

Communicative Competence and Willingness to Communicate among Tertiary Learners: An Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

Introduction: Willingness to communicate (WTC) is essential to second-language learning, yet students differ in their readiness to communicate in English. Examining its relationship with communicative competence and the contextual factors shaping this relationship can inform language instruction that promotes active participation.

Objective: This study examined the relationship between communicative competence and WTC among tertiary learners and explored students' experiences that contextualize the quantitative findings.

Methods: An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. The quantitative phase involved 426 college students from public and private higher education institutions selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using adapted five-point Likert-scale questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The qualitative phase involved 10 students in a focus group discussion, with responses analyzed thematically.

Results: Students reported high communicative competence ($M = 3.871$, $SD = 0.884$) and WTC ($M = 3.973$, $SD = 0.953$). PLS-SEM showed a strong positive relationship between communicative competence and WTC ($\beta = .894$, $p < .001$), explaining 79.9% of the variance in WTC ($R^2 = .799$; $f^2 = 3.965$). Qualitative findings highlighted proficiency development, communication experiences, emotional responses, social support, and individual differences.

Conclusions: Communicative competence is strongly associated with tertiary learners' WTC, while social and emotional experiences also shape their readiness to communicate. The findings support instruction that develops communicative competence alongside supportive opportunities for meaningful English interaction.

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1. Introduction

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is a central factor in second-language learning because learners' knowledge of English does not necessarily translate into a readiness to use it in actual communication. Students may possess adequate language skills yet hesitate to participate because of anxiety, low confidence, fear of negative evaluation, or contextual conditions that shape their communication experiences (Ramachandran & Kaur, 2021; Alrabai, 2024; Obenza, & Mendoza, 2021). WTC is also influenced by the linguistic and social environment in which communication occurs, with supportive teacher–student relationships, positive classroom climates, and interactive learning activities generally encouraging greater participation (Wang & Peng, 2024; Hu & Wang, 2023; Yang & Yao, 2024).

Communicative competence provides an important foundation for WTC. It refers to the ability to use language effectively and appropriately across contexts, encompassing linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, functional, and strategic abilities (Rahman & Ahmed, 2017). Research indicates that learners' perceived communicative competence is positively associated with WTC, as students who feel more capable of communicating are generally more willing to initiate and sustain interaction (Shirvan et al., 2019; Ramachandran, 2021; Zhang, 2024). Nevertheless, competence alone may not guarantee willingness to communicate because affective, interpersonal, and situational factors can either facilitate or constrain learners' participation (MacIntyre, 2020; Zhou & Lochtman, 2020).

Although previous studies have established the relationship between communicative competence and WTC, findings regarding the influence of sex remain inconsistent. Several studies report minimal or nonsignificant differences between male and female learners in WTC and communicative competence, while others identify differences in self-perceived competence, communication apprehension, and interpersonal communication patterns (Sinnott & Alishah, 2021; Nasha & Kipkemboi, 2025; Sarwat et al., 2023). Moreover, much of the existing literature has examined these variables quantitatively (Dadulla & Obenza, 2026), providing limited insight into how learners' experiences, emotions, classroom environments, and interpersonal relationships shape the translation of communicative competence into willingness to communicate.

In the Philippine tertiary context, this gap warrants further attention because English remains important in academic and professional communication, while students' opportunities and confidence in using English may vary across learning environments. A mixed-methods approach can therefore provide both empirical evidence of the relationship between communicative competence and WTC and contextual insights into the experiences underlying students' communication decisions.

This study consequently examines the relationship between communicative competence and willingness to communicate among tertiary learners and explores students' experiences that help contextualize the quantitative findings. Guided primarily by MacIntyre's Heuristic Model of WTC and informed by Self-Efficacy Theory, the study seeks to contribute evidence for language-learning practices that strengthen communicative competence while creating supportive conditions for students to participate in English communication.

Theoretical Framework

The Heuristic Model of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (MacIntyre et al., 1998) in second language (L2) acquisition highlights the importance of learners' readiness to use the L2 in enhancing language learning. The model emphasizes the interplay of situational, social, and psychological factors in shaping WTC. Immediate situational factors include the topic, interlocutor, and context, while social contexts involve the classroom environment and cultural norms. Psychological factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety collectively influence a learner's readiness to communicate. The model's dynamic, hierarchical structure acknowledges that WTC is not fixed but fluctuates depending on situational variables and instantaneous changes (Borasheva, 2023; Wen & Clément, 2003).

