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The Effect of Regulatory Focus Orientations on Iranian EFL learners' Speaking Fluency and Willingness to Communicate

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Abstract

The Regulatory Focus Theory, a classic self-regulatory approach, posits that human behavior is significantly influenced by salient standards and reference points that are either situation-dependent or chronically accessible in a person's mind. This study examined the impact of regulatory focus orientations, namely prevention and promotion, on the willingness of Iranian EFL learners to communicate in an English class. We selected 48 upper-intermediate-level students via the Oxford Placement test. These students were divided into three groups: promotion-focused, prevention-focused, and control. The promotion-focused group was encouraged through positive reinforcement of their success and accomplishments when using correct linguistic features during class. Conversely, the prevention-focused group was immediately corrected when a linguistic error occurred to avoid further mistakes, and no praise was given for correct language use. The control group received no intervention. Results derived from a one-way ANOVA demonstrated a significant relationship between the regulatory focus orientation and students' willingness to communicate. EFL learners exposed to promotion techniques demonstrated a higher willingness to communicate. The paper concludes with a discussion on the theoretical implications and pedagogical applications of the study.

Keywords: Iranian EFL learners, regulatory focus orientations, speaking fluency, willingness to communicate, promotion-focused, prevention-focused

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1. Introduction

The Regulatory Focus Theory, first proposed by Higgins (1997), holds immense significance in psychology and related disciplines. Built on the hedonic principle, it posits that all people strive to attain pleasure and circumvent pain. Central to the RFT is the notion that people devise unique pain/pleasure objectives, dictating the strategic orientation they employ in their pursuit of goals. Specifically, maximal goals (such as ideals, gains, and advances) prompt individuals to adopt a promotion-focused strategy known as ‘eagerness.’ In contrast, minimal goals (like obligations, avoiding losses, and safety) yield an adoption of a prevention-focused strategy, referred to as “vigilance.” The identification of these goals and corresponding strategies supports differential predictions of affect, cognition, motivation, and behavior in the self-regulation process across various occupational, hierarchical, social, and temporal contexts (Baas et al., 2008; Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Sassenberg & Hamstra, 2017; Sassenberg & Wolfin, 2009). Consequently, regulatory focus serves as a framework for examining various organizational practices, including leadership, motivation, work behavior, performance management, recruitment and selection, and training and development.

Fluency, the ultimate goal of all foreign language learners, equates to speaking with ease, considerable speed, and minimal pausing (Ellis, 2005). As integral aspects of communicative competence and effective speaking, fluency facilitates comprehensible and continuous communication despite limitations in one's mastery of language. Richards (2006) posits that fluency underscores naturally occurring language during meaningful communication. Bohn (2015) characterizes fluent speech by a low count of corrections and fillers, while Harmer (2015) lends a broader perspective, stating that fluency pertains to the ability to communicate a desired message effectively.

Fluency encompasses two primary dimensions. The first, posited by Lennon (2004), is a ‘narrow approach’ that emphasizes speaking speed and the smoothness of the language delivery. In contrast, the ‘broad approach’ by (Kopenen & Riggerback, 2000) takes into account semantic density, appropriateness of expression, the language user’s creativity, and additional sociolinguistic components. While various factors impact speaking skill, one crucial factor is the ‘willingness to communicate.’ This concept was adopted in the L2 context to identify variables contributing to L2 learners’ psychological preparedness to initiate communication (Xie, 2011). According to Clement et al., (2003), willingness to communicate serves as the immediate determinant of L2 use. Initially introduced as a personality tendency by McCroskey and Richmond (1991), it alludes to students’ motivation to engage in communication with others. As Dornyei (2003) argues, mere L2 competence is insufficient: learners must also demonstrate a willingness to communicate in the new language. Those with a high level of willingness are more likely to achieve success and engage in real classroom communication. Research corroborates that willingness to communicate affects learners’ frequency of active participation in L2 classroom communication (Clement et al., 2003).

Thus, a learner's inclination to communicate hinges not only on psychological aspects but also on social and linguistic factors. Consequently, in distinct contexts, learners will display varying degrees of willingness to communicate.

