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Abstract

This study examined the effects of EFL teachers' behavior on intermediate L2 learners' WTC in English. To this end, a proficiency test was administered to 150 female learners, and 98 intermediate learners aged 16 to 26 were recruited as the participants. Subsequently, a WTC questionnaire was distributed among them to measure their level of WTC. Moreover, interviews were carried out with 30 volunteers who agreed to participate in this phase of the study. The results of the analysis of the WTC questionnaire showed that the WTC level of the learners could be rated as above-average. Besides, the results of the interviews revealed that different kinds of teachers' behavior affected learners' WTC both positively and negatively: teachers' sense of humor and rapport could positively affect learners' WTC; on the other hand, teachers' methods of error correction while learners' speaking and teachers' lack of support could negatively affect learners' WTC. Additionally, according to learners' perspectives, there were a number of ways through which a language teacher could increase the learners' WTC in English such as encouraging learners to read extra-curricular topics and highlighting learners' strengths instead of their weaknesses. Several implications were proffered at the end of the study to heighten the awareness of L2 teachers, teacher-trainers, and language institute managers regarding the issue under investigation.

Keywords: teachers' behavior, EFL learners, willingness to communicate (WTC)

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1. Introduction

A key goal of many (if not all) English language programs is to develop learners' productive language skills. A strong movement has been established in the field of foreign language learning and pedagogy of increasing emphasis on meaningful communication, so the concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) has become progressively something essential in second language learning studies and; therefore, an increasing number of studies have been conducted on different variables that may affect second and foreign language learners' willingness to communicate (Alemi, Tajeddin, & Mesbah, 2013; Cao & Philip, 2006; MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Conrad, 2001; Wen & Clement, 2003). MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels (1998, p. 547) define WTC as "readiness to enter into the discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a second language (L2)" and believe it is associated with factors such as learners' personality and motivation, as well as societal variables. Despite the growing interest in willingness to communicate, teachers' influence on learners' WTC is a variable that has yet to be thoroughly researched. Of the studies that have looked into teachers' effects on learners' WTC, most have regarded it as one of several variables and have given the matter cursory treatments. Therefore, additional research is needed to determine whether teachers actually have an effect on their students' WTC in a classroom and if so, what the pedagogical repercussions of the phenomenon are.

The construct of WTC emerged in the mid-1980s. This concept was introduced to the communication literature based on 'unwillingness to communicate' (Burgoon, 1976), 'predisposition to verbal behavior' (Mortensen, Arnston, & Lusting, 1977) and 'shyness' (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982). For the first time, MacIntyre and Charos (1996) applied the WTC model to second language settings and showed that personality and social context had an effect on the frequency of second language (L2) use as well as WTC. Later, MacIntyre et al. (1998) broadened what was proposed by MacIntyre and Charos (1996) on the assumption that WTC in L2 could not simply manifest WTC in first language (L1) users. Of all the variables assumed to exert significant and direct effects on students' WTC (Cao & Philip, 2006; Kang, 2005; Leger & Storch, 2009; Weaver, 2010), teachers and teachers' variables are thought to weigh most heavily against students' reticence and WTC (Lee & Ng, 2009).

Teachers have been institutionally bestowed the right to create, manage, and decide the different types of students' interactions carried out in the classroom. More precisely, teachers, as those who, in one way or another, could shape the curriculum in its direct application with respect to content and topics for discussion and the specific methodological procedures which determine who talks, how they talk, who they talk to and how long they talk, hold a responsibility for creating participation opportunities and increasing them in classrooms (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Xie, 2009). MacIntyre et al. (1998) stress the importance of "opportunity", as "intention must combine with opportunity to produce behavior" (p.548). This implies that "without such an opportunity, reticence will be encouraged as the learners' wish to communicate is not stimulated" (Lee & Ng, 2009, p.303). This opportunity is important in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in which students hardly ever get the opportunity to use the language for communication purposes (Walsh, 2002).

Tsui (1996) conducted an action research project through which he planned to study teachers' better understanding of their students in terms of participation or being reticent. To do so, she investigated 38 Hong Kong English teachers who had videotaped their classes to specify the possible problems of their pedagogical teaching. Almost all the teachers observed the fact that teachers' talk is much more than students' talk during a lesson. These teachers believed that making students talk was one of the most problematic parts of the students' engagement in the class and it was in fact their primary concern. The teachers did their best to avoid the silence in the classroom as they felt failure when their learners failed to reply. In such a situation, teachers repeated or rephrased the question or finally answered themselves. Tsui (1996) also found that turn taking was not equal among the students and in some cases incomprehensible input intensified silence and put the student under stress.

Xie (2009) mentions that if student pressure and the supervision over classroom interactions are reduced, learning opportunities will increase. In this case, students' participation leads them towards learning; in other words, having less control over the classroom content lets learners get engaged in topics which are highly amusing for them. In a similar vein, Donald (2010), referring to the role of teachers in learners' WTC, argues that students' fear of being corrected, the amount of wait-time, and group work are among the factors influencing willingness to participate in the classroom discourse. The current study attempted to provide an answer to the demand of knowledge in the area of teacher effect on learners' WTC. This was done, firstly, by providing information on students' perceptions of the

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extent of teachers' effect on learners' willingness to communicate and, secondly, by specifying in more detail the elements considered to be most influential on WTC, both in a positive and negative manner.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Modern language pedagogy attaches a lot of importance to communication and training language learners who are able to communicate effectively in the target language. In a language classroom following communicative approach, language teachers are eager to have learners who are willing to use the language in the classroom. Over the last two decades, Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers such as MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) have all emphasized the importance of WTC as a crucial component of modern language instruction. Thus, it can be claimed that the notion of WTC, which is actually the intention and desire to initiate communication, plays a key role in learning a second/foreign language.

Willingness to communicate in EFL learners has been given a great attention worldwide. Much has been written on the determinants that can hinder learners' WTC in second or foreign language context. Though the literature is abundant with studies on many of these variables (Jasni & Safian, 2021; Mazaheri, 2015; Sato, 2020), little can be found on the effects of teachers' behavior on EFL learners. Therefore, in this study effects of teachers' behavior on EFL learners' WTC was the subject of investigation.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

Teachers' behavior is an objective criterion for willingness to communicate in EFL settings. It can foster or impede language learning. The present study aimed to investigate the effect of this factor among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. More specifically, this study aimed to (a) find the extent to which Iranian intermediate EFL learners had WTC, (b) explore the effects of teachers' behavior on the learners' WTC, and (c) unearth the best ways through which EFL teachers could promote and foster WTC in their EFL learners. In fact, the present study sought to find answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent are Iranian intermediate EFL learners willing to communicate?