Research consistently shows that learners with higher self-perceived communicative competence demonstrate stronger WTC, as confidence in one's language ability encourages engagement in L2

interactions (Shirvan et al., 2019; Oz & Pourfeiz, 2015; Balouchi & Samad, 2021; Tan et al., 2020). Communicative competence interacts with other factors, as its impact on WTC is mediated through confidence, motivation, and anxiety. For example, greater language proficiency fosters higher confidence, which in turn strengthens WTC. Nevertheless, WTC and communicative competence remain distinct; learners may have high competence but avoid communication due to anxiety or personality traits, while less proficient learners may still show a strong desire to participate. Meta-analyses and structural equation modeling indicate that perceived communicative competence is a stronger predictor of WTC than motivation or fear.

According to Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, learners' perceptions of their abilities directly influence motivation, persistence, and willingness to communicate (WTC). Higher self-efficacy predicts stronger WTC, which mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and perceived communicative competence, with positive correlations observed across diverse populations (Leeming et al., 2024; Šafranjić & Gak, 2023; Karimova & Ismagilova, 2020; Mehralian et al., 2023). Thus, fostering learners' self-efficacy and confidence is essential for promoting active participation and effective L2 use.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

Mixed-methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex research problems. By combining the strengths of both approaches, researchers can generate richer and more nuanced findings while addressing the limitations of relying on a single method (Fetters et al., 2013; Bazeley, 2024). Among mixed-methods designs, the Explanatory Sequential Design involves collecting and analyzing quantitative data first, followed by qualitative data to further explain, elaborate, or contextualize the quantitative findings. This design is particularly useful when qualitative evidence is needed to provide deeper insight into statistical patterns and participants' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Jenkins et al., 2023; Toyon, 2021). In this study, the design provides a structured approach for examining the relationship between communicative competence and willingness to communicate while using learners' qualitative accounts to contextualize the quantitative results.

2.2. Respondents and Sampling Procedure

The study involved 426 college students from both private and public higher education institutions. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants on a voluntary basis. Consistent with the explanatory sequential design, the quantitative phase involved the administration and analysis of survey data, followed by a qualitative phase to further explore and contextualize the quantitative findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Jenkins et al., 2023; Toyon, 2021). The qualitative phase included 10 college students from various programs, including Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Early Childhood Education, Business Administration, Tourism Management, Engineering, and Nursing. These participants were recruited voluntarily through convenience sampling.

2.3. Research Instruments and Data Collection

The researchers adapted two questionnaires as the primary instruments for the quantitative phase. The Communicative Competence questionnaire was adapted from Ivana and Hamidović (2022), while the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) questionnaire was adapted from Zhang and Zhang (2024). Both instruments employed a five-point Likert scale. The survey was administered through Google Forms to participants recruited on a voluntary basis through convenience sampling. Prior to data collection, an a priori power analysis using G*Power 3.1.9.6 indicated a minimum sample size of 89 participants to achieve 80% statistical power for detecting a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) at $\alpha = .05$. The final sample of 426 participants exceeded this requirement. The 10-times rule was also considered in assessing sample adequacy (Hair et al., 2011). For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview guide containing 10 questions adapted from Zhang and Zhang (2024) was used to explore participants' experiences related to WTC. The qualitative sessions lasted approximately 15–20 minutes. The responses

to the quantitative items were interpreted using the following mean ranges: 4.20–5.00 = Very High; 3.40–4.19 = High; 2.60–3.39 = Moderate; 1.80–2.59 = Low; and 1.00–1.79 = Very Low.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Descriptive statistics were computed using Jamovi to summarize the levels of the study constructs. PLS-SEM was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0 to assess the measurement and structural models and examine the hypothesized relationship between communicative competence and willingness to communicate (WTC). The measurement model was evaluated for internal consistency reliability and construct validity. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used to assess reliability, while Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to assess convergent validity and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) to assess discriminant validity. Multicollinearity was examined using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The structural model was assessed through the path coefficient, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS 4.0 to determine the significance of the hypothesized relationship.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles for research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to decline or withdraw from participation without penalty. Informed consent was obtained before the administration of the questionnaire and participation in the qualitative discussion. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected throughout the study. No personally identifying information was included in the presentation or publication of findings. Quantitative responses were treated confidentially, while qualitative participants were assigned codes instead of names in reporting their statements. Data collected through Google Forms and the qualitative sessions were accessed only for research purposes and were securely stored by the researchers. The study involved minimal risk, as the questions focused primarily on students' communicative competence, willingness to communicate, and related learning experiences. Participants were not required to disclose sensitive personal information and could decline to answer any question that caused discomfort. The researchers also ensured that participation did not affect students' academic standing or relationship with their institution. The researchers maintained academic integrity by accurately recording, analyzing, and reporting the quantitative and qualitative findings. No data were fabricated, altered, or selectively omitted to influence the results. Appropriate acknowledgment was provided for all adapted instruments and published sources. The researchers likewise observed applicable institutional requirements and secured the necessary permissions before conducting data collection.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Assessment of Measurement Model