Some factors that affect students' language learning and the development of speaking fluency include their motives to engage and persist in activities, which are influenced by their regulatory focus orientation. Regulatory focus theory is a classic self-regulatory approach to the study of human motivation that assumes human behavior is heavily influenced by the standards and reference points that are salient and relevant in a given situation or chronically accessible in the individual's mind (Keller, 2008). Regulatory focus theory specifies two basic modes of self-regulation: promotion-focused and prevention-focused self-regulation (Higgins, 2000, 2001). EFL learners are also affected by regulatory focus orientation. L2 learners with a promotion focus take advantage of every opportunity they encounter to use the target language (Papi & Khajavy, 2021) and are risk-takers (Scholer et al., 2010). On the other hand, L2 learners with a prevention focus, who are more risk-averse, have lower levels of speaking competence due to their tendency to minimize the possibility of making errors by avoiding the unnecessary use of L2.

The central premise of willingness to communicate in an L2 context revolves around whether students utilize English during interactions or what encourages or discourages them from engaging with others (Fallah, 2014; Hüseyin et al., 2015). Despite the body of research investigating the factors moderating L2 WTC, a significant gap remains in empirical studies specific to English language teaching. This gap is particularly pronounced in studies aimed at enhancing L2 students' willingness to communicate, especially through regulatory focus instruction. Minimal research investigates the connection between regulatory focus and willingness to communicate, as noted by (Zarinabadi & Saberi, 2021). Moreover, additional study is needed to better comprehend how to develop speaking fluency through promotional and preventive strategies. Consequently, this study aims to bridge this literature gap and examine these relationships in finer detail. The proposed research hypotheses for this study are as follows:

Ho1. Regulatory focus- orientation does not have any significant effect on involving students in communication.

Ho2. Regulatory focus orientation does not have any significant effect on improving fluency of speech among Iranian EFL learners.

2. Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework of this study is rooted in Regulatory Focus Theory. Higgins' (1997) regulatory focus theory underscores two motivational systems guiding an individual's goal-directed behaviors: the promotion system and the prevention system. In the promotion system, characterized by goal achievement, individuals with a predominant promotion focus are concerned with accomplishments, advancement, and growth. Conversely, in the prevention system, marked by

loss avoidance, individuals with a dominant prevention focus prioritize security, safety, and stability. Crowe and Higgins (1997) suggest that promotion and prevention foci also denote different strategic approaches to goal attainment. Individuals with a promotion focus tend to demonstrate an eager strategic propensity in their goal pursuit to maximize their chances for realizing gains, albeit with the risk of errors (Schokker et al., 2010). Conversely, individuals with a prevention focus are likely to exhibit a vigilant strategic tendency to minimize losses and avoid erroneous decisions (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Therefore, promotion and prevention foci signify two qualitatively different, chronic motivational systems, distinguished by the goals that inspire individuals (growth vs. security) as well as the strategic tendencies (eager vs. vigilant) they employ to realize these goals.

Regulatory Focus Theory generally regards pleasure and pain as psychological endpoints. However, instead of using affect to define these ends, Higgins (1998) adds a new dimension, distinguishing between ideal self-guides and ought self-guides as positive endpoints. Higgins defines ideal self-guides as the attributes that an individual or another person would ideally like one to possess, reflecting hopes, wishes, or aspirations (Higgins, 1987). Conversely, ought self-guides represent the attributes someone believes one should or ought to possess, related to duties, obligations, or responsibilities. Individuals strive to minimize discrepancies between their current situation and these desired endpoints. However, strategies vary depending on whether the endpoint is an ideal or an ought self-guide. Specifically, for ideal self-guides, individuals adopt approach-oriented strategies to match the desired state. In contrast, for ought self-guides, they use avoidance-oriented strategies to prevent mismatches. For instance, an excellent exam score, an ideal self-guide, is linked with praise, while not achieving it results in a lack of praise. Conversely, failing an exam brings punishment, whereas passing, an ought self-guide, is associated with avoiding punishment. Higgins (1998) suggests that the unique reward/punishment structures of the two self-guides should motivate individuals to strive towards ideal self-guide rewards and avoid discrepancies with ought self-guide punishments.

