



Exploring Students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-06-16 Revised: 2026-06-26 Accepted: 2026-06-30 Keywords: <i>Willingness to Communicate (WTC); English Language Teaching Students; English Language Skills.</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.12041 Corresponding Author: Nurul Amalia nurulama018072005@gmail.com Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya	<i>Proficiency in English communication is an essential competency for university students. However, empirical research mapping Willingness to Communicate (WTC) across specific language skills within private universities in regional contexts remains scarce. This study investigates the WTC levels among students enrolled in the English Language Teaching program at STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya, focusing on four dimensions: speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. Employing a quantitative descriptive methodology, the study surveyed 50 students selected through total sampling. Data were gathered using a validated 27-item Likert-scale questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.956) and analyzed descriptively. Findings indicate that students' overall WTC is moderate, with average scores ranging from 2.98 to 3.24. Among the four dimensions, comprehension yielded the highest score ($M = 3.24$; $SD = 0.596$), suggesting greater psychological comfort in receptive communication activities. Speaking ($M = 3.06$; $SD = 0.481$) and reading ($M = 3.06$; $SD = 0.528$) both reflected moderate, balanced levels. In contrast, writing received the lowest score ($M = 2.98$; $SD = 0.568$), indicating heightened anxiety regarding grammatical accuracy and language conventions. These results underscore the necessity for educators and institutions to implement student-centered learning strategies that reduce psychological barriers and foster holistic student engagement.</i>

1. Introduction

English communication skills constitute a vital competency for university students, operating as the primary currency within higher education and the globalized workforce. In the current era of rapid globalization, English has transcended its traditional role as a mere academic subject, emerging instead as an indispensable medium for international dialogue, unrestricted access to scientific knowledge, and the enhancement of professional competitiveness. Consequently, English language instruction at the tertiary level carries a dual mandate: it must systematically refine linguistic proficiency while simultaneously

dismantling barriers to active engagement across diverse communicative contexts (Cao et al., 2026). Actualizing this goal, however, requires a paradigm shift. True achievement in language acquisition is not solely determined by cognitive linguistic competence—such as mastery of syntax or vocabulary but is heavily contingent upon a learner's psychological readiness, explicitly framed as the willingness to communicate in the target language.

To contextualize the empirical findings of this study, it is necessary to unpack the theoretical dimensions of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and the specific socio-psychological factors that modulate it within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments. The conceptualization of WTC was originally established in the realm of first language (L1) communication before being systematically adapted for second language (L2) acquisition by MacIntyre et al. (1998). They proposed a heuristic pyramid model that revolutionized how linguists view learner participation. At the base of this pyramid lie stable, enduring traits—such as personality type, intergroup climate, and general communicative competence. As one moves toward the apex, the variables become increasingly situational, encompassing immediate affective states like the desire to communicate with a specific person in a specific moment, state anxiety, and the immediate context of the interaction. This layered multidimensionality reveals that when a student remains silent during an English lecture, it does not necessarily denote a lack of linguistic capability; rather, it often reflects a momentary misalignment of these psychological and contextual variables.

Furthermore, the distinction between productive skills (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (listening/comprehension and reading) is a critical theoretical boundary in WTC research. Productive activities require the spontaneous or planned retrieval and construction of language, demanding high cognitive resources and exposing the learner to immediate external scrutiny. Receptive skills, on the other hand, allow for internal processing, offering a 'safe harbor' where learners can engage with the language without the immediate risk of producing visible or audible errors. This inherent psychological difference often leads to an asymmetrical development of WTC across different language dimensions, a phenomenon deeply relevant to the current study.