2. What are the effects of teachers' behavior on EFL learners' willingness to communicate in the EFL classroom?

3. What are the best ways in which language teachers can increase EFL learners' willingness to communicate?

2. Literature Review

The construct of WTC emerged in the mid-1980s, and it was in fact introduced to the communication literature based on 'unwillingness to communicate' (Burgoon, 1976), 'predisposition to verbal behavior' (Mortensen, Arnston & Lusting, 1977) and 'shyness' (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982). For the first time, MacIntyre and Charos (1996) applied the WTC model to second language settings and showed that personality and social context had an effect on the frequency of L2 use as well as WTC. MacIntyre and associates (MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Conrod, 2001) referred to WTC as a final step before overt verbal action. It is a psychological process or a latent variable that is unlikely, if not impossible, to be fully observed.

Later, MacIntyre et al. (1998) broadened what was proposed by MacIntyre and Charos (1996) on the assumption that WTC in L2 could not simply manifest WTC in first language (L1) users. The rationale behind the lack of transferability of WTC from L1 to L2 was justified by greater difference in L2 users' communicative competence and social factors influencing L2 use (Cao & Philip, 2006; MacIntyre et al., 1998). Looking at WTC as a situational construct, they defined L2 WTC as ''readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547).

Subsequent research has lent support to the intertwined relationships between L2 WTC and many other variables. Among a number of individual variables, self-confidence has been overwhelmingly found to be the most immediate antecedent of L2 WTC (Clement, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Yashima, 2002). Attitudes and motivation conceptualized under the social psychological approach (Gardner, 1988) are also found to be closely related to L2 WTC. This approach emphasizes that integrative attitudes toward or intention to identify with the L2 community strongly influence motivation in L2 learning. Empirical studies have also found that L2 WTC is related to other more inherently stable individual factors such as personality, age, and gender.

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MacIntyre and Charos (1996) used path analysis to examine the effect of personality traits on L2 WTC. Their model indicated that, generally, personality traits affect L2 WTC indirectly through variables such as perceived confidence, L2 anxiety, and attitudes. They concluded that the influence of personality might be routed through other more proximal predictors of L2 WTC. MacIntyre and associates also observed differing levels of L2 WTC across age (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2002) and gender (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2002). These findings have undoubtedly contributed to the understanding of how L2 WTC differs across individuals. However, for researchers and language education practitioners in particular, additional insight is needed regarding how L2 WTC can be affected by classroom contextual factors.

Past research on the variables affecting WTC in the classroom context also indicated that teachers' attitude, involvement, and teaching style exert a significant and determining influence on learners' participation and WTC (Cao, 2011; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 2001; Wen & Clement, 2003). Wen and Clement (2003) reported that teacher involvement and immediacy influence learners' engagement and WTC. In their study, teacher involvement referred to the quality of an interpersonal relationship between teacher and students, while immediacy construct referred to those communication behaviors that enhance closeness and nonverbal interaction with another individual (Mehrabian, 1968).

Kang (2005) reported that social support from a tutor reduces anxiety and positively influences learners' WTC. Cao (2011) found that students are more willing to ask questions and participate more actively when they like their teacher. MacIntyre et al. (2001) referred to the teachers' central role and concluded that students are generally willing to talk with their teachers. The researchers also found that teachers can influence learners' WTC through external regulation of rules or satisfying learners' need for relatedness. However, far too little attention has been paid to the influence of teacher on learners in regard to WTC and, in those few instances that attention has been given to this idea, it was merely viewed as one of several factors. While evidence from previous studies indicates that teachers "have the potential at any moment to increase or decrease WTC among the students" (MacIntyre et al., 2001, p. 88), a study investigating teacher's behavior, activities, and moment-to-moment practices that have the potential to affect learners' willingness to talk seems necessary.

Previous research on WTC has shown that teachers' attitude, support, and teaching style can influence learners' WTC. Zarrinabadi (2014) investigated a qualitative study that utilized a focused essay technique to explore how teachers can affect learners' tendency to talk in class. Study participants were asked to describe those situations in which teachers influenced their willingness to communicate in English. A total of 97 entries were received for situations in which the students were most willing to communicate and 84 entries for situations in which the students were least willing to communicate. The findings indicate that teachers' wait time, error correction, decision on the topic, and support exert influence on learners' WTC.

Kang (2014) examined the effects of study-abroad (SA) experiences on EFL learners' WTC, speaking abilities, and participation in interaction in classes taught by the native English-speaking teacher (NEST) in their home country. Sixty Korean university students participated in this study. The results indicated that the EFL learners' WTC, speaking abilities, and participation in interaction in classes taught by the NEST were significantly developed as a result of SA in L1 English-speaking countries. Concerning proficiency dependent differences, the EFL learners in three proficiency level groups were differently influenced by SA experiences in terms of WTC and speaking abilities.

Hsu (2014) investigated teachers' inappropriate teaching misbehaviors in relation to students' WTC in English classes by positing 33 a mediational effect of students' affective learning. This study argues instead of an indirect effect on students' affective learning from teachers' misbehaviors— derisiveness, incompetence, irresponsibility, and non-immediacy—which occur in the classroom and could directly impact students' WTC. The participants were asked to respond to three instruments designed for this study. Three hypotheses were posed and found that teacher misbehaviors were correlated negatively at a significant level on four aspects of students' affective learning. Though teacher misbehavior only showed a minor negative relationship with students' WTC, but SEM analysis indicated that students' WTC was directly affected by teacher misbehavior than via indirect effect from students' affective learning.

Yaraghi and Shafiee (2018) aimed at investigating the relationships among learner autonomy (LA), WTC, and communication strategy (CS) use, and examining the predictive power of WTC and LA in accounting for CS use. To this end, 102 Iranian EFL learners were asked to fill out three questionnaires tapping into their LA, WTC, and CS use. Pearson correlation revealed that there was a weak, positive, yet statistically significant relationship between LA and CS use, while there was a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between WTC and CS use.

Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was conducted several times and the results showed that WTC was found to be a better predictor of CSs than LA. Additionally, WTC could significantly predict these components of CSs: fluency-oriented strategies, negotiation for meaning while speaking, accuracy-oriented strategies, message reduction and alteration strategies, nonverbal strategies while speaking, and message abandonment strategies. On the other hand, LA was a significant predictor of the social affective strategies component of CSs.

Zhou, Xi, and Lochtman (2020) explored the moderating effects of foreign language anxiety (FLA) on the relationship between L2 competence and WTC. Descriptive analyses indicated pretty low levels of FLA and fairly high levels of WTC of the participants. In addition, correlation analyses showed strong relations between L2 competence (including overall competence and listening, speaking, reading, and writing competence) and WTC of Chinese study-abroad learners beyond the classroom context. In fact, regression analyses indicated that FLA moderated the relationships between overall competence and WTC, between reading competence and WTC, and between writing competence and WTC. On the other hand, FLA did not moderate the relationships between listening competence and WTC, and between speaking competence and WTC.

