



The Interrelationships of L2 Willingness to Communicate, Emotional Intelligence, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and Teacher Immediacy

Xiaolei Zou

Guilin University of Technology

Hyesook Park

Kunsan National University

The present study aimed to examine the interrelationships between Chinese college EFL learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English, emotional intelligence (EI), foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), and their perceptions of teacher immediacy (TI). The study involved a total of 1040 non-English majors from fifteen universities located in different regions around China. Four questionnaires were employed to collect data. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized via AMOS 21.0 to testify the hypothesized model of the interrelationships between the aforementioned four variables. To be more specific, EI, FLCA, and students' perceptions of TI were hypothesized to have a direct influence on L2 WTC, respectively. Besides, FLCA was also hypothesized to play a mediating role between EI and L2 WTC as well as between TI and L2 WTC. The findings showed that the proposed structural model exhibited a good fit to the collected data. EI, FLCA, and TI proved to have significant and direct predictive effects on L2 WTC. Besides, two indirect paths were also confirmed, from EI and TI to FLCA, leading to L2 WTC. Finally, pedagogical implications to enhance students' L2 WTC were provided. Limitations, along with suggestions for future research were also outlined.

本研究以来自中国不同地区15所大学的1040名中国大学非英语专业学生为研究对象，通过问卷调查和结构方程建模方法探究了英语学习者的英语交流意愿、情绪智力、外语课堂焦虑及其对教师即时行为感知之间的相互关系。通过 AMOS 21.0 结构方程模型来验证上述四个变量之间相互关系的假设模型。结果显示，所提出的结构模型与收集的数据表现出良好的拟合。研究结果表明，学生的情绪智力、外语课堂焦虑和对教师即时行为的感知对其英语交流意愿具有显著的直接预测作用。此外，本研究还验证了以下两条关系链假设：学生的情绪智力及其对教师即时行为的感知分别经由外语课堂焦虑作为中介因素对英语交际意愿产生间接影响。研究结论表明，外语学习者的情绪智力和对教师即时行为的感知能够促进其英语交际意愿的提升，同时，降低外语课堂焦虑水平有助于学习者更加主动地投入二语交际。最后，根据研究结果为如何提升二语学习者的英语交流意愿提供了一定启示和建议。

Keywords: L2 willingness to communicate, emotional intelligence, foreign language classroom anxiety, teacher immediacy, Chinese EFL learners



Introduction

The cultivation of learners' communicative competence is an essential goal of language learning and teaching (Canale, 2014; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010). In other words, it is crucial to develop learners' ability to appropriately use the target language to communicate their thoughts and ideas in authentic environments. Moreover, prior research has also underscored the importance of oral production in developing a second language (L2) (Gass & Mackey, 2006; Payne & Whitney, 2002). Classroom learning plays a pivotal role in English education in countries where English is not the dominant language due to limited daily language exposure. In particular, oral participation and engagement in the classroom are highly valued in the education of English as a foreign language (EFL) (de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009; Zhou, 2015). Given the limitations of language exposure outside of the classroom, a pedagogical emphasis on oral practice in the classroom is essential to foster students' communicative competence and fluency in English (Zou & Park, 2022).

Chinese L2 learners have traditionally been viewed as passive and shy participants who often show reluctance and unwillingness to participate in L2 communication in the classroom (Holmes, 2004; Liu, 2002; Wang, 2014; Tao, 2021). In addition, Chinese EFL students' passive oral engagement in classroom activities is frequently reported and discussed in prior studies (Hu, 2002; Lv et al., 2015; Peng, 2014; Wang, 2014; Yu, 2001). It is observed that most Chinese EFL learners seldom actively participate in class although they may have a desire to communicate (Wen & Clément, 2003). Despite excelling in written examinations, some competent L2 learners are still not willing to participate orally in class and struggle with effective L2 verbal communication. For this reason, a growing attention has been paid to the exploration of students' WTC, which has proved to have a positive impact on their language production (Sun & Zhang, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021).

Teacher support was proposed to influence L2 WTC (Wen & Clément, 2003). Previous research has acknowledged that learners' WTC in English is closely linked with their language teachers' immediacy behaviors (Cetinkaya, 2005; Fallah, 2014; Myers & Bryant, 2002; Sheybani, 2019; Tormey, 2021). In addition, the influence of such immediacy behaviors on language learners' affective factors is well documented. For instance, TI has been discovered to be positively associated with learners' attitudes, motivation, and foreign language anxiety (FLA) (Ballester, 2013; Christophel, 1990; Gregersen, 2005; Henning, 2012; Potee, 2002). Anxiety has been considered as one of the most influential emotional factors in language learning (Arnold & Brown, 1999). It has been observed that communication anxiety is one of the major obstacles to developing learners' WTC (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). However, few studies have been found probing the relationship between students' L2 WTC and emotional intelligence. EI is a construct that has been conceptually linked to the realm of emotions and has been the focus of considerable research in the field of language acquisition. Its theoretical underpinnings have made it an essential factor to consider when investigating the process of language learning (Li & Jiang, 2017). EI has been posited as a predictor of students' ability to navigate diverse foreign language learning contexts, which is crucial for the successful acquisition of the target language (Shao et al., 2013).

