

EFL Students' Suggestions to Maintain Their Willingness to Communicate in Online English Language Lessons¹

Sugerencias de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera para mantener su disposición a comunicarse en lecciones de inglés en línea

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Abstract

Willingness to communicate (WTC) enhances proficiency for students of English as a foreign language (EFL) and has become a significant research topic. In the literature, several studies focus on the reasons that affect the WTC of EFL students. Yet, little is known about EFL students' suggestions to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. Therefore, the present study aims to find out EFL students' suggestions to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. It was designed as a qualitative case study. A group of 40 Turkish EFL students participated in the present study. The data were collected through an open-ended question online, and participants' responses were analyzed thematically. The participants made several suggestions related to lessons, topics, activities, teachers, classrooms, assignments, and programs. The findings were discussed, the limitations of the study were explained, and suggestions for further studies were made.

Keywords: Willingness to communicate, online English language lessons, EFL students, suggestions to maintain willingness to communicate

Resumen

La voluntad de comunicarse (VDC) mejora el dominio de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) y se ha convertido en un tema de investigación importante. En la literatura, varios estudios se centran en los motivos que afectan el VDC de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. Sin embargo, se sabe poco sobre las sugerencias de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de mantener su VDC en las lecciones de inglés en línea. Por lo tanto, el presente estudio tiene como objetivo conocer las sugerencias de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera para mantener su VDC en las lecciones de inglés en línea. Fue diseñado como un estudio de caso cualitativo. En el presente estudio participó un grupo de 40 estudiantes turcos de inglés como lengua extranjera. Los datos se recopilaban a través de una pregunta abierta en línea y las respuestas de los participantes se analizaron temáticamente. Los participantes hicieron varias sugerencias relacionadas con lecciones, temas, actividades, maestros, aulas, tareas y programas. Se discutieron los hallazgos, se explicaron las limitaciones del estudio y se hicieron sugerencias para estudios adicionales.

Palabras clave: Voluntad de comunicarse, lecciones de inglés en línea, estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, sugerencias para mantener la disposición de comunicarse.

Resumo

A disposição para se comunicar (DPC) aprimora a proficiência para estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) e tornou-se um tópico significativo de pesquisa. Na literatura, vários estudos se concentram nas razões que afetam a (DPC) dos estudantes de EFL. No entanto, pouco se sabe sobre as sugestões dos estudantes de EFL para manter sua (DPC) em aulas online de inglês. Portanto, o presente estudo tem como objetivo descobrir as sugestões dos estudantes de EFL para manter sua (DPC) em aulas online de inglês. Foi projetado como um estudo de caso qualitativo. Um grupo de 40 estudantes turcos de EFL participou do presente estudo. Os dados foram coletados por meio de uma pergunta aberta online, e as respostas dos participantes foram analisadas tematicamente. Os participantes fizeram várias sugestões relacionadas a aulas, tópicos, atividades, professores, salas de aula, tarefas e programas. Os resultados foram discutidos, as limitações do estudo foram explicadas, e sugestões para estudos futuros foram feitas.

Palavras-chave: Disposição para comunicar, aulas online de língua inglesa, estudantes de EFL, sugestões para manter a disposição para comunicar.

Willingness to communicate (WTC) plays a significant role in the development of English language skills of English as a foreign language (EFL) students in face-to-face and online English language lessons because they are usually required to use English to express their opinions, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs. It is also part of student participation essential for language learning (Cao, 2011). Therefore, it becomes significant to understand what WTC is and which factors can affect EFL students' WTC in face-to-face and online English language lessons, which is explained by reviewing several studies which focus on those factors. The context of these studies is mainly traditional L2 classrooms and more recently online learning environments.

Willingness to Communicate

WTC was coined in the literature by McCroskey and Baer in 1985 based on Burgoon's (1976) study that explored unwillingness to communicate in the first language (L1) and basically meant eagerness to initiate and pursue a conversation in L1 (as cited in MacIntyre et al., 1998). Then, in the 1990s, WTC in the second language (L2) started to become popular. WTC in L2 is defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p.547). Before moving to the studies conducted on WTC in face-to-face and online L2 learning environments, this section will discuss the importance of WTC in L2 learning.

