

Psychological traits of willingness to communicate: An assessment of students' speaking performance

M. Bambang Purwanto¹, Yuliana², Habib Soleimani³, Yusri⁴

¹Tourism Business Management, Prasetiya Mandiri Polytechnics, Bogor, Indonesia

e-mail: mbambangpurwanto@gmail.com

²Department of English, STKIP Muhammadiyah, Pagar Alam, Indonesia

e-mail: yulianaabi84@gmail.com

³Department of English, University of Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Iran

e-mail: h.soleimani@uok.ac.ir

⁴English Department, Sriwijaya Polytechnics, Palembang, Indonesia

e-mail: yusri@polsri.ac.id

Abstract

This study explores the relationship between psychological traits and willingness to communicate (WTC) as well as the speaking performance of students in the Department of United Kingdom, Sriwijaya State Polytechnic. The psychological characteristics studied include self-confidence, anxiety about speaking, and motivation. A quantitative descriptive approach was used to collect and analyze data from a selected sample of students. The instruments used in this study include questionnaires to measure the level of confidence, speaking anxiety, and motivation and an assessment of speaking performance through a speaking test. The study showed a significant correlation between psychological traits and WTC and speaking performance. The calculation results show the Personality factor: Score 85, categorized as "Medium" (Medium). Motivation (Score 82, categorized as "Medium." Communicative Competence: Score of 86, classified as "High." Learning Anxiety: Score 85, categorized as "Medium," and Self-Confidence: Score 78, categorized as "Low." High self-confidence and low speaking anxiety were positively correlated with higher WTC and better speaking performance. In addition, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation was also found to be an essential factor affecting students' active participation in oral communication activities. The conclusion of this study shows that psychological traits have a crucial role in influencing students' willingness to communicate and their speaking performance. These findings provide practical implications for developing teaching strategies to improve students' speaking skills by paying attention to their psychological aspects. Advice is given to create a supportive learning environment and psychological support for needy students.

Keywords: *High English Learner, Psychological Traits, Speaking Performance, Willingness to Communicate*

1. Introduction

Speaking skills are vital in United Kingdom language learning, especially in higher education institutions emphasizing mastery of professional communication. In the Department of United Kingdom at Sriwijaya State Polytechnic, the development of speaking skills is the main focus in the curriculum to prepare students to face the demands of the increasingly global and competitive world of work. One of the factors that affect students' speaking ability is *Willingness to Communicate* (WTC) (Ahmed et al. et al., 2023; Alemi et al., 2011), which reflects the individual's readiness and desire to engage in communication (Purwanto, 2022a; Ridayani & Purwanto, 2024).

Linguistic abilities and various psychological traits such as Personality, Motivation, Communicative Competence, Learning Anxiety, and Self-Confidence influence WTC. Allo and Priawan (2019) explained that confidence in public speaking often determines how well students can express themselves, while speaking anxiety can be a significant barrier (Nadiyah, 2019; Salim, 2015). Many students have good linguistic knowledge but experience difficulties in speaking due to high levels of anxiety (Ningsih & Fatimah, 2020; Pratiwi & Analido, 2018; Tallon, 2009). In addition, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Purwanto, 2022b) is essential in encouraging students to participate in communication activities actively (Marisyah et al., 2023; Purwanto & Al Firdaus, 2023).

This study identifies and analyzes the relationship between these psychological traits and WTC and students' speaking performance in the Department of United Kingdom at Sriwijaya State Polytechnic. Through a quantitative descriptive approach, this study will collect data using questionnaires to measure confidence levels, speech anxiety, and motivation. In addition, students' speaking performance will be evaluated through a speaking test to determine how these psychological traits affect their speaking skills.