Reviewing the literature on WTC and on teacher' behavior, it became evident that there was a paucity of research regarding the effects of EFL teachers' behavior on L2 learners' WTC, especially in the EFL context of Iran, and thus the present study sought to fill this existing niche in the literature by trying to find answers to the following research questions:

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study was a descriptive study in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected from intermediate Iranian EFL learners. A descriptive research study is one designed to depict the participants' behavior, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes in an accurate way (Mackey & Gass, 2005). More simply put, descriptive research is all about describing people who take part in the study. There are a range of different methods a researcher can go about doing a descriptive research project like a case study, historical study, and survey study; the research in hand is of the third type; survey was done through face-to-face interviews and handing out questionnaires to the participants.

3.2 Participants

The population from which this study drew its sample was intermediate EFL female learners studying English in language schools in Shahin Shahr, Isfahan, Iran. The sample included only female learners who met the criteria of availability and level of proficiency (i.e., intermediate). Their mother tongue was Persian, and their age ranged between 16 and 26. These participants were selected from 10 different classes with 10 different teachers. These teachers were only female and their age ranged from 27 to 33 with 4 to 6 years of teaching experience. To draw the sample, the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) version 2 was administered to 150 learners studying at the intermediate level in those language institutes. Based on the rating scale of the OQPT, those who scored between 30 and 47 were considered as intermediate learners, and this way, 98 homogeneous EFL learners were selected as the participants in this study.

3.3 Instruments

As to the purpose of the study, a number of instruments were employed that are described in order.

3.3.1 Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)

As an indicator to identify learners' L2 proficiency level, the results of an OQPT were used. The test contained 60 multiple-choice items consisting of grammar (20 items), vocabulary (20 items), and reading comprehension (20 items). The allotted time for answering the questions was 45 minutes. A multiple-choice test format is considered to be appropriate for Iranian learners who have had much experience taking tests in a similar format during formal schooling. Also, OQPT was selected because it is easy to administer and easy to score objectively. Furthermore, this widely-known placement test had been extensively used by previous researchers and credited for its established validity and reliability.

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3.3.2 WTC Questionnaire

Participants' tendency for communication was measured using the Willingness to Communicate Questionnaire developed by McCroskey and Richmond (1987). The questionnaire includes 25 items (e.g. "talk with an acquaintance while standing in line") which measures learners' WTC in different context and with different others. Participants were given the questionnaire to complete which asked them to rate their willingness to communicate in English on a Likert scale from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 5 "Strongly Agree." The validity of this questionnaire has been attested by previous authors, and its Cronbach's alpha reliability was found to be .84 in the current study.

3.3.3 Interviews

In the semi-structured interviews implemented in this study, the students were asked about their willingness to communicate, their perceptions about communication in the classroom, and the effects of teachers' behavior on their WTC. The interview included seven researcher-made questions, the first three of which were about the effects of teachers' behavior on learners' WTC in their own opinion, and the other four questions were about the best ways in which a language teacher can increase their WTC. These questions were made based on the objectives of the study and the literature review on the topic. Learners' answers and comments were recorded on audio tapes and transcribed later for further analysis.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected from learners of several institutes in Shahin Shahr, Iran in the summer term of 2019. In May, the researchers contacted the language institutes to ask for their permission to administer the test, distribute the questionnaire, and arrange for interviews. Upon being granted the permission to do so, the first instrument (i.e., OQPT) was distributed among 150 learners studying in those language institutes. Then the WTC questionnaire was distributed among 98 intermediate learners who were found to be homogeneous. They were asked to rate their willingness to communicate in English on a Likert scale from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 5 "Strongly Agree." Finally, the third researcher in this study interviewed 30 available learners who were willing to take part in the interview. They were asked some questions about the effects of teachers' behavior on their WTC. The learners' answers and comments were recorded on audiotapes, transcribed, and classified into emerging themes and categories. Then each answer in each category was tallied, and their frequencies and percentages were calculated. Descriptions of the frequencies and percentages of the categories followed the related tables and figures.

3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data in the present study took place mainly through descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. In fact, for the purpose of the first research question, such descriptive statistics as mean, median, and mode (among other things) were used and reported to help gain an understanding of the extent to which EFL learners had WTC. In the case of the second and third research questions, frequencies and percentages were utilized to provide a picture of the ways through which EFL teachers could suppress or promote EFL learners' WTC.

4. Results

4.1 Results for the OQPT

The learners who took part in this research were all studying at the intermediate level in several language institutes in Shahin Shahr. However, to ensure their homogeneity and to double-check their being at the intermediate level of proficiency, measures were taken to calculate the descriptive statistics of their placement test scores, identify the mean score, and include in the sample those whose scores ranged between 30 and 47. Since a single group of EFL learners was recruited as the participants of the study, no inferential statistics would apply here, and the results of the descriptive statics are in view in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics results of the OQPT

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Placement Test	150	25.00	49.00	38.51	3.69	-.007	-1.36

The number of participants (*N* = 150), the mean score (*M* = 38.51), standard deviation (SD = 3.69), and other descriptive statistics of the placement test are shown in Table 1. Those learners with a score between 30.00 and 47.00 were selected as intermediate learners (*n* = 98). Also, the skewness value (which provides an indication of the symmetry of the distribution) and the kurtosis value (which provides information about the peakedness of the distribution) are presented in Table 1. If the distribution is perfectly normal, a skewness and kurtosis value of 0 would be obtained. Here, the skewness value was a very small negative one (-.007), which indicates a slight clustering of scores at the high right-hand end of the distribution (negatively skewed), and the kurtosis value (-1.36) indicates that the distribution was not peaked, but rather slightly flat.

4.2 Results for Research Question One

The first research question of the study was: To what extent are Iranian intermediate EFL learners willing to communicate? To answer this research question, the descriptive statistics of the WTC scores of the participants were examined.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics results for the learners' WTC scores

WTC	Statistic
N	98
Mean	81.82
Trimmed Mean	82.16
Median	84.00
Mode	85.00
Variance	214.86
Std. Deviation	14.65
Minimum	43.00
Maximum	123.00
Range	80.00
Skewness	-.41
Kurtosis	.46

It could be seen in Table 2 that the mean score of the learners' WTC scores was 81.82 and the trimmed mean was 82.16. The trimmed mean is calculated by excluding the high and low extreme scores and calculation a new mean for the distribution. A small difference between the mean and the trimmed mean indicates that there were no extremes scores, or that those extreme scores could not influence the mean score to a large extent. In Table 2, the median was shown to be 84.00, and the standard deviation of the distribution equaled 14.65. It could be seen that the minimum score was 43.00, while the maximum score was 123.00, and thus the range equaled 80.00. Finally, skewness and kurtosis values of -.41 and .46 were obtained, which mean the distribution was a bit negatively skewed, and it was not peaked. The distribution, thus, must have been next to normal. This normality of the distribution is also evident in the histogram in Figure 1.

