were conducted by the researcher. Students' involvement in 4 types of activities (role play, group discussions, competitive and non-competitive games) demonstrated that various variables influenced task-situated WTC. The findings illustrated that situational variables influenced learners' WTC such as activity (interest, benefit), interlocutor (proficiency, cooperation, same interest, familiarity), and class atmosphere (peer pressure, teacher pressure/encouragement) interacted with the students' L2 motivation and L2 confidence in shaping their WTC.

Drawing on the studies mentioned above and the existing literature, it is apparent that WTC is widely examined with different methodologies, in different contexts. As far as the Kurdish context is concerned, the literature reveals a gap in terms of Kurdish EFL learners' WTC in English which has been densely investigated. One study that explored Kurdish learners' WTC in English is Hamasaid, Soleimani, and Hamamorad, (2021,p.159). The authors investigated 200 Iranian and Iraqi- Kurdish EFL learners' WTC and reticence to predict daily participation. They adopted a quantitative approach to investigate WTC. The regression analysis of the data presented that WTC and Reticence can predict the daily participation of English learners in the classrooms. Whilst researchers explored the relationship between WTC and daily participation, they left out the variables influencing WTC. Thus, the present study, employing a mixed-method approach, hopes to provide an account of potential variables, specifically situational and cultural, that foster or impede Kurdish EFL learners' WTC.

3. Methodology

This section provides a detailed description of the research design, the participants of the study, the instruments utilized, and the procedures undertaken for data collection and data analysis.

3.1 Research design

The current study employed a mixed method to provide answers to the research questions. The selection of the method is driven by previous studies on the psychological construct of WTC. Cao and Philp(2006, p.482) argued that although previous researchers mainly utilized quantitative approaches to investigate trait-like WTC, the inclusion of qualitative data is essential when investigating the situational variables and the situational nature of WTC. This study seeks to identify the influence of situational variables which are transient, and cultural variables which are stable on learners WTC in English in the Kurdish context; thus, the adaptation of a mixed method was reasonable.

3.2 Research setting and participants

This study was conducted in two Colleges at the University of Duhok, located in Duhok city- Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The target population of the present study were third-year



English majors from the College of Languages and College of Basic Education for the academic year 2021-2022. The number of students in both departments was 244 learners at the time of the research project. Third-year students were selected, as they had more exposure to the English language and more experience with the language. Another point is that the researchers hoped to uncover what affected the learners' WTC after they had attained language competence. The learners were selected by the technique of simple random sampling. The number of participants was estimated from the individuals who completed the questionnaire appropriately. Table 1 illustrates the details of participants in terms of gender and college.

Table 1: the number of participants

College	Category	Frequency	Percent
College of Basic Education	Male	35	35%
	Female	16	16%
College of Languages	Male	25	25%
	Female	24	24%
	Total	100	100%

3.3 Research instruments

The questionnaire: for the present study a semi-structured questionnaire was prepared. Singer and Couper (2017, p.117) assert that close-ended questions can have open-ended follow-ups, which can clear ambiguities, encourage truthful responses, and provide additional answers outside the range of set responses. The questionnaire items were adapted from the studies of Pattapong, (2010, pp.227-228) Riasati and Rahimi (2018, pp. 5-6), and the researchers' review of literature related to this topic. The questionnaire, apart from personal information, entails 17 questions in which 9 questions are multiple responses in which participants could select more than one option.

The classroom observation: the current study used structured non-participant classroom observations to obtain information about the communication behavior of the participants. The observation scheme was adapted from Cao (2011, p. 478). The focus of the observations was to identify the learners' actual communication behavior, interactions among teacher-student, student-teacher, student-student, and male-females (see table 4). Additionally, fieldnotes were employed to provide a clear and comprehensible account of what was taking place during the observation. Prior to the data collection, the researchers piloted the instruments and modified them according to the context of the study and the experts' suggestions.

