


**Student’s Willingness to Communicate in English in EFL Digital Context: A Narrative Inquiry**

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<b>SUBMISSION TRACK</b>	<b>A B S T R A C T</b>
Submitted : 27 May 2024 Accepted : 18 July 2024 Published : 25 July 2024	This study investigates the impact of social media on students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in digital contexts in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). WTC is defined as an individual's readiness to communicate verbally or remain silent when given the freedom to choose. This research utilizes a Narrative Inquiry approach to explore the experiences of an Indonesian EFL learner at the University of Islam Malang. Data was collected through in-depth narrative interviews, focusing on the participant's use of social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Telegram for English communication. Findings reveal that digital interactions significantly enhance the participant's motivation, confidence, and language proficiency. Social media platforms facilitate real-time communication, expose learners to diverse linguistic contexts, and provide opportunities for immersive language practice. This study underscores the importance of integrating digital tools into traditional language education to support self-directed learning and improve students' WTC in English. These insights contribute to the growing research on Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) and its role in language acquisition and communication readiness.
<b>KEYWORDS</b>	
Willingness to Communicate, Digital Context, Narrative Inquiry	
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**Introduction**

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is an individual's readiness to either engage in verbal communication or remain silent when given the freedom to decide (MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre, 2020). This communicative readiness varies across different activities and is particularly significant in multilingual settings, where second language (L2) learners decide whether to speak and which language to use. The usability of different languages plays a crucial role in these decisions, mainly when a contact language is used for practical communication (Canagarajah, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2005).

Since the 1990s, the concept of WTC has evolved, with a significant focus on L2 WTC. Initial models, such as the one proposed by MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels (1998), have been instrumental in shaping research. These models consider stable personality traits and dynamic, situation-specific factors influencing WTC. Psychological factors, including motivation, speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and grit, have been found to correlate with L2 WTC (Yu, 2011; Cha & Kim, 2013; Léger & Storch, 2009; Author & Co-author, 2019).

Recent research has also explored the relationship between Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and L2 WTC in formal settings, reflecting the growing engagement of EFL students with digital environments (Richards, 2015; Reinders & Wattana, 2014). The rapid development of technology and the internet, including social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, has transformed

how students interact and learn English. These platforms can enhance English learning, particularly in speaking activities.

Digital technology catalyzes societal and linguistic changes, offering diverse options to make teaching and learning more engaging and effective. As English usage increases, students are expected to demonstrate a willingness to communicate in English within digital contexts. The WTC framework, initially developed for first-language communication, has been adapted to L2 settings, considering both trait and state aspects of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The model incorporates social, psychological, and linguistic factors affecting L2 WTC and usage.

Technological advancements have facilitated L2 learning beyond traditional classroom settings, allowing students to practice English with peers and native speakers. Research has documented this shift, emphasizing the importance of out-of-class learning enabled by digital media and communication technologies (Reinders & Wattana, 2015). Scholars in applied linguistics and TESOL increasingly focus on these extramural digital (ED) contexts, where self-directed EFL learners use English in digital settings (Lee & Dressman, 2018; Lee & Drajati, 2019; Lee, 2019).

In South Korea, students face challenges in verbal communication despite substantial national efforts to enhance English proficiency, which have led to a focus on informal digital learning environments (IDLE). These environments involve self-directed English learning outside traditional classrooms, using platforms like Facebook and YouTube for communication practice (Lee, 2019a; Lee & Kim, 2014).

This study explores social media effects on students' WTC in EFL digital contexts. Employing a Narrative Inquiry approach, it provides an in-depth perspective on students' experiences with English communication through digital platforms. This research uniquely examines daily interactions on social media, such as commenting, posting captions, and chatting in English, to understand the factors influencing WTC. Additionally, it fills a gap in existing research by using narrative inquiry to analyze WTC and IDLE, focusing on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Telegram.

## **Research Method**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a narrative inquiry, a qualitative method introduced by Connelly and Clandinin in 1990. Narrative inquiry focuses on the meanings and values individuals assign to their experiences through stories. This method helps understand how individuals perceive, experience, and value events.

### **Time and Place of Study**

The study was conducted over three months, from January to March 2024, at the University of Islam Malang in Indonesia.

### **Targets**

The study explores the willingness among Indonesian EFL learners to communicate in English within a digital context.

### **Research Subject**

The participant is an Indonesian student enrolled at the University of Islam Malang, referred to as Naa (a pseudonym). In her early 20s, Naa is pursuing a bachelor's

degree in English language education. She has a passion for English, which she enhanced through social media activities, such as watching podcasts and videos.

#### Procedures

1. **Participant Selection:** Selected based on engagement in digital communication and willingness to participate.
2. **Consent Form:** Complete and sign a research consent form.
3. **Interview Scheduling:** Conducted at convenient times for the participant.
4. **Data Collection:** In-depth narrative interviews recorded via Zoom, with additional notes taken as memos.