Willingness to Communicate in Second Language Learning

As MacIntyre et al. (1998) argued, WTC in L2 has a more complex system to decipher than WTC in L1, and knowledge or competence in a language is the determining factor in lowering or increasing WTC. If L2 students have low language competency, they are expected to have less WTC. Shao and Gao (2016) also argued that WTC in L2 depends more on the situation than WTC in L1 because the WTC levels of L2 students may fluctuate significantly due to the language domain. To illustrate, students are less likely to initiate a conversation in English in a situation in which they are bored, sad, sleepy, anxious, or distracted or they are not interested in the topics discussed in the courses (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Such behavior is acceptable, but what sounds alarming is when students prefer to remain reticent about answering questions or joining classroom discussions habitually (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010).

WTC is crucial to initiate a conversation in L2 (Kang, 2005). Also, L2 students with high WTC could get the chance to increase the frequency of practicing English speaking both in- and out-of-classroom (Kang, 2005). As a result, it plays a pivotal role in L2 development.

Theoretical Framework of L2 Willingness to Communicate

The importance of situational WTC in L2 learning environments is evident, and theories to conceptualize L2 WTC rely heavily on these situational variables (Kang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 1998). To demonstrate the factors that affect L2 WTC, MacIntyre et al. (1998) developed a model for L2 WTC composed of “communication behavior, behavioral intention, situated antecedents of communication, motivational propensities, the affective and cognitive context, and the societal and individual context” (p.547). According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), the first one, communication behavior, refers to a person’s willingness to look for opportunities to communicate and make communication, the second one, behavioral intention, is related to whether he/she wants to behave by using a L2, the third one indicates his/her will to make communication with other people and his/her situational self-confidence, the fourth one focuses on his/her motivation toward other people and groups and self-confidence in L2, the fifth one deals with his/her attitudes toward different groups, the type of social situations he/she is in, and his/her communicative competence, and the last one is based on the atmosphere/climate between different groups and his/her personality. These variables could be influenced by one another and have an interrelated effect on L2 WTC (Yashima, 2002).

Studies on Willingness to Communicate in English Language Teaching

There have been numerous studies conducted on WTC in L2 (refers to English hereafter) internationally. These studies mainly focus on the factors that can affect WTC in traditional L2 classrooms and more recently in online learning environments. These studies list both trait-like and state-like variables that can either increase or decrease WTC. WTC among L2 learners is closely related to the English proficiency levels of students (Tan & Phariot, 2018), self-confidence (Cao, 2011; Kruk, 2021; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021; Şener, 2014), pleasant classroom atmosphere (Aomr et al., 2020; Cao, 2011; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022), motivation (Lee & Liu, 2022; Ma et al., 2019), anxiety (Dewaele, 2019; Kruk, 2021; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022), previous negative experiences (Kruk, 2019), methods and strategies applied in language teaching (Cao, 2011; Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019; Kruk, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022), technostress, which is what Brod (1984) defined as “a modern disease of adaptation caused by an inability to cope with new computer technologies in a healthy manner”(p. 16), (Kruk, 2021; Lee & Liu, 2022; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022), and psychology (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Zhang et al., 2022).

This set of factors that affect levels of WTC is interconnected, and their outcomes vary greatly. Due to the dynamic nature of WTC, these factors are also quite

unpredictable and may change depending on a specific learning environment (Kruk, 2021).

Tan and Phairot (2018) argued that there is a correlation between students' proficiencies and their WTC levels. Students who are proficient users of English are also those with high WTC, and such students tend to perform better on exams (Zhang et al., 2022) and being successful contributes to the L2 self-confidence of students. Students with L2 self-confidence tend to have high WTC (Cao, 2011; Kruk, 2021; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021). In fact, the most striking variable that affects WTC in the activities done in the class is self-confidence (Şener, 2014). Being L2 competent and self-confident may not be sufficient for high WTC without a pleasant learning atmosphere. This could explain why research shows L2 learners are more willing to practice English speaking outside the classroom than in the classroom (Başöz & Erten, 2018; Isma & Baharuddin, 2022). As a result, the significance of a pleasant classroom atmosphere in increasing L2 WTC is evident (Aomr et al., 2020; Cao, 2011; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022).

For Dewaele (2019), a pleasant classroom atmosphere is a non-threatening setting where mistakes are tolerated, and students feel free to use the target language. In a study conducted by Punyaporn and Soontornwipast (2022), positive behaviors of peers or interlocutors and open-minded and approachable language teachers were found to increase the WTC levels of students considerably. It is indisputable that language teachers are partially responsible for creating a pleasant classroom atmosphere, both traditional and online through some pedagogical and technical supports (Lee & Liu, 2022); however, they may need to be supported and trained on how to accomplish that (Aomt et al., 2020). Moreover, students are eager to speak more if they are surrounded by friendly students with high WTC (Kruk, 2021). Their friends may encourage them to speak, or they may get motivated to speak when they see that their friends are willing to speak. Not surprisingly, having higher motivation levels is another factor that affects L2 WTC as students with higher instrumental motivation are also those with higher WTC levels (Lee & Liu, 2022; Ma et al., 2019).

