

# L2 Willingness to Communicate of Indonesian High School Learners of English: An Exploratory Survey Study

Wendy Fernando, Adaninggar Septi Subekti  
Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, Indonesia

*Email: adaninggar@staff.ukdw.ac.id*

**Abstract:** This study intends to explore Indonesian Senior High School learners' second/foreign language (L2) Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English. The study employed a quantitative design of conducting a survey through distributing *Google Form* questionnaire. 159 L2 learners from more than six islands in Indonesia participated in this study. This study found that learners generally reported a moderate level of L2 WTC. They were moderately enthusiastic to speak in English class, moderately confident to use English in communication, and moderately willing to use English in small groups and pair work activities. However, seen from rather high standard deviations of the mean scores, the participants' responses may be very heterogeneous, suggesting rather spread-out values away from the mean scores. This may suggest that the learner participants' levels of L2 WTC were rather unbalanced. It indicates a high level of L2 WTC of some participants and a low level of L2 WTC of the others. Pedagogical implications include promoting small-group activities and minimizing whole-class discussions to increase L2 WTC especially in the case of those with a low level.

**Keywords:** Willingness to communicate (WTC), second/foreign language (L2), Senior High School learners

In second/foreign language (L2) learning, where the use of L2 in communication is crucial, learners' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) plays a vital role in L2 learning (Clement et al., 2003; MacIntyre et al., 1998). Clement et al. (2003) argued that learners' L2 WTC is the most immediate determinant of their use of L2. Thus, L2 WTC is a major cause of L2 use, thus L2 learning (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010).

The concept of L2 WTC was proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998). It is defined as "readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed that L2 WTC is different from the WTC construct developed by McCroskey (1997) defining WTC as "an individual predisposition to initiate communication with others" (p. 77), suggesting that WTC is a relatively stable personality trait in which one tends to start communication with others in a wide range of situations. In the view of MacIntyre et al. (1998), L2 WTC is different from one's WTC in their first language (L1), as L2 WTC is situation-specific and can be influenced by a wide range of factors.

Studies have contemplated factors affecting L2 WTC (Barjesteh et al., 2012; Cao, 2011, 2013; Subekti, 2019a). A study involving L2 learners of English residing in New Zealand reported that they were unwilling to use L2 in high-pressure situations such as whole-class discussions (Cao, 2011). Being in the spotlight of attention of the whole class when using L2 seemed to become a specter for learners, especially for low-achieving learners (Liu, 2006; Tallon, 2006). A participant in a longitudinal study on L2 WTC by Cao (2013) specifically mentioned the preference for group work and pair-work activities and the dislike towards teacher-led activities. Similarly, a study in Saudi Arabia also reported that the majority of learner participants were anxious about speaking in front of the whole class (Hamouda, 2013). In line with that, a qualitative study involving seven L2 learners at the university level reported that in contexts where there were fewer interlocutors such as group work, learners tended to be more willing to use L2 (Subekti, 2019a). Several previous studies on L2 anxiety, albeit not specifically investigating L2 WTC, also found that learners who felt less anxious became more relaxed when they were required to use L2 in front of a smaller audience (Kitano, 2001;

Subekti, 2018). Other factors reported to positively affect L2 WTC included preparations before an L2 performance (Mak, 2011; Zia & Sulan, 2015), peer support, familiarity with peers or interlocutors, perception of competence, and past experiences in using L2 (Subekti, 2019a).

Several previous studies on group work and pair work suggested a positive role towards the improvement of learners' use of L2 (Almanafi & Alghatani, 2020; Hahn, 2003; Kaweera et al., 2019; Wang, 2021). Involving Libyan L2 learners of English, Almanafi and Alghatani (2020) found that pair-work activities made learners speak English more. In Thailand, a study by Kaweera et al. (2019) reported learners' willingness to do discussions and role-plays in pairs. A rather old yet still relevant study by Hahn (2003) in Korea reported that group work encouraged L2 interactions. Similarly, a qualitative study in a Chinese context by Wang (2021) also reported that learners found confidence and positive interdependence among learners from working in small groups. These findings may be related to the probability that in a group consisting of only a few learners, each learner would likely have more opportunity to use L2 than in whole-class discussion (Jacobs & Hall, 2002) and thus this could give learners a psychologically safer environment where they could use L2 more extensively.