Finally, the sociocultural dimension in the context of EFL cannot be ignored, especially in regions of Indonesia such as Southwest Aceh. Unlike English as a Second Language (ESL) settings, where the target language is integrated into everyday public life, EFL settings limit the use of English almost entirely to the formal educational environment. Furthermore, the Indonesian cultural paradigm, which often emphasizes communal harmony, respect for authority, and "saving face," can significantly influence classroom interactions. The fear of appearing arrogant by speaking English too fluently, or conversely, the fear of losing face by making glaring grammatical errors in front of peers, creates a complex and challenging socio-emotional situation that students must navigate. Consequently, developing an "international mindset" a conceptual sense of belonging to the global English-speaking community, becomes both a challenge and a necessity for students in these regions who wish to improve their WTC.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) has steadily gained recognition as a central psychological construct that captures a learner's readiness to enter into discourse at a specific time, with a specific person or persons, using a second or foreign language. As Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2017) assert, WTC is far from a static trait; rather, it evolves dynamically, fluctuating through a complex interplay of individual, social, and contextual variables during the language acquisition journey. When a learning environment successfully nurtures this psychological readiness, the behavioral outcomes shift dramatically. Peng (2025) reports that students demonstrating elevated WTC levels are far more inclined to actively seek out classroom interactions, inadvertently expanding their

own opportunities to internalize and practice English. In essence, WTC serves as the critical bridge crossing the gap between knowing a language and actually using it.

Within the parameters of this study, WTC is defined precisely as the students' readiness and volitional intention to initiate communication in English whenever contextual opportunities arise. This perspective deliberately moves away from traditional assessments of raw competence, anchoring the investigation firmly in the psychological domain. Here, WTC is operationalized through students' self-reported willingness across four foundational English language-skill dimensions: speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. By dissecting WTC into these modalities, researchers can isolate which specific types of communication trigger engagement and which provoke retreat.

The academic landscape surrounding WTC is rich with investigations exploring the myriad factors that either catalyze or suppress this phenomenon. For instance, Zhang et al. (2026) illuminated the internal psychological mechanisms, finding that a well-developed growth mindset, coupled with an intrinsic enjoyment of the foreign language and low levels of language anxiety, acts as a powerful propellant for EFL students' WTC. Similarly, the immediate pedagogical environment plays a non-negotiable role. Research by Banunaek et al. (2026) highlights the triad of self-confidence, proactive instructor support, and dynamic classroom interaction as essential ingredients for coaxing students into active linguistic participation. Pushing the boundary further into contemporary learning ecosystems, a comprehensive systematic review by Cao et al. (2026) established that integrating artificial intelligence (AI)-based technologies into EFL contexts can significantly elevate student engagement, offering safe, low-stakes environments that amplify their willingness to experiment with the language.

Beyond individual cognition and digital tools, the socio-emotional fabric of the classroom exerts profound influence. Lohar et al. (2026) demonstrated that intrinsic academic motivation directly correlates with a heightened readiness to engage in English discourse. Furthermore, the quality of interpersonal dynamics cannot be overstated; Yuxia (2026) found that empathetic, positive rapport between instructors and students inherently fosters a psychologically safe learning environment. This sense of security mitigates the fear of negative evaluation, reinforcing self-confidence and paving the way for spontaneous interaction. Collectively, this body of evidence solidifies the consensus that WTC is a highly sensitive, multidimensional construct shaped by a delicate balance of psychological states, social interactions, and environmental affordances.

Despite the rapid proliferation of WTC research, a noticeable gap persists in the literature. The overwhelming majority of current studies tend to focus either on correlating isolated variables with WTC or on evaluating specific pedagogical interventions. What remains relatively scarce—particularly within the specific demographic of English Language Education Programs at private universities in regional areas like Aceh—is a granular, descriptive mapping of students' WTC across the distinct dimensions of speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. Regional institutions often possess unique student demographics, distinct academic cultures, and differing levels of exposure to the English language outside the classroom. These localized characteristics naturally breed variations in communicative willingness that metropolitan-centric studies fail to capture.

STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya represents a prime example of such an institutional context. As a higher education provider offering a dedicated English Language Education program, the institution shoulders the responsibility of producing graduates who are not only theoretically competent but also practically fluent in English language education and teaching. The curriculum inherently demands that students actively utilize English in both oral and written forms. Yet, anecdotal observations and preliminary faculty reflections suggest that the actual willingness of these students to voluntarily initiate

communication varies wildly, often falling short of programmatic expectations. This discrepancy necessitates rigorous empirical investigation. Granular data detailing exactly where students feel confident and where they hesitate can serve as a vital diagnostic tool, empowering faculty and curriculum designers to overhaul learning strategies, tailor interventions, and cultivate a deeply communicative academic climate.