Finding the measurement model's validity and reliability is the first stage in structural equation modeling Hair et al, 2017. Cronbach's alpha assesses internal consistency by showing how strongly a group of items relate to one another. It is typically applied to scales designed to measure a single underlying construct (Liptáková, 2025; Izah & Hait, 2023; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011; Spiliotopoulou, 2009). Composite Reliability (ρ_a) offers a more precise measure of internal consistency, particularly useful in structural equation modeling (SEM) and for congeneric indicators that have varying factor loadings (Khademi et al., 2024; Panahi & Mirzaie, 2023; Nia et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2021).

Table 1 shows the reliability results for the study's instruments, highlighting Cronbach's alpha as the most suitable measure for evaluating their consistency. The Cronbach's alpha values for the questionnaires are as follows: .968 for the General Evaluation (GE), .985 for the Linguistic Competence (LC), .966 for the Sociolinguistic Competence (SC), .961 for the Discourse Competence (DC), .960 for the Functional Competence (FC), .954 for the Strategic Competence (SemC), .961 for the Communicative Competence (CC) variable, .966 for the Speaking Task Traits (STT), .969 for the Individual Differences (ID), .964 for the Teachers and Peers (TP), .944 for the Self-perception of

English Language Proficiency (SELP), and .961 for the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) variable. With Cronbach's alpha values between .944 and .985, all instruments show excellent internal consistency (SI), indicating that their items are highly correlated and reliably measure their intended constructs. For internal consistency, ≥ 0.70 is typically regarded as the minimum acceptable number, however 0.80 – 0.90 indicates good to excellent reliability (Asaye et al., 2022; Kılıç, 2016; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

The composite reliability test by Jöreskog (2025) evaluates how consistently a set of indicators measures a latent construct, taking into consideration the differing contributions of each item according to its factor loadings. It offers a more accurate estimate of reliability than Cronbach's alpha, where scores over 0.7 are deemed acceptable and those exceeding 0.8 are preferred for well-established scales. GE (0.968), LC (0.985), SC (0.966), DC (0.961), FC (0.960), SemC (.954), CC (.961), STT (.966), ID (.969), TP (.964) SELP (.944) and WTC (0.961) show values above 0.7, indicating that all fall within acceptable reliability levels. In general, composite reliability scores higher than 0.7 are regarded as satisfactory (Kusumawardan et al, 2016). The convergent validity of the instruments was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Convergent validity is shown by (Cheung et al., 2023; Ferreira et al., 2020; Clark and Watson, 2019) when various tools or approaches intended to assess the same construct produce comparable outcomes or exhibit high correlations. GE (0.886), LC (0.879), SC (0.906), DC (0.896), FC (0.896), SemC (.915), CC (.895), STT (.831), ID (.864), TP (.903) SELP (.900) and WTC (0.896) all constructs had AVE values surpassing the 0.50 threshold, reported AVE values in prior studies are all greater than 0.50 (ranging from 0.61 to 0.73), lending additional support to the model's robustness (Tosun et al., 2024).

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
General Evaluation	.968	.968	.975	.886
Linguistic Competence	.985	.985	.986	.879
Sociolinguistic Competence	.966	.966	.975	.906
Discourse Competence	.961	.962	.972	.896
Functional Competence	.960	.961	.971	.896
Strategic Competence	.954	.954	.970	.915
Communicative Competence	.961	.961	.972	.895
Speaking Task Traits	.966	.970	.972	.831
Individual Differences	.969	.969	.974	.864
Teachers and Peers	.964	.964	.974	.903
Self-perception of English Language Proficiency	.944	.945	.964	.900
Willingness to Communicate (WTC)	.961	.962	.972	.896