Research shows that foreign language classroom anxiety can decrease WTC (Dewaele, 2019). The studies conducted in online or hybrid L2 learning environments claim that students often feel less anxious in online settings and tend to have higher WTC compared to traditional classroom settings (Kruk, 2021; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022). This finding can be explained in various ways. Students may feel less anxious about making mistakes in online settings, and using avatars may create an anxiety-free learning environment which may give the courage to introverted students and help them boost their L2 WTC (Kruk, 2021). Moreover, Punyaporn and Soontornwipast (2022) argue that shy students may feel more comfortable in online classrooms where they are not required to open their cameras while practicing English speaking.

Another factor that affects their L2 WTC is the quality of the speaking practices, that is, whether a student has positive or negative experiences in speaking. Previous negative experiences in speaking practices could distort the interest and motivation of students and thus lower their WTC (Kruk, 2019). However, positive experiences when they see that they can understand what is being said in L2 may build their confidence and help them become more eager to talk (Kruk, 2021). On the other hand, having little or no background knowledge about the topics being discussed may result in negative experiences (Kang, 2005). Obviously, students tend to speak more if they are provided with interesting topics and tasks (Cao, 2011; Kruk, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022) and talk more about the topics they know well.

Another crucial factor that can influence WTC levels in EFL classrooms is methods and strategies applied by language teachers. For example, allocating additional time to interactive activities may increase the L2 WTC levels of students (Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019). Organizing one-to-one or group work activities while practising engaging activities seems to require decisions with precision. Kruk (2021) noted that while group work activities are enjoyed by many interlocutors, one-to-one activities are preferred by others. Language teachers need to be careful while merging in-class activities with out-of-class activities that could help students become autonomous. Cao (2011) argued that group size matters in classroom activities in order not to get lost while reaching every student. Students may get more excited while talking in front of a group of people (Kang, 2005). Kaufmann and Tatum (2018) warned that when students feel they receive fair opportunities and treatment in online instruction, this could help them like their teacher and increase their WTC.

Technostress, which is “a modern disease of adaptation caused by an inability to cope with new computer technologies in a healthy manner” (Brod, 1984, p. 16), could be another reason that decreases WTC. Studies that explored the WTC levels of EFL students in online education in Thailand (Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022) and in China (Lee & Liu, 2022) revealed that students experienced a sort of technostress. Both studies reported that technical issues such as poor internet connection or power cuts faced during online learning experiences resulted in low WTC. In fact, some students in the study could not hear other interlocutors well due to some technical issues, and some had difficulties in learning about an online platform, such as Second Life, which is a virtual world program thanks to which language learners can create their own avatars and interact with native speakers to improve their English (Kruk, 2021).

As MacIntyre and Doucette (2010) argued, the psychological state of a person may affect his/her WTC level. A happy person may have a higher WTC level than a sad person. While studying what increases or decreases L2 WTC, Zhang et al. (2022) stressed the significance of psychological aspects that affect language learning. Individual learner differences matter considerably, and they could result in fluctuation in the L2 WTC of students due to its dynamic nature.

To sum up, it might be wrong to attribute WTC levels of EFL students to only one factor such as personality or a situation since WTC can be affected by the joint influence of various factors (Cao, 2011). As Kruk (2021) argued, WTC has a dynamic nature, and it may be misleading to consider all these factors as positive or negative all the time.

Aim of the Research and Research Question

According to the literature review, the reasons that influence the WTC of EFL students have been studied, but there is little information about how to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to examine student suggestions for the maintenance of their WTC in online English language lessons by posing the following open-ended research question: “What do you want to be done to maintain your WTC in online English language lessons?”

Methodology

Research design

The present study was designed as a qualitative case study which aimed to research a modern phenomenon (i.e., EFL students' suggestions to maintain their willingness to communicate in online English language lessons) in its real context (i.e., in online English language lessons) as Yin (2009) mentioned.

Participants

There were 40 Turkish EFL students (37 females and 3 males) at a Turkish university who participated in the present study. Their ages were between 18 and 38. Their level of English was B1, and they were studying English.