3.4 Data collection

Once the essential permission was granted, the procedures of data collection started at the end of January and extended to March in the second semester of the academic year 2021-2022. At first, data for the questionnaire were collected. For that purpose, the researchers personally went into classrooms and gave clear instructions to participants in their mother tongue to ensure that the participants fully understood how to fill out the questionnaire. Afterwards, classroom observations were carried out. The classes which were observed were selected based on the students' answers to a question regarding the class in which they participate the most. Six classes were selected to be observed three from each college as shown in table 2 below:

Table 2: The classes observed

College	Classes	Duration of lectures	Number of vibists
College of Basic Education	Listening and speaking	2 hours	3 times
	Methods of Teaching	2 hours	3 times
	Linguistics	2 hours	3 times
College of Languages	Reading and Writing	1 hour	6 times
	Linguistics	1 hour	6 times
	American Literature	1 hour	6 times



Six hours of each class were observed. The observations were conducted over the entire duration of the class time in order to observe a complete set of communication situations. It is worth mentioning, that for reliability purposes a fellow observer attended the classrooms with the researchers for observing the students' communication behavior.

3.5 Methods of data analysis

The instruments utilized in this study elicited nominal and textual data. The nominal data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. As for the textual data obtained from the questionnaire and filed notes, Thematic analysis was employed for the analysis. Concerning the observation checklist, which consisted of two parts: one elicited the number of occurrences of an item, whereas the second collected whether items occurred or not. Furthermore, the analysis of the observation was triangulated with data from the questionnaire for the purpose of identifying the underlying variables of participants' WTC in English in that particular event.

3.6 Issues of validity and reliability

In this study, some procedures were undertaken to establish the validity of the used instruments. Bolarinwa (2015,p.196) states that to ensure Face and content validity the researcher should consult experts in the field. Thus, the instruments were sent to a panel of experts in the field of applied linguistics and English language teaching. Moreover, the two instruments were piloted, which is another way of ensuring validity, to evaluate their feasibility, structure, style, and layout. Consequently, reliability was ensured by checking internal consistency, which refers to the uniformity of items in the questionnaire as stated by Dörnyei (2007,p.51). The modified piloted questionnaire was analyzed using Kuder-Richardson20 which is the equivalent of Cronbach's Alpha for binary scored items. The reliability value of the 24 items in the questionnaire was 0.7 which according to Dörnyei (2007,p.207) is reliable in the field of applied linguistics. Additionally, triangulation was used, which served to validate the qualitative data.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative data

Quantitative findings obtained from the questionnaire and the observation checklist are presented below.

Table 3: The degree of participants' WTC

Q.	Item	Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
1	those who you know well	84	72.4%	84.0%
	those who you do not know well	32	27.6%	32.0%
2	the teacher	57	42.9%	57.6%
	Classmates	76	57.1%	76.8%
3	the same gender	91	60.7%	91.0%
	the opposite gender	59	39.3%	59.0%
4	more proficient in English	92	74.2%	92.0%
	less proficient in English	32	25.8%	32.0%
5	most of the classmates participate	82	56.2%	84.5%
	Only a few of the classmates participate	64	43.8%	66.0%
8	when the teacher corrects your mistakes	38	31.1%	39.2%
	when the teacher helps you to correct your mistakes on your own	65	53.3%	67.0%
	when the teacher does not correct your mistakes	19	15.6%	19.6%
10	when you are well prepared	50	34.5%	56.2%
	when you have enough knowledge of the topic under discussion	48	33.1%	53.9%



	when you are interested in the topic	47	32.4%	52.8%
11	Presentation	52	26.8%	52.0%
	Discussion	47	24.2%	47.0%
	Debate	40	20.6%	40.0%
	problem solving	29	14.9%	29.0%
	role-play	26	13.4%	26.0%
12	in pairs	55	37.2%	55.6%
	in small groups	58	39.2%	58.6%
	with the teacher in a whole class	35	23.6%	35.4%