Despite the increasing interest in the relationship between L2 WTC and EI, few studies have been conducted to date and empirical evidence on this subject is still limited (Alavinia & Alikhani, 2014; Öz, 2015; Wei et al., 2021), and even fewer studies have investigated the interrelationships among L2 WTC, EI, FLCA, and TI. To fill in the gap, this study attempted to examine the relationships among the aforementioned variables in the hope that the findings will make theoretical and pedagogical contributions to second language acquisition and provide new insights into foreign language instruction, both in China and in other EFL contexts.

Literature Review

L2 Willingness to Communicate

The significance of WTC in English has been widely acknowledged and highly valued as a crucial component of EFL education. The promotion of L2 WTC in classroom settings has been shown to enhance students' oral performance and language output (Sun & Zhang, 2020), thereby contributing to the overall effectiveness of English language learning. L2 researchers have observed that WTC may lead to variations in communication behaviour among individuals and result in differences in the attainment of L2 proficiency (Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008).

WTC was defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person, or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). In this definition, WTC is not only a stable trait-like construct but also an immediate situation-like construct which can change with various situational factors. MacIntyre et al. (1998) further proposes a L2 heuristic WTC model, in which both stable trait-like factors and immediate situational influences affect an individual's WTC.

Wen and Clément (2003) argued that the heuristic model proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998) was based on research principally conducted in western contexts. They claimed that WTC within a Chinese cultural context was a "more complicated notion entailing the interplay of affect, the teacher and the learner's environment" (Wen & Clément, 2003, p. 24). Thus, Wen and Clément (2003) proposed a WTC model from a non-western cultural perspective. It is argued that Chinese students' reticent behaviors might be ascribed to tendencies to submit to social expectations and try to avoid negative evaluations. Besides, it is assumed that Confucian values of interpersonal relations may result in the belief that language teachers are the authority, who are responsible for L2 modeling.

As the significance of L2 WTC was recognized, extensive research has been conducted to investigate the various factors that impact L2 WTC in diverse contexts. Prior studies have identified several influential factors that shape students' WTC. These factors encompass, among others, L2 communication competence (Zhou et al., 2023), motivation (Khajavy et al., 2016), L2 self-confidence (Peng & Woodrow, 2010), anxiety levels (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011), personality traits (Zohoorian et al., 2022), cultural background (Cao, 2010), and the dynamics of classroom environments (Khajavy et al., 2016; Zarrinabadi, 2014). For instance, Khajavy et al. (2016) investigated WTC in English among 243 Iranian EFL learners using SEM to test a proposed model based on WTC theories and empirical studies. Their findings revealed that the classroom environment emerged as the most robust direct predictor of L2 WTC, while motivation was found to exert an indirect effect on L2WTC through its impact on communication confidence. The purpose of Zohoorian et al.'s (2022) research was to explore the associations between WTC, the big five personality traits, and empathy. The results unveiled that WTC exhibited modest correlations with extraversion, openness, and agreeableness. Besides, the correlation analyses conducted in Zhou et al.'s (2023) study involving 129 Chinese students studying abroad in Belgium indicated strong links between L2 competence and WTC of Chinese study-abroad learners beyond the classroom context. Moreover, emerging research also suggests the importance of considering additional elements such as EI (Wei et al., 2021) and TI (Hu & Wang, 2023) in understanding students' WTC more comprehensively.

Emotional Intelligence

Salovey and Mayer (1990) were among the earliest to propose the term "emotional intelligence" to represent one's ability to deal with their emotions. In their seminal article, EI was conceptualized as a set of abilities to deal with emotions or process emotional information. It included the ability to identify and express emotions; the capacity of effectively regulating and managing emotions; and the ability to utilize or reason with emotions in thought (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In subsequent years, Mayer and Salovey (1997) expanded such definition, depicting EI as the "the ability to perceive and express emotions, the

ability to assimilate emotion in thought, the ability to understand and reason with emotion, and the ability to regulate emotion to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (p. 5).

In the field of EFL education, Stottlemayer (2002) investigated the correlation between EI and academic performance in a study involving 200 American students from Texas. The results revealed a significant predictive relationship between EI competencies and students' academic achievement. Research has also demonstrated that EI can exert an influence on both EFL learning and teaching. For instance, Aghasafari (2006) conducted a correlational study within the realm of foreign language education to examine the association between EI and language learning strategies among 100 Iranian EFL university students. The findings revealed a positive correlation between the participants' overall EI levels and their utilization of language learning strategies. In a Chinese setting, Li's (2020) research examined the EI, emotions in English learning, and their correlations with English achievement among 1,307 second-year senior high school students in China. The findings revealed small to moderate correlations among EI, enjoyment, anxiety, burnout, self-perceived English ability, and actual English achievement.

