

# Encouraging ESL Students' Willingness to Communicate

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## Encouraging ESL Students' Willingness to Communicate

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Zadar, 8. prosinca 2023.

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## 1. Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) is both the study of individual people and groups who are learning another language after having learned their first one in their childhood (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). According to Saville-Troike & Barto (2017), a second language (L2) is often an official language required for education and employment, mostly acquired by immigrants who have a different first language. A foreign language is not used in the learner's immediate context, but could potentially be used for future travel or as an elective at school. A library language is typically used for learning through reading when the sources are not in the learner's native language. An auxiliary language is learned to gain knowledge about some official functions in the learner's political setting (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017).

According to Saville-Troike & Barto (2017), SLA has been studied from various perspectives, such as linguistics, psychology, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and social psychology. From a psychological perspective, several individual differences (IDs) have been identified as important factors in L2 learning success (Dörnyei, 2005). According to Saville-Troike and Barto (2017), individual differences include age, sex, aptitude, motivation, cognitive styles, personality, and learning strategies. Moreover, Dörnyei (2005) suggests five ID variables: self-esteem, anxiety, creativity, learner beliefs, and willingness to communicate (WTC).

Due to the absence of a valid instrument for assessing individual WTC in existing literature, the first instrument was developed by McCroskey & Baer (1985). This instrument was grounded in the concept that WTC is a personality-based trait, exhibiting consistency across various communication contexts and with different types of receivers. It is a general WTC instrument used to test the general population. In the context of L2 learning, WTC can be defined as a state in which the L2 learner is ready to engage in communication with others, the last step of all procedures that prepare the learner for interacting with others (Macintyre et al., 2001). MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed a comprehensive array of factors influencing WTC in the context of SLA. According to their pyramid model, various elements, such as self-confidence, motivation, communicative competence, intergroup climate, and personality play a role in shaping learners' WTC in the L2. Many studies which have confirmed the importance of WTC in L2 learning and some have investigated factors that influence students' WTC. For example, Vongsila & Reinders (2016) identified nine significant factors which may influence

WTC: shyness, anxiety, group size, self-confidence, familiarity with the interlocutor, familiarity with topics under discussion, class atmosphere, task type, and self-perceived speaking ability.

Teachers' beliefs about WTC and strategies for encouraging it are important elements of L2 learning. WTC-encouraging strategies that teachers use depend on the degree to which they increase or halt opportunities for learners' involvement in communication (Walsh, 2011, as cited in Bahraini & Niami, 2020). It has been shown that teaching strategies, such as, the size of the group, familiarity with the interlocutor, the topic of discussion and the teacher's wait time, facilitate students' WTC (Cao and Philip, 2006, as cited in Zarrinabadi et al., 2014). Riasati (2014) suggests other strategies that are important for facilitating students' WTC including creating a relaxed atmosphere and a supportive environment, as well as using pair and group work (task type). Another strategy which may affect students' WTC is their self-perceived speaking ability, and teachers' positive feedback aids their perceptions (De Léger & Storch, 2009, as cited in Vongsila & Reinders, 2016). Furthermore, Groenke & Paulus (2007), demonstrate that teacher's questions can lead to better communication and discussion, especially open-ended questions.

Although many studies in various contexts have focused on WTC in the L2 classroom, little research on this topic has been carried out in the Croatian context. In an effort to address this research gap, this study aims to investigate L2 learners' WTC, including teachers' beliefs about the importance of encouraging WTC, as well as the strategies they use. The research will focus on teachers' beliefs about WTC based on Vongsila & Reinders' (2016) taxonomy. It will also focus on teachers' classroom interaction patterns.

Firstly, the theoretical background is presented followed by the aim and method sections. Then, the results are presented along with the discussion. Lastly, the conclusion is given, including the limitations of the study.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

In early childhood, individuals naturally start learning at least one language with minimal conscious effort or awareness, subsequently, they may acquire additional languages, and this is known as the process of second language acquisition (SLA) (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). Language acquisition can sometimes be confused with learning; however, they are different terms. The incidental process of “picking up” a language without a deliberate attempt to obtain knowledge is known as acquisition, while learning is a conscious attempt to master a language (Ellis, 2015). According to Radišić (2013), interaction is a key component of language acquisition, so all the language that learners are exposed to during class is beneficial for learners’ intake.

SLA involves both the process of learning a second language (L2) and the study of people learning another language after learning their first language during childhood (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). Informal L2 learning occurs when a person learns a second language through interaction in natural contexts, while formal L2 learning appears when there is an intentional learning of a language in a formal institution (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). According to Saville-Troike & Barto (2017), several learner differences affect SLA: age, aptitude, sex, motivation, personality, cognitive styles and learning strategies. Another important factor is WTC, which is a prerequisite for the use of L2 input and interaction (Vongsila & Reinders, 2016),

It is popularly believed that children are more successful in learning a second language than adults, however, each age group has its advantages. For example, young learners are non-analytical, and usually have fewer inhibitions and brain plasticity, while older learners have a larger learning capacity, analytic ability, pragmatic skills, and a better knowledge of L1 and real-world knowledge (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). The critical period hypothesis is a theory that claims that younger learners have an advantage in learning another language because there is a period when people learn a language more naturally and without much effort. After that age, it becomes more difficult to process it in the same way (Scovel, 1988).

Another learner difference that may affect L2 learning success is aptitude. Aptitude is a natural talent for language learning (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017) and, just like intelligence quotient or height, it can be assessed through psychological tests constructed to measure it.



There are several benefits from a higher aptitude for learning a second language, such as quicker progress in learning, higher level of attained proficiency and better adaptation to exposure to the L2 (Robinson, 2019).

Moreover, another factor that may have an influence on L2 learning success is 'sex' or 'gender'. According to Ellis (1994), there is a difference between the terms because sex refers to a biological feature, while gender refers to a social feature. Some sociolinguists prefer 'gender' because it emphasizes the social aspects of 'male' and 'female' (Ellis, 1994). Thus, according to various research, women tend to be better at verbal fluency (Kimura, 1992, as cited in Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017) and memorizing complex forms, while men outperform them at computing compositional rules (Halpern, 2000, as cited in Saville-Troike and Barto, 2017) as higher androgen levels are associated with better-automatized skills, while high estrogen correlates with better semantic skills (Mack, 1992, as cited in Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017).

Another factor that may affect L2 learning is motivation. Motivation is widely acknowledged as a key factor in L2 learning, serving as the primary catalyst and driving force throughout the process. Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with remarkable abilities struggle to achieve long-term language learning goals, emphasizing its crucial role alongside effective curricula and teaching for student success (Dörnyei, 1998). According to Noels et al. (1998), there is a distinction between 4 types of motivation: intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, and instrumental motivation. Intrinsic motivation is an internal force which is derived from learning the language itself, while extrinsic motivation is derived from the need for an external reward or recognition. Moreover, according to Deci et al. (1985), intrinsic motivation results in higher levels of knowledge. Gardner (1985) developed his socio-educational model to explore attitudes and motivation in SLA. Emphasizing diverse acquisition contexts, he highlights the influence of the learner's cultural setting on language acquisition motivation. The model incorporates four interconnected variables: social milieu (culture and environment), individual differences (intelligence, aptitude, motivation, and anxiety), second language acquisition contexts (formal and informal settings), and outcomes (linguistic and non-linguistic skills). He enhanced the model by introducing the integrative motive within individual differences, encompassing integrativeness (interest and identification with the second language community), attitudes toward the learning situation, and motivation (effort, desire, and positive attitudes). According to Gardner et al. (1985), integrative motivation is derived from a social component, e.g., to be accepted in a community, and instrumental

motivation is driven by a need for academic success. Motivation is a “driving force” which inspires learners to learn a language.

Another factor that influences L2 learning is personality. Personality is defined as a set of traits such as neuroticism/stability and extraversion/introversion (Ellis, 2015). Furthermore, openness to experience, self-esteem and risk-taking are personality traits that are beneficial for language learning (Ellis, 2015). On the other hand, anxiety is a personality trait that has been heavily researched in SLA and it negatively correlates with L2 learning success (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). English language anxiety refers to a form of situation-specific anxiety that is specifically linked to contexts involving the English language, including speaking, listening, and learning (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Scientific studies have shown that language anxiety is connected to difficulties in understanding spoken language, decreased ability to produce words, hindered acquisition of vocabulary, poorer performance in language courses, and lower scores on standardized tests (Horwitz & Young, 1991, as cited in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Another learner difference that may affect L2 acquisition is cognitive style. Cognitive style is a link between cognition and personality and it specifies a person’s way of processing new information (Conner, 2003, as cited in Salvisberg, 2005). The most prominent styles are field-dependent and field-independent cognitive styles. Field-dependent types often use external references as a ground for approaching new information (Yin, 2020), and according to Saville-Troike & Barto (2017), they respond better to contextualised communicative experiences when learning a language. Field-independent types rely on their subjective references and are not affected by external factors, they process new information on a more abstract level (Yin, 2020).