The above table illustrates learners' WTC with reference to conversational partners and classroom situations. The first 4 items are related to the interlocutor, 84 % were WTC with their close friends, wherein 32% choose those who they do not know well. According to the item which is about who to turn to when not understanding a lesson, 57.6% chose their teacher, and 76.8% chose their classmates. The following two items about gender and proficiency of interlocutor, 91% selected the same gender, 59% chose the opposite gender, 92% chose a more proficient conversational partner, and only 32% chose a less proficient interlocutor. Items number 5 and 8 are concerned with the influence of classmates' participation, and teacher's feedback, respectively. The participants' responses indicated their readiness to speak English when most of their classmates contribute to the class discussion as 84.5 % selected that option. However, 66% appeared to be willing to communicate even when a few classmates participate. As for the influence of the teacher's feedback, the results demonstrate that students were more willing to speak when they feel that they are supported by the teacher as 67% chose the option in which the teacher helps them. Moreover, item number ten which is connected to the topic, the three options received close results; with preparation receiving 56.2%, knowledge of the topic 53.9%, and interest in the topic 52.8%. It is evident that all of these topic characteristics had a positive influence on learners' WTC in English. As for the eleventh item which is related to the activity type, 52.0% of participants were willing to speak in presentation, 47.0% in discussions, and 40.0% in debates. Whereas, problem-solving, and roleplay received lower results. Lastly, item number 12 which addresses the interactional patterns, the participants preference of pair and group work was evident in comparison to whole class interaction. 55.6% selected pairs, and 58.6% chose group work.

Following the questionnaire data, triangulation of data was done by observing different classes in both colleges. The table below displays the frequency of learners' communication behavior in six classes, taught by different teachers. The data from the observation demonstrated that a few learners spoke in English to the one sitting next to them in class as informal socializing. As for communication initiation, item 2 demonstrates student-teacher, whereas items 3 and 4 illustrate teacher-student. It is clear that teacher-initiated communication is more than students. The presence of activities provided learners with more chances to communicate, thus classes where there were activities provided more chances for communication for students. Following that, communication between genders was prominent, however, it was low. The symbol (-) refers to situations that were not observed, thus the observer could not count their frequencies.



Table 4: Observation results

Categories	Description	College languages of			College of Basic Education		
		Linguistics	Academic Writing	American Literature.	& Listening speaking	Methods of Teaching	Linguistics
1.Talk to a classmate	A student talks to the one sitting next to him/her in English.(socializing informally)	2	9	4	11	4	2
2.Ask the teacher question/for clarification	A student asks the teacher a question / for clarification in English.	15	26	13	19	4	19
3.Volunteer an answer/comment	A student answers a question raised by the teacher to the whole class after the teacher gives the permission to the student to answer.	65	43	50	109	35	80
	A student answers a question raised by the teacher to the whole class from their place. (Without the teacher’s permission to answer)	35	9	18	51	0	1
	A student answers a question raised by the presenter to the whole class.	2	-	-	-	16	16
4.Present own opinion in class/respond to an opinion	A student states his/her opinions to the class (with or without the teacher’s permission to answer)	2	8	15	15	11	1
5.activities	a student participates in class activities.	27	-	-	25	18	13
6.Talking to the opposite gender	A student from one gender speaks to a student from the opposite gender.	4	29	3	15	12	7
Dichotomies							
8.Teaching Style	Teacher employs teacher- centered instruction	yes	Yes	yes	No	yes	Yes
	Teacher employs student- centered instruction	no	Yes	no	No	yes	no
	Mixed (Teacher-centered and Student-centered)	yes	No	no	Yes	no	no
10. Interactional patterns	Students use English when in pairs.	no	No	-	Yes	no	-
	Students use English when in groups.	no	Yes	-	Yes	yes	-
	Students use English with the teacher in a whole class.	yes	Yes	yes	Yes	yes	yes
	Students use Kurdish when in pairs.	yes	Yes	-	Yes	yes	-
	Students use Kurdish when in groups.	yes	Yes	-	Yes	yes	-
	Students use Kurdish with the teacher in a whole class.	yes	Yes	no	No	no	no

4.2 Qualitative data

The analysis based on the questionnaire and observation data demonstrated that the learners’ responses can be categorized into four main groups: Situational variables, cultural variables, psychological variables, and linguistic variables. Significant findings in each category will be discussed below.