Additionally, scholars propose that EI is associated with individual differences in the capacity to perceive, analyze, and leverage emotion-laden information (Öz, 2015; Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Petrides et al., 2004). As WTC is also commonly recognized as an individual difference variable with both personality traits and situational dimensions (Dörnyei, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 1999; McCroskey & Baer, 1985), it would be reasonable to anticipate an association between the construct of EI and WTC in the context of second language learning (Öz, 2015). Moreover, Öz (2014) also found a statistically significant correlation between L2 WTC and personality traits, which further corroborates the associations of individual difference variables such as EI, emotions (e.g. anxiety), and L2 WTC.

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

Schumann (1994) asserts that affective contributions act as key factors in language learning. In fact, investigations into affective variables in the language learning context have remained a consistently prominent subject within the field of applied linguistics for several decades (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Gkonou et al., 2017).

Language anxiety has been acknowledged as a significant affective factor that exerts considerable influence on the process of foreign language learning. Horwitz and his colleagues (Horwitz et al., 1986) were the first to propose the construct of foreign language anxiety specific to language learning situation, and defined it as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs and behaviors related to classroom language learning" (p. 128). FLA is a situation-specific anxiety experienced by learners of a second language, which is often aroused by the process of learning and using it (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1991). The situation-specific approach posits that anxiety is context-dependent and may manifest in specific situations, such as public speaking or classroom learning. Foreign language classroom anxiety represents a distinct category of anxiety that arises specifically in the context of language learning classrooms, warranting attention due to its significant impact on classroom dynamics and language learning outcomes (Capan & Simsek, 2012; Young, 1992). FLCA is a specific construct designed and developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and measured through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS).

In L2 WTC research, anxiety was sometimes termed as communication apprehension (MacIntyre et al., 2003) or communication anxiety (Yashima, 2002). Communication apprehension, as a variable that inhibits an individual's WTC, has been widely studied. Its negative effects on L2 WTC have also been explored in EFL classrooms (Liu, 2005; Liu & Jackson, 2008). By applying the FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), Rastegar and Karami (2015) found that there was a significant negative relationship between Iranian college students' FLCA and their WTC measured by MacIntyre et al.'s (2001) WTC scale. In Chinese EFL settings, Peng and Woodrow (2010) utilized FLCAS to investigate Chinese students' WTC in English, and the results indicated that the unified construct of self-confidence comprising language anxiety and perceived competence proved to be a strong predictor of learners' L2 WTC.

Teacher Immediacy

As one of the factors that have an impact on students' emotions, teacher immediacy behaviors play an important role in building rapport with students in class. Verbal immediacy was initially interpreted by Mehrabian (1969) as verbal communication behaviors that enhance closeness to and interaction with another. They include specific verbal cues of liking or closeness. In educational settings, verbal immediacy is often expressed through teachers' use of praise for students' hard work and efforts, use of humor, self-disclosure, and overall openness and willingness to interact with students (Gorham, 1988). In contrast, teacher nonverbal immediacy behaviors were first examined in instructional communication research by Andersen (1979), who explored the effects of teacher nonverbal immediacy on students' affective learning and teacher effectiveness. Teacher nonverbal immediacy was conceptualized as "the nonverbal behavior manifestation of high affect" (Andersen, 1979, p. 545). Building upon this research, TI was defined by Christophel and Gorham (1995) as a combination of both verbal and nonverbal immediate behaviors that can enhance closeness, and reduce physical proximity as well as psychological distance between instructors and students. Christophel (1990) notes that by employing immediacy behaviors in the classroom, teachers are able to establish a closer relationship with students, which is likely to motivate students to speak and engage in oral communication.

In the field of education, Roberts and Friedman's (2013) research examined how professors' immediacy behaviors exerted an influence on student classroom participation, and the results suggested that professors who exhibited greater immediacy had higher levels of student classroom participation. Besides, Velez and Cano (2008) noted that TI was related to both verbal and nonverbal constructs, which increased students' good feelings towards both their instructors and the subject matter, and also decreased their apprehension. To date, a comparatively small number of studies have been conducted to investigate TI and L2 WTC. For instance, Fallah's (2014) SEM analysis demonstrated that TI indirectly affected student's L2 WTC through the mediation of motivation. Additionally, Sheybani (2019) investigated the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' WTC and their teachers' immediacy attributes. The results indicated that all the dimensions of WTC are significantly and positively predicted by both verbal and nonverbal immediacy. In recent years, Hu and Wang (2023) examined the predicting role of EFL teachers' immediacy behaviors in students' WTC and academic engagement. The findings demonstrated a notable impact of TI, including both verbal and nonverbal cues, on EFL students' WTC and academic engagement.