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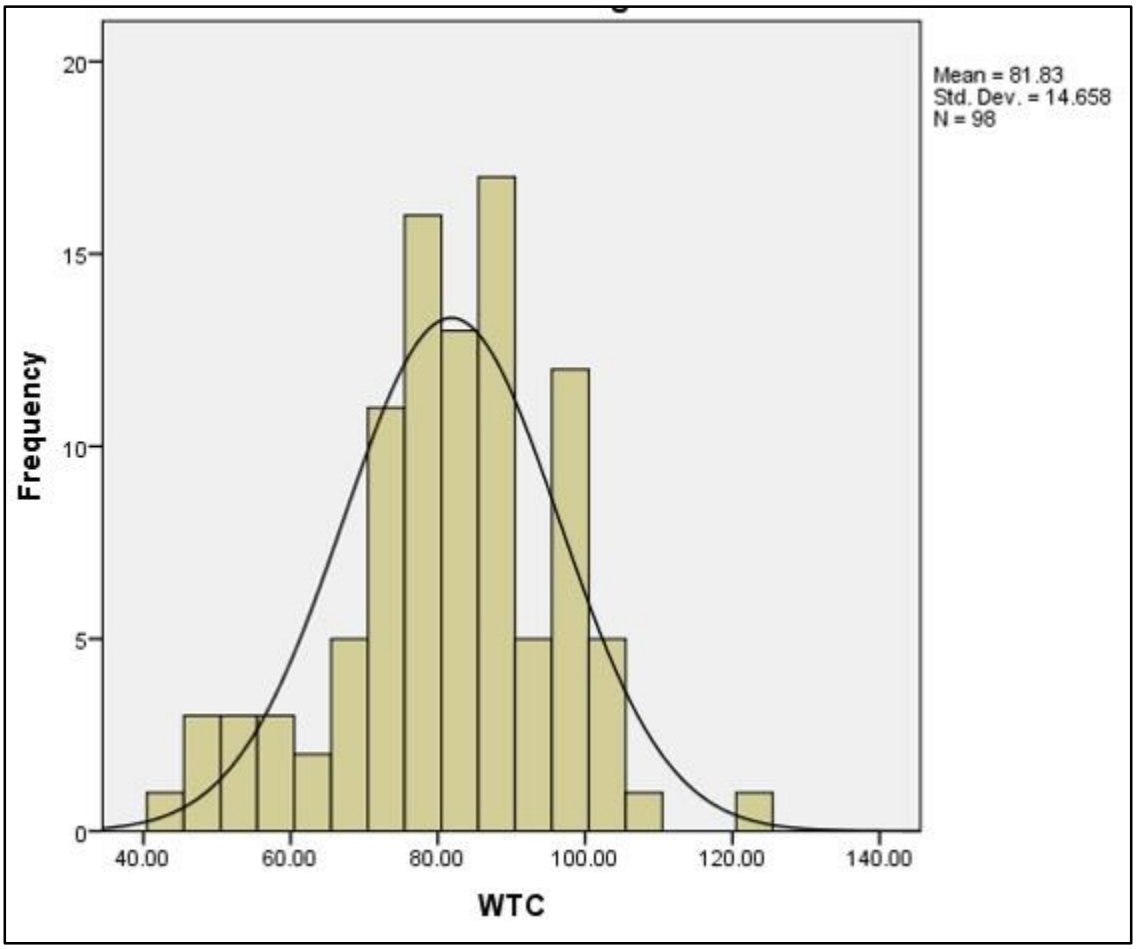


Figure 1. Histogram showing the distribution of scores for the learners' WTC scores

As it could be seen in Figure 1, the distribution of the scores represented graphically via the histogram was not far from a normal distribution. As the WTC scores could range from 25 to 125, and the midpoint of this range of scores is 75, one can conclude that the obtained mean score by the participants of the study (M = 81.82) was greater than the average score one could get on the WTC questionnaire. It could thus be inferred that the WTC level of the learners who took part in this study could be rated as above-average.

4.3 Results for Research Question Two

The second research question of the study was: What are the effects of teachers' behavior on EFL learners' willingness to communicate in an EFL classroom in the learners' own opinion? The frequencies and percentages of learners' answers are provided in Table 3.

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Table 3. Results for the effects of teachers' behavior on the intermediate EFL learners' WTC

Teachers' behavior effects on learners' WTC		Frequency	Percentage
Positive effects	1.Teachers' wait time	5	16.66%
	2. Teachers' sense of humor	4	13.33%
	3. Teachers' error correction	5	16.66%
	4. Teachers' appearance and neatness	2	6.66%
	5. Teachers' kindness and patience	3	10%
	6. Teachers' intimate relationship with learners	4	13.33%
	7. Teachers' asking question from all learners	3	10%
	8. Teachers' encouraging (by saying you are in progress to learners	2	6.66%
	9. Teachers' questions about learners' personal opinions in class discussion	3	10%
Negative effects	1. Teachers' error correction while learners speak	7	23.33%
	2. Teachers' being book-bound	5	16.66%
	3. Teachers' mood	4	13.33%
	4. Lack of teachers' support	6	20%

Table 3 revealed that for teachers' wait time, the highest frequency was obtained, i.e., $f = 5$ for positive effects of teacher's behavior. Teachers' wait time is the time a teacher waits for receiving the response, which influences the students' willingness or unwillingness to communicate, frequency of communication, and quality of speaking. The learners said that they needed more time to prepare their sentences or to find the most appropriate vocabulary or structure. One student told about discussing the problem with her teacher and asking for more time. In the current study, some students considered teacher's wait-time, which they called patience, as the reason for being active and communicative, and some others believed the short time given for reflection was the main factor leading to embarrassment and unwillingness to communicate. A learner (Rosa, age: 21) commented that "when you talk in English you need more time to organize what you want to say." Another respondent (Mina, age: 18) described a situation in which she was willing to talk and commented as follows: "my teacher at language institute was very good. She waited until you prepared your sentences and told her the answer. I was always active in the class because she was patient to hear the answers." A respondent said the following: "I paused for some seconds. Suddenly the teacher asked another one to continue. She thought I didn't want to go on while I was thinking." (Ghazal, age: 19).

The second factor which received the same frequency as the previous one for positive effects of teachers' behavior was teacher's error correction, ($f = 5$). Methods of delivering error correction were found to affect students' WTC. Error correction is closely connected to whether individuals feel secure or insecure and teachers should try to create a safe environment in which nothing is threatening students in case they make mistakes. One of the learners (Nikoo, age: 18) preferred delayed error correction for it allowed her "to continue and accomplish the message." Another example comes from the excerpt below: Elham (age: 23) said: "my teacher is a very kind person. When I speak in her class, I feel comfortable and not stressed. I think what makes her different from other teachers is that she is not much concerned about your pronunciation. The message of the sentences is important for her not pronunciation or grammar. She never interrupts the students and gives her comments at the end of their speech. Even those who speak English worse than me speak in her class. I always talk in her class but less in other classes."