#### Instruments

The primary instrument was an in-depth narrative interview conducted via Zoom meeting recorder. Questions were adapted from Lee and Hsieh (2019) to explore various contexts of digital communication.

#### Data Analysis Techniques

The narrative inquiry approach was employed for data analysis. The researcher thoroughly familiarized herself with the data, transcribed recordings, and read transcripts multiple times. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations, patterns were identified, coded, and organized into themes to capture the participant's experiences.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### **Result**

The researcher presents the results of the data that have been analyzed. The researcher asked the participant a few questions to explore the readiness of English communication in the EFL digital context.

#### Stories Told

In this section, the researcher elaborated on the narrative shared by the participant regarding her desire to communicate in English within the digital context. This narrative encompasses participant's stories—including her willingness to communicate in English inside and outside the classroom and speak in digital EFL contexts.

1. **Participant's Motivation:** When describing participant's narrative, it is important to portray her motivation for learning and communicating in English. This motivation may stem from various factors, such as academic, professional, social, or personal needs. For example, participants may aspire to enhance their English language skills to secure better job opportunities or to interact with people from diverse cultures in the digital environment.
2. **Challenges Faced:** The narrative should also encompass the difficulties the participant faces in English communication, especially in the digital EFL context. These may include problems in understanding different accents, limitations in vocabulary or grammar, feelings of nervousness or lack of confidence when interacting with native English speakers.
3. **Participant's Aspirations:** Additionally, the narrative should include participant's aspirations related to the use of English. This includes hopes of becoming more fluent in speaking, expanding vocabulary, improving listening comprehension,

or even reaching a proficiency level that allows her to participate in more complex digital activities, such as academic discussion or international collaboration.

4. Digital EFL Context: The explanation should also encompass the digital EFL context in which participants operate. This could include the platforms or applications they use to learn English, such as language learning websites, social media platforms, or online discussion forums. Depicting this context helps understand how participants integrate their English language learning into their digital lives.

By elucidating this narrative in-depth, we can understand the participant's journey and experience in learning and communicating in English within the digital EFL context. This can also aid in designing more effective and relevant learning strategies to support participant's goal and need in developing her English language proficiency.

Naa's story: I eventually adjust myself

Naa has spent over a decade studying the English language. In her first year of junior high school, she attended her first English classes. She has been studying English until now. She stated that the majority of language classes were less engaging and the emphasis was on teaching receptive skills. She felt her English was inadequate; therefore, she rarely speaks it.

Naa was determined to sharpen her speaking skills by communicating in English through digital EFL contexts, and she slowly began practising her English. Initially, it wasn't easy, but eventually, she communicated well.

This narrative highlights Naa's journey in learning English and her efforts to overcome the challenges she faced in traditional language learning settings. It underscores her determination to improve her English proficiency through digital media, ultimately leading to successful communication.

She said there was an improvement in her English skills. She loves watching movies or listening to English podcasts, engaging in social media, and trying to communicate. This helped her to train her English language skills.

*.....If I compare my skills from year to year, I think my English has improved with the availability of communication in the digital context.*

In conversations with non-native English speakers (e.g., Koreans, Japanese, Chinese) on Facebook, there is a possibility of changes in the use of English. This can occur due to adjustments to the interlocutor's understanding level and communication style, such as using simpler vocabulary, reducing grammatical complexity, or adapting the speed and clarity in conveying messages.

When communicating with native English speakers (e.g., Americans, Australians, British) on Facebook, there is a tendency to use more formal or standard language due to a desire to demonstrate higher language proficiency, avoid misunderstandings, or create a better impression on the interlocutor.

When writing comments on a foreign friend's wall on Facebook, there is variation in the use of English depending on the relationship with the friend and the communication context. The vocabulary and linguistic style in close relationships tend to be more casual and comfortable. In contrast, written messages may be more polite and structured in more formal situations.

In an interview with Naa, she said that communicating in a digital context, like social media, improved her vocabulary. She said:

.....*No, because I think social media can improve English language skills because almost all social media use English. Therefore, we can improve our vocabularies from social media.*

Furthermore, Naa explained that communicating through chatting does not improve her English skills unless she chatted with native speakers of English. Doing live and active activities on social media, such as making videos or calls, greatly helps her to improve her English skills. She said:

.....*In my opinion, chatting does not greatly improve my English language skills unless we are chatting with native English speakers. Providing live and active activity on social media, such as video or phone can help me enhance my English skills.*

While social media can be a place to improve English skills through interactions with native speakers and learning provided content, there is also the potential to weaken language skills. This can happen due to the predominant use of informal language on social media platforms, exposure to uncorrected grammatical or spelling errors, and the tendency to use abbreviations or emoticons that reduce the practice of correct and formal language usage. However, wise usage and awareness of these potentials can help mitigate the negative impacts and strengthen English skills.

The use of English in digital media influences a variety of perspectives on the language while also making it easier for everyone to communicate with others. According to an interview with Naa, social media boosts her self-esteem and her capacity to interact with others in English in a digital EFL context.