4.2.1 Situational variables

4.2.1.1 Interlocutor

Interlocutors had a prominent influence on learners’ WTC in English. Interlocutor familiarity, behavior, participation, proficiency, gender, and number all had an influence on students’ WTC in English. In the current study, the participants reported that they prefer to speak English with familiar people (e.g., close friends). The majority of the participants preferred to converse and be paired with those who they knew well. *“In pairs. Because I am with my friend not a stranger I will feel more comfortable to speak” (L.99)*. Familiarity with



the interlocutor increased learners' self-confidence and decreased their anxiety. Another characteristic is the behavior of the interlocutor. In line with this, subjects maintained that their close friends who are supportive and considerate increased their WTC. Conversely, close friends who were not considerate or supportive lowered learners' WTC "*my close friend will laugh at me when I speak with them in English*" (p.85). Participants' comments also indicated that their WTC increases when they see the interlocutor speaks English. Nonetheless, participants' WTC in English decreases when the interlocutor did not speak English or did not contribute to the discussion. Participants stated that they speak English when the interlocutor speaks it even if the interlocutor is a teacher "*If teacher speaks Kurdish I speak Kurdish too if the teacher speaks English I speak English too.*" (L.13). The number of interlocutors also influenced learners WTC, participants reported that they prefer pair and group work over the whole class. One shortcoming of group and pair work is that learners switched to their native language unless the teacher warned them. The data from the observation confirm this point, interaction between students was prominent in pair and group work, however, it was not in English (see table 4).

4.2.1.2 The teacher

It is unsurprising that the teacher was found to have a major impact on learners' WTC. Teacher's personality, behavior, teaching style, and error correction had an influence on learners' WTC in English. Participants preferred teachers who they perceived as kind and friendly, and were less willing to communicate in teachers' lessons who they perceived as strict, angry, and unfriendly "*Some of them are not helpful and some are perfect and open to students they do their work in an excellent way they can be your best friend I think it depends on other teachers' behavior to be friendly or unfriendly with students.*" (L.20). Teacher behavior refers to the teacher's actions in class. The teacher's reaction to students' question and answers was found to be a predicate of learners' WTC as well. Learners wrote that they were more willing to ask and answer when the teacher did not judge their questions or answers and instead praised them for participating. "*To be honest yeah, because we student get happily when we answer and the teacher praise us by saying well done, or something like that and the teacher didn't react happy we may not participate*" (N.40). This point was confirmed in observations; the teacher clarifying questions for students, encouraging them to speak, and praising them for participating had a positive effect on learners WTC. Furthermore, the teacher's teaching style. The participants stressed the importance of the way a teacher delivers a topic and manages the class in an interesting and facilitative way. Nonetheless, when the students perceived the teacher's style boring they refrained from participating "*yes, I do. I like some teachers more than others because I see their explanation and organization differ from some other ones. This is a good reason for me to participate in some teachers' lessons and not all of them.*" (L.40).

4.2.1.3 The classroom atmosphere

The classroom atmosphere is the impressions the students perceive of the classroom, which derive from teaching style, teacher support, classmates' participation, and activities as stated by Peng (2012, p.208). The teacher's teaching style and support were already reviewed in the previous section. classmate's participation appeared to affect the classroom atmosphere. Some participants reported that they were more willing to participate upon seeing their classmates contributing to the class discussion. "*Seeing people around me gives me a kind of positive energy to participate with them, but if the whole class was silent I remain silent too because silence kills the vibe and atmosphere of the class*". (L.40). Some participants stated that they avoid participation when the atmosphere is silent in order not to draw attention to themselves "*to be honest when only a few of my friends participate, I think if I participate all of them turn and look at me as I am I am Einstein that makes me feel shy so when most of*



them participate I participate too”(L.13). Nevertheless, many participants reported that their classmates’ participation has no effect on their WTC. Based on results from participants’ responses to the questionnaire and the observations it was clear that classmates’ participation did not have a major impact on learners’ WTC.

4.2.1.4 The topic

One prominent variable reported by the participants influencing their willingness to speak is the topic. It is worth noting, that participants’ responses regarding the topic refer to; (1) the subject being taught (e.g., Linguistics), (2) the topic discussed in class. Almost all participants asserted that knowledge of the topic was the main reason for their WTC in class. The lack of content knowledge, being unprepared, and uninterested in the topic prohibited learners from contributing to the class. Learners asserted that when they were unsure of their responses they were reluctant to participate in class. Furthermore, learners reported when the material is easy, they are more WTC. That is also confirmed by observational data, learners spoke when they were prepared, and the topic was easy or related to their life experiences. *“of course, due to the subject for example I speak in Listening and Speaking more than the others because it is an easy topic and I love it.”* (L.78).