Hypothesized Model of L2 WTC, EI, FLCA and Students' Perceptions of TI

Up to date, little research has explored the interrelationships among L2 WTC, EI, FLCA, and TI. For this reason, this study seeks to propose and empirically evaluate a model that examines the potential relationships between one teacher situational variable (i.e., TI) and three learner affective and individual factors (i.e., EI, FLCA, and L2 WTC).

In this study, the hypothesized model was developed by integrating four latent variables: EFL learners' L2 WTC, EI, FLCA, and their perceptions of TI. The model specifications were developed based on theoretical foundations within the field of language learning and teaching, with a particular focus on the relationships among the study variables as well as insights from prior empirical research on L2 WTC.

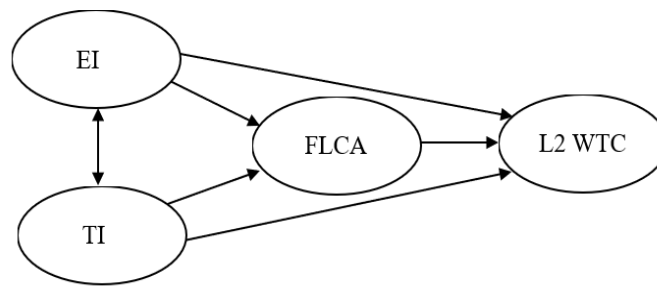


Figure 1. The hypothesized model.

As shown in the hypothesized model (see Figure 1), emotional intelligence was anticipated to directly influence L2 WTC based on empirical evidence (Birjandi & Tabataba'ian, 2012; Wei et. al, 2021) and indirectly through the influence of FLA based on relevant empirical investigations (Shao et. al, 2013). Previous research (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Peng, 2015; Wu & Lin, 2014) has also provided evidence for the negative influence of FLA on L2 WTC. Thus, foreign language anxiety was hypothesized to directly affect students' L2 WTC. Besides, in light of the L2 WTC model (Wen & Clément, 2003) and previous empirical studies (Gol et al., 2014; Menzel & Carrell, 1999; Rashidi & Mahmoudi Kia, 2012), TI was proposed to exert direct influence on learner L2 WTC, and indirectly influence L2 WTC through language anxiety (Fallah & Mashhady, 2014; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Wu & Lin, 2014; Peng, 2015). In addition, EI was expected to be closely related to students' perceptions of TI (Gholamrezae & Ghanizadeh, 2018). Accordingly, in conceptualizing the model, direct paths from EI, TI, and foreign language anxiety to L2 WTC, respectively, were anticipated. Meanwhile, two indirect paths were also constructed, one from TI to L2 WTC through FLCA, and another from EI to FLCA, leading to students' L2 WTC was uniquely tested in the present study.

Methods

Participants

The study recruited participants from fifteen universities located in various cities across southern and northern China. A total of 1040 Chinese university students across different academic levels, including 501 freshmen, 369 sophomores, 152 juniors, and 18 seniors, voluntarily took part in the main study. The sample included 650 female (62.5%) and 390 male students (37.5%), with the average age of 19.1.

An anonymous survey was created through Wenjuanxing (<https://www.wjx.cn/>), a professional online survey platform widely used in China. All questions were presented to the participants in Mandarin Chinese. The digital version of the questionnaire was formatted to be accessible on both computer platforms and mobile devices, including smartphones, and typically required approximately ten minutes for completion.

Instrumentation

For data collecting, the study administered a questionnaire survey which consists of four sections as follows:

The first section attempted to measure students' L2 WTC. The items in the WTC questionnaire (see Appendix) were adapted from Peng and Woodrow's (2010) WTC scale where the questions were well shaped to be apt for the university EFL educational context in China. This scale gauges the construct of learner L2 WTC through ten items, each evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (definitely not

willing) to 5 (definitely willing). In this study, students' L2 WTC was approached in terms of students' WTC when engaged in meaning-focused activities (e.g., I am willing to give a short speech in English to the class about my hometown with notes.) and WTC when engaged in form-focused activities (e.g., I am willing to ask my group mates in English the meaning of word I do not know.). Accordingly, the participants' L2 WTC scale was comprised of two factors: WTC in meaning-focused activities (WTCMFA), and WTC form-focused activities (WTCFFA). In terms of the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha for WTC was 0.93.

The EI questionnaire (see Appendix) in the second section was adapted from the Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Wong and Law (2002). The validity and reliability of this scale were proved by multiple prior studies (Ng et al., 2007; Shi & Wang, 2007). Sixteen items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, which is comprised of four distinct dimensions: self-emotional appraisal (SEA); others' emotional appraisal (OEA); regulation of emotion (ROE); use of emotion (UOE). The EI questionnaire was proved internally highly consistent, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.93.