Driven by this imperative, the present study seeks to fill the identified research gap by answering the primary question: 'What is the level of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) at STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya across the four language-skill dimensions of speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension?' Ultimately, this research aims to meticulously describe, map, and analyze these levels, providing an evidentiary foundation for future pedagogical reforms tailored to regional EFL contexts.

2. Method

This study employs a quantitative approach with a descriptive research design to describe the level of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among students in the English Language Education Program at STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya. A quantitative approach was chosen because this study aims to obtain an objective picture of students' willingness to communicate in English based on data collected through a questionnaire (Creswell, 2023).

The participants in this study were 50 students enrolled in the English Language Education Program at STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya. The inclusion criteria required that participants be active students currently registered in the program during the 2026/2027 academic year. Students from all years of study (2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th, and 10th semesters) who had completed at least one semester were eligible for participation. All individuals who met these criteria were included as respondents using a total sampling technique, ensuring that every qualified member of the population had an equal opportunity to participate in the study.

The research instrument was the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) questionnaire, which used a five-point Likert scale: 1 = almost never willing, 2 = sometimes willing, 3 = willing half of the time, 4 = usually willing, and 5 = almost always willing. The questionnaire consists of 27 items covering four dimensions: speaking (8 items), reading (6 items), writing (8 items), and comprehension (5 items). Each item is designed to measure students' level of willingness to use English in various learning situations.

Data were collected using a questionnaire to measure students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC). The questionnaire was adapted from the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) instrument developed by MacIntyre et al. (2001), which consists of 27 items covering four dimensions: speaking, reading, writing, and comprehension. To ensure contextual appropriateness for students at STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya, several modifications were made during the adaptation process. Some items were reworded for clarity and to better reflect local classroom and cultural contexts, such as changing references to specific communicative situations that are more relevant to the study population.

Additionally, a small number of items were adjusted to use language familiar to participants and to accommodate examples aligned with the learning environment. These adaptations aimed to preserve the core constructs of the original instrument while enhancing its relevance and comprehensibility for the target group. In the original study, the classroom version of the instrument demonstrated satisfactory reliability across the four dimensions (Cronbach's α ranging from .81 to .88). In the present study, the adapted instrument showed excellent internal consistency, with an overall Cronbach's Alpha

coefficient of .956. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Almost never willing) to 5 (Almost always willing).

3. Result

This section presents the results of the analysis of quantitative data collected from questionnaires distributed to students in the English Language Education Program at STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya. In total, this study involved 50 respondents who met the inclusion criteria. In terms of gender demographics, the majority of participants were female students, totaling 48 (96.0%), while male students numbered only 2 (4.0%). This predominance of women is consistent with the general trend in language education programs, which historically have often been more popular among women than men.

When viewed in terms of educational level or current semester, the study participants showed a fairly varied distribution from the beginning to the end of their studies. Most respondents were in the final stages of their studies, specifically 25 students (50.0%) in their 8th semester. The second-largest group consisted of 12 freshmen in their 2nd semester (24.0%), followed by students in their 4th semester (12.0%) and 6th semester (8.0%). There was also one respondent in the 10th semester (2.0%), as well as 2 missing entries (4.0%). This variation provides a representative picture of the willingness to communicate across various levels of academic maturity among students at this university.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	2	4.0%
	Female	48	96.0%
Semester Level	Semester 2	12	24.0%
	Semester 4	6	12.0%
	Semester 6	4	8.0%
	Semester 8	25	50.0%
	Semester 10	1	2.0%
	Data Not Entered	2	4.0%
Total		50	100.0%

Before the data were analyzed descriptively to answer the main research question, the instrument's validity was first tested through a reliability test to assess the questionnaire's internal consistency. The statistical results showed that Cronbach's Alpha for all 27 items reached 0.956. Given that quantitative research methodology sets a minimum threshold of 0.70 for an instrument to be considered reliable, this score, which exceeds 0.90, conclusively confirms that the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) measurement instrument used possesses a very high level of reliability and is empirically valid.