In relation to prevention and promotion, the state linked with an ideal self-guide is termed as the promotion focus, while the state connected with an ought self-guide is termed the prevention focus. Regulatory focus is not a fixed property, unlike certain personality traits; rather it can be activated based on situational contexts. The activation of a specific RF can occur through highlighting potential rewards or punishments, relating to specific self-guides. For instance, individuals who face the threat of punishment for failing to achieve something should find themselves in a state of prevention focus. This is compared to those who are offered rewards for accomplishing something, even if the outcomes of achieving or not achieving something are formally identical.

3. Empirical Background

Davoudian et al., (2021) explored the performance of L2 students with different motivational orientations on oral tasks. They first categorized 52 intermediate students into two groups: prevention-oriented or promotion-oriented, based on each student's primary motivational orientation. The study was conducted in two stages: initially, with a conditionally neutral speaking task (regulating focus) and then with two conditionally charged speaking tasks, each task designed to induce either a prevention or promotion condition in the test-takers. The objective was to observe how the task condition and the participants' motivational orientation interacted (regulatory fit). However, the results did not reveal a significant causal relationship between participants' motivational orientation or task condition, and their fluency or accuracy during the tasks.

Zarinabadi and Saberi (2021) researched the impact of reference of comparison (self-referential vs. normative) and regulatory focus orientation (promotion-focused vs. prevention-focused) on willingness to communicate among EFL learners. These learners were allocated to self-referential, normative, prevention, promotion, or control feedback groups. Over 15 sessions, they received different types of feedback. The learners were assessed for their WTC, anxiety levels, and communication competence both prior to and following the intervention. Results from MANOVA and paired sample comparisons indicated that self-referential, normative, and promotion feedback significantly improved WTC and communication competence and reduced anxiety levels. Conversely, prevention feedback was found to diminish WTC and communication competence and escalate anxiety levels.

Hodis and Hodis (2021) conducted an investigation into the relationship between crucial motivational elements and three significant communication constructs, namely, communication apprehension, self-perceived communication competence, and willingness to communicate. The study aimed to examine the theory of regulatory focus and self-determination. Their findings indicated that both promotion focus and satisfaction or frustration of competence were robust predictors of variance in communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence. Additionally, the study suggested that positive self-perceptions of communicative competence could effectively predict an increased willingness to communicate.

Prasetyanto (2019) conducted a study aiming to identify what type of reinforcement stimulates students' willingness to communicate. Data was collected from a group of 28 college students aged between 19 to 21 years, composed of 7 males and 21 females. The research findings highlighted that teacher reinforcement in an EFL classroom influences students' willingness to communicate, particularly affecting their self-confidence, interpersonal motivation, and intergroup motivation.

Han and McDonough (2018) conducted separate studies investigating whether the trait-based and task-induced regulatory focus of Korean and Vietnamese L2 speakers could impact their oral task performance. In both studies, 62 learners completed a questionnaire to identify their

prevention or promotion orientations. They were then randomly assigned to either a promotion or prevention task-induced condition before performing an oral task. The findings from both studies revealed that while the participants' general motivational tendencies did not significantly impact their task performance, the task-induced prevention condition facilitated fluency and resulted in lower error rate or better accuracy than the promotion condition. These results suggest that regulatory focus orientation can influence speaking performance in an EFL context.

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

The study population comprised 56 Iranian EFL learners, both males and females, aged between 15 and 19. These participants were selected through convenience sampling from a language institute. An Oxford Placement Test was then administered, and from this group, 48 students with upper-intermediate proficiency were selected. These students, who had been studying English for between 5 to 7 years, were either high school or university students studying a variety of majors.