Furthermore, learning strategies also play an important role in L2 learning. Learning strategies are techniques learners use to learn a new language and they mostly use cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies. Cognitive strategies use direct analysis of linguistic material, while metacognitive strategies regulate language by monitoring and planning, and social strategies use interaction with others (Chamot, 1989). Moreover, according to Saville-Troike & Barto (2017), age and sex can influence learning strategies, for example, children typically use more repetition, while adults use synthesis. In listening tasks, females are inclined to use social or affective strategies, while males use metacognitive strategies (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017).

Another learner difference that may affect L2 acquisition is Willingness to communicate (WTC). In the context of SLA, WTC can be defined as the likelihood that a learner will actively

engage in communication when they have the freedom to initiate it (MacIntyre, 2007). Active participation of students in communication leads to improved proficiency in communication, as well as enhanced acquisition of vocabulary and language structures in the target language (Liu, 2005).

## 2.2. Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

McCroskey & Baer (1985), argue that even though nonverbal language has a significant role in human interaction, spoken language is an integral part of communication. According to a study by Berger & Calabrese (1975, as cited in McCroskey & Baer, 1985), which looks into the amount of talk at the beginning of interpersonal relationships, it was shown that the initial stages are filled with uneasiness; however, as communication and nonverbal expressions between people increase, the uneasiness decreases, which results in intimacy and closeness. The establishment of solid interpersonal connections relies significantly on the extent of communication in which individuals are prepared to participate. The greater a person's willingness to engage in verbal and nonverbal expression, the more probable it is for that person to cultivate positive interpersonal relationships (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, as cited in McCroskey & Baer, 1985).

Moreover, McCroskey & Baer (1985) also highlight the fact that people vary in their communicative behaviours: some are very talkative, while others talk only when they are asked to, and their communicative behaviour depends on the context. They indicate that WTC can be influenced by situational factors, including a person's emotional state, recent communication experiences, the identity of the recipient and perceived gains or losses from communicating. They were the first to create an instrument designed to measure individual WTC. Their tool evaluated four distinct communication scenarios, including "public speaking," "participation in meetings," "engagement in small group discussions," and "interactions within dyads." Additionally, it considered three different categories of conversation partners: "strangers," "acquaintances," and "friends." Their underlying belief was that WTC is a trait-based characteristic that remains relatively consistent across various communication contexts. It was revealed that personal relationships have an important role in WTC. Participants showed higher WTC levels when communicating with individuals they shared more intimate relationships with, such as friends or acquaintances. On the contrary, WTC levels were notably lower when

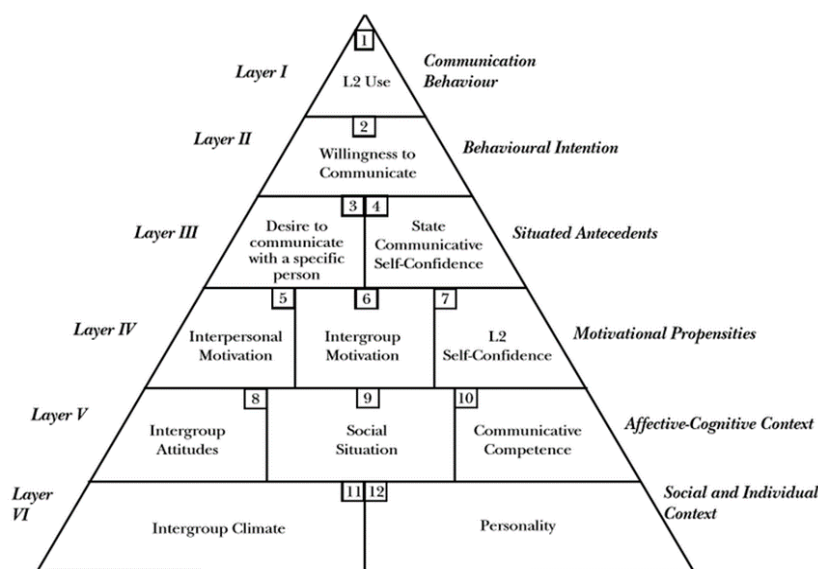
interacting with strangers, highlighting the role of relationship proximity in shaping WTC (McCroskey & Baer, 1985).

### 2.2.1. Willingness to communicate (WTC) in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

WTC is an important factor that underlies L2 acquisition. According to Macintyre et al. (2011), WTC is a state in which the learner is ready to engage in the L2, it is the final step of the processes that prepare the learner to communicate with others. Different factors negatively affect students' WTC, such as anxiety or fear, and special classroom activities are required to overcome them (Macintyre et al., 2011).

Macintyre et al. (1998), present a pyramid model which illustrates the influences on WTC in L2, from immediate to more enduring elements. It is made up of six layers and each of them represents factors influencing people's WTC in L2. This model can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Macintyre's et al. (1998) "pyramid-shaped model" of influences on WTC



The first and topmost layer is "Communication Behaviour" and it includes "L2 use", which represents immediate influences, such as speaking, watching television or reading. L2 teaching needs to incorporate different forms of communication to achieve this complexity. The second layer "Behavioural intention" is focused on WTC and it is an extension of McCroskey & Baer's (1985) trait-like view of WTC which exceeds verbal communication and includes nonverbal participation, such as raising a hand in a classroom. Nonverbal communication indicates one's motivation for language learning, confidence in their language abilities and lack of anxiety. Moreover, the third layer, "Situated Antecedents of Communication" consists of 2 elements:

“Desire to communicate with a specific person”, which describes the impact of relationships on the desire to communicate, and “State Communicative Self-Confidence”, which indicates state self-confidence influences by perceived competence and prior experiences. Additionally, the layer, “Motivational Propensities”, is comprised of 3 elements: "Interpersonal Motivation", "Intergroup Motivation" and "L2 Self-Confidence". Interpersonal motivation refers to the characteristics of interlocutors, intergroup motivation is affected by power relations and group dynamics, while L2 self-confidence relates to affective and cognitive factors of a person's L2 ability. Furthermore, the fifth layer “Affective and Cognitive Context” includes "Intergroup Attitudes"(fear of assimilation, motivation to learn L2), "Social Situation"(relies on setting, participants, topic, purpose and communication channel), and "Communicative Competence” (includes sociocultural, strategic, linguistic, actional and discourse competencies). The last layer, "Societal and Individual Context", consists of "Intergroup Climate", which refers to the representation of L1 and L2 communities, and "Personality”, which plays an important role in group interactions.

According to McCroskey & Richmond, (1991, as cited in MacIntyre & Charos, 1996), the model underscores the ongoing construction of the decision-making moment, occurring second by second over time. It conveys the idea of reaching a juncture where a learner can decide whether to engage in communication or not. Following each moment, another one unfolds, creating a continuous sequence as communication takes place. This dynamic and fluid interpretation of WTC differs from earlier studies that viewed it as a trait-like concept primarily developed in the context of native-language communication (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991).

Several factors influence WTC, and some are mentioned in the analysis of Macintyre's et al. (1998) “pyramid-shaped model“ and anxiety is one of them (MacIntyre et al., 1999). Moreover, there are other factors, such as classroom conditions, group cohesiveness, topic relevance (Aubrey, 2011; Vongsila & Reinders, 2016) and communication confidence (Peng and Woodrow, 2010; Vongsila & Reinders, 2016). Vongsila & Reinders (2016) highlight nine important factors that this research will be focused on: shyness, anxiety, group size, self-confidence, familiarity with the interlocutor, familiarity with topics under discussion, class atmosphere, task type, and self-perceived speaking ability.

Shyness has been identified as one of the predictors of L2 WTC, however, there is still a lack of research on this topic in SLA, and there are only a few studies that have explored the

connection between WTC and shyness. Fallah (2014), studied Iranian EFL learners and found that shyness harms students' WTC. Moreover, Riasati and Rahimi (2018), explored Iranian EFL students' WTC to speak in English and discovered that shyness was a factor that negatively affected their L2 WTC.

According to Macintyre et al. (1991), anxiety is a factor that causes problems for EFL students because it can affect the acquisition, retention and production of the L2. There are 3 types of anxiety: trait anxiety, state anxiety and situation-specific anxiety. Trait anxiety is a person's tendency to become anxious in any situation, state anxiety is experienced at a particular moment, e.g., before taking an exam (Spielberger, 1983 as cited in Macintyre et al., 1991), and situation-specific anxiety is a reaction in a well-defined situation, e.g., in public speaking (Macintyre et al., 1991). Moreover, Macintyre et al. (1997), have found that in activities, such as reading, speaking and writing, anxious students underestimate their language abilities and are less willing to engage in communication.