The Mean and Standard Deviation values were the next test used. As a measure of central tendency, the mean according to Yaska and Nuhu (2024) indicates the dataset's midpoint and helps describe the usual value observed in a sample while the standard deviation (SD) according to Rakrak (2025) measures how widely data points are distributed around the mean. With values ranging from 3.71 to 4.15, the mean scores for all categories reflect generally positive impressions, indicating that respondents tend to agree or exhibit favorable views toward the constructs measured (Vanier et al., 2021; De Los Reyes, 2019). While SELP had the lowest mean, it was still within a positive range. TP, and ID obtained the highest ratings, indicating strong positive influences in these areas. For a normal distribution, about 68% of scores are expected to fall one SD above or below the mean. Given SDs of 0.85–0.98, the majority of responses cluster within approximately one unit of the mean (Rakrak, 2025). With general evaluation presented the highest mean among communicative competence components implies an integrated strategy that makes use of the interaction of all parts is necessary for effective communicative competence.

This method goes beyond simple language accuracy to include essential components of cultural awareness, adaptability, and context sensitivity for successful real-world communication (Shaik, 2024; Du, 2025; Fedorenko, 2021; Bosa et al., 2025). Meanwhile, teachers and peers presented the highest mean among willingness to communicate (WTC), teacher support indirectly increases WTC by increasing students' enjoyment and self-efficacy its impacts are more pronounced for students who have a growth mindset or greater grit. It has been demonstrated that peer assistance is just as crucial as instructor help, particularly when it comes to peer-led feedback and group projects. Since peer-directed feedback promotes a sense of community and lessens the fear of making mistakes (Hejazi et al., 2023, Yang et al., 2024; Xu & Pan, 2025; Jelínková et al., 2024; Warrick, 2024; Ducke, 2021; Muhammad & Ismail, 2024).

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Description

Constructs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
General Evaluation	3.998	.931	High
Linguistic Competence	3.785	.879	High
Sociolinguistic Competence	3.903	.857	High
Discourse Competence	3.789	.852	High
Functional Competence	3.769	.853	High
Strategic Competence	3.979	.900	High
Communicative Competence	3.871	.884	High
Speaking Task Traits	3.897	.976	High
Individual Differences	4.13	.939	High
Teachers and Peers	4.15	.898	High
Self-perception of English	3.715	.930	High
Language Proficiency			
Willingness to Communicate (WTC)	3.973	.953	High

3.2. Assessment of Structural Model

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is a common tool for assessing multicollinearity in regression analysis. It highlights predictors that might weaken the stability of regression estimates, though it should be evaluated together with other diagnostics and model factors (Kalnins & Hill, 2023; Murray et al., 2012; Kyriazos & Poga, 2023). Ideal thresholds for VIF values range from less than 3.5 up to 5.0, indicating that the constructs do not exhibit multicollinearity problems (Becker et al., 2014). As presented in Table 3, all constructs fall within acceptable limits, indicating no substantial

multicollinearity concerns. This strengthens the reliability and validity of the regression results and confirms that the constructs are suitable for inclusion in the model.

Table 3. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Structural Path	VIF
Communicative Competence -> CCGE	1.000
Communicative Competence -> CCLC	1.000
Communicative Competence -> CCSC	1.000
Communicative Competence -> CCDC	1.000
Communicative Competence -> CCFC	1.000
CCSemC -> Communicative Competence	1.000
Willingness to Communicate -> WTCSTT	1.000
Willingness to Communicate -> WTCID	1.000
Willingness to Communicate -> WTCTP	1.000
Willingness to Communicate -> WTCSELP	1.000
Communicative Competence -> Willingness to Communicate	1.000

The findings of this study indicate a strong, highly significant positive relationship between communicative competence and willingness to communicate (WTC) ($\beta = 0.894$, $p < 0.000$, $f^2 = 0.3.965$) which convey the predictor and outcome variables, with a large effect size. Multiple studies, such as extensive meta-analyses and structural equation modeling, consistently demonstrate a high positive link between second language learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) and communicative competence, which is frequently evaluated as self-perceived communicative competence. When compared to other variables like anxiety or motivation, perceived communicative competence emerges as the most significant predictor of WTC. This relationship is strong across a variety of cultural and educational situations (Shirvan et al., 2019; Jin & Lee, 2022; Zhou & Lochtmann, 2020; Zhang, 2024; Amirian et al., 2020). These findings support prior studies of Sarwat et al. (2023), Mutar et al. (2024), Zhang (2024), and Amirian et al. (2020) which state both males and females have a positive correlation between communicative competence and willingness to communicate (WTC), and the majority of research indicates that there are no appreciable sex-based variations in the degree of this correlation. The overall beneficial correlation is unaffected by small variations in mean WTC and communicative competence scores by sex, according to several researches (Albooni & Ishag, 2020; Görgülü & Uğurlu, 2022; Salvador, 2023). This is in contrary to the study of Darasawang and Reinders (2021) communicative competence and willingness to communicate (WTC) were shown to be only weakly to moderately correlated in a study of Thai university students, with self-confidence being a bigger predictor than true communicative competence.