4.2. Materials and Instruments

The following materials and instruments were used in the study to gather the necessary data.

a. Oxford Placement Test

The study's first instrument was the Oxford Placement Test, administered prior to the study to ascertain the participants' proficiency levels. This test helps in identifying those with upper-intermediate proficiency. Specifically designed to evaluate second or foreign language learners, the test gauges two essential aspects: 1) the test takers' knowledge of the second language, encapsulating both their grammatical and pragmatic understanding, and 2) their capability to utilize this knowledge to discern a range of meanings while engaged in listening tasks. Moreover, as David (2011) pointed out, this test can be instrumental in accurately categorizing students into various proficiency levels.

b. WTC Questionnaire

Willingness to Communicate in a Foreign Language Scale (WTC-FLS), developed and validated by Baghaei (2012) was distributed both before the study and after the study to check the effect of treatment on WTC. The instrument is composed of three subscales measuring: a. Willingness to communicate with native speakers of English (WTC-NS), b. willingness to communicate with foreigners who are not native speakers of English (WTC- NN), and c. willingness

to communicate in the school context (WTC-SC). Participants were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral=3, Agree=4, and Strongly Agree=5) how willing they were to communicate.

c. Regulatory Focus Questionnaire

The regulatory focus questionnaire developed by Higgins et al. (2001) was used to examine the participants' regulatory focus. The questionnaire consists of 11 items using five-point Likert scales in the questionnaire (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). Six questions quantify Promotion and five questions quantify Prevention. There are 3 reverse-scored questions for the promotion subscale and 4 reverse-scored questions for the prevention subscale. This set of questions asked how frequently specific events actually occurred or have occurred in one's life.

d. Speaking Test as Pretest and Posttest

After dividing the students into different groups, they took a speaking test on topics they were expected to discuss in the classroom. This test, carried out both pre and post-intervention, served to measure the participants' speech fluency and gauge the effects of different interventions. The topics were sourced from Summit 1A and 1B textbooks, appropriate for the participants' proficiency level. The reliability of the tests was ensured through inter-rater reliability, and their content validity was estimated by two expert judges.

e. Summit Series

The Summit Series are authored by Saslow and Ascher (2009). The series include students' book, teachers' book, workbooks, along with audio CDs and TV video programs. The series develop the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In addition, the series develop students' knowledge on frequent vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and pronunciation. The authors contend that the primary goal of the course is to teach communicative competence; that is the ability to communicate in English according to the context, purpose, and roles of the participants.

4.3. Data Collection Procedure

Participants were selected through the Oxford Placement Test and a subsequent speaking test. These participants were divided into three groups – promotion-focused, prevention-focused, and control – and participated in a speaking pretest. Group assignments were predicated on results from the Regulatory Focus Analysis questionnaire. In the promotion-focused condition, researchers encouraged success and accomplishment, prompting students to contribute more

frequently. Contrarily, prevention-focused students were corrected during their speech to prevent future errors. This group received no specific encouragement when their language use was right. The control group, meanwhile, received no intervention - they weren't corrected nor openly encouraged. Treatment sessions involved different topics for discussion, with participants' speech recorded for assessment. Upon conclusion of the 12-session treatment (each approximately one hour), students took a post-test to evaluate how the different methods affected their speaking fluency.

5. Results

The first research hypothesis proposed that a regulatory focus-orientation does not significantly affect students' engagement in communication. To analyze this, students' mean responses to the WTC questionnaire were evaluated using a one-way ANOVA.

Table 1

Results of One- Way ANOVA for Learners' WTC after the Treatment

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	13.028	2	6.514	23.555	.000
Within Groups	8.296	30	.277		
Total	21.324	32			

As the table shows, the P value is significant at 95% confidence interval, $P=0.000$, therefore the first hypothesis indicating no significant differences between the three groups in terms of their willingness to communicate is rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between the regulatory focus orientation and students' willingness to communicate in the classroom. Then, in order to see which group had a higher willingness to communicate, post-hoc Tukey's test was conducted.