Several studies have indicated that students have better academic success when they are placed in smaller classes rather than in larger classes. Glass et al. (1982), found that students in smaller classes show higher results in achievement attitude, student morale, and satisfaction. Moreover, Everston & Folger (1989), conclude that students placed in small classes have more opportunities to speak to the teacher about problems, and Wells & Chang-Well (1992) argue that smaller classes have more student talk and utterances. Group work and pair work are used in EFL classrooms to develop students' communicative competence in English. Smaller groups enable students to interact in natural ways, which helps to develop different aspects of their language competence, such as strategic competence, pragmatic competence, and organizational competence (Bachman, 1990).

Self-confidence in L2 communication can be defined as a mixture of self-perceived speaking ability and a lack of anxiety in learning and using the L2 (Clément & Kruidenier, 1985). Several studies have been conducted regarding self-confidence and students' WTC in English, for example Sener (2014) studied Turkish students' WTC in English and found a significant correlation with self-confidence. According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), L2 learners who possess self-confidence believe in their ability to effectively communicate in the target language. Essentially, self-confident language learners have faith in their skills and proficiency to use the L2 language meaningfully in communication. Furthermore, according to Cao and Philip (2006), WTC can be affected by group size, self-confidence, cultural background, familiarity with the

interlocutor, and participation. Moreover, Pawlak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2015), demonstrate that the degree of knowing the interlocutor correlated with students' WTC, in combination with other factors, such as presence or absence of laughter, having ideas to share, etc. Furthermore, according to Berger & Calabrese (1975, as cited in McCroskey & Baer, 1985), at the beginning of an interaction between strangers, there is a significant level of uncertainty and since uncertainty is typically not beneficial to positive interactions, individuals generally seek to minimize it. As communication increases, the levels of uncertainty for both individuals decrease. This decrease in uncertainty results in closer relationships. Therefore, the formation of strong interpersonal relationships relies heavily on the extent of communication in which individuals are willing to participate.

Macintyre et al. (1998), argue that familiarity with the topic under discussion influences the ease of language use because content knowledge advances students' self-confidence, while lack of topic familiarity hinders communication. Moreover, Kang (2005) demonstrates that students feel insecure when talking about a topic they are not familiar with. Furthermore, students' WTC in L2 is affected by the classroom atmosphere, and this was shown in various studies. A stress-free and positive classroom with classmates who cooperate and teachers who provide support to their students increases students' WTC (Eddy-U, 2015; Lee, 2009; Riasati, 2012). According to Lee (2009), some students perceive the teacher to be the most prominent factor in determining classroom atmosphere. Moreover, several task types can be used to promote students' WTC, and one of them is debate (Ericson et al., 2003). Debates are activities that require students to discuss a matter with their peers whose opinions are different. Students need to be open-minded, assess the situation critically and express their opinions (Ericson et al., 2003). Tasks that involve pair and group work have been shown to improve students' WTC: according to Cao and Philip (2006), groups of three or four students result in increased WTC.

According to Macintyre & Charos (1996), WTC is directly affected by self-perceived speaking ability, language anxiety and opportunities to speak L2. Students who lack the anxiety in L2 use, have more opportunities to engage in L2 and have a higher perceived communicative competence, are more confident and motivated to communicate in the L2. Also, it was shown that the measure of intellect and perceived speaking ability are correlated: people who perceive themselves as intellectual think that they are better in L2 (Macintyre & Charos, 1996).

Vongsila & Reinders (2016) have demonstrated seven interaction patterns that affect students' WTC in the EFL context: open-ended questions, closed questions, teacher talk, student

talk, student topic initiation, peer talk, and encouraging use of English outside the classroom. Teachers can use several tactics to stimulate students' independence, creativity, and curiosity. One effective way to achieve this is by asking open-ended questions that require fresh ideas and open minds (Denton, 2007). Open-ended questions require students to provide the answers in their own words; they do not demand a single correct answer, while closed questions require students to respond with one of a closed series of choices (Richards and Schmidt, 2002). Moreover, an integral part of language acquisition is the active use of the L2 (Nunan, 1999), and an effective EFL classroom should create an environment in which students can maximize their use of the L2 (van Lier, 2001). Paul (2003), suggests that more teacher talk time results in less student talk time and a less effective lesson overall. Furthermore, student talk can be used in multiple situations: they can express their ideas, develop their own opinions and initiate new topics (Brown, 2001).

Students' peer talk has been shown to affect language acquisition (Blum-Kulka et al., 2004 as cited in Wang et al., 2009). Moreover, it expands children's linguistic abilities by employing negotiating, persuading, arguing and questioning, which they use less while talking to teachers (Ervin-Tripp, 1991; Fassler, 2003 as cited in Wang et al., 2009). A study conducted on young learners, their parents and teachers by Sayer & Ban (2014), indicates that teachers think that students do not have enough opportunities to practice English outside the classroom. However, children and parents express that students use English in a variety of communicative functions outside the classroom context, e.g., while listening to music, watching movies, playing video games, using the Internet and Google Translate, reading books, etc.

### 2.3. Research on encouraging ESL students' WTC

Encouraging students' WTC is an important aspect of L2 teaching. Teachers can have different beliefs about encouraging WTC and they can use several strategies to influence students' WTC. The research data in this thesis is drawn from various research studies undertaken by Vongsila & Reinders (2016), Grau (2009), Zarei et al. (2019), Coplan et al. (2011), Ricon (2020), Inada (2021), Ahlquist (2019) and Farahian & Rezaee (2012). These studies give insight on teachers' beliefs and strategies for encouraging students' WTC.

Firstly, Vongsila & Reinders' (2016) study examined teachers' perspectives on their role in promoting WTC through questionnaires, comparing them with observations of their actual classroom activities. The research was conducted in New Zealand primarily focusing on communicative skills of Asian learners. Findings indicated that teachers perceived their role as



crucial in fostering WTC, and that they employed various strategies in class. While most of the strategies were recorded, there was no explicit encouragement for language practice beyond the classroom.

Grau's (2009) research examined German teenagers' use of English in two contexts: leisure activities and formal language learning at school. Based on an empirical study in German secondary schools using a mixed methods approach, the research included a questionnaire and focus group interviews with 15-year-old students and English teachers. The main focus was on how teenagers experience learning English in school compared to their exposure to the language during their free time. The study also explored teachers' perceptions of students' use of English outside of school and how they integrated this into the classroom. Findings indicated a difference between classroom and leisure activities, with limited incorporation of out-of-class English activities in the EFL classroom.

Zarrei's et al. (2019) qualitative study utilized focus group interviews to explore 19 EFL teachers' perspectives on the socioaffective and pedagogic strategies they used in intermediate classes, specifically considering Iranian culture. The aim was to assess the impact of these strategies on students' WTC. Findings indicated that two main themes, facilitators and barriers, emerged. The results also highlighted the influence of cultural and social factors on the interaction between EFL teachers and students and its connection to WTC.

Coplan's et al. (2011) study explored how elementary teachers approached and perceived hypothetical shy, exuberant, and average children, considering the influence of the child's sex and the teacher's own shyness. Findings revealed that teachers tended to use high-powered and social learning strategies for exuberant children, while employing peer-focused and indirect strategies for shy children. The results also indicated that they considered shy children as less intelligent and academically weaker than exuberant children. Some of these findings were influenced by teachers' own levels of shyness.

Ricon's (2020) study examined the characteristics of students nominated as shy by teachers, involving 329 participants from 303 elementary schools in Norway. Teachers were asked to identify a current or past student as "shy" and then assessed various aspects of the child's school adjustment. The findings revealed that teacher-nominated shy students constituted a diverse group, displaying variations across multiple school functioning domains. The descriptions provided by teachers were consistent and did not significantly differ based on school characteristics, teacher attributes, or student grade. However, on the whole, teachers perceived

shy male students as experiencing more adjustment difficulties compared to their female counterparts.

The purpose of Inada's (2021) study was to explore how teachers addressed students' anxiety levels to enhance their communication skills. Through semi-structured individual interviews with six teachers, diverse strategies for reducing student anxiety were identified. Some of the strategies identified by the teachers included fostering an unthreatening atmosphere and managing group dynamics.

Ahlquist's (2019) study involved 60 Swedish students, aged 15–16, who participated in a Storyline project centred around a young adult fantasy novel. In the Storyline method, learners assumed character roles in a fictional world, collaborating in small groups to advance the story. Throughout the six-week duration, the students engaged in various speaking and writing tasks in English. The project yielded several advantages, with the most significant being an improved motivation to communicate in English and higher self-confidence in doing so.

In Farahian & Rezaee's (2012) research, an EFL teacher's queries and the corresponding student responses were categorized, and a structured interview was conducted. The analysis revealed that the prevalence of coded/display and yes/no questions surpassed that of open/referential questions. While the use of these questions appeared to be linked to the students' proficiency levels, it became apparent that the teacher's limited proficiency and lack of experience significantly influenced the choice of such questions. Moreover, it was discovered that the learners' reticence or reluctance to participate might be attributed to the ineffectiveness of the questioning techniques employed.