With the results of this study, a more profound insight can be obtained about the psychological factors that affect WTC and students' speaking performance. These findings can be used to develop more effective teaching strategies to support the development of student's speaking skills and create a more supportive learning environment for students at the Sriwijaya State Polytechnic.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Nature of Willingness to Communicate

The willingness to communicate in a second language (L2 WTC) refers to the learner's readiness to speak a second language when free. It has been increasingly shown to correlate with learners' language fluency, proficiency, and communication skills (Abu Bakar et al., 2022). Unsurprisingly, the concept has recently received considerable attention in second-language research. According to MacIntyre & Wang (2021), the pyramid model has been the most influential framework that has inspired research into L2 WTC over the last two decades. The model presents the influence of trait-like and state-like variables on L2 WTC. While the state-like variables, including self-confidence and desire to communicate with a specific person/group at a specific time, exert an immediate influence on L2 WTC, the trait-like variables, such as interpersonal motivation and intergroup motivation, intergroup attitudes, social situation, communicative competence, intergroup climate, and personality, exert an indirect, distal influence on L2 WTC.

Much of the subsequent research inspired by the model has been characterized by studies focusing on the trait-like and stable features of learners' L2 WTC. However, recently, studies adopting this model have been criticized for their overwhelming use of quantitative measures explicitly designed to examine the influence of underlying variables, mainly perceived communicative competence, communication apprehension, and motivation in ESL contexts. Even with the significant contributions of these studies, we still need a more comprehensive and elaborate theoretical perspective that allows a holistic understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of learners' L2 WTC.

2.2 Psychological Variables

According to the WTC model (McCroskey & Baer, 1985), two factors affect one's willingness to communicate in a second or foreign language, which differs from one's WTC in his/her native language. Individual (enduring) factors include the personality aspects of the language learner, the social situation in which he/she lives, intergroup attitudes between native

speakers and second language groups, general self-confidence of the learner, and his/her motivation to learn English. On the other hand, situational (environmental) variables are identified as one's desire to speak with a specific person and the self-confidence one feels within a particular situation.

2.3 Concept of Speaking Performance

Good competence is accompanied by good performance, as (Brown, 2003) defines performance as the overtly observable and concrete manifestation or realization of competence. This term describes performance as something that can be observed by actually doing something. Bad or good, someone's competence can be measured by their actual performance. In conclusion, speaking performance is how speakers deliver their ideas to the audience through words and sentences, and their speaking performance will automatically show their competence (Agustin & Purwanto, 2023). The competence is similar to the speaker's knowledge of speaking performance (Yuliana et al., 2024), such as grammar, fluency, accuracy, size, interaction, and coherence category. Speaking includes many types of activities, such as presentations in front of the class, speech, drama, or theatre. Such activities show that speaking is a performance. She has performed as a public speaker when someone speaks among many people.

3. Research Method

This study uses a quantitative descriptive approach to explore the relationship between psychological traits, students' willingness to communicate (WTC), and students' speaking performance. This research is included in the quantitative descriptive category, which aims to describe and analyze the relationship between certain variables. These variables are psychological traits (Personality, Motivation, Communicative Competence, Learning Anxiety, Self-Confidence), WTC, and students' speaking performance. This study's population will likely be 2nd-semester students of the Department of United Kingdom Languages and Polytechnics of Sriwijaya State. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure the representativeness of students with varying levels of WTC and speaking performance.

Table 1. Research Sample

No	Class	Total
1	AB1	35

In collecting data, questionnaires are used to measure psychological traits such as confidence, anxiety speaking, and motivation; validated questionnaires are used. The Likert Scale may assess respondents' agreement or disagreement with certain statements. Questionnaires are usually given to students to fill out in class. Then, students' speaking performance can be assessed through standardized speaking tests or observation during classroom speaking activities. This assessment may use predetermined rubrics to evaluate different aspects of speaking performance. Conclusions were drawn based on the results of data analysis, identifying which psychological traits were most significant in influencing WTC and students' speaking performance. Generalizations were made carefully, considering the study's limitations, such as the sample size and diversity of participants. With a quantitative descriptive approach, this study provides a comprehensive overview of how psychological traits affect students' ability to communicate verbally.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Results of Students' Speaking Performance