Table 4. Path Coefficients

Endogenous Construct	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	f-square
Communicative Competence -> Willingness to Communicate	0.894	0.893	0.008	105.422	0.000	3.965
	R-square	R-square adjusted				
Willingness to Communicate	0.799	0.798				

The R-squared (R^2) and Adjusted R^2 values represent the proportion of variance explained by the model. The variance presented for willingness to communicate (WTC) is 79.9 which suggests a strong relationship between the predictors (independent variable) which is the communicative competence and the outcome (dependent variable) the WTC.

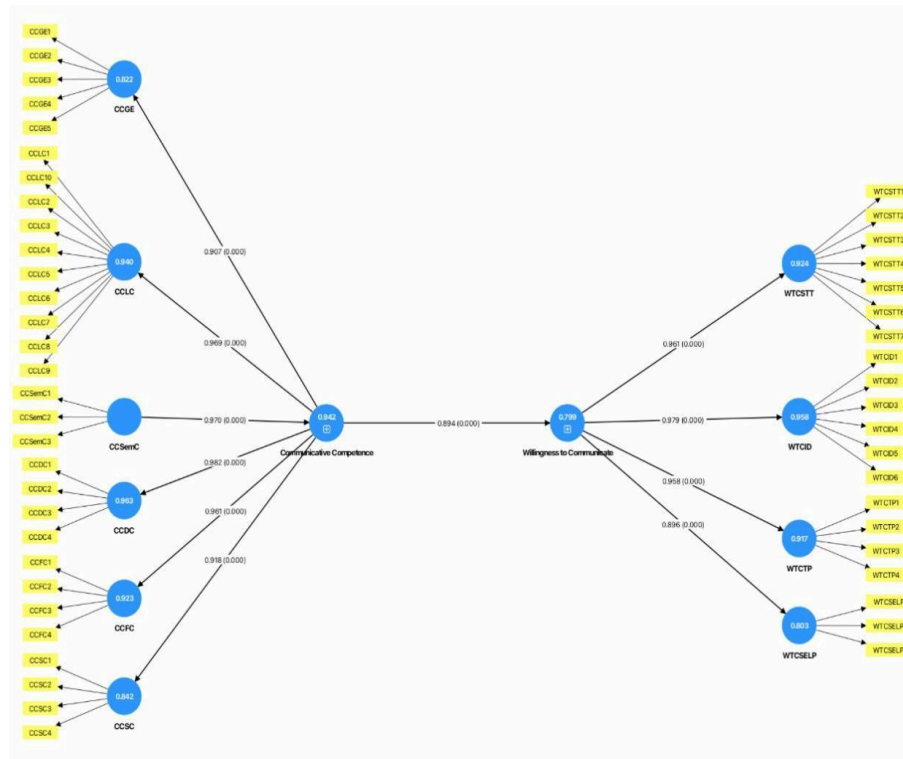


Figure 1. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) Results using Smart PLS 4.0

3.3. Thematic Analysis of Precedent Interview Data

The thematic analysis of precedent interview data aims to identify and organize common patterns or themes that appear in participants' responses. It opens understanding on the key ideas and meanings within the data in a clear and structured way in particular the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among participants. The themes were identified through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted via face-to-face interview comprised of Male and Female participants with a code of M for Male, then F for Female before the code numbers.