Recent studies in L2 WTC in Indonesia mostly involved learners at the university level (Fadilah, 2018b, 2018a; Manipuspika, 2018; Subekti, 2019a, 2019b) with fewer studies involving secondary school learners (Havwini, 2019). A quantitative study involving 276 L2 learners at the university level by Subekti (2019b) reported that the participants generally had a high level of L2 WTC. Studies by Fadilah (2018a) contemplated L2 WTC of 156 English department learners from Surabaya, Malang, and Bali. The study found that learners' perception of L2 competence and motivation mediated by learners' self-confidence affected L2 WTC and that learners' self-confidence significantly influenced learners' L2 WTC. Furthermore, in an under-researched secondary context, the study by Havwini (2019) tried to investigate learners' WTC in English classes and involved L2 learners in two English classes at a junior high school in Aceh. From close observations of the two classes, the study found that different types of the task led to different patterns of L2 WTC, further implying the necessity to provide various activities to increase both learners' engagement and varieties of their L2 WTC. Albeit the contributions of these previous studies in the

understanding of L2 WTC, studies were mostly conducted at the university level with fewer studies being conducted in secondary-level contexts. A study by Havwini (2019), despite the possible contribution, could be a case study in nature considering it being conducted in one school. Quantitative studies involving Indonesian Senior High School learners on L2 WTC may be necessary. Studies involving these participants may still be very rare and thus it could be worthwhile to provide a general picture regarding L2 WTC of these under-involved learners through quantitative studies. Moreover, at present, these learners only obtain a ninety-minute English class session once a week with little or no opportunity to practice the L2 outside the classroom context. Considering this limited opportunity to use L2 in general, their L2 WTC could have a more strategic position in affecting their L2 learning. Considering the rationales, the present study seeks to investigate the level of L2 WTC of Indonesian Senior High School learners from various regions in the country.

## **METHODS**

The present study employed a quantitative method of distributing questionnaires. First, it was attributed to the popularity of quantitative methods in this field. Many previous studies were conducted on the topic of L2 WTC using quantitative methods (Aoyama, 2020; Baran-Lucarz, 2014; Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004; Fadilah, 2018a; Subekti, 2019b), suggesting the widespread use of the methods among researchers in this field. Secondly, considering L2 WTC studies involving Indonesian Senior High School learners may be rare, conducting such a study using a quantitative method involving a sufficient sample may produce results with the possibility of generalization (Gray, 2014).

The participants of this study were 159 Senior High School learners from grades nine to twelve from various regions in Indonesia regardless of their schools or institutions. Of these 159 participants, 81 participants (50.9%) were males whilst 78 participants (49.1%) were females. Senior High School learners were targeted in this study because many previous studies seemed to overwhelmingly involve learners at the university level (Aoyama, 2020; Manipuspika, 2018; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Subekti, 2019b). Thus, an empirical study involving participants from a rather under-researched education level may be worthwhile. The demographic data regarding this can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. The Participants' Domiciles**

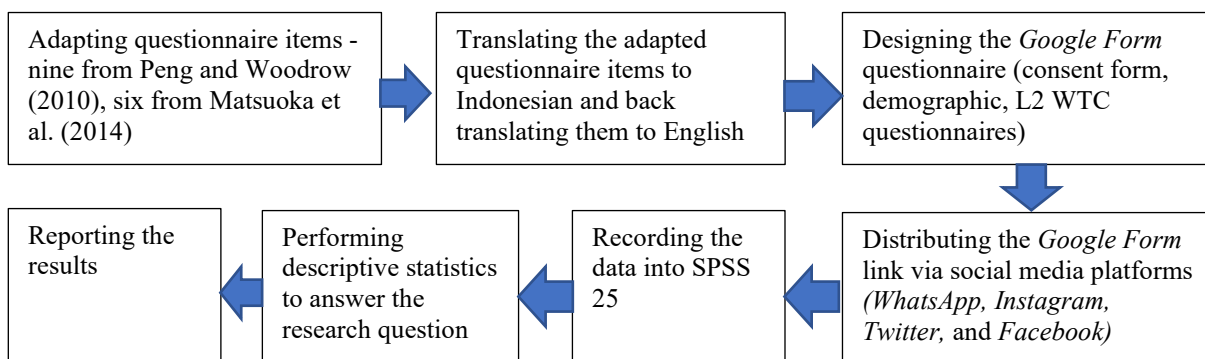
No	Islands/Regions	Number of Participants	Percentage
1	Java	37	23.3%
2	Sumatera	17	10.7%
3	Kalimantan	70	44.0%
4	Sulawesi	25	15.7%
5	Bali	2	1.3%
6	Nusa Tenggara	1	0.6%
7	Other islands or regions	7	4.4%