Table 2. Results of Speaking Performance Assessment

NO	MCC	%	Information	Average
1	72	78,0	Complete	81,1
2	72	88,0	Complete	
3	72	85,0	Complete	
4	72	83,0	Complete	
5	72	89,0	Complete	
6	72	60,0	Incomplete	
7	72	80,0	Complete	
8	72	82,0	Complete	
9	72	74,0	Complete	
10	72	79,0	Complete	
11	72	95,0	Complete	
12	72	90,0	Complete	
13	72	85,0	Complete	
14	72	84,0	Complete	
15	72	76,0	Complete	
16	72	78,0	Complete	
17	72	85,0	Complete	
18	72	71,0	Incomplete	
19	72	89,0	Complete	
20	72	96,0	Complete	
21	72	83,0	Complete	
22	72	86,0	Complete	
23	72	78,0	Complete	
24	72	83,0	Complete	
25	72	60,0	Incomplete	
26	72	82,0	Complete	
27	72	63,0	incomplete	
28	72	86,0	Complete	
29	72	98,0	Complete	
30	72	87,0	Complete	
31	72	86,0	Complete	
32	72	70,0	Complete	
33	72	63,0	Incomplete	
34	72	86,0	Complete	
35	72	82,0	Complete	

Table 2 displays and contains data on the students' speaking performance assessment results of the D3 Department of the United Kingdom at the Sriwijaya State Polytechnic, with the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) set at 72%. This table contains columns

that show the participant number, MCC, percentage of scores obtained (%), information about whether the student is “Complete” or “Not Complete,” and overall average. The table consists of 35 students. The percentage score shows the results of the grades obtained by each student in the form of a percentage. The “Complete” information is given to students who have reached or exceeded the MCC (72%), while “Not Complete” is given to students who have not reached the MCC. The overall average of the scores obtained by students is 81.1%, which means that overall, the average score of students is already above the MCC. In the analysis results, most students (27 out of 35) were declared “Complete” with scores above MCC of 72%.

The data presented in Table 2 emphasizes a positive overall outcome in students’ speaking performance, with an average score of 81.1%, which surpasses the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) of 72%. It indicates that most students have met the expected proficiency standards. Specifically, 27 out of 35 students were categorized as “Complete,” showcasing their ability to perform at or above the required level. This achievement demonstrates that most students have a strong foundation in speaking skills.

However, the table also highlights a gap, with eight students failing to meet the MCC. These students, categorized as “Not Complete,” scored below the required threshold, with the lowest score being 60%. It suggests a need for further investigation into the factors contributing to these lower scores, such as potential gaps in understanding, lack of confidence, or limited practice opportunities. Addressing these issues through targeted interventions, such as individualized feedback, additional speaking exercises, or enhanced support mechanisms, could help these students improve their speaking proficiency.

The analysis underscores that while the overall performance is promising, there is room for improvement to ensure all students achieve the desired competency level. The findings highlight the importance of continuous assessment and tailored instructional strategies to support students’ varying needs in their speaking development.