Table 2

Results of Post-Hoc Tukey's Test for Post WTC

(I) VAR00003	(J) VAR00003	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
promotion	Prevention	1.41065*	.19951	.000	.9188	1.9025
	Control	1.42883*	.19951	.000	.9370	1.9207
Prevention	promotion	-1.41065*	.19951	.000	-1.9025	-.9188
	Control	.01818	.19951	.995	-.4737	.5100
Control	promotion	-1.42883*	.19951	.000	-1.9207	-.9370
	Prevention	-.01818	.19951	.995	-.5100	.4737

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results of Tukey's test indicated that there is a significant difference between the promotion and prevention groups in terms of their willingness to communicate when treated with

different modes. In addition, the difference between the rate of willingness to communicate was significant between promotion group and the control group. This is to say that those EFL learners treated with promotion phrases were more willing to communicate in their classes than those who were prevented from speaking and those who were neither promoted nor prevented. However, the difference between the prevention group and the control group was not significant in terms of their willingness to communicate in the class, meaning that both these orientation could not induce EFL learners to communicate in the class.

The second research hypothesis indicated regulatory focus orientation does not have any significant effect on improving fluency of speech among Iranian EFL learners. To test this hypothesis, the learners' speeches were analyzed using the criteria explained in 3.6 for fluency and a t-test was run on their posttest scores, once for the number of syllables produced per minute of speech (Rate A) and then for the number of meaningful syllables per minute of speech (Rate B).

Table 3*One-Way ANOVA on the Results of Fluency Scores in Posttest*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4736.098	2	2368.049	22.784	.000
Within Groups	4053.391	39	103.933		
Total	8789.489	41			

According to Table 3, *P* value is significant at 95% confidence interval, $P=0.000$, therefore the second hypothesis indicating no significant differences between two experimental groups and the control group is rejected, and there is a significant relationship between the orientation and the number of syllables (Rate A). In the next stage, in order to see which group had a better improvement in terms of fluency of speech, post-hoc Tukey's test was conducted. The results of Tukey's test indicated that there is a significant difference between the performance of the promotion group and the prevention group on one hand and the performance of the promotion group and the control group on the other hand. This is to say that those EFL learners receiving promotion had a better performance than the students who were treated with prevention or not promotion and prevention. In addition, the difference between the performance of the prevention group and control group was not significant meaning that both these methods had almost the same effect on the learners which indicates the similar function of both these behavioral methods in improving fluency of speech in the learners.

Table 4*One-Way ANOVA on the Results of Fluency Scores in Posttest*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2184.442	2	1092.221	9.156	.001
Within Groups	4652.229	39	119.288		
Total	6836.671	41			

The results of Rate B analysis also indicates that P-value is significant at 95% confidence interval, $P=0.001$, therefore, the related hypothesis indicating no significant differences between two experimental groups and the control group on the number of meaningful syllables is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between the orientation and the number of meaningful syllables (Rate B). In the next stage, a post-hoc Tukey's test was conducted to see the differences between the group and their improvements in terms of Rate A and Rate B.

Table 5

The Results of Post-Hoc Tukey's Test for Fluency Scores in Posttest for the Number of Syllables

(I) Scores	(J) Scores	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Promotion	Prevention	16.91071*	3.85326	.000	7.5230	26.2984
	Control	25.57143*	3.85326	.000	16.1837	34.9591
Prevention	Promotion	-16.91071*	3.85326	.000	-26.2984	-7.5230
	Control	8.66071	3.85326	.076	-.7270	18.0484
Control	Promotion	-25.57143*	3.85326	.000	-34.9591	-16.1837
	Prevention	-8.66071	3.85326	.076	-18.0484	.7270

Table 6

The Results of Post-Hoc Tukey's Test for Fluency Scores in Posttest for the Number of Meaningful Syllables

(I) Scores	(J) Scores	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Promotion	Prevention	14.77643*	4.12809	.003	4.7191	24.8337
	Control	15.77214*	4.12809	.001	5.7148	25.8294
Prevention	Promotion	-14.77643*	4.12809	.003	-24.8337	-4.7191
	Control	-.99571	4.12809	.968	-9.0616	11.0530
Control	Promotion	-15.77214*	4.12809	.001	-25.8294	-5.7148
	Prevention	-.99571	4.12809	.968	-11.0530	9.0616

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results of Tukey test indicated that there is a significant difference between the performance of the promotion group and the prevention group on one hand and the performance of the promotion group and the control group on the other hand. This is to say, those EFL learners receiving promotion had a better performance than the students who were treated with prevention or not promotion and prevention. In addition, the difference between the performance of the prevention group and control group was not significant meaning that both these methods had almost the same effect on the learners which indicates the similar function of both these behavioral methods in improving fluency of speech in the learners.