As it could be seen in the table above, next frequently received response in positive effects of teachers' behavior was for teachers' sense of humor ($f = 4$). Some learners argued that their teachers' sense of humor could affect their WTC

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in class. For instance, one of learners said "I am more willing to communicate when my teacher has a good sense of humor in class, and I never become tired." (Sahar, age: 18)

Besides, teacher's intimate relationship with learners had the same frequency with teachers' sense of humor (f = 4). They thought that their friendly and intimate relation with their teacher reduced their stress and anxiety. Thus, they became more relaxed and willing to express their opinions in class. Next frequently received response was teachers' kindness and patience (f = 3), as three learners mentioned their teachers' kindness and patience had positive effects on their WTC in class. One of them (Samira, age: 19) pointed out that "last semester I had Konkur examination and I couldn't be ready all the time in class, but she was very kind and patient. She understood my problems. For this reason, I became more willing to speak in her class."

The other factors which received the same frequency as the previous one were teachers' asking questions to all learners (f = 3), and teachers' questions about learners' personal opinions (f = 3). Three learners believed that when their teachers asked questions of all learners even a silent or shy one, instead of asking questions just of volunteers, they would become more eager to communicate because they felt that they were equally important for their teachers. Three other learners believed that when their teachers asked them their personal opinions in class one by one, they were more motivated to express their own opinion. One of respondents (Fateme, age: 20) cited that "I didn't like to give my opinions in the last semester, but this semester my teacher always asks everyone opinions and listens carefully to our comments and opinions, even if we are wrong. This behavior gives me confidence to speak in her class." The least frequently received responses for positive effects of teachers' behavior in Table 3 were teachers' encouraging (by saying you are in progress to learners), and teachers' appearance and neatness, (f = 2). The results which were mentioned above are shown in Figure 2 below.

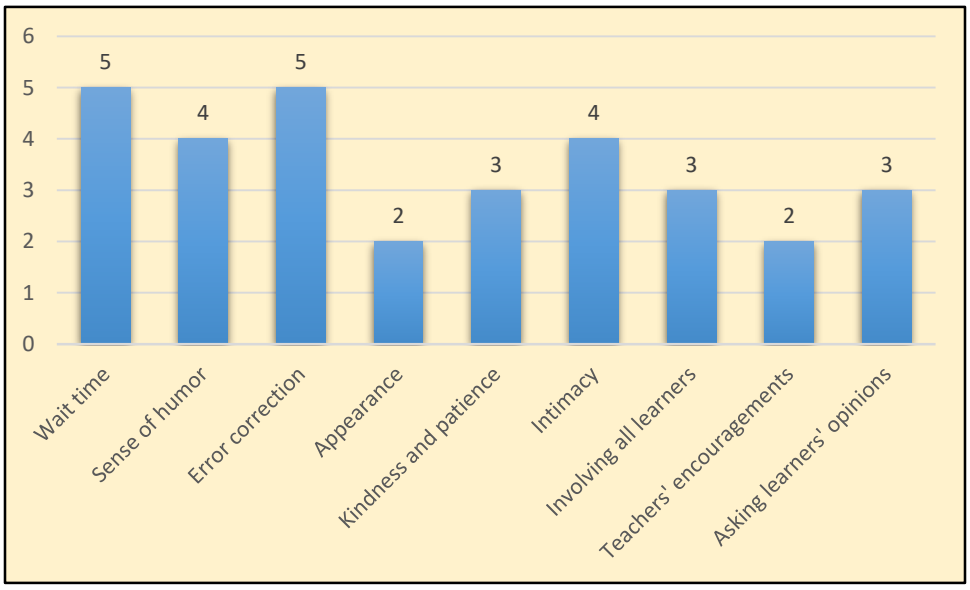


Figure 2. Bar graph of positive effects of teachers' behavior on learners' WTC

As it can be seen above, Figure 2 showed that the highest frequencies belonged to both teachers' wait time and teachers' error correction methods. On the other hand, lowest frequencies were both teachers' encouraging learners by saying they were in progress to learners, and teachers' appearance. Table 3 also revealed that for negative effects of teachers' behavior on learners' WTC, teachers' error correction while learners speak had the highest frequency i.e. (f = 7). In fact, when error correction happens in the moment and the teacher's feedback immediately follows the individual's error, it tends to reduce WTC. Some learners answered that teacher's immediate error correction enhanced their anxiety and made them feel insecure about making mistakes in future interactions. A respondent reported feeling "ashamed and stressful to continue her speech" due to teacher's immediate reaction to the error produced. Another learner, opposing immediate error correction, said the following: "It is very unpleasant to hear the correct grammatical form or pronunciation when you are speaking in the classroom. One day I was talking about the discussion in our

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class. The teacher repeated one of my sentences exactly when I wanted to use what I have read before. It was a bad moment. I felt embarrassed to make that mistake and I talked a little. I decided to speak when I am sure about the accuracy of sentence I'm going to say" (Nasim, age: 20).

The second highest frequency for negative effects of teachers' behavior on learners' WTC was lack of teacher's support, (f = 6). In the excerpt presented below, the learner considers lack of teacher support as a variable leading to unwillingness to communicate. Rahil said "I am not willing to communicate when I am in teacher B's class. I like to give comments in the class, but everything I say seems to be unpleasant or wrong for the teacher. Actually, when I talk to the teacher during the class discussion she looks at her papers or book finding the things she wants to say after me. I think her behavior shows that my ideas are not true" (Rahil, age: 18). The next frequently received response which had negative effects on learners' WTC, was teachers' being book-bound, (f = 5). Sahar (age: 26) cited: "I'm unwilling to communicate when my teacher come to class and open her book and start to teach from the beginning to the end. Learners usually need to speak about different subjects and they don't like have a teacher who relies too much on books. Because they become unwilling to speak, when the English class is the same as school class atmosphere." The last one was teachers' mood (f = 4). As it is obvious no one likes to have a boring teacher and surely an angry teacher can hinder one's WTC. Mobina (age: 16) mentioned that: "when my teacher is sad or angry and come to class with that mood, she doesn't like to speak anymore." The results which were mentioned above are shown in Figure 3 below.