Table 5. Thematic Elements and Corresponding Thematic Responses

Essential themes	Thematic statements
English Proficiency Development Across Educational Levels	<i>"From elementary to college, English learning progressed from basic vocabulary to more complex academic tasks such as presentations and written reports."</i> -Participant 3F
	<i>"Increased exposure through media, school activities, and social interactions strengthened familiarity with the language."</i> -Participant 9M
	<i>"Over time, repeated classroom practices and real-life engagements helped build confidence. As I matured, English shifted from a school subject to an essential communication tool in academic and professional settings."</i> -Participant 2F

	<i>"We usually speak in English during class recitations, group presentations, and sometimes when we communicate with teachers. We also use English when chatting online or writing academic papers. Occasionally, we try to speak English with our friends just to practice and improve our fluency."</i> -Participant 1F
English Usage in Formal and Informal Settings	<i>"I usually speak English during class recitations, group presentations, and when communicating with teachers. Sometimes, I also use English in casual conversations with classmates, especially when we practice for oral activities or public speaking tasks."</i> -Participant 4M <i>"I use informal speaking when joking around with classmates or expressing opinions in casual conversations. Both help us use English in different contexts."</i> -Participant 5F
Emotional Responses to Speaking English	<i>"Speaking in English brings me a mix of feelings: a little fear and a lot of eagerness. The fear comes from the possibility of making a mistake or not knowing some words."</i> -Participant 10M <i>"At first, I felt nervous and shy, especially when speaking in front of many people. But over time, I realized that using English helps us grow academically and personally. Now, we see English speaking as an opportunity to express ourselves better and improve our communication skills."</i> -Participant 7F <i>"I often feel nervous or shy when speaking English, but I am becoming more confident and see mistakes as part of the learning process."</i> -Participant 8M
Environment, Peers, and Teachers Support Influences	<i>"I feel more willing to speak when the teacher is encouraging, the topic is interesting, and our classmates are supportive and respectful."</i> -Participant 4M <i>"When the teacher is approachable and classmates are respectful, we feel more comfortable speaking. On the other hand, if the environment feels judgmental, we tend to hold back."</i> -Participant 5F <i>"Within the ESL classrooms, our willingness to speak in English is impacted by the teacher's approach, classmates' behaviors, and the atmosphere of the classroom. If the teacher is supportive, patient, and makes us feel questions and mistakes are okay, we feel more comfortable in speaking English."</i> -Participant 6M
Individual Differences	<i>"I feel that having a lot of support from friends or teachers will enhance our willingness to engage in English speaking more frequently."</i> -Participant 4M <i>"I am unwilling when we're unsure of our grammar or pronunciation, or when I fear being judged. In those moments, we tend to stay quiet or switch to our native language."</i> -Participant 5F

During the interview, the researcher observed the Five recurring themes identified as follows: English Proficiency Development Across Educational Levels, English Usage in Formal and Informal Settings, Emotional Responses to Speaking English, Environment, Peers, and Teachers Support Influence, and Individual Differences.

English Proficiency Development Across Educational Levels. As students move from early childhood to higher education, English proficiency development is an organized, multi-stage process that involves the growing acquisition of language abilities for both social and academic purposes. It is evaluated and encouraged through specific frameworks (Vega-Abarzúa et al., 2025; Demie, 2018 Hadiani et al., 2025). Research indicates although there is considerable diversity both within and between levels, that English proficiency generally rises with educational advancement. For instance, many university students are still in the intermediate or "developing" phases, particularly in

academic writing and vocabulary, and undergraduates frequently show lesser skill than postgraduates (Ukhrowi & Qani'ah, 2025; Vega-Abarzúa et al., 2025; Demie, 2018; Samillano & Pastolero, 2025). The result supports these studies that development of English proficiency is aided by a wide variety of teaching methods and approaches that change as students' advance through the educational system. Modern strategies like flipped classrooms, digital storytelling, and gamification greatly increase engagement, oral proficiency, and practical language use, particularly at the secondary level, but traditional methods like grammar translation and lecture-based instruction are still beneficial for basic grammar and reading (Dewi et al., 2025; Setyowati et al., 2025).

English Usage in Formal and Informal Settings. Formal English is distinguished by its objective tone, precision, clarity, and organized, impersonal style, typically used in academic, professional, legal, and official settings. Informal English features a more relaxed style, straightforward expression, implied meanings, and a personal, conversational tone, making it suitable for casual, social, and familiar interactions (Hyland & Jiang, 2017; Riyanto & Ardianto, 2023). Formal English is generally used in situations involving hierarchy or unfamiliar relationships, such as in professional or academic contexts. In contrast, informal English is common in interactions with peers, friends, or family. These differences appear in both written forms like emails or letters and spoken exchanges, with the level of formality adjusting depending on the purpose, audience, and context (Riyanto & Ardianto, 2023).