6. Discussion

The study's results indicate that the promotion condition positively influences EFL learners' willingness to communicate in the classroom. In contrast, the prevention condition had adverse effects. According to MacIntyre (1994), communication apprehension impacts willingness to communicate, with students suffering from high anxiety likely to feel incapable of effective communication. Prasetyanto et al. (2019) suggested that teacher reinforcement in the EFL classroom could positively impact learners' WTC by reinforcing self-confidence, interpersonal motivation, and intergroup motivation. Encouraging phrases such as 'that is great' serve as progress markers, influencing language development over time. Sapolsky (1998) emphasized the importance of a supportive environment in reducing stress levels. Competence perception can eliminate anxiety, encouraging students to actively participate and take opportunities to demonstrate their English improvement, leading to increased participation and engagement.

Wen and Clement (2003) suggests that "face protection" can discourage students from engaging in classroom communication due to their sensitivity to judgment on their language behavior. This aspect, coupled with interrupting students to correct their errors, causing a decrease in participation and 'Willingness to Communicate', may lead to students avoiding the expression of feelings, emotions, and thoughts due to fear of exposure or judgment (Aubrey, 2011). Teacher interventions using negative phrases such as "no, that's not correct" may create peer pressure, resulting in a negative classroom atmosphere. As students compare themselves to peers, they may become hesitant to speak in front of others, resulting in doubt and stress in subsequent sessions (Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012). The control group's lower WTC could be a result of reduced motivation over the semester, due to lack of special incentives or encouragement that would have increased their interest (Papi et al., 2019). Interestingly, the control group performed better than the prevention condition, which may be due to the unfavorable results of correctional feedback deemed unsuccessful, as opposed to offering no feedback.

Another factor contributing to higher willingness to communicate among students is motivation, which can be increased by encouraging them to speak more. Motivation, as Yashima (2002) suggests, plays a key role in building learners' trust in their competence and improving their perceived capabilities, which in turn supports WTC. Wen & Cle'ment (2003) also underscore the role of teachers as both a source of motivation and demotivation. A teacher's attitude and approach can either facilitate or hinder students' participation, as noted by Cao (2011). Teachers can utilize techniques such as acceptance of students' answers, engaging in discussions, and reassuring students of their communication skills to foster WTC. Moreover, creating a safe and supportive classroom environment from day one, as suggested by Michael & Modell (2003), enhances positive teacher-student interactions, encourages appropriate student behavior, and promotes active classroom participation, says Reifman (2008).

This study substantiates earlier works that the teacher's use of encouraging or discouraging phrases significantly impacts student anxiety levels (Zarrinabadi, 2014) and their willingness to engage in classroom activities (Horwitz, 1986). Consistent with Saberi's et al., (2021) findings, this research determined that preventative phrases negatively influenced students' willingness to communicate by inducing negative self-evaluations and anxiety about using their second language. Similarly, our results align with Slimanis (2018) by identifying a significant correlation between students' willingness to communicate and their speaking performance, with student participation prominently influenced by teacher encouragement. However, our finding that the promotion group demonstrated superior performance and speaking fluency contradicts Han and McDonough's (2018) work, who found greater accuracy and fluency among prevention group students. Lastly, Yousefi and Kasaian's (2014) assertion that students who speak more than others achieve better accuracy and fluency supports our findings. Please paste this text using the editor.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, modern language learning aims to equip learners with the ability to communicate effectively both within and outside the classroom. In this regard, a learner's willingness to communicate plays a prominent role in second language acquisition. EFL learners face various challenges while communicating in a foreign language. Hence, it is crucial for EFL teachers to pay substantial attention to this aspect and diligently explore the factors, conditions, and techniques that effectively enhance communicative skill. Varied communication intent among learners when learning a second or foreign language is largely explained by the construct of WTC, viewed as an individual difference variable. Promoting WTC as a primary learning goal can encourage more active learners, leading to L2 development and successful communication across various L2 communication contexts.