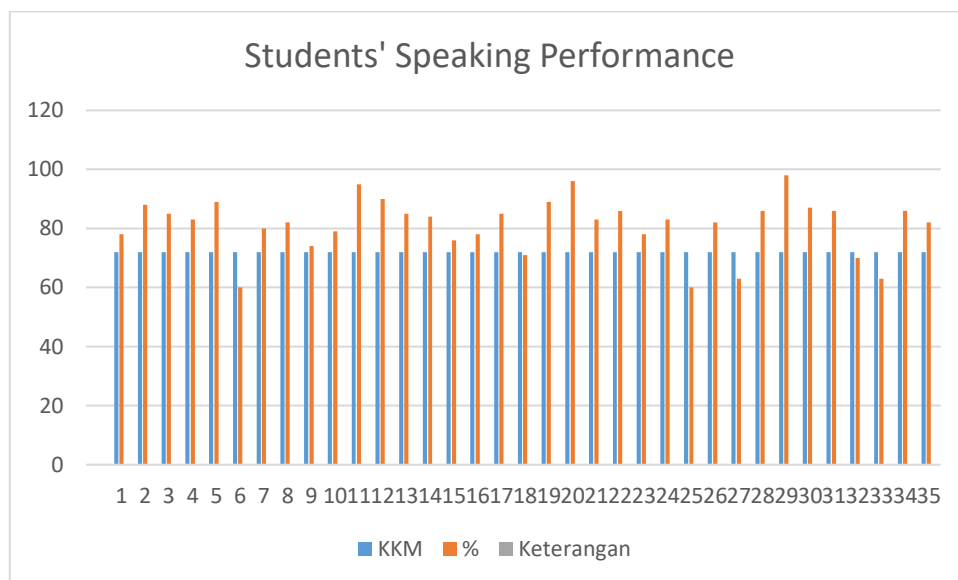


Figure 1. Students Speaking Performance Grafik

Figure 1 illustrates a bar graph that presents quantitative data on students’ speaking performance. The data is presented as percentages (%) and MCC (Minimum et al.) values. Each bar on the graph represents a single student, and the height of the bars indicates that student’s score or percentage of achievement in speaking ability. The results showed that

some students achieved high scores, such as the highest score of 98%. On the other hand, eight students have yet to reach the MCC, with the lowest score of 60%. It shows that although most students already have an excellent readiness to speak English, some students need additional attention to achieve the expected standards. From this explanation, the average score of 81.1% shows that, in general, students' speaking performance is quite good. However, additional attention may be needed to support students who still need to attain MCC and improve their understanding and engagement with speaking skills.

Figure 1 visualizes the students' speaking performance, showing their strengths and gaps in their achievements. The bar graph demonstrates that most students have achieved satisfactory results, with several excelling, as evidenced by the highest score of 98%. It reflects that most students have a strong readiness and capability to communicate effectively in English.

However, the data also reveals that eight students failed to meet the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) of 72%, with the lowest score recorded at 60%. It indicates that while the overall performance is commendable, a portion of the cohort struggles to achieve the expected standards. To enhance their speaking abilities, these students may require additional support through targeted interventions, such as more practice opportunities, tailored instruction, or confidence-building activities.

The average score of 81.1% reinforces that the class's general performance is above the benchmark, reflecting the effectiveness of the current teaching strategies. Nevertheless, the variability in individual performance underscores the need for differentiated approaches to address the challenges underperforming students face and ensure equitable learning outcomes for all. This analysis emphasizes the importance of continuous monitoring and personalized support to bridge the performance gap and foster comprehensive skill development.