### 3. Aim and Method

#### 3.1. Aim of the research

The overall aim of this research is to examine ESL teachers' beliefs about WTC, as well as the strategies and interaction patterns they use to encourage WTC inside a English language classroom in Croatia. The research will try to answer the following questions:

1. What are Croatian ESL teachers' beliefs about the importance of encouraging WTC?
2. What are teachers' beliefs about the strategies they use to encourage students' WTC?
3. What strategies do teachers use to encourage WTC in the L2 classroom?
4. What interaction patterns characterize their classes?

### 3.2. Method

#### 3.2.1. Sample

The questionnaire was sent to ten teachers in total, and nine responses were received. The teachers were employed in nine different schools in Zadar: Classical Gymnasium Ivan Pavao II, Technical School Zadar, Šime Budinić Primary School, Hotel-tourism and catering school Zadar, Bartul Kašić Primary School, Smiljevac Primary School, Ante Kuzmanić Medical School, Kruno Krstić Primary School and Franjo Petrić High School.

Out of a total of 9 teachers, all were female (n=9). All teachers in this sample had more than 15 years of experience in language teaching (n=9). Regarding the school of work, 6 teachers taught in primary schools (n=6), while 3 teachers worked in secondary schools (n=3). When it comes to teaching in primary school classes, 2 teachers taught in classes from 1st to 8th grade (n=2), which makes up 33.33% of teachers. 3 teachers taught in classes from 5th to 8th grade (n=3), which makes up 50% teachers, while 1 teacher taught in sixth and seventh grade classes (n=1), which makes up 16.67% teachers. Among high school teachers, they worked in grades 1 and 2, from 1 to 4 and combined grades 1, 2 and 4, with one teacher in each of those categories (n=1 for each category), which also accounts for 33.33% of teachers in each of those categories. The findings are summarized in Table 1.

Additionally, classroom observations were conducted in 9 classes of 4 teachers, 3 of them agreed to 2 of their classes for the observation, while 1 agreed to 3 classes.

Table 1: Description of sample: Gender, Years of experience, Grade level

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	9	100.00
Male	0	0.00
<b>Years of experience</b>		
Up to 15 years	0	0.00
More than 15 years	9	100.00

Type of school

Elementary	6	66.67
High school	3	33.33
Grade level		
Elementary school		
1-8	2	33.33
5-8	3	5.00
6-7	1	16.67
High school		
1-2	1	33.33
1-4	1	33.33
1, 2, 4	1	33.33

### 3.2.2. Instruments

A mixed-method approach was employed in this study. The instruments included a questionnaire and classroom observations based on Vongsila & Reinders' (2016) research. The questionnaire included three sections. The first part consisted of questions pertaining to the participants' background information, such as gender, number of years of teaching, level of teaching (elementary school or high school), and the grade level they teach. The next section aimed at measuring teachers' attitudes towards WTC using a Likert scale; the goal was to establish the participants' agreement with 4 statements using scales with a range of values from 1 to 5, where the value 1 indicated complete disagreement, while the value 5 indicated complete agreement. The third part required participants to identify the strategies they used to encourage WTC. The list included 9 strategies: shyness, anxiety, group size, self-confidence, familiarity with the interlocutor, familiarity with topics under discussion, task type, class atmosphere and self-perceived speaking ability. Participants were asked to describe their utilization of the specified strategies and to identify additional strategies not explicitly enumerated in the provided list.

In addition, a classroom observation sheet was created in order to have a basis to observe teachers' strategies of encouraging WTC in the classroom. The classroom observations aimed to investigate the strategies that help problems such as shyness, anxiety, group size, self-confidence, familiarity with the interlocutor, familiarity with topics under discussion, task type, class atmosphere and self-perceived speaking ability. Additionally, interaction patterns which characterized each class were examined, including: open-ended questions, closed questions, teacher talk, student talk, peer talk and encouraging the use of English outside of the classroom. The last part of the observations included classroom atmosphere analysis, the goal was to determine whether students seemed relaxed, the presence of laughter, jokes and unstrained conversation.

### 3.2.3. Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms at the conclusion of the 2023 school year. First, 10 teachers were sent an electronic questionnaire with 18 questions to establish their beliefs about the importance of encouraging WTC inside and outside the classroom, and 9 responses were collected. Participants were given information about the study's purpose and assured that their involvement was voluntary and their responses would remain anonymous.

Then, 9 classroom observations were conducted. This was done using an observation sheet and an audio recorder. Prior to conducting the observations, teachers provided their informed consent. They were clearly briefed on the study's objectives, and it was emphasized that the results would be anonymous, with recordings solely utilized by the observer. During the class, the observer sat at the back quietly and did not participate in the activities. The observer took note of the teacher strategies for dealing with different factors affecting WTC, classroom interaction patterns and the overall classroom atmosphere.

### 3.2.4. Data analysis

Descriptive analysis was used for the sample, including frequency, and summarizing data into percentages. For the purpose of answering the first research question, descriptive analysis was also employed. It used measures of frequency for each Likert scale item to provide a summary of the values and the number and percentage of responses for each item. In order to answer the second research question, qualitative procedures such as thematic analysis and content analysis were employed. They were used to identify and analyse recurring themes,

patterns, and topics in the responses and to systematically categorize and quantify the content of open-ended responses. For the purpose of answering the third and the fourth research questions, thematic analysis, content analysis and coding were used. The data from classroom observations was analysed to determine recurring themes and patterns, categories and segments.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. ESL Teachers' Attitudes toward the Importance of WTC

In order to answer the first research question, teachers were asked about their beliefs about the concept of WTC. The first question focused on teachers' attitudes towards the definition "Willingness to communicate (WTC) is usually defined as a speaker's willingness to speak in class and outside the class", and it received mixed reactions among teachers. The majority, specifically 6 out of 9 teachers, agreed with this definition while 1 teacher expressed partial agreement. In addition, 1 teacher highlighted an additional aspect of WTC, which included the ability to listen and respect other people's opinions. Also, 1 teacher did not have a specific opinion on the definition. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Agreement with the definition of WTC

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
Partial agreement with the definition	1	11.11
Agreement with the definition	6	66.67

In order to investigate teachers' beliefs about the importance encouraging L2 learners' WTC both inside and outside the classroom, teachers were asked to express their opinion about 2 statements. As indicated above, they provided their agreement with the statements on a 5 point Likert scale with 1 indicating strong agreement, and 5 indicating strong disagreement. Teachers were asked to state their viewpoint towards the statement "One of the most important roles for the teacher is to encourage students to speak in English in class". The results showed that three teachers agreed with the statement, while 5 teachers expressed complete agreement with it. In addition, 1 teacher had no definite opinion about this statement. The results can be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Agreement on encouraging the use of English inside the class

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
I completely agree	5	55.56
I agree	3	33.33
I don't have a specific opinion	1	11.11
I disagree	0	0
I completely disagree	0	0

Teachers were then asked to express their agreement with the statement "One of the most important roles for the teacher is to encourage students to speak in English outside the class". The results indicated different attitudes among the teachers. The majority, or 4 teachers, completely agreed with the statement, emphasizing the importance of encouraging students to actively communicate in English outside the class. Also, the results showed that 3 teachers did not have a specific opinion on this statement, which indicated neutrality or lack of opinion among that part of the teachers. One teacher disagreed with the statement, while another 1 expressed general agreement. The results are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Agreement on encouraging the use English outside the class

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
I completely agree	4	44.44
I agree	1	11.11
I don't have a definite opinion	3	33.33
I disagree	1	11.11
I completely disagree	0	0

In addition, teachers were asked to express their beliefs about several factors that may influence learners' WTC. These included: shyness, anxiety, group size, self-confidence, familiarity with the interlocutor, familiarity with topics under discussion, task type, class

atmosphere and self-perceived speaking ability. The results showed that 8 teachers believed that they can help with problems relating to students' self-confidence, familiarity with topics under discussion and self-perceived speaking ability. Additionally, it was indicated that 6 teachers considered that they can influence task type and shyness to encourage WTC. The results also demonstrated that 3 teachers believed they can help with students' familiarity with interlocutor. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Factors affecting WTC that teachers influence

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
Self-confidence	8	88.89
Class atmosphere	8	88.89
Familiarity with topics under discussion	8	88.89
Self-perceived speaking ability	8	88.89
Task type	6	66.67
Shyness	6	66.67
Group size (work in pairs or in groups)	5	55.56
Anxiety	4	44.44
Familiarity with interlocutor	3	33.33

#### 4.2. ESL Teachers' Beliefs about the Strategies for Encouraging Students' WTC

In an attempt to answer the second research question, the third section of the questionnaire asked how the teachers dealt with the factors that influence L2 learners' WTC. Teachers were asked how they dealt with each of the following factors: self-confidence, class atmosphere, familiarity with topics under discussion, self-perceived speaking ability, task type, shyness, group size, anxiety and familiarity with interlocutor.