In the next section, FLCA was measured by FLCAS originally created by Horwitz et al. (1986). A preliminary validation study by Horwitz (1986) reported that the FLCAS had sufficiently high internal-consistency and reliability. Fifteen items of the FLCA questionnaire (see Appendix) were selected and slightly revised from previous research (Horwitz et. al, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Young, 1991; Pappamihel, 2002). A three-factor structure for FLCA was suggested after the exploratory factor analysis. Those three components correspond to language apprehension (LA), teacher-student interaction anxiety (TSIA) and fear of negative evaluation (FNE). Thus, they were named accordingly. Cronbach's alpha for the FLCA questionnaire was 0.92, indicating that it has high reliability.

Finally, to assess learners' perceptions of their English instructors' immediacy behaviors, TI was measured as a composite variable, comprising two subscales: verbal and nonverbal immediacy. TI questionnaire utilized in the study was adapted and modified from Gorham's (1988) verbal immediacy scale, and the nonverbal immediacy scale developed by McCroskey et al. (1996). To respond to the 13 question items, students were asked to mark the degree to which their teachers demonstrated each immediacy behavior on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The TI questionnaire also proved to have a high level of reliability, indicated by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89.

Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis involved several statistical procedures using the statistical analysis package SPSS 23.0 and AMOS 21.0. The major statistical methods used in this study were confirmatory factor analysis, reliability analysis, and structural equation modeling. SEM was conducted to examine if the hypothesized model provided a good fit and was a reasonable representation of the structural relationships among the four research variables (i.e., L2 WTC, EI, FLCA and TI) as well as to test the mediating role of FLCA in the model.

The quality of the structural model was assessed using the chi-squared (χ^2), normed χ^2 (χ^2/df) statistics and model fit indices such as goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), root-mean-square error approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR). According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), a normed chi-square (χ^2) value below 2 indicates a good fit. Hair et al. (2019) suggested that GFI, NFI and CFI values exceeding 0.95 are indicative of a well-fitting model, whereas RMSEA and SRMR values should be below 0.05 for a good fit.

Results and Discussion

AMOS 21 was conducted with the maximum likelihood procedure to verify the fitness of the research model and the structural relationships between students' WTC, EI, FLA, and their perceptions of TI.

Students' L2 WTC, EI, FLCA, and their perceptions of TI were used as latent variables of the measurement model, and the sublevels of these four latent variables were treated as observable variables.

Overall Model Fit of the Proposed Model

The model-fit measures were used to assess the model's overall goodness of fit. The output suggests that the model represents a close fit to the data. More specifically, the χ^2 value was 59.30, $p=.015$, rejecting the null hypothesis. The χ^2 value could be affected by the sample size. The Chi-Square statistic exhibits sensitivity to sample size, often resulting in model rejection when large samples are used (Bentler & Bonnet, 1980; Hooper & Mullen, 2008). The present study involved a sample of 1040 participants, which can be considered substantial in size. As the number of samples increases, the chi-square value usually becomes lower than the significant level ($p < .05$). Thus, consideration of additional indicators is warranted. The results show that 13 indicators lie within the good fit thresholds. In other words, the majority of the indicator values have met the standards: CMIN/df= 1.561, RMSEA=.023 < .05, RMR value =.009 < .05, SRMR value=.015 < .05, GFI value=.99 > .90, CN value= 936 > 200, NFI value=.991 > .90, RFI value=.987 > .90, IFI value=.997 > .90, TLI value=.995 > .90, CFI value=.997 > .90, PGFI value=.57 > .50, PNFI value=.685 > .50, and PCFI value=.689 > .50. Hence, it can be concluded that the proposed four-factor model (EI, FLCA, TI, and WTC) exhibited a very good fit to the empirical data. It requires no modification.

Fit Criteria of the Internal Structure of the Proposed Model

Once the overall model fit is assessed, the next step is to check the reliability and validity of the constructs.

To begin with, construct reliability is usually assessed by using composite reliability (CR) in AMOS. The value is interpreted using the guidelines created by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), in which 0.7 was suggested as a benchmark indicative of modest reliability. This reliability value is calculated based on factor loadings in standardized regression weights and its formula is offered by Hair et al. (2006).

On the other hand, in order to statistically ascertain the individuality of the constructs, discriminant validity is also addressed in the present study. Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest that the average variance extracted (AVE) value should be greater than the variance between the given construct and other constructs in the model (i.e., the squared correlation between two constructs). Therefore, the square root of the AVE of each latent variable should exceed its correlations with any other latent variables in the assessment.

TABLE 1

Abstract of the Fit of Internal Structure of the Proposed Model

Latent Variables	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Observed Variables	R^2
EI	.85	.59	OEA	0.67
			UOE	0.59
			SEA	0.62
			ROE	0.50
FLCA	.88	.71	LA	0.79
			TSIA	0.67
			FNE	0.67
TI	.90	.82	TIVB	0.82
			TINVB	0.81
WTC	.81	.68	WTCMFA	0.70
			WTCFFA	0.65
Criteria of Acceptable Fit	>.70	>.50		>.50

Table 1 presents the calculated CR and AVE values of all latent variables in the model. From Table 1, goodness can be found lying in the internal reliability and validity of the measure models. The CR estimates

of the latent variables ranging from 0.81 to .90 all exceed the recommended level of .70. Hence, construct reliability was established for each construct in the study. Estimates in AVE, ranging from .50 to .82, all reach the ideal level of .50. As for discriminant validity, Table 2 showed that the square root of the AVE of each latent variable was greater than its correlations with any other latent variables, which ascertained the individuality of each latent construct.