4.1.2 Analysis Results of Psychological Traits of WTC

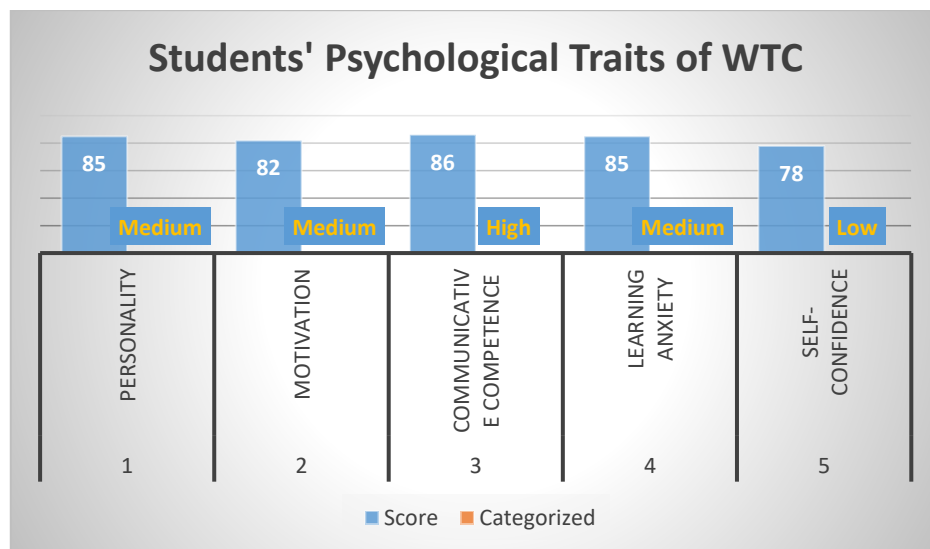


Figure 2. Students' Psychological Traits of WTC

Figure 2 shows a bar chart titled "Students' Psychological Traits of WTC." This diagram lists five psychological dimensions with their respective score values and accompanying categories. Here are the details: Personality: Score 85, categorized as "Medium," meaning from the sample used as the object of their readiness to speak English

in the intermediate category, which means that students must be given a stimulus in the form of a learning topic, warmed up so that they are provoked to communicate in English. Motivation: Score 82, categorized as “Medium.” Communicative Competence: A score of 86, categorized as “High,” a high category means that the student’s communicative competence is already excellent. When students are encouraged to talk about specific topics, they enjoy it and desire to speak English correctly. Learning Anxiety: Score 85, categorized as “Medium.” Self-Confidence: Score 78, categorized as “Low.” Confidence gets the lowest score in the psychological trait factor of WTC, meaning that almost all students are less confident in speaking English. One of the factors that causes students to need more confidence is that students are afraid of being wrong in speaking, especially regarding the limitations of vocabulary and grammatical perfection. Each dimension has a blue bar indicating the score, while categories are labeled yellow.

The analysis of Figure 2, which presents a bar chart on “Students’ Psychological Traits of WTC (Willingness to Communicate),” provides valuable insights into the psychological factors influencing students’ readiness to speak English. The scores and categories highlight varying levels of psychological preparedness among students, revealing strengths and areas for improvement.

The results show that Communicative Competence scored the highest at 86, categorized as “High,” indicating that students have a strong communication foundation. It suggests that when provided with relevant and engaging topics, students demonstrate enthusiasm and a desire to use English correctly. In contrast, Self-Confidence scored the lowest at 78, categorized as “Low,” indicating a significant challenge. The lack of confidence stems from fears of making mistakes, particularly in vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy, highlighting the need for strategies to build students’ self-assurance.

Other dimensions, such as Personality, Motivation, and Learning Anxiety, scored in the “Medium” range (85, 82, and 85, respectively). These scores suggest that while students possess a moderate level of readiness, they require additional stimulation and encouragement to participate actively in English communication. For instance, incorporating warm-up activities and engaging learning topics could enhance their motivation and reduce anxiety.

4.2 Discussion

This study discusses the Psychological Traits of Willingness to Communicate factor in speaking learning. The students’ speaking performance results showed that some students achieved high scores, such as 98%. On the other hand, eight students have yet to reach the MCC, with the lowest score of 60%. It shows that although most students already have an excellent readiness to speak English, some students need additional attention to achieve the expected standards. From this explanation, the average score of 81.1% shows that, in general, students’ speaking performance is quite good. However, additional attention may be needed to support students who still need to attain MCC and improve their understanding and engagement with speaking skills.

Based on the expected results of this study, some of the implications that may arise in education and teaching are that educational institutions can design programs that support the development of these aspects by recognizing the importance of psychological traits such as confidence and anxiety. For example, programs that reduce speaking anxiety and increase self-confidence can help students be more willing to communicate and improve their speaking performance. Lecturers may receive special training to recognize and address psychological factors affecting students’ WTC. They can learn techniques to create a learning environment that supports and encourages students’ active participation in

speaking. Adopting teaching strategies that reduce anxiety, such as project-based learning or group work, can help students feel more comfortable and motivated to speak. Students' speaking performance is assessed based on technical skills and the psychological aspects affecting their communication ability. It can include engagement evaluations, active participation, and initiative in speaking. By integrating an understanding of psychological factors into teaching strategies and educational programs, educational institutions can be more effective in improving students' speaking skills and preparing them to communicate well in various contexts.