Data collection instrument

The data were collected online through one open-ended question. It asked students “What do you want to be done to maintain your WTC in online English language lessons? Explain.”

Data analysis

There were 40 students when the data were collected online. All of these students answered the question individually. While twelve participants made one suggestion in their responses, the rest shared at least two suggestions in their responses to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. The collected responses were analyzed through thematic analysis. The responses of the participant EFL students to the open-ended question were read many times, several sub-themes emerged from the student responses, and these sub-themes were placed under main themes depending on the similarities between them. Then, the findings were presented according to the themes and were interpreted in consensus with the data analysis. The themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The Themes and Sub-themes

| Themes | Sub-themes |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Lesson-related suggestions | Varying the way online English language lessons are taught |
| | Shortening the length of online English language lessons |
| | Changing the nature of online English language lessons |
| | Accelerating the pace of online English language lessons |
| Topic-related suggestions | Changing the nature of the topics |
| | Varying the content of the topics |
| Activity-related suggestion | Changing the nature of the activities |
| Teacher-related suggestions | Encouraging students to participate |
| | Having positive attitudes |
| Classroom-related suggestions | Creating intimacy in online English language lessons |
| | Reducing the number of students in online English language lessons |
| | Increasing student participation |
| Assignment-related suggestions | Reducing the number of assignments |
| | Giving assignments |
| | Changing the nature of the assignments |
| Program-related suggestion | Designing an English language program relevant to students' level of English |

Trustworthiness

In-depth robust descriptions were used to make the present study more valid. That is, the findings were presented with the quotations of the participant EFL students.

Findings

The present study's findings were presented according to the themes developed from the student responses in order: lesson-related, topic-related, activity-related, teacher-related, classroom-related, assignment-related, and program-related suggestions.

Theme 1: Lesson-related suggestions

The first theme is lesson-related suggestions because, according to the responses of the participants, online English language lessons seem to influence the maintenance of their WTC in online English language lessons. Online English language lessons appear to affect the maintenance of WTC because the participants' responses focus on several aspects of online English language lessons which are the way online English language lessons are taught, the length of online English language lessons, the pace of online English language lessons, and the nature of online English language lessons. As a result, lesson-related suggestions are sub-themed as (a) varying the way online English language lessons are taught, (b) shortening the length of online English language lessons, (c) changing the nature of online English language lessons, and (d) accelerating the pace of online English language lessons.

Sub-theme 1: Varying the way online English language lessons are taught

The way online English language lessons are made seems to impact the maintenance of some participants in online English language lessons negatively if it is monotonous and repetitive (i.e., the lesson is always taught using the same ways). Therefore, to maintain WTC in online English language lessons, it was suggested that the way online English language lessons are taught should be varied. The following quotations clearly show this.

Participant (P) 1: "After a certain point, our attention is distracted in the lesson. There should not be monotony in lessons."

P3: "Changes can be made in the way lessons are taught."

P36: "... using different ways to get more efficiency from the lesson and increase willingness to participate..."

Sub-theme 2: Shortening the length of online English language lessons

The length of online English language lessons appears to have a negative effect on maintaining WTC in online English language lessons if it is long. Therefore, shortening the length of online English language lessons was recommended by three participants. The quotations below support this.

P2: “Lessons should be short, but efficient.”

P6: “Some lessons are too long, and this causes distraction.”

P19: “... and that lessons should not last long.”

Sub-theme 3: Changing the nature of online English language lessons

If online English languages are boring and uninteresting and if students feel uncomfortable in online English language lessons, the WTC of the participants seems to be affected negatively, so the nature of online English language lessons may affect the maintenance of WTC in online English language lessons negatively. As a result, it was recommended that online English language lessons should be made fun, interesting, and comfortable for students to maintain their WTC in online English language classes. The following quotations illustrate this.

P19: “... that lessons become more fun.”

P24: “Making lessons more interesting.”

P23: “I think the teacher should teach in a way that comforts students more.”

P36: “... making lessons more interesting can help this situation to alleviate.”

Sub-theme 4: Accelerating the pace of online English language lessons

The pace of online English language lessons might influence the maintenance of the participants negatively in online English language lessons if the pace is not fast. It can be suggested that the pace of online English language lessons should become fast by P40 who implied this suggestion by writing “And that the lesson is taught very slowly becomes boring.”