The results showed that teachers applied different strategies for dealing with students' shyness. For example, six teachers stated that they asked shy students additional questions to



encourage them to actively communicate. Also, the results indicated that two teachers used group work in order to give students the opportunity to communicate, two teachers provided verbal encouragement, using words of support, praise and affirmation. Moreover, it was demonstrated that one teacher used humor or jokes, non-verbal cues, such as smiling, and asked additional questions combined with verbal encouragement to promote WTC. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Teacher strategies for dealing with students' shyness

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
Ask additional questions	2	22.22
Group work	2	22.22
Verbal encouragement	2	22.22
Jokes	1	11.11
Non-verbal cues	1	11.11
Asking questions, verbal encouragement	1	11.11

Teachers were asked to express how they dealt with students' anxiety to encourage WTC. The results showed that 4 teachers provided verbal encouragement. Moreover, one teacher used an unspecified strategy (various ways) to help overcome students' anxiety. The results also indicated that one teacher used humor and jokes, one teacher organized group work combined with verbal encouragement and another one used practice and review of the materials. It was also demonstrated that one teacher combined verbal encouragement with the practice and review of the materials. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Teacher strategies for dealing with students' anxiety

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
Verbal encouragement	4	44.44

Indeterminate strategy (various modes)	1	11.11
Jokes	1	11.11
Verbal encouragement, group work	1	11.11
Practice and review of materials	1	11.11
Verbal encouragement, practicing and review of materials	1	11.11

Teachers were then asked about the strategies they used to adjust group size to influence students' WTC. The results indicated that four teachers combined pair and group work depending on the task type, two teachers used group work and one teacher used pair work. It was indicated that one teacher used pair work or work in small groups of students who are familiar with each other, while one assembled groups of students with different levels of proficiency. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Teacher strategies for adjusting group size

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
Pair work or group work depending on the type of task	4	44.44
Group work	2	22.22
Pair work	1	11.11
Pairs/small groups of students who know each other	1	11.11
Groups of students of different proficiency levels	1	11.11

Moreover, teachers were inquired about the strategies they used for improving students' self-confidence. The results indicated that the majority, 6 of them, used verbal encouragement. Additionally, one teacher combined verbal encouragement with group work, another one used it along with communication through digital platforms, while another teacher used non verbal cues combined with follow-up questions to boost students' self confidence. The results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Teacher strategies for improving students' self-confidence

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
Verbal encouragement	6	66.67
Verbal encouragement, group work	1	11.11
Verbal encouragement, communication via digital platforms	1	11.11
Non-verbal cues, follow-up questions	1	11.11

Teachers then needed to identify the strategies they used to improve familiarity with the interlocutor. The results showed that various strategies were applied; 6 teachers used ice breaker activities, one teacher used tasks that encouraged communication, one used personalized questions and another one used pair and group work to improve students' familiarity with interlocutor. The results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Teacher strategies for improving students' familiarity with interlocutor

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
Ice breakers	6	66.67
Tasks that encourage communication	1	11.11
Personalized questions	1	11.11
Pair or group work	1	11.11

The next questions required teachers to provide answers about the strategies they applied to improve students' familiarity with topics under discussion. The results indicated that 4 teachers made an introduction to the topic and that two teachers used everyday topics in their classes. Moreover, it was demonstrated that two teachers used multimedia materials, such as videos, pictures and presentations, while one teacher connected previously learned material with the

new material to improve students' knowledge about the topics under discussion. The results can be seen in Table 11.

Table 11: Teacher strategies for improving familiarity with topics under discussion

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
Introduction to the topic	4	44.44
Everyday topics	2	22.22
Multimedia materials	2	22.22
Connecting familiar materials with new material	1	11.11

Teachers were asked to indicate the strategies they used to adjust task type to improve students' WTC. The results showed that two teachers used debate, one teacher used short and interesting tasks, another one used a combination of open-ended questions, projects and pair or group work. Moreover, it was indicated that one teacher used project tasks and one used interviews, quizzes and debates, another teacher used debates, project tasks, everyday topics. It was also demonstrated that one teacher used presentations, plays, pair work and quizzes, while one teacher used tasks with everyday topics. The results are given in Table 12.

Table 12: Teacher strategies for adjusting task type

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
Debate	2	22.22
Short and interesting tasks	1	11.11
Open-ended questions, project assignments, pairs or group work	1	11.11
Projects	1	11.11
Interviews, quizzes, debates	1	11.11
Debates, project tasks, everyday topics	1	11.11

Presentations, plays, pair work, quizzes	1	11.11
Tasks with everyday topics	1	11.11

The next question required teachers' insights about the strategies they used to improve the classroom atmosphere in order to influence students' WTC. The results indicated that 3 teachers used pair and group work, which was the most frequently used strategy. It was also demonstrated that two teachers used verbal encouragement, while one used regular preparation, knowing the students and maintaining discipline. Moreover, the results showed that one teacher encouraged peer support, one teacher used topics that are interesting to students, and another teacher offered her own help. The results are shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Teacher strategies for improving classroom atmosphere

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
Group work or pair work	3	33.33
Verbal encouragement	2	2.22
Regular preparation, knowing the students, maintaining discipline	1	11.11
Topics that are interesting to students	1	11.11
Encouraging peer support	1	11.11
Teacher help	1	11.11

Teachers were then asked to specify the strategies they used to improve students' self-perceived speaking ability. The results indicated the use of various strategies, the most used ones being assessment (self-assessment and peer assessment) and verbal encouragement, which were used by two teachers. It was also demonstrated that one teacher used self-assessment in which students would record themselves with their phones and listen to the recordings. Furthermore, the results showed that one teacher combined verbal encouragement with error correction without overly emphasizing the mistakes. It was also indicated that one teacher used

debates, one teacher gave their students advice, while another teacher used error correction without an overt emphasis on the errors. The results are given in Table 14.

Table 14: Teacher strategies for improving students' self-perceived speaking ability

	Frequency (Number)	Percentage (%)
Self-assessment and peer assessment	2	22.22
Verbal encouragement	2	22.22
Self-assessment (recording with a mobile phone and listening)	1	11.11
Verbal encouragement, error correction without emphasizing the error	1	11.11
Debates	1	11.11
Teacher's advice	1	11.11
Error correction without emphasizing the error	1	11.11

#### 4.3. ESL Teachers' Classroom Strategies for Encouraging WTC among L2 Learners

In order to examine the third research question, the researcher attended classes to observe what strategies teachers actually used to encourage WTC among L2 learners. As stated in the instruments section, an observation sheet was used which included the various factors that may influence L2 learners' WTC, including: shyness, anxiety, group size, self-confidence, familiarity with the interlocutor, class atmosphere, familiarity with topics under discussion, task type and self-perceived speaking ability. The results showed several interesting findings about the strategies used by ESL teachers for improving students' WTC.

For dealing with shyness to improve WTC, teachers applied several strategies. The findings indicated that all of the teachers (4 out of 4) attempted to make sure that all the students spoke during the lesson. Another strategy that 3 out of 4 teachers used for dealing with shyness were words of encouragement. For example, the teacher would verbally encourage shy students to raise their hands and speak up, "Just try to answer it! Don't worry if you get it wrong!" (T1C1),

“Whatever you say will be correct, it’s your opinion!” (T1C3), “Don’t be shy to speak up! You know the answers!” (T3C1), and “Come on Dajana, you can do it!” (T4C2). Moreover, it was indicated that 3 out of 4 teachers asked additional questions about the topic under discussion if they noticed that students are too shy to answer, “So, can someone tell me what did we talk about last time? (...) What famous person did we talk about? What was he famous for?” (T1C2), “What do you know about Leonardo da Vinci? What was he? What did he paint? When did he live?” (T2C1), and “Can you tell me about your travels? Have you ever travelled by train? When was it and was it a nice journey?” (T4C1). The results also showed that 2 teachers used non-verbal language, such as nodding or using hand gestures to signal the students to them to speak up.

For dealing with anxiety to improve students’ WTC, all the teachers used several strategies. The results indicated that one strategy teachers used was consoling students, which was used by 3 teachers in 3 lessons in total. They told their students phrases such as, “You have enough time, don’t worry” (T1C2), “Hajde, nije tako teško!” (T2C1), and “You have nothing to be afraid of” (T3C1). Another strategy used by 2 teachers in 3 lessons was offering help/assistance from the teacher. They would ask their students if they needed help doing the tasks and tell them to call the teacher if they had a problem and that they will figure it out together, “Don’t worry, we will do it together!” (T1C1), “If you have a problem, ask me or your colleague” (T1C2), and “Don’t worry about the answers. If you are not sure about them, I will help you!” (T4C2). Encouraging peer help/assistance was a strategy used by 2 teachers in 2 lessons, the teachers would encourage students to ask for help from the other students if they encountered a problem, “Don’t worry! Niko, help him with the answer.” (T1C1) and “Can someone help her with the answer?” (T3C1). Additionally, 2 teachers in 2 lessons used jokes and laughter to ease the anxiety and make everyone more comfortable, Student” *Možda je state država za sebe a country država za nekog drugoga.*” Teacher: “*Ne znam ja što je država za nekog drugoga!*” (followed by laughter) (T2C1), and Teacher: “*Ivane, što ti je rekla sestra, nastavnica engleskog, za esej?*” Ivan: “*Poslala mi je samo OK.*” Teacher “*Just OK, ha-ha-ha.*” (followed by laughter of Ivan and other students) (T4C2).