Emotional Responses to Speaking English. The spectrum of pleasant and negative emotions, bodily reactions, and psychological states that people encounter when speaking English, particularly as a second or foreign language, is referred to as emotional responses to speaking English. These reactions, which can have a big impact on language learning and speaking performance, include feelings like worry, fear, shyness, lack of confidence, hope, delight, and pride. In addition to being subjective sentiments, emotional responses also involve quantifiable physiological changes such as skin conductivity and heart rate variability and are impacted by both internal such as self-efficacy and emotional intelligence and external which are peer reactions and the classroom environment elements. Speaking performance can be impeded by negative emotions, which lower willingness to communicate, engagement, and fluency. Positive feelings improve engagement, motivation, and language learning results (Santos et al., 2020; Nurmasadah et al., 2022; Rahmadani & Etfita, 2022; Li, 2025; Ravichandran & Amran, 2024; Mentari & Zumam, 2025; Sun, 2024; Piniel & Albert, 2018)

Environment, Peers, and Teachers Support Influence. Higher WTC is reliably predicted by positive feedback, autonomous support, and teacher encouragement. Students are more likely to engage in communication when they get teacher support because it lowers language fear, improves enjoyment, and increases self-efficacy. Particularly in online and group environments, cooperative activities and encouraging peer interactions promote a feeling of community, lessen anxiety about receiving a poor grade, and boost incentive to talk. Higher WTC is closely correlated with a supportive, engaging, and emotionally safe atmosphere that is marked by task orientation, student cohesion, and instructor immediacy (Hejaz et al., 2023; Borasheva, 2024; Liu & Fan, 2024; Zarrinabadi et al., 2021; Kun et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2024; Tauchid 2025; Jelínková et al., 2024; Salbaş & Ekmekçi, 2025).

Individual Differences. Age, gender, major, and socioeconomic status also contribute to individual differences in willingness to communicate (WTC). For example, some studies find females may have higher WTC in certain contexts, and socioeconomic status can positively predict WTC (Cheng & Xu, 2022; Li & Li, 2022). Willingness to communicate traits refer to steady, personality-based communication tendency that holds true across a variety of contexts. Extraversion, openness to new experiences, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and self- confidence are some of the characteristics that affect it. A dynamic, situation-specific communication aim that varies based on the topic, interlocutors, emotional state, and context. State WTC is subject to change and is impacted by variables such as motivation, anxiety, and perceived opportunity (Zhang et al., 2020; Syed & Kuzborska, 2019; Yashima et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2019).

Table 6. Joint Display of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Thematic Statements	Integrated Interpretation
Teachers and peers presented the highest mean among willingness to communicate (WTC) domains.	<i>“Within the ESL classrooms, our willingness to speak in English is impacted by the teacher's approach, classmates' behaviors, and the atmosphere of the classroom. If the teacher is supportive, patient, and makes us feel questions and mistakes are okay, we feel more comfortable in speaking English.”</i>	Students are encouraged to contribute orally in a psychologically safe environment created by supporting instructional techniques and favorable peer interactions. As a result, the social climate in the classroom becomes a crucial factor in determining students' WTC, highlighting the significance of compassionate instruction, group projects, and a safe space for communication in promoting active English language usage.
This study presented a high mean on Self-perception of English Language Proficiency as one of the domains of willingness to communicate (WTC).	<i>“From elementary to college, English learning progressed from basic vocabulary to more complex academic tasks such as presentations and written reports.”</i>	This development implies that learners' sense of competence has been reinforced by regular exposure to progressively challenging English activities across educational levels. Students are more likely to start conversations and participate fully in English-mediated activities when they believe they are competent. Long-term, scaffolded language learning experiences strengthen learners' self-perceived proficiency, which in turn increases their willingness to communicate.
Individual Differences among one of willingness to communicate (WTC) domains also showed the second highest mean among domains which is interpreted high.	<i>“I am unwilling when we're unsure of our grammar or pronunciation, or when I fear being judged. In those moments, we tend to stay quiet or switch to our native language.”</i> <i>“I feel that having a lot of support from friends or teachers will enhance our willingness to engage in English speaking more frequently.”</i>	These results show that learners' emotional states and the social support they get shape individual differences, which are not fixed. As a result, the domain's high mean emphasizes how important felt emotional safety and self-assurance are to students' WTC, underscoring the necessity of teaching strategies that normalize communicative risks and foster self-assurance.
The findings of this study indicate a strong, highly significant positive relationship between communicative competence and willingness to communicate (WTC) ($\beta = 0.894$, $p < 0.000$, $f^2 = 0.3.965$).	<i>“When speaking in front of many people. But over time, I realized that using English helps us grow academically and personally. Now, we see English speaking as an opportunity to express ourselves better and improve our communication skills.”</i>	This reflection demonstrates how improving communicative competence lowers anxiety and turns using English from a source of fear into a useful tool for academic advancement and self-expression. Enhanced communicative competence empowers learners, boosts their confidence, and immediately promotes their willingness to speak in English, especially in more difficult communicative contexts.