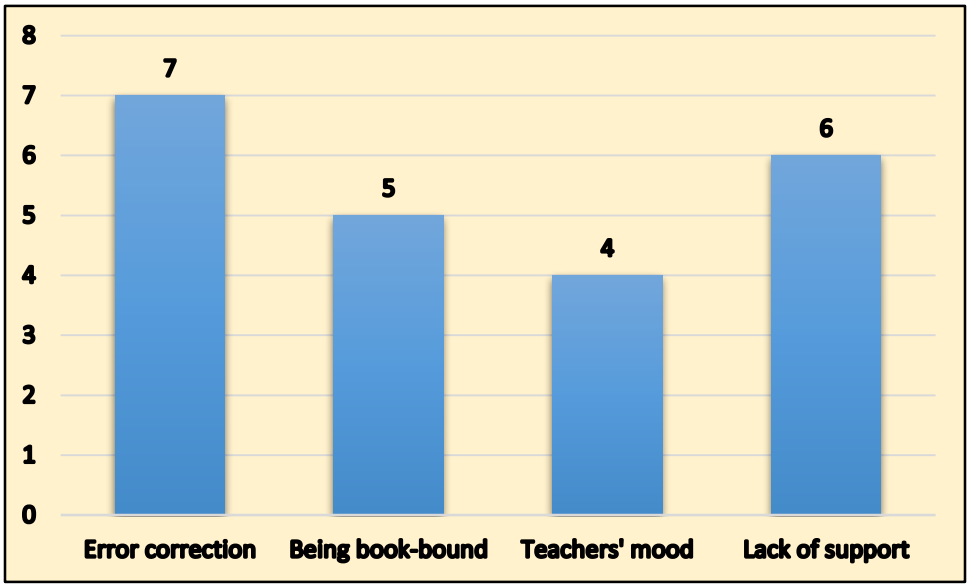


Figure 3. Bar graph for negative effects of teachers' behavior on learners' WTC

As it could be seen, Figure 3 showed that the highest frequencies belonged to teachers' error correction while learners speak and the lowest frequency was the one for teachers' mood.

4.4 Results for Research Question Three

The third research question of the study was: In learners' opinion, what are the best ways in which a language teacher can increase their willingness to communicate? The best ways in which a language teacher can increase the learners' WTC, in learners' own opinions, were shown in Table 4.

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Table 4. Results for the best ways language teachers can increase learners' WTC

Best ways in which a language teacher can increase the learners' WTC	Frequency	Percentage
1. Encouraging learners to read on extra-curricular topics	8	26.66%
2. Supporting learners	7	23.33%
3. Having fun	4	13.33%
4. Encouraging learners to watch English language movies	3	10%
5. Highlighting learners' strength instead of their weakness	4	13.33%

As it could be seen in Table 4, for encouraging learners to read extra-curricular topics, the highest frequency was reported ($f = 8$). The teacher's approach for selecting classroom discussion topics and extra-curricular topics was found to influence learners' WTC. A respondent, called the topic as the main variable affecting her unwillingness to communicate. She explained: "Our teacher has chosen me to deliver a lecture about addiction. I am not interested in addiction and I want to prepare something and present just in order to pass the credit. I am not willing to communicate about topics which are not interesting to me" (Shamim, age: 22). Moreover, some learners were interested to speak about their favorite topics. Most respondents seemed to appreciate being given the chance to choose the discussion topic in the classroom. They used the opportunity to select the topics with which they were familiar, knowledgeable, and interested, which ultimately led to higher WTC and classroom participation. A respondent highlighted the role of discussion topic and expressed: "I really appreciated the teacher's decision to select the topic suggested by students. I think it was due to the topic that most of us spoke." Another respondent echoed similar sentiments and said: "In listening and speaking class, teacher and students negotiate on the topic for the next session. It is very good that our teacher asks the students' ideas about the class activities and I think it makes the students more active. For example, yesterday's topic was about marriage and most of the students spoke because all of us were interested in it" (Nazanin, age: 19). Another respondent said: "my teacher often asks our favorite topic for our next session discussion. Thus, I will be very willing to speak about that topic in next session" (Sepideh, age: 17).

The next factor in the table is teacher's support ($f = 7$). Teacher's support in the form of short confirmatory phrases or smiling was found to positively affect learners' WTC. The positive function of teacher support on learners' WTC can be well illuminated in the following expression from one of learners: "I love to speak in teacher C's class. She carefully listens to you and when you finish your speech, she thanks you for expressing your ideas. Yesterday, I said something in the classroom. To be honest, I was not sure whether it was true or not, but I become sure that it is true when I saw the smile on the teacher's face, her looking at me, and words like yes and good" (Ferdos, age: 26). Another learner said: "I am very willing to communicate in class discussions. One of my reasons is our teacher. She is not strict about grammar or pronunciation and helps you to deliver your message. Last session I said something in the class but I knew that I couldn't deliver my message. The teacher understood that I need help and asked me that do you mean this. I answered 'yes' and the teacher told the classmates that it was a very insightful comment." (Kimiya, age: 23). Also they said they were willing to communicate in the classes which had friendly teachers.

Some teachers smile, look at your face, nod in agreement, and behave in a way that makes you eager to speak again. The learners were more willing to communicate when they felt "secure from the fear of being an unpleasant conversation partner." One respondent cited the following: "the teacher was very friendly. She encouraged us to speak in English and created a pleasant and lovely class. I really enjoyed talking in her class." Another participant credited a teacher who was "sympathetic and interested in her students" and believed that "teacher's attention to students makes them less anxious and more willing to speak." Respondents enjoyed when teachers expressed their support by providing some active responses such as "yes" or "good", smiling, looking students in the eyes (which is a sign of listening and attention in Iranian culture), or by saying "thank you" at the end of the student's speech, confirming that teachers' sympathy, attention, and support contributed to students' progress and interest in language learning.

Having fun was the next frequent answer ($f = 4$). These four respondents believed having fun with learners had very important effects on their WTC and it could motivate them to speak more during the class. One of respondents (Maral, age: 19) cited that: "my teacher is very serious in teaching and works with us very hard but she has fun when she feels

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that her learners get tired. This behavior gives me energy to participate in class discussion." Next way was highlighting learners' strength instead of their weakness (f = 4). When teachers mentioned their learners' strengths, they were motivated to speak and they were more confident. Providing learners with affective feedback could affect learners' WTC. And then, encouraging learners to watch English language movies was the next frequently received response (f = 3). The results which were mentioned above are shown in Figure 4 below.

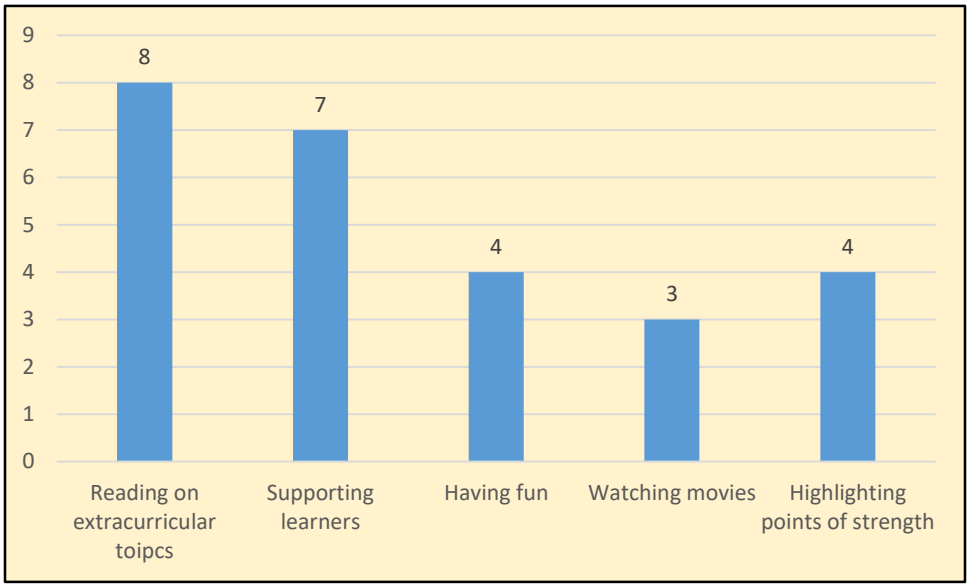


Figure 4. Bar graph of best ways language teachers can increase learners' WTC

As it could be seen, Figure 4 showed that the highest frequency belonged to encouraging learners to read on extra-curricular topics, and lowest frequency was encouraging learners to watch English language movies.