Since the establishment of the theory, scholars have begun to investigate whether individual factors such as gender, age, anxiety, motivation, and social background directly or indirectly influence the willingness to communicate. This study examined WTC in an English classroom environment among Iranian university students in three distinct groups: promotion, prevention, and control. The objective was to determine whether different treatment methods resulted in variant or comparable levels of WTC among the student groups. The results indicated that promotion feedback enhanced WTC and communication competence while decreasing anxiety. In contrast, prevention feedback negatively impacted WTC and communication competence, and heightened anxiety levels. This negative influence occurred because prevention lessened learners' self-confidence and belief in their ability to communicate in L2 effectively, with both accuracy and fluency. It was observed that numerous students opted to participate in classroom discussions only if they were confident their speech was correct. These students prioritized accuracy in speaking,

focusing heavily on grammatical correctness in their sentences before uttering them. Hence, in cases of uncertainty about their speech accuracy, they chose silence over participation.

In general, the results of this study revealed that teachers play a central role in encouraging active communication among their students. The teacher is considered to be the primary source of making the classroom environment conducive for learning by establishing a participatory learning community and a caring environment, wherein learners feel safe and are confident of their participation in the classroom to express themselves without fear and anxiety. The teacher's behavior and orientation and their encouragement and motivation are important factors influencing the students' willingness to communicate inside the classroom and can influence the students' motivation to participate in communication situations outside the classroom.

This study proposes implications for both language teachers and learners. Teachers are advised to enhance students' perceived competence, reduce language anxiety, and improve classroom motivation to increase learners' willingness to communicate. By reducing the display of authoritative behavior and introducing varied motivators, teachers can create a less intimidating classroom environment that encourages student motivation. Additionally, teachers should be cognizant of students reluctant to speak and work to remedy this by creating a supportive learning atmosphere established through friendly interaction, motivational guidance, and academic reliability.

The study also holds implications for students. They are encouraged to acknowledge the importance of speaking skills as an EFL learner, and to develop a high level of oral competence by fostering their willingness to engage in classroom communications actively. Success in language learning stems from communication and not solely from memorizing a series of rules. Students also need to be aware that there are factors beyond language aptitude and competence that influence their willingness to communicate in a second language, and should aim to prepare themselves accordingly for such communication. As EFL students rarely have the opportunity to use the second language outside the classroom, it is crucial they leverage the classroom experience to practice their language skills. Moreover, understanding the factors that influence their willingness to communicate in English can help learners recognize their own communicative preferences, fostering improved communication and speaking engagement in the classroom.

The primary limitation of this study is the use of the WTC questionnaire, which was initially designed for ESL contexts. Thus, responses were based on learners' interpretations of hypothetical scenarios, which may not accurately reflect their actual communication willingness. The data derived was from Iranian upper-intermediate students learning English as a foreign language, which potentially limits the applicability of the findings to other groups with varying linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels. The study did not account for individual personality traits of the students. Some students, due to shyness or low self-confidence, may have a reluctance to speak, which could have influenced the results. Moreover, the study did not take into account the intrinsic and extrinsic or integrative and instrumental motivations of the participants, which could be

correlated with their speaking ability and willingness to communicate. Often a distinction is made between personality trait WTC and situational or state WTC that relates to learners' enduring personality traits; these are consistent across different contexts. This study, however, did not control for this variable, and as such, the findings might reflect state level WTC, rather than the classroom conditions themselves.

This study offers several recommendations for future research. Given the limited sample size of the current study, subsequent investigations may benefit from involving participants from different proficiency levels to probe the connection between language proficiency and WTC. Participants' gender should also be considered to examine if prevention and promotion strategies affect them differently. Although the current study solely utilized surveys, future research can employ other data collection methods like interviews and classroom observations to increase the validity of results. There would be value in exploring the experiences of students subjected to these three distinct strategies to verify if such orientations affect their WTC. This could provide a broader understanding of the factors influencing classroom participation. Future studies might consider whether promotion and prevention conditions significantly impact language learners' attitudes towards the productive skill of writing. Additionally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct empirical studies investigating teachers' perceptions of using promotion and prevention phrases to alter students' willingness and communicative fluency.

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