Involving human participants, the present study implemented beneficence and autonomy principles of research ethics (Israel & Hay, 2006). In this study, participants were provided with an online consent form along with the questionnaire items. In the consent form, each participant was provided with information regarding the purposes of the study, and their rights and responsibilities, suggesting the implementation of the beneficence principle (Jones, 2012). Learners who agreed to the details of the consent form were directed to fill out the questionnaire, whilst those who were reluctant could stop filling out the consent form immediately. This suggested the implementation of the autonomy principle where participation was voluntary (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Furthermore, this study employed a Google Form questionnaire on L2 WTC. It employed a total of fifteen Likert-scaled questionnaire items on L2 WTC. Nine items were adapted from the work of Peng and Woodrow (2010) whilst the other six items were adapted from that of Matsuoka et al. (2014). An example of the items was "I am willing to give a presentation in English in front of the class". Four possible responses were available for each statement, "Strongly agree", "Agree",

"Disagree", and "Strongly disagree". Before being distributed, these fifteen items were translated into Indonesian, the target participants' L1, to ensure that they understood all the items. Back translation was also employed to ensure the accuracy of the Indonesian translation.

The distribution of the Google Form link was conducted via social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook. All Indonesian learners at the Senior High School level could participate in this study without any restrictions or other requirements. The data collection process was conducted for around four months, from 24 September 2021 up to 4 February 2022. After the study reached a sufficient number of participants for meaningful quantitative analysis, the online questionnaire was closed and all the obtained data were recorded to SPSS 25. The Likert-scaled responses were recorded numerically as follows: "Strongly agree" was recorded as five points, "Agree" as four points, "Disagree" as two points, and "Strongly disagree" as one point. To answer the research question of this study, descriptive statistics were employed and the data were presented in the forms of mean scores and percentages. For a clearer presentation of the findings, in this report, the fifteen items are divided into four categories, "Enthusiasm to Speak English in Class" (items 1, 7, and 8), "Courage to Use English in Communication" (items 2, 11, 12, 14, and 15), "Willingness to Communicate in Small Groups" (items 3, 5, 9, 10, and 13), and "Willingness to Communicate in Pairs" (items 4 and 6). The overall sequence of data collection and analysis can be seen in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. The Sequence of Data Collection and Analysis**

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The fifteen items on L2 WTC produced Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .70 and MacDonald’s omega coefficient of .70 indicating high reliability.

From the fifteen items on L2 WTC, it was found that the highest L2 WTC obtained from the fifteen questionnaire items was 70 whilst the minimum was 28. The mean score was 54.61 (SD = 8.08). This finding indicated that the L2 WTC of Indonesian Senior High School learners was generally at a moderate level. This finding was slightly different from the finding of a study in an Indonesian university context which reported that university learner participants had high L2 WTC (Subekti, 2019b). In this case, the different levels of education of the participants may play a part. Senior

High school learners in the present study may have had formal English classes for a maximum of six years starting from their first year in Junior High School where English became a mandatory subject. Besides, English classes at secondary school levels, due to several factors such as class size and assessment types, may not be highly communicative. In comparison, the university learner participants in the study by Subekti (2019b) had obtained more English lessons throughout the years and had obtained communicative English courses at the university level. These may be differentiating factors why the participants of the present study only had a moderate level of L2 WTC.

Furthermore, the more specific findings on the first category “Willingness to Speak English in Class”, consisting of items 1, 7, and 8, can be seen in Table 2 Willingness to Speak English in Class

**Table 2. Willingness to Speak English in Class**

Item No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score	SD
1	I am willing to present arguments to all my friends in my class using English.	35.8%	47.2%	11.9%	5.1%	3.97	1.14
7	I am willing to speak and express my opinion in English in class when all my classmates listen to me.	23.3%	50.3%	18.2%	8.2%	3.62	1.25
8	I am willing to do pair and group activities in class so that I can speak in English with my classmates.	30.8%	49.7%	16.4%	3.1%	3.89	1.11

As seen in Table 2, item 1 "I am willing to present arguments to all my friends in my class using English" produced a mean score of 3.97, the highest mean score not only in this category but among all the other items. It was endorsed by 132 participants (83%), suggesting that the participants generally were enthusiastic to present their opinions in English. Though not investigating L2 WTC, a study involving 70 Indonesian High School learners also found that learners reported a high enthusiasm for learning English (Yusriyah et al., 2021). These studies may give some kind of support that, albeit several authors suggested the rather unsuccessful English instruction in Indonesian formal schools (Kirkpatrick, 2012; Yulia, 2013), Indonesian High School learners had the potential seen from their willingness to use English and enthusiasm in general. Facilitating them through providing a psychologically-safer environment where they could adopt risk-taking behaviors and be less afraid of making mistakes may be the key to more successful L2 learning. This could be related to item 7, "I am willing to speak and express my opinion in