4.2.1.5 The activity

Activities, in general, had a positive effect, learners enjoyed presenting, acting, solving exercises, and working with their classmates. The learners reported that they speak mostly in lectures that have activities. By referring to table 4 it is evident that classes from College of Basic Education had more activities. Regarding the characteristics of activities in which participants were involved in, they showed an interest in activities in which they can share their ideas in their own words such as discussions *“ because discussion is an open talk, I mean maybe it doesn't depend on one topic so whatever you know you will talk about”*(L.13). Referring to questionnaire results, it is evident that presentations received the highest response rate. The selection of presentations returns to the fact that students have time to prepare before giving a presentation. As previously seen with the topic students are more willing to speak when they are prepared. Notwithstanding that, other activities such as debate, problem-solving, and role play were of interest to the participants as well.

4.2.2 Cultural variables

Cultural variables, in contrast to fluctuating situational variables, are trait-like as stated by Ushioda (2009, cited in Pattapong, 2010, p. 40). Due to the broad concept of culture, this study only focused on factors that affect communication. Although, the participants’ responses were not uniform as some values were only reported by some participants. The participants’ responses are discussed below:

4.2.2.1 Fear of negative evaluation

One variable underlying learners’ Willingness to Communicate in English, which was continually reported by students, was their fear of being ridiculed by people be it their friends, classmates, teachers, or even strangers. Fear of negative evaluation is a characteristic of individuals from collectivist cultures who are extremely concerned about their face Triandis (2001, p.31). The participants’ concern about losing face was a strong predictor of their UWTC in and outside the classroom. Some participants avoided entering situations that might cause them to lose face *“I speak in English when I am well prepared because I don't want to make mistakes and look foolish Infront of my classmates.”*(L.84). It is worth noting, that the participants maintained that they only use English inside the classroom and not outside the classroom. *“The classroom is the only place this language is used in. I feel shy because in our society we speak Kurdish in public places when we speak a foreign language especially*



English people are looking at me in a weird way, that's the reason(L.2). Although some participants indicated their happiness when speaking English in public, the majority only used it inside the classroom in order not to draw attention to themselves.

4.2.2.2 Teacher status

The teacher's status affected classroom communication, and discussions. Teachers are transmitters of knowledge; thus, learners are dependent on the teachers and will not question the teacher's wisdom or debate with the teacher. When learners were asked about how they feel about contradicting teachers, students expressed their unease in such situations, and instances of respecting teachers and the power distance were stated by learners as well. *"Without a doubt, the feeling of respecting them occurs"(L.3), " I will be upset then I will recall that he is a teacher and I am just a student, therefore, I need to keep quiet."*(L.23). The distance between teachers and students were also highlighted in their comments regarding who to turn to when not understanding the lesson, participants had various responses. Some of the participants trusted the teacher to provide them with information since the teacher was more experienced. Whereas, others did not want to interrupt the lesson, participants maintained that they feel shame and shyness when speaking with the teacher and would rather ask a classmate *"my classmates because when they explain for me I can ask them more than once to repeat it for me, but with the teacher, I feel shy sometimes to ask for a repetition even if I don't understand."*(L.28).

4.2.2.3 Communication between genders

Some of the participants highlighted the role of their culture and society in shaping their behavior towards the opposite gender *"in our culture boys are always with boys and girls go with girls. Our society makes us speak with the same gender even at all levels of learning except college.(L.57).* Regardless of comments such as the above, many participants did not mind conversing with the opposite gender and stated that the opposite gender does not affect them. Nonetheless, findings from the observational data on communication between genders presented a few insights. Firstly, the seating arrangement of students from both colleges entailed males sitting on a side and females on a side. Secondly, when told to make groups learners mostly chose the same gender to work with.