Descriptive statistical analysis was then applied to map students' willingness to use English, classified into four main skill dimensions. Measurements based on a Likert scale (scores 1 through 5) showed that the average scores for each dimension fell into the moderate category, ranging from 2.98 to 3.24. This summary of statistical data explicitly indicates that, collectively, the initiative of students at STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya to actively and voluntarily communicate in English has not yet reached its maximum potential, thus requiring further pedagogical intervention.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Students' Level of Willingness to Communicate

Skill Dimensions	N	Min	Max	Mean (M)	SD
Comprehension	50	1.20	4.00	3.24	0.596
Speaking	50	1.38	4.00	3.06	0.481
Reading	50	1.33	4.00	3.06	0.528
Writing	50	1.38	4.00	2.98	0.568

Dissecting the data dimension by dimension uncovers a clear hierarchy of communicative comfort. Comprehension emerged as the undisputed leader, recording the highest average score ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.596$). This statistical peak reflects a profound psychological readiness among students when engaged in receptive, auditory-based communication such as absorbing lecture content, listening to peer presentations, or processing English-language media. In these scenarios, the internal filter blocking engagement is at its lowest.

Occupying the middle tier, speaking and reading demonstrated identical mean scores of 3.06, albeit with slightly different standard deviations ($SD = 0.481$ for speaking; $SD = 0.528$ for reading). This statistical equivalence is particularly intriguing as it bridges a productive skill (speaking) with a receptive one (reading). It suggests a complex equilibrium: the students' intrinsic desire to verbalize their thoughts is counterbalanced by apprehension, pulling the score down to a moderate level, while their engagement with written texts, though generally less anxiety-inducing, may lack the interactive stimulation needed to score higher.

Finally, the writing dimension plummeted to the bottom of the WTC hierarchy, registering the lowest mean score across the board ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.568$). The empirical reality that writing is the most actively avoided form of communication among this cohort speaks volumes about the cognitive and emotional toll it exacts. A score falling below the 3.0 threshold indicates a pervasive apprehension regarding structural mechanics. For these students, translating intellectual concepts into written English is not perceived as a fluid communicative act, but rather as an intimidating, high-stakes assessment fraught with the risk of grammatical failure and permanent linguistic exposure.

4. Discussion

The results of this study comprehensively reveal that the overall level of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among students in the English Language Education program at STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya falls into the moderate category. The specific finding that the comprehension dimension outperformed the other three dimensions confirms the academic postulate that receptive language skills generally feel psychologically safer for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). In the process of interpreting information, students are not required to construct grammatical structures spontaneously and immediately. This effectively minimizes the anxiety that often arises when they practice the language directly (Lin, 2025).

The predominance of a sense of comfort in this aspect of receptive comprehension is very likely closely related to classroom dynamics that still tend to be teacher-centered, so that students are more accustomed to positioning themselves as active listeners. This finding aligns with the perspective of Derakhshan et al. (2022), who emphasize that the quality of rapport and positive communication between instructors and learners are key determinant in fostering student engagement. This high willingness to "simply understand" serves as an indicator that a restructuring of teaching methodology is needed, an approach that not only requires students to absorb information but also encourages them to respond actively without being held back by the fear of evaluation (Yunus et al., 2023).

In the speaking and reading dimensions, the equivalence of willingness scores at a moderate level (3.06) indicates a proportional relationship between motivation to process textual input and self-confidence in producing oral output. Rotjanawongchai (2024) found in his study that teacher support and self-perceived communicative confidence are crucial factors that encourage students to dare to produce spoken language. The partial reluctance reflected in these speaking scores underscores that although students have an intrinsic drive to speak, their execution is often hindered by anxiety and the fear of making mistakes (fear of negative evaluation) (Lin, 2025).