For adjusting group size to improve students WTC, teachers applied different strategies. The results indicated that 3 out of 4 teachers used strategies for adjusting group size in 4 out of 9 observed lessons. They mostly used group and pair work, and they would make small groups of 3-5 students to discuss classroom topics or do tasks.

For dealing with students' self-confidence to improve WTC, all teachers employed various strategies. The findings showed that 3 teachers in 4 lessons used non-verbal encouragement, they would mostly nod and smile to the students when they would give a correct answer. Moreover, one teacher used points to build students' self-confidence: when she organized a quiz, she gave the winning group a + in her notes, "The winning group will get a + so try hard!" (T4C1).

For improving familiarity with the interlocutor to influence students' WTC, 3 teachers used several strategies in 4 lessons. The finding indicated that they mostly did this during pair and group work when they told students to pair up with their desk mates, whom they are familiar with. One of them told her students to pick anyone they want to be grouped with.

For improving class atmosphere, all teachers applied numerous strategies. The results showed that the most common one was making jokes and laughing, in 8 out of 9 lessons, "Speak in English, I don't understand Croatian!" (T3C1). Another strategy 2 teachers used was non-verbal language, it was used in 3 lessons; the teachers would stand up, make eye contact, smile, nod and walk around. It was also indicated that 3 teachers used small talk at the beginning of 3 lessons to improve classroom atmosphere, one of them asked her students how was PE, what sports they play and what their interests are in general, "How is everyone? Are you okay?" (T1C3), "Kako ste? Gdje ste bili za vikend?" (T2C1), and "Kako vam je bilo na tjelesnom? (...) Koji sport treniraš?" (T4C2). Moreover, 1 teacher greeted all of her students by name and paid attention to each of them while they were entering the classroom during both of her lessons by saying "Hello", "Hi", "Kako si?" to everyone as they entered the classroom (T4C1 and T4C2).

Additionally, The observer recorded the overall atmosphere of each class: if the students seemed relaxed, if laughter was present etc. The results indicated that the classroom atmosphere in every class was mostly relaxed and friendly, the teachers made their students feel comfortable, but there were some differences in students' WTC. For example, the best atmosphere, as well as students' WTC, was recorded in high school in 2 classes of one teacher, and it was the same teacher who greeted everyone at the beginning and made small talk with them about their interests. Her students seemed relaxed and comfortable and the atmosphere was warm and welcoming, the students were chatty and even competitive. Moreover, one teacher used group work to improve students' WTC during the classes and it resulted in a lot of peer talk and students expressing their opinion freely. The observations also indicated that



another teacher struggled with her students' WTC at the beginning of one of her classes, but when she put them in pairs to do a task, the atmosphere changed into a more relaxing one and students started communicating with each other and the teacher. Additionally, in one class in elementary school, the atmosphere was also friendly, but students' WTC was low. This was the teacher that asked the most closed questions and prepared mostly individual tasks for her students. The atmosphere was relaxed and the students seemed comfortable, but they were quiet, they did not initiate communication, however; there is a possibility that the topic of Renaissance and Leonardo Da Vinci was not interesting to them.

Several strategies were used for improving familiarity with topics under discussion by all of the teachers. The findings indicated that 2 out of 4 teachers chose interesting and everyday topics in 5 lessons to make students more familiar with them, they used topics such as conflicts, flashmobs, ecology and short stories with everyday themes. Moreover, 2 teachers asked warm-up questions at the beginning of 3 lessons, e.g., one of them had a lesson about Orient Express so she asked the students about their trips. Another strategy used by 2 teachers in 5 lessons was making an introduction to the topic by announcing what they are going to learn about and providing some background information about it, "Leonardo da Vinci was a Renaissance man. The term exists even today, even though we are not in the Renaissance anymore. Leonardo da Vinci was a painter, scientist and inventor, do you know anyone today who is all those things? No, because this is not usual for regular people..." (T2C2). Additionally, 2 teachers connected previous lessons to the lesson under discussion. They did so in 3 lessons and asked students to compare the lessons to something that they previously learned about.

Teachers used several strategies for adjusting task type to improve WTC. The findings indicated that they adjusted task type in 8 classes with 3 teachers having asked their students for their opinion during 3 lessons, while 3 teachers used pair and group work and 2 of them used a re-telling a story as a task.

Several teacher strategies were applied for improving self-perceived speaking ability. The results showed that teachers praised the students verbally, all of them did it in 7 lessons, they would agree with the students' answers, telling them: "bravo", "well done" or "excellent" and that they are good speakers. Another strategy for improving self-perceived speaking ability used by one teacher was non-verbal language, such as nodding and smiling.

#### 4.4. ESL Teachers' Interaction Patterns in L2 Classes

In an attempt to answer the fourth research question, that is, to investigate the types of interactions patterns used by ESL teachers in their classrooms several factors were considered. This included focusing on the types of interaction patterns used by teachers, including the use of open-ended questions, closed questions, teacher talk, student talk, student topic initiation, peer talk and encouraging the use of English outside the classroom.

The first interaction pattern used by the teachers that was examined were open-ended questions. It was indicated that all of the teachers used open-ended questions, the smallest number of open-ended questions during a lesson was 4 and the biggest number was 23. The total number of open-ended questions during 9 observed lessons was 98, and the average amount of open-ended questions per lesson was 10.9. The questions were mostly about students' opinions, warm-up questions about their experiences and questions about the lesson that required elaborate answers.

The second interaction patterns that was analysed were closed questions. The results showed that all of the teachers used closed questions, the smallest number of closed questions during a lesson was 3, and the highest number 48. The teacher with the most closed questions was asking her students yes/no questions and short-answer questions throughout the entire lesson, she was the only elementary school teacher out of 4 of them, the others were high school teachers. The total number of closed questions during 9 observed lessons was 132, and the average amount of closed-ended questions per lesson was 14.7.

The third interaction pattern that was examined was teacher talk. Teacher talk was mostly used for asking questions and giving instructions, all of the turns that the teachers started talking in front of the class were counted. The highest number of turns of teacher talk was 60 and the lowest was 22. The total number of teacher talk during 9 observed lessons was 362 turns, and the average amount of teacher talk per lesson was 40.2 turns.

Another classroom interaction pattern that was analysed was student talk. Student talk was mostly used for expressing opinions and answering questions in all of the lessons, all of the turns that the students started to talk in front of the class were recorded. The highest number of turns of student talk was 65 and the lowest was 27. The total number of turns of student talk during 9 observed lessons was 376, and the average amount of turns of student talk per lesson was 41.8.

Additionally, student topic initiation was another interaction pattern that was examined. Student topic initiation was mostly used when expressing opinions or asking the teacher about something that the students were not sure about. It was recorded in 4 classes of 3 teachers with the lowest number of turns of student topic initiation being 1, and the highest 5. The total number of turns of student topic initiation during 9 observed lessons was 15, and the average amount of student topic initiation per lesson was 1.6 turns.

Moreover, one of the interaction patterns that was analysed was peer talk. Peer talk was present in 6 classes in total, all of the times that peer talk occurred were recorded with the highest number of times being 10, and the lowest 1. The total number of peer talk during 9 observed lessons was 30, and the average amount of peer talk per lesson was 3.3.

The last interaction pattern examined was encouraging the use of English outside the classroom. The results indicated that only 1 teacher encouraged the use of English outside the classroom during two of her lessons. She did it once in both of the observed classes so the total number of this interaction pattern was 2, and the average number of times when teachers encouraged students to use English outside the classroom was 0.22. The teacher encouraged students to listen to English songs and think about their meaning and to connect a short story they read during the lesson to an English proverb by researching the Internet and other available sources.

## 5. Discussion

The first research question aimed to determine teachers' beliefs about the importance of encouraging WTC. The results indicated that the majority of teachers believed that they should encourage students' WTC both inside and outside the classroom; moreover, they strongly agreed with the statement that they should encourage WTC inside a classroom, while there was less agreement on encouraging it outside the classroom. This was also evident in the classroom observations, where only one teacher encouraged the use of English outside the classroom by telling them to listen to English songs and look up English proverbs on the Internet. Similar results were shown by Vongsila & Reinders (2016) whereby teachers strongly agreed with the statement that they should encourage students to use English inside a classroom, while they agreed less with the statement to encourage them to use it outside the classroom. There is no extensive research on teachers' attitudes towards the use of English outside the classroom, but some studies indicated how students engage in English in their free time. For example, Grau's (2009) study aimed to explore and compare how German high school students utilize English in both non-classroom and classroom settings. The results revealed a significant use of English by students during their free time outside the classroom, with notable differences between boys and girls. Boys leaned towards playing computer games, while girls tended to watch English programs and listen to music. Furthermore, the teachers were then asked to indicate the factors affecting WTC that they can influence through their teaching. The results showed that the majority of them believed that they could influence self-confidence, class atmosphere, familiarity with topics under discussion and self-perceived speaking ability, while a smaller number believed that they could influence task type, shyness, and group size. The results also demonstrated that the factors they can impact the least are anxiety and familiarity with the interlocutor. Similarly, teachers in Vongsila & Reinders (2016) expressed almost identical beliefs. The results indicated that the majority of them believed they could affect students' self-confidence, class atmosphere, familiarity with topics under discussion, and self-perceived speaking ability. A smaller number expressed that they can impact shyness, task type and group size, while the things that they believe impact the least are anxiety and familiarity with the interlocutor.