4.2.3 Psychological variables

Psychological variables such as motivation, self-confidence, personality, and emotions were found to influence learners' WTC. Participants expressed their WTC in order to improve their English language, particularly their communications skills *"no, I participate in every lesson, because I see that participation and communication with your teacher, and classmates will help each of us to use the language and be more able to improve language."*(L.55). Whereas others desired to obtain marks to pass the course. Furthermore, desire to develop personality was found in participants' responses to the questionnaire. Most of the participants indicated their desire to improve their personalities *"I really like presentation because it makes me brave and a fluent student and also by doing this way I can break my shyness in the class".(L.2).* Communication self-confidence refers to a combination of perceived competence and lack of anxiety as reported by MacIntyre et al.(1998, p. 548). Students reported that they felt less confident in some situations *"for me it is difficult because I lose confidence when I discuss with my teacher(L.26).* Thus, learners WTC decreased when they were in a situation that increased their anxiety, and decreased their perceived competence. Whereas, others wrote *"It does not matter whether it is a close friend or someone I do not know because I am pretty confident with my English and it is really something normal"*(L.4). Personality which is an ID variable, refers to a trait-like variable that underly an individual's WTC. Previous research on WTC has recognized that personality affects WTC, whether a



person is talkative or silent, extrovert or introvert, confident or timid. In line with that, in the present study, it was found that personality influenced WTC *“I feel like I am more comfortable talking to close friends rather than strangers. I must accept the fact that I am an introvert and most of the time I shy away from speaking English with others”*(L.16). Lastly, Emotions which reflected the participants’ feeling before or at the moment of speaking (Pattapong,2010, p.131). Negative emotions such as feeling nervous, being tired, boredom, sick, and shyness negatively affected WTC whereas feelings of happiness, comfort, enjoyment, and satisfaction increased learners’ WTC. *“It depends on my mood sometimes I want to talk to all in English and I am confident but sometimes I am stressed I don't want to speak to all only the closest person I'm comfortable to speak to him is my classmate X”*(L.36)

4.2.4 Linguistic variables

Linguistic variables such as comprehension, and English proficiency were highlighted by participants to have a great influence on their WTC. One participant commented: *I use Kurdish so that I be able to coherently explain my answer to them and they understand me better because if I ask the teacher I have to do it in English and my English isn't that good*(L.53). Students reflected their inability to convey their intention in English as a major factor influencing their WTC.

5. Discussion

The analysis of communication in English in a Kurdish classroom context highlighted four types of variables impacting learners’ WTC. Based on learners’ comments and classroom observations, situational, cultural, psychological, and linguistic variables appeared to exert influence on WTC in English. The findings of this study indicate that learners’ WTC in EFL classes can be influenced by a range of variables which confirms the findings of previous studies (e.g., Cao, 2011; MacIntyre et al, 1998). MacIntyre et al. (1998,p. 558) posited that an array of potential transient and enduring variables influences WTC. The present study uncovered Situation-specific influences such as interest in a topic or feeling momentary confidence, and enduring influences as personality contributed to learners WTC in English. In regard to situational variables, it was found that interlocutor, teacher, classroom atmosphere, topic, and activity had a positive and negative influence on learners’ WTC in English. The conversational partner played a significant role in learners’ intention to speak English: the interlocutor familiarity, behavior, contribution, number, language proficiency, and gender exerted influence on learners WTC in English, this finding is consistent with Pattapong (2010, pp.85-88) and Kang(2005, pp.282-286). Conversation in English is already stressful for Kurdish EFL learners as it is not their native language, therefore, having an interlocutor who is not supportive will lower learners WTC in English. Moreover, Interlocutor proficiency and gender were also noted in the findings. Learners appeared to favor proficient peers and the same gender as conversational partners. Due to the learners’ motivation to learn English, learners preferred someone who they can benefit from, someone who can provide them with more knowledge, and did not communicate in English with those who they perceived would not help them reach their goal. As for gender, although the participants showed their enthusiasm to converse with the opposite gender some cultural restraints still prohibit individuals from interacting with the opposite gender. This finding differs from Eddy-U(2015, 49) stressing the importance of context and culture in WTC. In the present study, the teachers’ personality, behavior towards students, and teaching style were found to influence learners’ WTC. Likewise, Pattapong(2010, p.89) discovered that learners are more WTC when the teacher provides them with some support, gives them the chance to speak, and gives them clear instructions. The topic appeared to play a key role, content knowledge, pre-class preparation, interest, and difficulty were found in responders’ comments as influencers of their WTC in English. Knowledge and preparation of a topic gave learners more confidence



in their linguistic competence to participate. Cao(2011, p. 472) asserts that content knowledge and familiarity with a topic boost an individual linguistic self-confidence to speak. In regard to the level of difficulty of a topic/task, Phung(2016, p.11) uncovered the difficulty of a topic or a task led learners to dislike it and refrain from participating.