Meanwhile, the moderate scores in the reading domain can be interpreted as a result of the shift in modern learners' literacy habits, as they increasingly move toward a more interactive digital realm. Currently, students' interactions with English-language texts are often facilitated by technological devices, social media, and online platforms. As noted by Ibrahim (2024), modern digital platforms (such as digital storytelling) have proven effective in accelerating learning engagement and improving reading comprehension. Nevertheless, these digital receptive activities still require guidance to ultimately foster the development of the willingness to communicate in the target language as a whole, given that WTC is also built upon informal habits outside the classroom (Drajati et al., 2025).

The fact that the "writing" dimension ranks lowest on the WTC scale is a clear reflection of the high cognitive load students experience when they must put their ideas into written form. Writing in a foreign language requires a complex synchronization of vocabulary richness, grammatical accuracy, cohesion, and syntactic logic. This phenomenon is closely linked to emotional dynamics and high levels of frustration or anxiety related to writing, as emphasized by Ariyanti (2026). These challenges can be gradually reduced if institutions are able to provide strategies for emotional regulation and an ecosystem of constructive feedback.

To summarize these findings, a crucial pedagogical implication that STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya must implement is a massive transition toward a communicative learning environment focused on reducing academic burnout. Faculty members need to begin integrating a variety of interactive assignments and utilizing the latest digital learning platforms to accommodate students who remain psychologically vulnerable. By creating an academic climate that tolerates mistakes as an essential part of language acquisition, future graduates will not only possess linguistic competencies on paper but will also demonstrate a strong determination to communicate holistically on the global stage.

Furthermore, an understanding of this phenomenon of willingness to communicate cannot be separated from the socio-contextual factors surrounding students' daily lives. In the context of higher education institutions located in regional areas, limited exposure to the use of English in social settings often poses a distinct barrier that erodes learners' communicative self-confidence. As highlighted by Pammu (2023), the determinants influencing fluctuations in Willingness to Communicate among EFL students in Indonesia are highly dependent on the availability of opportunities to interact beyond the confines of the formal classroom.

Therefore, bridging this gap by strengthening exposure to international cultures (international posture) is a crucial step, because self-confidence cultivated through informal external interactions has been shown to have a strong positive correlation with students' willingness to actively participate during learning activities (Mbau, Rahman, & Nurlaela, 2024).

5. Conclusion

In synthesizing the empirical data and subsequent analysis, it becomes evident that the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among students in the English Language Education Program at STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya operates fundamentally at a moderate tier. By mapping this psychological construct across four distinct modalities, the study illuminated a stark stratification in learner comfort. Students exhibited the highest degree of resilience and volitional readiness within the receptive domain of comprehension, signaling a heavy reliance on the psychological safety afforded by listening and internal processing.

In sharp contrast, the writing dimension emerged as the most formidable barrier to communication, undermined by pervasive anxieties surrounding grammatical exactitude, structural rigidity, and the permanence of textual errors. Meanwhile, the willingness to engage in speaking and reading stabilized at identical, moderate levels, reflecting a complex tug-of-war between students' communicative ambitions and their deeply ingrained fears of negative social evaluation.

The implications of these findings are profound for regional higher education institutions aiming to cultivate truly proficient English communicators. It is no longer sufficient to merely impart linguistic knowledge; educators must actively dismantle the affective barriers that silence students. Pedagogical frameworks at STKIP Muhammadiyah Aceh Barat Daya must pivot decisively toward low-anxiety, student-centered methodologies.

This transition can be catalyzed by integrating collaborative, task-based assignments that shift the focus from accuracy to fluency, deploying AI-driven platforms to offer private, non-intimidating feedback on writing, and deliberately normalizing errors as an integral, celebrated component of the language acquisition journey. By transforming the classroom from an arena of linguistic evaluation into a sanctuary for communicative experimentation, institutions can empower students to transcend their passive receptive comfort zones, ultimately forging them into confident, holistic communicators ready to engage on the global stage. Future research should prioritize longitudinal qualitative studies to track how these specific affective variables shift over a student's academic tenure, providing a dynamic map of WTC development.

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