The second research question tried to determine teachers' beliefs about the strategies they used to encourage WTC, which they indicated in the questionnaire, and the third research question aimed to uncover the specific strategies teachers use to encourage WTC inside a classroom, which was analysed through classroom observations. The classroom observation

findings indicated that all of them used strategies for dealing with shyness, anxiety, self-confidence, class atmosphere, familiarity with topics under discussion, task type and self-perceived speaking ability, while a smaller number of them used strategies for adjusting group size and dealing with familiarity with the interlocutor. Different findings were indicated by Zarei et al. (2019), who studied how teachers' socio-affective and pedagogic strategies affected students' WTC. They investigated 19 teachers through a focus group and the only similar factor that the teachers in their research expressed that they can influence was teachers' choice of topic. Other factors that the teachers in this research have not mentioned were highlighted. Those are immediacy, teacher's support, fairness, teacher's enthusiasm, challenging activities, error correction, and teacher's congruence.

Furthermore, for dealing with shyness, the results from the questionnaire indicated that teachers used the following strategies: asking additional questions, group work, verbal encouragement, jokes, and non-verbal cues. On the other hand, the observations showed that the majority of them used verbal encouragement, additional questions, and non-verbal cues inside a classroom. They did not mention this in the questionnaire, but all of them picked the students for certain tasks to make sure that everyone spoke during the lesson. Moreover, for dealing with anxiety, in the questionnaire, teachers reported that they used: verbal encouragement, jokes, group work and practicing class materials. During the classroom observations, it was indicated that they used jokes and laughter to deal with anxiety, alongside consolation, teacher's assistance and peer help. As strategies for adjusting group size, the questionnaire results showed that the majority of teachers believed they used pair and group work, and this was shown to be true during the observations, where 3 out of 4 used these strategies. Furthermore, to improve students' self-confidence, in the questionnaire, teachers expressed that they used verbal encouragement, group work, communication via digital platforms, non-verbal cues, and follow-up questions. On the other hand, during the observations, the majority of them used non-verbal cues, such as nodding or smiling at students when they answered a question correctly. Moreover, for improving familiarity with interlocutors, the results of the questionnaire indicated that the teachers used icebreaker activities, tasks that encouraged communication, personalized questions, and group and pair work. Similarly, the observation findings showed that they used a lot of group and pair work, mostly pairing students up with their desk mates or other students that they are close with. To improve familiarity with topics under discussion, questionnaire results indicated that the teachers made an introduction to the topic, used everyday topics and multimedia materials, and

connected the lesson content with previous lessons. Most of this was confirmed during the classroom observations, where the teachers used everyday topics, asked warm-up questions, and made short introductions to the topic, as well as connecting previous lessons to topics under discussion. Furthermore, for adjusting task type, the questionnaire results demonstrated that teachers used debates, short and interesting tasks, projects, group and pair work, interviews, quizzes, everyday topics, and plays. On the other hand, out of all of the strategies mentioned, during the observations they used only pair and group work, along with asking students about their opinion and to re-tell a story.

Moreover, as strategies used for improving class atmosphere, the questionnaire results indicated that the teachers used: group work, pair work, interesting topics, peer help, verbal encouragement, teacher help, etc. Similarly, pair and group work, as well as peer help, teacher help and verbal encouragement, were already mentioned to be used during the observations, teachers also used non-verbal cues, jokes, small talk, and greeting all the students to improve the class atmosphere. Furthermore, notes about class atmosphere taken during the observations show that the overall atmosphere was friendly in every class, and the best atmosphere recorded was in a class of a teacher who greeted everyone and made small talk. Moreover, as activities used for aiding students' self-perceived speaking ability, the questionnaire findings indicated that teachers employed: self-assessment, peer assessment, verbal encouragement, debates, advice, and not emphasizing errors. On the other hand, the observations showed that they used verbal encouragement and non-verbal cues like nodding and smiling.

Several studies have investigated the factors that teachers affect to improve students' WTC. Moreover, some of the studies analysed teachers' techniques for dealing with shyness. Coplan et al. (2011), similarly to this study, reported that teachers typically used encouragement and praise when assessing shyness. Similarly, Nadiv and Ricon (2020), found that teachers used verbal encouragement and reinforcement to deal with shyness. Moreover, Inada (2021), explored Japanese teachers' strategies for lowering students' anxiety, and the teachers reported that they created an unthreatening environment, practised speaking English, and used pair and group work, which is similar to the findings of this research, where the results indicated that teachers also used practising, pair and group work. Likewise, Ahlquist (2019) claims that story-telling activities in groups aid self-confidence. Moreover, Vongsila & Reinders (2016) found that to improve familiarity with the interlocutor, teachers mentioned that they made a conscious effort to foster a positive classroom environment overall. Specifically, they aimed to incorporate activities that promoted interactions among students, encouraging them to engage with as many

of their peers as they could, which was similar to the findings of this study, where teachers also indicated that they used tasks that promoted interaction among students. Also, Vongsila & Reinders (2016) indicated that to improve familiarity with topics under discussion, teachers employed pre-reading strategies, while one recommended encouraging students to watch programs like the daily news, and another one proposed having students conduct online research for information. Their findings were different from this investigation because none of the teachers used the suggested pre-reading strategies.

The fourth research question aimed to determine the interaction patterns that characterize the classes. The observations have shown that most teachers used more closed questions than open-ended questions during their lessons, however, the observations also indicated that the amount of student talk was slightly higher than the amount of teacher talk. Moreover, students were not too eager to initiate topics themselves and there weren't many attempts recorded. Peer talk was present in everyone's classes. Finally, it was already mentioned that only one teacher encouraged the use of English outside the classroom. Similar results were found in Farahian & Rezaee's research (2012), who studied teachers' types of questions in EFL contexts and found that there were significantly more closed and yes/no questions than open-ended questions, just like in this research. On the contrary, they reported that teacher talk took up 62% to 73% of the class time compared to student talk, while this study showed that student talk time was higher than teacher talk time. Similar to this research, Farahian & Rezaee (2012) found that student topic initiation was low in numbers. This was also shown in Vongsila & Reinders' (2016) research, where student topic initiation was recorded only once when a student requested the change of topic from politics to music and fashion. Vongsila & Reinders (2016) also indicated that none of the teachers encouraged the use of English outside the classroom, while the findings of this study showed that only one teacher used this interaction pattern.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate ESL teachers' beliefs about WTC and the strategies they used to encourage it, as well as the interaction patterns that took place inside their classrooms. The research was conducted on 9 ESL teachers from 9 schools in Zadar, Croatia. It also attempted to explore the differences in teachers' beliefs and actions about WTC, which was done through a questionnaire and classroom observations. The results were then analysed and compared.

The results indicated that teachers agreed with the statement that one of their most important roles is to encourage students to speak English inside the classroom, but there was less agreement on the statement that they should encourage them to speak in English outside the classroom, and this was confirmed during the observations. The results also showed that most of the teachers used several strategies for dealing with factors influencing WTC. Furthermore, the findings also indicated that teachers used most of the interaction patterns, the most prominent ones being student talk and teacher talk.

This study showed a connection between teachers' beliefs about strategies they used to encourage WTC and their classroom practice. This research supported several previous claims about teachers' beliefs about their role in encouraging students to use English inside and outside of the classroom. Moreover, numerous factors influence WTC which teachers need to be aware of and they should be encouraged to use specific techniques to deal with each of them to ensure their students speak more freely. The results of this study also supported the findings that teachers used several strategies to deal with different factors affecting WTC, including self-confidence, class atmosphere, familiarity with topics under discussion, self-perceived speaking ability, shyness, task type, group size, anxiety, and familiarity with the interlocutor. Moreover, this study also indicated that student talk was higher than teacher talk inside the classroom, which is in contrast to most other studies. Despite the small sample, this study has shown some of the teachers' beliefs about WTC and strategies for improving it, and it can be used as a valuable resource for future research on the most efficient strategies that can be used to encourage WTC



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## Appendix A: Questionnaire

**Poticanje spremnosti na komunikaciju kod učenika**

Ovaj upitnik dio je diplomskog rada pod nazivom *Poticanje spremnosti na komunikaciju među učenicima engleskog jezika kao stranog jezika*. Ovaj upitnik je prilagođena verzija Reindersovog (2016) istraživanja. Svrha ovog upitnika je 1) identificirati čimbenike koji utječu na spremnost učenika da komuniciraju unutar i izvan učionice i 2) istražiti koje aktivnosti nastavnici koriste u nastavi kako bi potaknuli spremnost na komunikaciju. Upitnik je u potpunosti anonimna pa molim da što iskrenije odgovorite na svako pitanje kako bi se dobili što točniji i vjerodostojniji podaci. Ne postoje točni i netočni odgovori. Trebate procijeniti koliko dobro svaka tvrdnja opisuje Vas.