Furthermore, the influence of Kurdish culture, although less explicitly addressed, was observable in the data. The Learners' culture shaped the way they behave in the learning situations as denoted by Wen and Clement(2003, p. 34) that Societal and educational norms vary from one culture to another. The present study revealed that fear of negative evaluation, teacher status, and the opposite gender exerted influence on Learners' WTC but not as intense as other variables. The first two variables are in line with Pattapong(2010, p. p.68) findings on Thai learners' WTC. Fear of negative evaluation led learners to avoid entering situations that will cause them to lose face. That will explain why participants were reluctant to communicate when they were unsure of their answers. Speaking to the teacher was not favorable to learners even the Teacher's presence lowered some learners' WTC in English, teacher was regarded as an authority figure. This finding is in line with Pattapong(2010, p. 77), who identified the role of teacher status on Thai learners' WTC, learners preferred talking to their classmates rather than their teachers. Lastly, a variable not considered in other studies on WTC, the present study uncovered the influence of culture on communication between genders. Although learners appeared to cope with it, the opposite gender was not a favorable interlocutor for most of the participants. In addition to situational and cultural variables, this study has identified psychological and linguistic variables. Cao(2011, p.473) identified the psychological variables that influence learners' WTC in English as personality, self-confidence- and emotions, the present study revealed the same pattern. Additionally, motivation had a positive influence on learners WTC. Students who were motivated to learn took up every chance they got to speak English. Finally, a variable that prohibited learners from communicating is perceived Language proficiency. When learners perceived that they could not convey their intention at a specific time, they avoided speaking in English.

6. Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify the role of situational and cultural variables on Kurdish EFL learners' WTC in English. The reason behind such interest came from the utmost importance current language pedagogy places on students' ability to communicate in English inside and outside the classroom. The present study detected an array of variables that exert influence on learners' WTC in English, namely, situational, cultural, psychological, and linguistic variables.

In light of the finding already mentioned, some pedagogical implications can be offered. The findings imply that teachers should consider the variables contributing to learners' WTC in EFL classes. Considering the vital role instructors play in language learning process teachers ought to promote variables that promote communication and remove those that hinder communication. For instance, it was evident that learners' fear of making mistakes and losing face was a major reason for their reluctance to communicate. Instructors can foster classroom dynamics that prioritize respect, tolerance, empathy, and understanding among all class members. Creating a less threatening environment which can be accomplished by applying cooperative learning so that learners get to know each other better. Moreover, learners should be provided with authentic communication situations and be given opportunities to express themselves in their own words. One effective technique for instructors to have active students is that teachers provide learners with positive feedback to increase their self-confidence. Teachers, being a key figure in which students trust their knowledge, getting support from teachers is likely to boost learners' self-assessment of their language performance. As for the colleges, in order to increase learners' WTC in English clear and strict rules are ought to be set which require all students and teachers to use English



in the learning environment. This will lead students to practice the language which is very important to enhance learners' WTC.

It is necessary to address the limitation of this study, of which at least three can be identified. Firstly, the findings of the current study are limited and cannot be generalized to other educational contexts. As the data were collected from 3rd year students at the English departments, university of Duhok, Duhok, Iraq. Secondly, this study is from students' perspective. For further research, it is recommended to explore the concept of WTC from the teacher's perspective regarding the variables contributing to learners' WTC. Thirdly, this study solely targeted WTC of students' speaking, future studies can consider Writing and reading.