.....*Yes of course, social media can increase confidence in communication by providing a platform for regular interaction and feedback. Engaging with a supportive online community fosters a sense of belonging and encourages individuals to express themselves more freely in English in the digital context of the EFL.*

Chatting on social media facilitates real-time communication and interaction with diverse users. This allows individuals to practice various aspects of language, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, in a relaxed and informal setting. Additionally, the availability of multimedia content enhances language learning through exposure to authentic language use. Participating in live activities on social media, such as videos or calls, offers immersive language learning experiences. These activities provide opportunities for listening comprehension, speaking practice, and cultural immersion in real time. Additionally, interactive features allow immediate feedback and correction, facilitating language improvement.

Individuals communicate in English through various means, including text-based messaging, voice calls, video chats, and multimedia content creation. Each mode of communication offers unique opportunities for language practice and skill development.

In the following interview questions, Naa explained that there were differences in understanding of English variations. Now that she has been involved in digital media activities, she knows and understands English in the broader realm. She said:

.....*I think using language on social media has gradually changed how we speak and communicate with others. However, we also need to understand that the various social media platforms have a limited character or have their own characteristics that ultimately impact the language used. However, we also need to realize that the various social media that now dominate have character constraints for the text messages delivered or have characteristics that ultimately affect the language used.*

Before engaging in social media, Naa had limited exposure to English diversity, primarily influenced by formal education and media. However, after interacting with

diverse English speakers on social media, her perception expands to include a broader range of accents, dialects, and cultural contexts.

.....*Engaging with non-native English speakers on YouTube positively impacts my Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English by exposing me to diverse linguistic backgrounds and encouraging active participation in English conversations.*

Meanwhile, interacting with native English speakers on Instagram also influences her confidence in communicating in English in a digital context.

.....*Yes, interacting with native English speakers on Instagram significantly boosts my confidence in communicating in English within digital contexts, as it exposes me to natural language use and cultural nuances in digital communication.*

Additionally, she found a way to express her WTC in English when posting comments or content on YouTube.

.....*I express my Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English when posting comments or content on YouTube by actively participating in discussions, sharing opinions, asking questions, and providing feedback in English.*

She also explained that live activities on Instagram contributed to her language learning and WTC in English.

.....*Live activities on Instagram contribute to my language learning and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English by providing immersive experiences, real-time interaction with native speakers, and spontaneous communication and feedback opportunities.*

The last question in the interview completes the data about the willingness to communicate in English in a digital EFL context. Naa explained that Telegram can increase her WTC by participating in English language groups or channels compared with other social media platforms. She said:

.....*Participating in English language groups or channels on Telegram can enhance my Willingness to Communicate (WTC) compared to other social media platforms, as it provides a focused and supportive environment for language practice, collaboration, and continuous learning.*

## Discussions

The findings indicate that engaging in EFL digital environments, mainly social media, significantly boosts students' motivation and readiness to communicate in English. This is supported by Lee and Dressman (2017), who found a positive correlation between participation in Informal Digital Learning of English (IDLE) activities and English proficiency. Naa's social media interactions improved her language skills, cultural awareness, and acceptance of linguistic diversity, aligning with Lee and Lee (2018).

Internal factors like personal motivation and external factors like academic demands, influence WTC in English. Ningsih et al. (2018) explained WTC as a mental state that reflects students' preparedness for English-language communication. Studies by Freiermuth and Jarrell (2006) and Goldoust (2017) emphasized that online interactions facilitate communication and improve WTC. Social media provides a conducive environment for these interactions, allowing students to practice English more relaxedly. The content creators on social media platforms like TikTok and TV shows are typically native speakers, thus, their content not only gives students practice speaking English with foreigners directly but also increases students' motivation and confidence (Yulita, F. & Hertiki, H 2023; Jalil H, et al., 2024).

As highlighted by Lee (2019a), IDLE offers a self-directed learning environment outside the classroom, significantly enhancing English proficiency and WTC. Activities such as watching English movies, engaging in social media, and online gaming, as noted by Sundqvist and Sylven (2016), contribute to language learning and WTC. Lee (2019b) further emphasized that familiarity with digital environments and interlocutors enhances WTC in extramural digital settings.

In summary, the digital EFL context, especially social media, plays a crucial role in improving students' English communication skills and their WTC, providing valuable insights for future research and practical applications in language education.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that engaging in EFL digital activities enhances students' readiness to communicate in English and improves their language skills. Digital platforms boost vocabulary, confidence, and cultural awareness. The findings emphasize integrating digital tools into traditional education to support language learning.

Digital contexts often promote autonomous learning, this autonomy can positively influence students' confidence and motivation to communicate in English. To encourage and facilitate English communication, instructors can make use of a range of digital resources, including social media, language learning applications, online forums, and virtual classrooms.

In short, teachers and educators can learn useful techniques, resources, and strategies to foster a supportive and engaging environment for English language learning and communication by gaining an understanding of students' WTC in EFL digital contexts.

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