English in class when all my classmates listen to me" obtaining a rather low mean score of 3.62, the lowest in this category. 42 participants expressed disagreement with the statement indicating their unwillingness to use English when they seemed to become the center of attention in class. A quantitative study involving 159 learners in Saudi Arabia by Hamouda (2013) also reported that 64.2% of the participants were afraid of speaking in front of others in the class. They perceived it as risky as it may cause embarrassment. In comparison, learners felt better when they were not required to face the whole class when using L2. In line with that several other studies also suggested that learners were less anxious about using L2 when they were only interacting with a small number of interlocutors such as in small group activities (Kitano, 2001; Subekti, 2018).

The findings on the second category “Courage to Use English in Communication” covering items 2, 11, 12, 14, and 15 can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3. Courage to Use English in Communication**

Item No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score	SD
2	I am willing to give a presentation in English in front of the class.	21.4%	48.4%	27.0%	3.2%	3.58	1.19
11	I am willing to answer when the teacher asks questions in English.	20.1%	54.1%	14.5%	11.3%	3.57	1.27
12	I am willing to speak English without preparation in class.	14.5%	39.6%	31.4%	14.5%	3.08	1.37
14	I am willing to give a short speech in front of my class.	28.3%	43.4%	22.0%	6.3%	3.65	1.27
15	I am willing to lead the discussion in English.	15.1%	54.1%	18.2%	12.6%	3.41	1.29

As seen in Table 3, the mean scores of all five items were rather low, ranging from 3.08 to 3.65. The highest mean score of 3.65 was obtained from item 14 "I am willing to give a short speech in front of my class." This particular finding could be interpreted in two different ways. First, seen from the angle that it produced the highest mean score in this category, the participants may be willing to use their English in front of the whole class if they were only required to speak shortly. However, seen from the disagreement from 45 participants (28.3%), the finding may strengthen several authors' reiteration that speaking in L2 in front of the whole class often becomes the specter for L2 learners (Kitano, 2001; Liu, 2006; Tallon, 2006). This may especially be the case for low-achieving learners and may also be attributed to the limited opportunity of using L2 outside the classroom context.

Furthermore, item 12 "I am willing to speak English without preparation in class" produced a low mean score of 3.08. 86 participants (54.1%) expressed their agreement whilst 73 participants (45.9%) expressed their disagreement. The majority

of the participants expressed their willingness to speak without preparation. This finding could be surprising considering that many studies reported learners' apprehension in speaking without prior preparation (Mak, 2011; Subekti, 2019a; Zia & Sulan, 2015). A quantitative study involving 115 learners in Afghanistan reported that most participants were not ready to speak without any preparation because of fear of negative evaluation. In line with that, a qualitative study involving Indonesian university learners also suggested that learners with low L2 WTC would just keep silent when required to do impromptu speaking in L2 (Subekti, 2019a). In this case, despite the finding of the present study could be a positive indication that Indonesia Senior High School learners' L2 WTC regarding impromptu performance in L2, further studies contemplating this specific issue may be necessary.

The findings on the third category of the questionnaire "Willingness to Communicate in Small Groups", consisting of items 3, 5, 9, 10, and 13, can be observed in Table 4.

**Table 4. Willingness to Communicate in Small Groups**

Item No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score	SD
3	I am willing to do English role-play in small groups.	21.4%	53.4%	20.8%	4.4%	3.67	1.16
5	I am willing to take part in English discussions in small groups.	20.8%	53.4%	17.0%	8.8%	3.60	1.24
9	In group work activities in class when the group consists of my friends, I am willing to speak in English.	21.4%	56.6%	17.6%	4.4%	3.73	1.12
10	In group work activities in class when the group does NOT consist of my friends, I am willing to speak in English.	27.0%	45.3%	17.6%	10.1%	3.62	1.32
13	I am willing to tell my group mates in English about the things I do in my spare time.	34.0%	45.8%	14.5%	5.7%	3.88	1.19

As seen in Table 4, all five items produced relatively homogenous mean scores ranging from

3.62 to 3.88. The participants were generally willing to do role play in small groups (74.80%), take part

in discussions in small groups (74.20%), speak in a group consisting of peers with whom they were familiar (78%) and they were not familiar (82.30%) as well as to tell group mates things they do in their spare time in English (79.80%). These findings somewhat aligned with the findings of several previous studies not directly investigating L2 WTC (Hahn, 2003; Wang, 2021). A qualitative study involving six L2 learners in China found that learners found confidence and interdependence in group activities in L2 classes (Wang, 2021). In South Korea, in a rather old yet relevant study involving 268 L2 learners, Hahn (2003) found that

learners generally had positive attitudes towards group work and small group work activities encouraged interactions. These fairly uniform findings supported the implementation of small group activities in L2 classes. This seems to be reasonable as in small group activities, learners tend to have more opportunity to use L2 than in whole-class discussions (Jacobs & Hall, 2002) and they tend to be less anxious to use L2 as well (Kitano, 2001).