TABLE 2
Abstract of the Square Root of AVE and Correlation Coefficients

	TI	EI	FLCA	WTC
TI	.90($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$)			
EI	.571***	.772($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$)		
FLCA	-.314***	-.288***	.843($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$)	
WTC	.567***	.553***	-.678***	.826($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$)

Path Analysis

As presented in Figure 2, the path from the latent variable "TI" to "FLCA" was negative and significant ($p < .001$), with the standardized estimate of $-.22$, as was the path from "EI" to "FLCA" ($p < .001$), with the standardized estimate of $-.16$. The study found that the path from "FLCA" to "WTC" was statistically significant ($p < .001$), exhibiting a negative relationship with the path coefficient of $-.53$. The path from "TI" to "WTC" demonstrated a significant positive relationship ($p < .001$), as indicated by the standardized estimate of $.25$, and a similar pattern emerged for the path from "EI" to "WTC", with the standardized estimate of $.25$. Table 3 showed that EI, TI and FLCA jointly accounted for 65% of the variance in WTC.

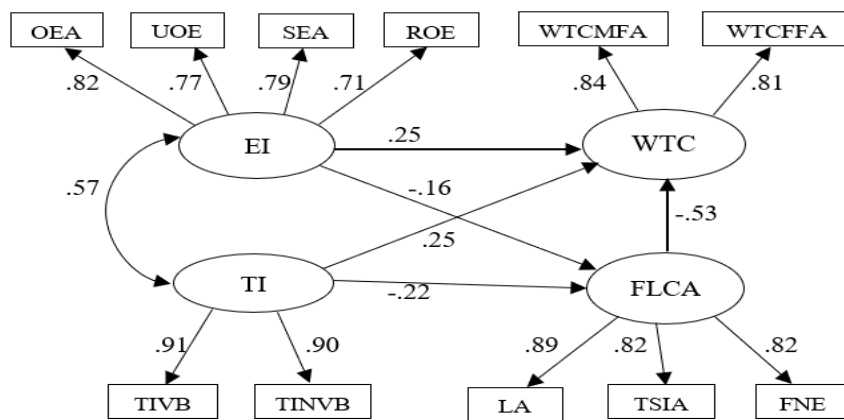


Figure 2. The four-factor structural model in the Chinese college EFL context.

All the regression coefficients for the paths are statistically significant at the level of .001 or below.

TABLE 3
Regression Weights of Latent Variables

Component	Regression Weights	Sig.	R ²
EI-- > WTC	.25	***	.65
TI-- > WTC	.25	***	
FLCA-- > WTC	-.53	***	
TI-- > FLCA	-.22	***	
EI-- > FLCA	-.16	***	

Note. *** $p < .001$.

The study also assessed the mediating role of FLCA on the relationship between TI and WTC, and between EI and WTC. The results revealed a significant indirect effect of impact of TI on WTC was positive and significant ($p < .001$). The findings also showed that a significant indirect effect of impact of EI on WTC was positive and significant ($p < .001$). Furthermore, the direct effects of both TI on WTC and EI on WTC were also found significant, as previously mentioned. Hence, it can be concluded that FLCA partially mediated the relationship between TI and WTC, and between EI and WTC. Mediation analysis summary is presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Mediation Analysis Summary

Relationship	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Confidence Interval		p-value
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
TI -> FLCA -> WTC	.25	0.12	0.37	0.06	0.13	< .001
EI -> FLCA -> WTC	.25	0.09	0.34	0.05	0.15	< .001

Discussion

Three direct and two indirect significant paths were captured in this study. EI in the model had a direct and indirect positive effect on learners' WTC, emphasizing the fact that stronger abilities to deal with emotions usually result in greater WTC. This is well recognized by Birjandi and Tabataba'ian (2012), who found that higher EI can improve students' WTC. The significant path observed in this study, where EI serves as a direct predictor of L2 WTC, aligns with the work of Wei et al. (2021) in a Chinese EFL setting, which was also based on SEM analysis. This finding might be explained by Fernández-García and Fonseca-Mora's (2022) argument that higher levels of EI are associated with enhanced abilities to perceive and manage one's own emotions as well as those of others, which, in turn, may facilitate the identification of shared interests and the initiation of natural interactions and communication.