5. Discussion

This study aimed at gathering information about the effects of teachers' behavior on EFL learners' WTC in English. The study started with a large group of participants to participate in a test, and the selected participants filled out a questionnaire; then, the researchers interviewed 30 available learners. After doing so, by analyzing the participants' answers and opinions, the researchers found the answers to the related research questions, which are rewritten here, along with the summaries of their answers, for reasons of convenience.

Research Question One: To what extent are Iranian intermediate EFL learners willing to communicate? It can be concluded that the obtained mean score by the participants of the study (M = 81.82) was greater than the average score one could get on the WTC questionnaire. It could thus be inferred that the WTC level of the learners who took part in this study could be rated as above-average.

Research Question Two: What are the effects of teachers' behavior on EFL learners' willingness to communicate in an EFL classroom in the learners' own opinion? According to learners' answers, positive effects of teachers' behavior on learners' WTC in a descending order were as follows: Teachers' wait time, teachers' error correction, teachers' sense of humor, teachers' intimate relationship with learners, teachers' kindness and patience, teachers' questions about learners' personal opinions in class discussion, teachers' asking question to all learners, teachers' encouraging (by saying you are in progress to learners), teachers' appearance and neatness. Furthermore, negative effects in a descending order were teachers' error correction while learners speak, lack of teachers' support, teachers' being book-bound, and teachers' mood.

Research Question Three: In learners' opinion, what are the best ways in which a language teacher can increase their willingness to communicate? In learners' opinion, the best ways in a descending order were as follows: encouraging

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learners to read extra-curricular topics, supporting learners, having fun, highlighting learners' strength instead of their weakness, encouraging learners to watch English language movies.

5.1 Addressing the First Research Question

Regarding the first research question with the aim of evaluating the extent of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' WTC, the results indicated that the WTC level of the learners who took part in this study could be rated as above-average. To answer this question, the researchers tested the intermediate group by distributing WTC questionnaire. It was observed that the obtained mean score by the participants of the study (M = 81.82) was greater than the average score one could get on the WTC questionnaire.

The findings of the study were in line with previous research studies; for instance, Barjesteh, Vaseghi, and Neissi (2012) indicated that learners are much more willing to communicate in group discussions and meetings with friends than other situations. They conclude that Iranian students are willing to initiate communication in situations experienced before, like group discussion or communicating with their friends. Zarrinabadi (2014) concluded that teachers can influence their students' willingness to communicate and participation in classroom activities by giving more power to students to negotiate topics, focusing more on students' knowledge, being aware of and adapting methods of error correction, giving more time for consideration and reflection before answering questions, and by creating a learning environment where the learners' feel supported. As teachers traditionally have the right to select how topics and tasks are chosen and they are the ones who manage how they are carried out in the classroom, teachers have the power to create opportunities for learners to communicate.

5.2 Addressing the Second Research Question

The second research question took account of the effects of teachers' behavior on EFL learners' willingness to communicate in an EFL classroom in the learners' own opinion. According to the results, for teachers' wait time, the highest frequency was obtained i.e. (f = 5). Rowe (1974) stated that nearly 0.9 seconds pass between the teachers' initiating a question and his or her waiting for a student's response or reaction. After this amount of time, the teacher decides whether to continue the conversation by presenting the answer or asking another student to answer the question. Rowe (1986) believed that "slow" students need more time to organize their speech or think about the grammar or vocabulary. The data revealed that hesitation occurring in the speech may not be due to learner's unwillingness to communicate but may simply be a strategy that offers more time for students to reflect and produce more linguistically appropriate utterances. Extending the wait time proves to be a useful procedure to involve students in classroom communication, particularly reflective students (Brown, 2007) and those who are not advanced language learners. Teachers can help these learners by waiting to follow up on their question until the learners have fully reflected and are ready to respond. While learners speak, the teacher may provide backchannels, smile, and nod in agreement to create an encouraging wait time for them so that they can more easily and confidently express themselves.

In a research study in this area, MacIntyre and Blackie (2012) examined the relative ability of action control theory to predict non-linguistic outcomes of language learning, and claimed that hesitation negatively influenced learners' WTC. Hesitation refers to the learner's inability to initiate intended actions from decisions. Hesitant students tend to be too slow to respond when the opportunity to speak arises in class. MacIntyre and Blackie (2012) reported that hesitation might create reactions from interlocutors, which reinforce the tendency to hesitate more in the future. In some situations, described by learners, the teachers interpreted hesitation to reflect on the message as a sign of inability and unwillingness to comprehend the message. MacIntyre and Blackie (2012) consider response time a fundamental component of communication and reported that hesitant learners were at risk of being construed as unwilling or incompetent. MacIntyre and Blackie (2012) suggested that teachers should know their own tendencies in dealing with hesitant learners and notice involuntary responses they may generate. The data indicated that teachers' allocating longer periods of wait-time can be an appropriate strategy to address hesitant learners and influence their WTC positively.

The second factor which received the same frequency as the previous one for positive effects of teachers' behavior was teacher's error correction (f = 5). Methods of delivering error correction were found to affect students' WTC. Error correction is closely connected to whether individuals feel secure or insecure and teachers should try to create a safe environment in which nothing is threatening students in case they make mistakes. MacIntyre et al. (2001) also

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considered feedback from the teacher as a variable exerting influence on students' WTC. Delayed error correction, however, was found to increase WTC in that it let the students keep the flow of their speaking and deliver the message.

The third factor which received the next highest frequency was teachers' sense of humor. Some learners argued that their teacher's sense of humor could affect their WTC in class. In a previous research study, Bostina-Bratu (2007) introduced humor in classrooms and claimed it might help create a friendly atmosphere. Humor and laughter may reduce tension and improve the classroom climate, augment student-teacher rapport, and increase learning. Humor may also assist shy students to take risks, see themselves as part of the class, and help lower their affective tensions. Humor may change the learners' perception about the experience of learning and consider it as a fun activity rather than an overwhelming task.