Many other factors, including introversion/extroversion, self-esteem, cultural differences, and communication skills, influenced students' willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1999; Maulana et al., 2023; McCroskey et al., 1977; McCroskey & Richmond, 1982). People's disposition toward conversation may be affected by their upbringing and cultural background. Nevertheless, these factors alone cannot be considered the root of the variety in people's communication styles. Since individuals show consistency in WTC across various settings, it might be interpreted as a character quirk. Since people's WTC might change depending on the context, WTC is also a situational variable (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). At every stage of an engagement, individuals make up their minds and decide whether or not to speak, and their risk-taking orientation heavily impacts this choice. Bielska (2006) proposed that risk-taking behavior is context- and person-specific. Therefore, in the field of SLA, risk-taking is both a globally shared and locally impacted personality characteristic and construct. Considerations like social environment, past information, emotions, and stubbornness are all critical in the study of decision-making. Some study (Banyard & Hayes, 2013) suggests that social psychologists, not cognitive psychologists, may be best equipped to examine the roots of human decision-making.

The notion that such communicative readiness stems from introversion/extroversion stems from well-known studies linking personality factors with communication (Eysenck, 1971). Introverts are thought to be less inclined to interact than extroverts, who talk more often. Individuals' importance on communication is determined by their desire to communicate with others. Communication is essential for extroverts in social situations. Introverts, on the other hand, need to prioritize communication. The extraversion-introversion continuum depicts how individuals differ in expressing their emotions and being more "people-oriented."

It is argued that how people view and assess their value is a significant factor in the degree to which they are eager to speak with one another (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). A person's self-concept may be both good and bad depending on how they evaluate their self-knowledge. There are many reasons why a person with poor self-esteem is less inclined to interact with others and share their thoughts and feelings. To begin, persons with low self-esteem are hypersensitive to criticism. Because of this, people avoid situations where others may dispute their self-worth. Second, individuals with low self-esteem think they have nothing to say and that their involvement in communication is unimportant. It does not seem that self-esteem is a significant factor in communication willingness (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). It is plausible that a person's self-esteem has a significant effect on other components of communication, such as communication apprehension and their impression of their communicative skill, both of which affect their willingness to communicate. McCroskey and Richmond (1982) state that culture powerfully influences communication practices. As a result, various nations and cultures need distinct communication patterns, which individuals from other places need to learn to adapt to. Such adaptation may be challenging, particularly in cases where the culture of the original language and the culture

of the target language differ. Lack of communication skills commonly contributes to people's unwillingness to speak out (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982; Tauchid et al., 2023).

Based on the study conducted by McCroskey and Baer (1985), one may assume that as individuals improve their communication abilities, they become more inclined to talk with one another. In other words, cautious people refrain from discussion because they need more requisite abilities. Even more significant is how the speaker perceives his or her ability level. It is also conceivable that those with a negative view of their communication skills are pretty good at the subject. A cognitive and emotive decision is involved when deciding whether to be willing to communicate (Zayed, 2021). The relationship between communication and those two components is complex. More research is needed to understand the relationship between the desire to communicate and cognitive and emotional characteristics that makeup language attitude.

5. Conclusions

This study shows that psychological traits such as personality, motivation, communicative competence, learning anxiety, and self-confidence significantly impact students' willingness to communicate (WTC) and their speaking performance. Students who have higher self-confidence and lower levels of anxiety tend to be more willing to speak and show better speaking performance. In addition, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation also play a role in influencing how active students are in participating in communication activities. For suggestions for institutions, it is best to design programs that focus on developing students' psychological aspects, such as increasing self-confidence and reducing speaking anxiety. Evaluation of students' speaking performance should include psychological aspects that affect their ability to communicate, apart from the assessment of technical skills, and the curriculum should be designed to accommodate individual differences in the WTC and the student's personality, providing a variety of opportunities to practice speaking in a variety of contexts.

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