## 1. Dio: Opći podaci

## 1. Spol

 Muško Žensko

## 2. Koliko dugo podučavate engleski jezik (uključujući i prethodne poslove)?

 Manje od 1 godine 2-5 godina 6-10 godina 11-15 godina Više od 15 godina

## 3. Podučavate li u osnovnoj ili srednjoj školi?

 Osnovna škola

Srednja škola

4. Ukoliko radite u osnovnoj školi, u kojim razredima podučavate?

1. razred

2. razred

3. razred

4. razred

5. razred

6. razred

7. razred

8. razred

5. Ukoliko radite u srednjoj školi, u kojim razredima podučavate?

1. razred

2. razred

3. razred

4. razred

2. dio

1. Spremnost na komunikaciju obično se definira kao spremnost govornika da komunicira na nastavi i izvan nje. Ako mislite da ova definicija nedovoljno dobro opisuje spremnost na komunikaciju, navedite svoju.

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2. Navedite koliko se slažete s ovom izjavom: 'Jedna od najvažnijih uloga nastavnika je poticanje učenika da pričaju na engleskom jeziku tijekom nastave'.

- U potpunosti se slažem
- Slažem se
- Nemam određeno mišljenje
- Ne slažem se
- Uopće se ne slažem

3. Navedite koliko se slažete s ovom izjavom: 'Jedna od najvažnijih uloga nastavnika je poticanje učenika da pričaju na engleskom jeziku i izvan nastave'.

- U potpunosti se slažem
- Slažem se
- Nemam određeno mišljenje
- Ne slažem se
- Uopće se ne slažem

4. Pokazalo se da sljedeći faktori utječu na spremnost na komunikaciju kod učenika. Na koje mislite da utječete svojim poučavanjem:

- Sramežljivost
- Anksioznost
- Veličina grupe (rad u paru ili rad u grupi)
- Samopouzdanje

- Poznavanje sugovornika
- Razredno ozračje
- Upoznatost s temama o kojima se raspravlja
- Vrsta zadatka
- Percepcija vlastite govorne sposobnosti
- Ostalo (navedite): \_\_\_\_\_

3. dio: Prisjetite se posljednjeg nastavnog sata i odgovorite na sljedeća pitanja:

a. Sramežljivost: Što ste učinili da pomognete učenicima da prevladaju svoju sramežljivost?

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b. Anksioznost: Što ste učinili da pomognete učenicima da prevladaju svoju anksioznost?

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c. Veličina grupe: Kako ste prilagodili veličinu grupe da biste potaknuli spremnost na komunikaciju učenika?

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d. Samopouzdanje: Što ste učinili da pomognete učenicima da poboljšaju svoje samopouzdanje?

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e. Poznavanje sugovornika: Što ste učinili kako bi Vaši učenici bolje upoznali svog sugovornika?

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f. Upoznatost s temama o kojima se raspravlja: Kako ste poboljšali upoznatost učenika s temama o kojima se raspravlja?

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g. Vrsta zadataka: Koje ste vrste zadataka koristili kako bi potaknuli spremnost na komunikaciju kod učenika?

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h. Razredno ozračje: Što ste učinili da poboljšate razredno ozračje?

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i. Percepcija vlastite govorne sposobnosti: Što ste učinili kako bi pomogli učenicima da poboljšaju percepciju vlastite govorne sposobnosti?

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Appendix B: Observation sheet

### OBSERVATION SHEET

Teacher:

School:

Class:

#### 1. STRATEGIES TEACHERS USE TO ENCOURAGE WTC:

Strategies	+/-	Notes and comments
Shyness		
Anxiety		
Group size		

Self-confidence		
Familiarity with interlocutor		
Class atmosphere		
Familiarity with topics under discussion		
Task type		
Self-perceived speaking ability		

## 2. INTERACTION PATTERNS

<b>Interaction patterns</b>	<b>+/-</b>	<b>Notes and comments</b>
Open-ended questions		
Closed questions		
Teacher talk		

Student talk		
Student topic initiation		
Peer talk		
Encouraging use of English outside the classroom		

**3. IMPRESSION OF CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE** (presence or absence of laughter, whether students seem relaxed or anxious, etc).

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying the lower half of the page. It is intended for the user to write their observations regarding the classroom atmosphere.

## Abstract

**Encouraging ESL Students' Willingness to Communicate**

There are many individual difference factors that are involved in successful second language (L2) acquisition, including Willingness to Communicate (WTC). WTC can be described as the probability that a learner will initiate communication in situations where they are free to do so (MacIntyre, 2007). Studies have shown that L2 learners' involvement in communication results in better communicative competence in the target language. The major aim of this thesis was to investigate how ESL teachers encourage learners' WTC in the L2 classroom. It focused on ESL teacher's beliefs about WTC, as well as the strategies and interaction patterns they used to encourage WTC inside an English L2 classroom. The sample included a small number of elementary and high school teachers who were asked to fill out a questionnaire. In addition, classroom observations were carried out in several of their classes. The results showed that Croatian ESL teachers have a positive attitude toward encouraging WTC inside the classroom, but there was less agreement on encouraging it outside of the classroom. Moreover, the findings indicated that teachers used several strategies to deal with some of the challenges of WTC among learners, such as verbal encouragement, non-verbal language, peer help, teacher help, etc. Additionally, it was indicated that they used several interaction patterns: open-ended questions, closed questions, teacher talk, student talk, student topic initiation, and peer talk, while they rarely encouraged the use of English outside of the classroom. It has been determined that the length of students' talk time exceeded the teacher talk time, and that students rarely initiated topics. In conclusion, despite a small sample size, this study has revealed ESL teachers' beliefs about students' WTC and some of the strategies they employed to encourage it. It can serve as a valuable source for future research on strategies that can be used to improve students' WTC.

**Key words:** Second language acquisition (SLA), English as a second language (ESL), Willingness to communicate (WTC), Teacher strategies, Interaction patterns



Sažetak

### **Poticanje spremnosti na komunikaciju kod učenika**

Postoji mnogo individualnih razlika koje utječu na usvajanje drugog jezika, a jedna od njih je spremnost na komunikaciju. Spremnost na komunikaciju može se opisati kao vjerojatnost da će učenik/ca inicirati komunikaciju u situacijama u kojima to ima priliku učiniti (MacIntyre, 2007). Istraživanja su pokazala da uključenost učenika u komunikaciju na drugom jeziku rezultira boljom komunikacijskom kompetencijom. Cilj ovog rada bio je istražiti na koji način nastavnici engleskog jezika potiču spremnost na komunikaciju kod učenika. Također su se proučavala uvjerenja nastavnika o spremnosti na komunikaciju, kao i strategije i komunikacijski obrasci koje koriste za poticanje spremnosti na komunikaciju unutar učionice. Uzorak istraživanja bio je mali broj nastavnika osnovnih i srednjih škola koji su ispunili upitnik te su se provela promatranja njihovih satova. Rezultati su pokazali da nastavnici engleskog jezika imaju pozitivan stav prema poticanju spremnosti na komunikaciju unutar učionice, no bilo je manje slaganja oko poticanja istog izvan učionice. Štoviše, pokazalo se da su nastavnici koristili nekoliko strategija kako bi se nosili s nekim od stvari koje utječu na spremnost na komunikaciju kod učenika, kao što su: verbalno ohrabrivanje, neverbalni jezik, vršnjačka pomoć, pomoć nastavnika itd. Nadalje, koristili su i nekoliko komunikacijskih obrazaca: otvorena pitanja, zatvorena pitanja, govor nastavnika, govor učenika, iniciranje teme od strane učenika, razgovor s vršnjacima, dok su rijetko poticali korištenje engleskog jezika izvan učionice. Utvrđeno je da duljina vremena govora učenika premašuje vrijeme govora nastavnika i da učenici rijetko započinju teme. Zaključno, unatoč malom uzorku, ovo je istraživanje pokazalo uvjerenja nastavnika engleskog jezika o spremnosti na komunikaciju učenika i neke od strategija koje koriste za njeno poticanje. Ovo istraživanje može poslužiti kao vrijedan izvor za buduća istraživanja o strategijama koje se mogu koristiti za poticanje spremnosti na komunikaciju kod učenika.

**Ključne riječi:** usvajanje drugog jezika, engleski kao drugi jezik, spremnost na komunikaciju, strategije nastavnika, komunikacijski obrasci