The next frequently received response in positive effects of teachers' behavior was intimate and friendly relationship with learners. Bowman (2011) suggested teachers should work on their relationship with their students. Establishing a good rapport between the teacher and the learner is a basic requirement in any successful learning environment. Take those extra steps that may improve your relationship with your students. Try functioning as an instinctive pride builder in the classroom by creating self-confidence in your learners. Creating a friendly atmosphere is one of the many ways teachers can ensure a lower use of avoidance strategy. Zarrinabadi, Ketabi, and Abdi (2014) found that teacher support decreased learner's stress and enhanced a willingness to participate in classroom activities.

The next factor based on the results of the current study was encouraging learners by saying you are in progress to learners. Some previous studies also found similar results; for instance, Dornyei and Csizer (1998) stated that teachers should increase learners' self-confidence. Belief in one's ability and competence is vital to perform tasks and achieve goals (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). They advise L2 teachers to help their learners reach a high level of self-belief, and recommend that if constantly reminding them of their abilities is what it takes to build that self-esteem, then do not hesitate to do so.

The next frequently received responses were for negative effects of teachers' behavior on the learners' WTC. For instance, teachers' error correction while learners speak and lack of teachers' support had negative effects on the learners' WTC. In previous research, Wen and Clement (2003) found that support from a teacher is a determining and significant factor influencing learners' WTC. Furthermore, Kang (2005) believed that error correction is closely connected to whether individuals feel secure or insecure and teachers should try to create a safe environment in which nothing is threatening students in case they make mistakes. Zarrinabadi (2014) believed that, when teacher's error correction immediately follows the individual's error, it tends to reduce WTC. Kang (2005) believed that delayed teacher feedback and on-the-spot error correction, respectively, have facilitating and debilitating impacts on students' WTC. Based on this study's findings, it is suggested that teachers use more delayed error correction whenever possible to create a less anxiety-inducing environment for students. In doing so, teachers can pave the way for a friendly and supportive manner in error correction. They can smile and use informal sentences to present the correct form.

5.3 Addressing the Third Research Question

Taking the third research question into account, i.e. in learners' opinion, what are the best ways in which a language teacher can increase their willingness to communicate? There were a number of ways a language teacher could do which increased EFL learners' WTC in English classes. For instance, encouraging learners to read extra-curricular topics, supporting learners, having fun, highlighting learners' strength instead of their weakness, and encouraging learners to watch English language movies. The obtained results in light with the previous studies on the topic are discussed below.

Several researchers have reported that the topic under discussion influences students' WTC (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 2001). The study findings also confirmed results from other studies indicating that the discussion topic affects WTC (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 2011). In contrast, when the topic is chosen based on students' opinions and interests, it leads to increased WTC. When the topic selected by a teacher is not familiar, it tends to decrease WTC. As Kang (2005) suggested, teachers can use brainstorming and surveys to identify the most commonly occurring interests to be presented as discussion topics to generate situational WTC. Knowledge of the topic under discussion will increase the person's linguistic self-confidence, while lack of this knowledge hinders communication.

This study echoed previous studies' findings, which indicated that teachers' use of friendly, supportive behavior (Kang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 2001) and motivational strategies can be beneficial factors in influencing students'

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participation in L2 communication in the classroom (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991; MacIntyre et al., 2001) and can make students more willing to communicate in this context. Strategies such as smiling, nodding in agreement, and thanking students for their participation positively influenced learners' WTC. Kang (2005) reported that social support, especially from tutors, plays an important role in creating security and situational WTC. Highlighting learners' strengths instead of their weakness was next way for a language teacher to increase learners' WTC. Providing learners with affective feedback will not only encourage learners but also exerts immediate impact on willingness to participate in the classroom (MacIntyre et al., 2003; Zarrinabadi et al., 2014). Giving genuine praise at the appropriate time and providing ongoing, supportive and personalized feedback can positively influence student achievements.

6. Conclusion

This study tried to discover EFL teachers' behaviors that influenced L2 learners' WTC. The results of this study indicated that the situations in which learners experience higher WTC included teachers' sense of humor, teachers' wait time (allotment of time for consideration and reflection prior to answering questions), teachers' intimate relationship with learners, teachers' error correction, encouraging learners, teachers' asking questions of all learners, teachers' questions about learners' personal opinions, and teachers' appearance. These characteristics were found as positive effects of teachers' behavior on learners' WTC. And for negative effects of teachers' behavior, they reported the situations in which the teachers corrected learners' errors while they speak, lack of teachers' support, teachers' being book-bound, and teachers' mood. Additionally, the results showed that teachers could increase their learners' WTC with some recommended ways from learners. For instance, encouraging learners to read extra-curricular topics, supporting learners, having fun, highlighting learners' strength instead of their weakness, and encouraging learners to watch English language movies.

In conclusion, teachers' behavior and factors such as those mentioned throughout this research significantly influence learners' willingness or unwillingness to communicate and participate in classroom interactions. Therefore, the authors suggest that language teachers pay close attention to these factors and the way they exert influence on learners' willingness or unwillingness to communicate. According to the results, it could be inferred that the present study could be significant in a number of aspects. First it could be useful for managers of institutes. For instance, manager of institutes could guide their language teachers to behave in a way that increases their learners' WTC. The results of the study may be an aid to the training managers at education departments for improving their teachers' behavior. Another importance of this study is that it has an obvious effect on language pedagogy. This research is of course very valuable for supporting foreign language learning process. Thus, it will be applicable for language teachers and language educators. With this information in hand, teachers should now establish exactly what behaviors to do which learners become more eager to communicate in the classroom.

Based on the findings of the present study, it could be applicable for teacher trainers to conduct some educational instructions for their teachers. For instance, they can instruct the best ways of error correction to their teachers, because as it could be seen in the present study, error correction was a sensitive factor for learners and it could have both positive and negative effects on learners' WTC. A word of caution, however, is in order as the qualitative methodology used in this study was subject to some limitations, which can influence the interpretation of the findings. This study utilized interview as the only tool for gathering data for learners' opinions about their teachers' behavior. The authors believe that a future study triangulating different methods of data collection will render more illuminating results. As MacIntyre et al. (2001) report, exclusive self-reported data based on students' perceptions cannot measure typicality of the experiences or frequency of L2 communication. Besides, teachers in this study may not constitute a representative sample of the population. Whether the findings of this study are generalizable to other social and educational contexts hinges upon the extent to which the contexts are similar.

On the basis of findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made. Future research can be conducted on effects of teachers' behavior on male learners' WTC. The present study encourages further research in the field of WTC in L2. The results should be confirmed quantitatively with a larger sample size, which would then allow for more generalization of the findings. Moreover, studies can be carried out to discover the effect of learners' age and the teachers' behavior on their WTC, because EFL learners in different ages need special behavior on behalf of their teachers. In addition, conducting a research on relationship between different situations and WTC in English can be another good suggestion for future research. Another suggestion can be conducted on the effects of teachers' behavior on beginner learners' WTC, because learners at this level are very sensitive to their teachers' behavior.

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