The findings on the fourth category “Willingness to Communicate in Pairs”, consisting of items 4 and 6, can be seen in Table 5.

**Table 5. Willingness to Communicate in Pairs**

Item No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score	SD
4	I am willing to do English role-play in pairs.	29.6%	43.4%	20.1%	6.9%	3.69	1.28
6	I am willing to take part in the English discussion in pairs	23.3%	51.6%	17.6%	7.5%	3.65	1.23

As seen in Table 5, both items 4 and 6 produced relatively the same mean scores, 3.69 and 3.65 respectively. 116 participants (73%) were willing to do role plays and 119 participants (74.9%) were willing to do discussion in pairs. Finding in both statements may further indicate learners' inclination to use L2 in front of less audience. A qualitative study in Thailand by Kaweera et al. (2019) suggested the use of pair-work to discuss ideas and facilitate more confidence in using L2. Similarly, a study involving Libyan L2 learners of English in the UK also reported that the majority of the 59 learner participants agreed that pair activities made them speak English more (Almanafi & Alghatani, 2020). In pair activities, where each of the learners is required to speak in English in front of just a friend, they may not be afraid of making mistakes and be more willing to use L2 regardless of possible inaccuracies.

**CONCLUSION**

As a conclusion, several important points can be highlighted. Generally, learners reported a moderate level of L2 WTC. This includes moderate level of enthusiasm and confidence to use L2 in English class and moderate willingness to use L2 in small groups and pair work activities. However, there seems to be a gap between those with a high level of WTC and those with a low level of WTC seen from the fairly high standard deviations of the

mean scores. This may give some kind of support that on the rather unbalanced L2 WTC among L2 learners in this study.

Informed by several findings of this study, pedagogical implications can be suggested as follows. This study found that many participants did not feel confident in making a short speech and presenting in front of the class. Hence, Senior High School teachers are suggested to minimize whole-class discussion, allow learners to prepare for their L2 performance and minimize asking learners for any impromptu speeches in L2. Whilst some learner participants in this study reported their willingness to speak without preparation, this could be attributed to good language competence. Hence, teachers are advised not to ask just learners to speak in front of the class randomly. Otherwise, rather than compelling learners to practice their English, teachers are indirectly giving learners negative experiences associated with L2 which could further hamper learning, instead. Likewise, considering learners' higher L2 WTC in small group activities, Senior High School teachers should allocate more time for such activities. By providing the right amount of challenge and a clear target to be achieved, for example, clear scoring rubrics, teachers can help facilitate learners to be more responsible for their learning through small group tasks.

This present study has several limitations. It used a survey as the only method of collecting data.

Hence, the accuracy of learners' responses to reality solely depended on their honesty and seriousness in responding to the questionnaire items. The second obvious limitation was that the data collection was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic when learners had online English instructions. This situation may hinder direct interactions because there may be participants who had not experienced offline learning activities at all in Senior High School levels. This, to a certain extent, may have compromised the quality of the questionnaire data, especially on learners' L2 WTC in pair and group activities.

Despite the limitations, overall, the present study contributes to the understanding of L2 WTC among Indonesian Senior High School learners of English. It found that the participants' L2 WTC was at a moderate level. However, this general finding should be interpreted with caution. Seen from the fairly high standard deviations of the participants' responses ranging from 1.11-1.37, it can be stated that the participants were quite heterogeneous in their responses and the response values were spread out over a wider range. This could partly be attributed to the fact that the participants were from different islands and regions in Indonesia. Learners who lived in a certain region may have different L2 learning experiences from learners living in other regions. For example, some participants may be quite accustomed to communicating in English in class whilst others may be very reticent. In this case, the different instructional qualities may also play a part. For these reasons, even though considering the spread of the participants' places of residence the findings of this study may provide an early picture regarding the L2 WTC of learners having similar characteristics to those of the present study, the findings should be considered exploratory. Making definite conclusions may be too early and further investigations in the same context are necessary. A large-scale study specifically could compare the L2 WTC of Indonesian Senior High School learners from several main biggest islands in Indonesia strictly controlling the number of participants to be approximately equal. Such a study may reveal whether there is any difference in learners' L2 WTC level among learners residing in different Indonesian islands.

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