Besides, TI exhibited a significant and positive direct impact on students' WTC, meaning that learners' perceptions of teachers' proper immediacy behaviors positively affect their WTC in class. In other words, appropriate teacher verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors lead to students' stronger WTC in English inside the classroom. This effect has also garnered recognition in prior research such as that of Fallah (2014) and Hsu (2005), whose investigations established that TI could exert a direct and statistically significant impact on learners' willingness to learn. The results in Hu and Wang's (2023) research also indicated that the immediacy behaviors exhibited by teachers exerted a markedly significant impact on EFL students' WTC. This could be attributed to the findings of Gorham (1988), and Pogue and Ahyun (2006) that teacher verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors can enhance teacher-student relationships, leading to positive and effective interpersonal interaction. The results suggest that teacher immediacy behaviors indirectly affect learners' L2 WTC through the mediation of FLCA, highlighting that TI may also account for learners' L2 WTC in English, particularly when students experience less intense anxiety in class.

In addition, students' foreign language learning anxiety in class had a substantial direct negative effect on their WTC in class, confirming that lower levels of anxiety in learning English leads to greater WTC in

English. This path is supported by earlier correlational studies (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; Yashima, 2002). The significant direct path from FLCA to L2 WTC is also in line with the L2 WTC model by MacIntyre et al. (1998) and previous empirical studies (Peng, 2015), where Chinese EFL learners' anxiety negatively affects WTC. It emphasizes the negative effect of anxiety on L2 WTC. When EFL learners feel intensely anxious in English class, they become less willing to communicate in English inside the language classroom. In comparison with other variables (i.e., TI and EI) in the present study, language anxiety is the strongest predictor of students' WTC.

Conclusion and Implications

The structural equation approach was employed to verify the fitness of the established model and the interrelationships among students' WTC, EI, FLCA, and their perceptions of TI. The findings showed that the proposed model exhibited a very good fit to the data after the verification of the construct reliability and validity. Besides, the present study also observed three direct paths from EI, FLCA, and TI to learners' L2 WTC, respectively. In addition to direct paths, two indirect paths were also proved feasible, that is, from EI and TI to FLCA, leading to L2 WTC, respectively. This implies that EI directly affects L2 WTC and also indirectly exerts influence on L2 WTC through the mediation of FLCA. Similarly, TI directly affects L2 WTC and also has indirect influences on learners' L2 WTC through the impact of FLCA.

The findings provide some pedagogical implications for college English teachers to enhance students' L2 WTC. First, to optimize language learning outcomes, it is essential that teachers possess a comprehensive understanding of their students' WTC, which is an individual difference affecting language acquisition. Awareness of students' WTC levels empowers teachers to design lessons that cater to students' needs and develop their language skills (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016), indicating the importance of teachers recognizing different students' WTC levels and adjusting their teaching strategies accordingly. For instance, teachers can encourage students with low WTC to participate more in classroom activities through pair or small group work to increase their confidence and motivation (Tan & Phairot, 2018). On the other hand, teachers can challenge high WTC students with more complex tasks or the opportunities to communicate with native speakers to foster their growth. Additionally, providing positive feedback and creating a supportive classroom environment can help students feel more comfortable and motivated to use the target language. By taking into account students' individual WTC levels, teachers can create a more inclusive and effective language learning environment for all students.

Furthermore, teachers should be cognizant of students' emotions in class. MacIntyre (2002) states that, "to some extent, language learning itself is prone to create intense emotion" (p. 67), and research on emotions deserves far greater attention in language learning. In light of the obtained results indicative of a positive correlation between WTC and EI, and by taking Bar-on's (2000) findings into account, designing curricula with a focus on the development of EI skills for EFL learners can be deemed justifiable.

In addition, Woodrow (2006) asserts that anxiety is an important issue in the process of language acquisition and it can hinder some students from speaking in English. In the study conducted by Trang, Moni, and Baldauf (2013), the findings showed that the educators demonstrated awareness of potential causes and consequences of FLA, yet lacked insight into the specific circumstances experienced by their students. Given the prevalence of FLA among language learners, it is incumbent upon educators to demonstrate a heightened awareness of this phenomenon and proactively offer targeted interventions to mitigate its negative impact during classroom interactions. Situational interventions including both classroom activities and teacher behaviors could be made (Williams & Andrade, 2008), for example, effective ways of presenting input and correcting errors (Burden, 2004; Stroud & Wee, 2006). Effective language instruction involves providing learners with comprehensible input, which refers to language input that is slightly beyond their current level of proficiency but still accessible (Krashen, 1982; Swain, 1985; VanPatten, 2015). Teachers can use various strategies, such as visuals, gestures, and simplified language,

to support learners' understanding of the target language. Additionally, encouraging learners to engage in self-correction can reinforce learning and promote autonomy (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Last but not least, the importance of teacher support to Chinese learners' engagement and positive affect were highlighted in Wen and Clément's (2003) modified model of Chinese students' WTC in English. TI is perceived as a notable socio-cultural factor impacting the involvement of Chinese students in the instructional context. Thus, establishing a constructive and enduring relationship between teachers and students is of paramount importance in the academic realm. In order to accomplish this, teachers should demonstrate empathy and understanding towards their students by actively listening to their concerns, and providing emotional support when needed (Pekrun et al., 2009; Roorda et al., 2011). Furthermore, teachers should encourage student engagement by creating opportunities for active learning, incorporating student interests into lesson plans, and allowing for individual choice and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Weinstein & Mayer, 1983). Additionally, educators should foster a positive classroom climate wherein students feel at ease, confident, and engaged in interactive learning activities by promoting respect and inclusivity, and proactively resolving any issues that may arise in a timely and effective manner (Cohen, 2006; Wang, 2011).