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دور المتغيرات الظرفية والثقافية في ارادة متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الأكراد للتواصل باللغة الإنجليزية

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ملخص

هو استعداد الفرد للتواصل طوعياً مع فرد معين أو أفراد معينين في سياق معين، باستخدام اللغة (WTC)أرادة التواصل المستهدفة. تبحث الدراسة الحالية ذات المنهجيات المختلطة في أرادة متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الأكراد للتواصل باللغة الإنجليزية في بيئة التعلم، ولا سيما دور المتغيرات الظرفية والثقافية. هذه الدراسة تسهم إلى تحديد المتغيرات التي تعزز أو تعيق أرادة المتعلمين في التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية، بهدف أن يتمكن معلموا اللغة في داخل الفصل الدراسي من الترويج و التحكم في المتغيرات لتعزز أرادة المتعلمين في التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية. تم جمع البيانات الكمية والنوعية من طلاب السنة الثالثة متخصصي اللغة الإنجليزية باستخدام استبيان شبه منظم وأستمارة مشاهدة. أظهر تحليل البيانات أن المتغيرات الظرفية والثقافية والنفسية واللغوية أثرت على أرادة المتعلمين للتواصل في بيئة التعلم. النتائج تدعم الطبيعة المعقدة لأرادة التواصل حيث تم العثور على مجموعة من المتغيرات التي تكمن وراء أرادة التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية. في الختام، أدت النتائج إلى أستنتاجات أقتراحات تربوية لمعلمي اللغة، بالأخص تعليم الطلاب الأكراد اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية في الفصل الدراسي.

الكلمات الدالة: الأرادة في التواصل (WTC)، المتغيرات الظرفية، المتغيرات الثقافية، متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية.

رۆل فاکتەرین بارودوخی و کەلتوری د حەزا فێرخوازیڤ زمانێ ئینگلیزی وەک زمانەکی بیانی یێن کورد بۆ پەیوەندیکردن ب زمانێ ئینگلیزی

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کورتى

هەزا پەيوەندیکردن بەرھەفییا خۆبەخشانە یا تاقیە بۆ پەيوەندیکردن لگەل کەسەکی یان کۆمەکا کەسان د چارچووڤه کە دیارکری دا، ب زمانەکی دەستنیشانکری. ئەف ڤه کۆلینا پەیره وین ئیکەل، هەزا فێرخوازیڤ زمانێ ئینگلیزی وەک زمانەکی بیانی یێن کورد بۆ پەيوەندیکردن ب زمانێ ئینگلیزی دا د ژینگەها فێرخوازیڤ دا ڤه دخوینیت ب تاییەت گوهریڤیت بارودوخی و کەلتوری. ئەف ڤه کۆلینە کاردکەت بۆ دیارکریا وان گوهریڤیت پالدهر و رێگر د حەزا فێرخوازان دا بۆ پەيوەندیکردن ب زمانێ ئینگلیزی. ئارمانجا ڤه کۆلینێ ئەو کو مامۆستا یێن زمانێ ئینگلیزی دناڤ کۆرس خواندنێ دا بئین وان فاکتەرین هاندهر بو پەيوەندیکردن ب زمانێ ئینگلیزی پشپێخن و کۆنترۆل بکەن. داتا یێن چەندایەتی و جوړی یێن ڤن ڤه کۆلینێ ژ قوتاییڤ قونغا سیب یا پشکا زمانێ ئینگلیزی هاتینە کۆمکر ب کارئینانا راپرسیه کا نیڤ ریکتییستی و پلانه کا چاڤدێریخ. شروڤه کرنا داتا یان دیارکر کو گوهریڤیت بارودوخی، کەلتوری، دەرونی، و یێن زمانی کارئیکرن یا هە ل سەر حەزا فێرخوازان بۆ پەيوەندیکردن د ژینگەها فێرخوازیڤ دا. ئەنجام پشته فانییا سروشتی ئالۆز یح حەزا فێرخوازان دکەن ژبەرکو کۆمەکا فاکتەران کارئیکرن دکەن د حەزا پەيوەندیکردن ب زمانێ ئینگلیزی. ل دۆماهیڤ ڤه کۆلین گەهشتییه هندهک دەرئەنجام و پشپانار بۆ مامۆستا یێن زمانی ب تاییەت بۆ فێرخوازان قوتاییڤ کورد د کۆرس ئینگلیزیدا وەک زمانەکی بیانی.

په یقین ریهه: حەزا پەيوەندیکردن، گوهریڤیت بارودوخی، گوهریڤیت کەلتوری، فێربویت زمانێ ئینگلیزی وەک زمانەکی بیانی.