The variance presented for willingness to communicate (WTC) is 79.9 which suggests a strong relationship between the predictors

“Over time, repeated classroom practices and real-life engagements helped build confidence. As I matured, English shifted from a school subject to an essential communication tool in academic and professional settings.

This demonstrates how the predictors that affect WTC are reinforced by continued language use, developmental maturity, and real-world communicative experiences. All of these results point to a strong overall model fit, suggesting that the predictors significantly influence learners' willingness to communicate by promoting both skill development and functional appreciation of English.

4. Conclusion

The findings provide evidence that the instruments used to assess communicative competence and willingness to communicate (WTC) demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity within the present sample. Students reported generally high levels of communicative competence and WTC, with teacher and peer support receiving particularly high ratings. These findings highlight the importance of combining communicative skill development with supportive and interactive learning environments that encourage student participation. The qualitative findings further indicated that students' willingness to communicate was shaped by their English-language development, communication experiences, emotional responses, teacher and peer support, classroom environment, and individual differences. The findings suggest that strengthening students' communicative competence may be an important component of fostering greater willingness to communicate. Language programs should therefore provide meaningful opportunities for English interaction, collaborative learning, constructive feedback, and confidence-building activities. Rather than emphasizing linguistic competence alone, educators should create supportive environments in which students can apply their communication skills across academic and authentic contexts.

5. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the quantitative participants were recruited through convenience sampling on a voluntary basis, which may limit the representativeness of the sample and the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of tertiary learners. Although the study included 426 respondents, participants were drawn from selected higher education institutions and academic programs, and the findings may therefore reflect the characteristics of the participating learners and institutions.

Second, the study relied primarily on self-reported questionnaire data to measure communicative competence and willingness to communicate. Such measures may be influenced by participants' self-perceptions, response tendencies, or social desirability and may not fully represent their actual communicative performance or behavior. The strong relationship observed between the constructs should therefore be interpreted within the context of self-reported measures.

Third, the study employed a cross-sectional design, with data collected at a single period. Consequently, the findings establish statistical associations rather than temporal or causal relationships between communicative competence and WTC. Longitudinal or experimental research would be needed to determine whether changes in communicative competence result in corresponding changes in willingness to communicate.

Fourth, the qualitative component involved only 10 participants who voluntarily participated in a face-to-face focus group discussion. Although their accounts provided contextual insights into the quantitative findings, the experiences reported may not represent all tertiary learners or all institutional contexts. The qualitative findings should therefore be understood as contextual explanations rather than broadly generalizable evidence.

Finally, the study focused primarily on the relationship between communicative competence and willingness to communicate. Other factors identified in the literature and qualitative findings, including communication anxiety, self-efficacy, motivation, classroom climate, teacher support, peer relationships, and individual differences were not directly modeled as predictors in the quantitative analysis. Future research may incorporate these psychological, interpersonal, and contextual variables, as well as longitudinal or comparative designs, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing tertiary learners' willingness to communicate.

Supplementary Details

Supplementary Materials & Data availability statement:

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality restrictions, as they contain information that could compromise the anonymity of the research participants.

Author Contributions:

Rolando B. Teringtering Jr.: Conceptualization, methodology, participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, qualitative data coding and thematic analysis, interpretation of findings, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, and supervision. The author reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and accepts responsibility for its content.

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Not applicable. The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Necessary permissions were obtained from the concerned educational authorities and participating higher education institutions prior to data collection.

Informed Consent Statement:

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, and their right to decline or withdraw from the study without penalty.

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Conflicts of Interest:

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Disclosure Statement:

The author used Grammarly solely for language editing and proofreading. No artificial intelligence tools were used in the collection, analysis, or generation of the study's results. The author reviewed and verified the manuscript and takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of its contents.

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