Regarding the limitations for the study, self-report tools were used for data collection, and data were subject to participants' decision to respond truthfully. Besides, the present study only examined the role of three variables (i.e., EI, FLCA, and TI) in L2 WTC. Due to the complex nature of the concept of L2 WTC, it is recommended to explore more teacher and learner factors such as teacher credibility and learner mindset that exert potential influence on students' WTC in EFL class. Various instruments such as classroom observations and reflective diaries are also suggested for future research on the influence of teacher behaviors and learner affective factors on L2 WTC.

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The Authors

Xiaolei Zou is a lecturer at School of Foreign Languages, Guilin University of Technology, China. Her current research interests include English learning and teaching strategies and the effects of positive psychology on second language acquisition. Her recent work has been published in *Studies in English Language & Literature*.

School of Foreign Languages,
Guilin University of Technology
Guilin City, Guangxi, China
Mobile: +86-159-7734-0186
Email: leandlei303@gmail.com

Hyesook Park (corresponding author) is a professor at Department of English Language and Literature, Kunsan National University, South Korea. She received her B.A., M.A. and Ph D. at Korea University in Seoul. She was a visiting professor at Michigan State University and at King's College in London. Her special research interests include SLA, L2 writing instruction and development.

Department of English Language and Literature,
Kunsan National University
Gunsan-si, Jeollabuk-do, Korea

Tel: +82-10-8292-4650
Email: sapark@kunsan.ac.kr

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Appendix

L2 Willingness to Communicate Questionnaire

Items	SD	D	BA	A	SA
1. I am willing to do a role-play in English at my desk, with my peer (e.g., ordering food in a restaurant).					
2. I am willing to ask the teacher in English to repeat what he/she just said in English because I did not understand.					
3. I am willing to give a short speech in English to the class about my hometown with notes.					
4. I am willing to do a role-play standing in front of the class in English (e.g., borrowing books in the library).					
5. I am willing to ask my group mates in English how to pronounce a word in English.					
6. I am willing to ask my peer sitting next to me in English how to say an English phrase to express the thoughts in my mind.					
7. I am willing to ask my group mates in English the meaning of word I do not know.					
8. I am willing to ask my peer sitting next to me in English the spelling of an English word.					
9. I am willing to give a short self-introduction without notes in English to the class.					
10. I am willing to translate a spoken utterance from Chinese into English in my group.					

Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire

Items	SD	D	BA	A	SA
1. I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time.					
2. I have a good understanding of my own emotions.					
3. I really understand what I feel.					
4. I always know whether or not I am happy.					
5. I always know my friends' emotions from their behaviors.					
6. I am a good observer of others' emotions.					
7. I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.					
8. I have good understanding of the emotions of people around me.					
9. I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them.					
10. I always tell myself I am a competent person.					
11. I am a self-motivated person.					

12. I would always encourage myself to try my best.					
13. I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally.					
14. I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions.					
15. I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry.					
16. I have good control of my own emotions.					

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Questionnaire

Items	SD	D	BA	A	SA
1. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in the English class.					
2. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in the English class.					
3. I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.					
4. I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.					
5. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking English in class.					
6. I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.					
7. I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.					
8. In English class, I deliberately sit in the back row of the classroom to avoid eye contact with my English teacher.					
9. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.					
10. I have a feeling of unease in front of my English teacher.					
11. I am worried that I will make mistakes in English class, and lose face.					
12. When I practice English, I am afraid that I don't perform well, and the teacher has a bad impression on me.					
13. I worry about getting left behind in English tests.					
14. I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak English.					
15. I still feel anxious even if I am well prepared for English class.					
16. In English class, I can get so nervous that I forget things I know.					

Teacher Immediacy Questionnaire

Items:	SD	D	BA	A	SA
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My English teacher					
1. Addresses students by name.					
2. Gets into conversations with individual students before or after class.					
3. Calls on students to answer questions when they indicate that they want to talk.					
4. Uses humor in class.					
5. Provides feedback on my individual work through comments on papers, oral discussion, etc.					
6. Asks how students feel about an assignment, due date, or discussion topic.					
7. Asks questions that solicit viewpoints or opinions.					
8. Praises students' work, actions, or comments.					
9. Gestures while talking to the class.					
10. Uses varied/energetic voice when talking to class.					
11. Smiles at the class as a whole.					
12. Moves around the classroom while teaching.					
13. Looks at the whole class while talking to students.					