Theme 2: Topic-related suggestions

The second theme was topic-related suggestions since the topics studied in online English language lessons appear to impact the maintenance of the WTC of the participants in online English language lessons negatively if they do not get the participants’ attention. The participants’ responses concentrate on the nature and content of the topics studied in online English language lessons, so this main theme is sub-themed as (a) changing the nature of the topics and (b) varying the content of the topics.

Sub-theme 1: Changing the nature of the topics

According to some participants, if the nature of the topics in online English language lessons does not catch their attention, their WTC may be affected negatively, so they may not maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. Therefore, they recommended studying more interesting, modern, and fun topics in online English language lessons for the maintenance of their WTC in such lessons. To illustrate:

P5: "...or we can make conversations about topics that we are interested in every week."

P7: "...making the topic talked about more fun with video and visuals..."

P27: "Up-to-date topics should be mentioned."

P31: "... and we can be asked to study the topics that catch our interest."

P32: "In lessons, more interesting topics can be practiced."

Sub-theme 2: Varying the content of the topics

Like the nature of the topics, the content of the topics studied in online English language lessons may have a negative effect on the maintenance of the WTC of the participants in online English language lessons if it does not get their attention. Consequently, varying the content of the topics studied in online English language lessons was suggested to maintain WTC in online English language lessons by two participants in their responses below.

P11: "... totally talking about daily life, studying daily speaking structures."

P39: "... at least different and fun contents can be provided to gather students' attention."

Theme 3: Activity-related suggestion

The third theme is the activity-related suggestion since like the topics studied in online English language lessons, the activities used in such lessons seem to impact the maintenance of the WTC of the participants negatively if they do not grab their attention because of being uninteresting, old, boring, and so on. As the responses of the participants focus on the nature of the activities used in online English language lessons, changing the nature of the activities is placed under this theme as its only sub-theme.

Sub-theme 1: Changing the nature of the activities

The nature of activities in an online English language lesson catches the attention of the participants by being interesting, fun, beautiful, and so on, yet if it does not, according to some participants, they may not maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. Consequently, the nature of the activities used in online English

language lessons was recommended to be changed by making them more interesting, fun, up-to-date, participative, and different. To demonstrate:

P7: “By choosing more up-to-date and fun activities that can catch our interest...”

P14: “That there are more fun and interesting activities can be good.”

P17: “More different activities can be done for efficient lessons.”

P18: “Some activities that can make the lesson more fun can be done.”

P21: “There can be activities in which students can participate more in lessons.”

Theme 4: Teacher-related suggestions

The fourth theme is teacher-related suggestions because English language teachers in online English language classes seem to have a direct effect on the maintenance of the WTC of the participants in online English language lessons through their attitudes and behaviors in online English language lessons. Since the focus of the participants' responses is on teachers' behaviors and attitudes, this theme is sub-themed as (a) encouraging students to participate and (b) having positive attitudes.

Sub-theme 1: Encouraging students to participate

According to some participants, if English language teachers encourage them to participate through their behaviors, such as giving students the right to talk, in online English language lessons, they can maintain their WTC in such lessons, but if they do not, the maintenance of their WTC in online English language lessons may be affected negatively. The quotations below indicate this:

P5: “... or if individual rights to talk are given to everybody, it can become more interesting.”

P7: “By choosing more up-to-date and fun activities that can catch our interest, having students comment about them in the lessons, that students express their opinions, ... will maintain the participation of all students, including me, in the lesson.”

P26: “It is not difficult to communicate in general, but for continuity, I think opportunities should be given like in the speaking lessons.”

P28: “I want teachers to give the individuals the right to speak by saying names in the lesson.”

P33: “... but if turning on his/her microphone is asked obligatorily, the student turns on his/her microphone obligatorily.”

P34: “Encouraging students to talk more.”

P35: “I think the fact that teachers choose the student [to talk] can be good...”

Sub-theme 2: Having positive attitudes

English language teachers' attitudes in online English language lessons appear to have an influence on the maintenance of their WTC in such lessons because, according to some participants, positive attitudes seem to contribute to the maintenance of their WTC in online English language lessons. The quotations below show this.

P4: “[Teachers] should become understanding and provide easiness.”

P29: “A concerned teacher’s helping students during the process of focusing on the lesson, ..., making students not feel afraid of making mistakes intimately, building trust in this issue.”

P30: “... our teachers’ encouraging us to speak through our microphone can increase this willingness. Teachers’ more motivative, that is, encouraging approaches can increase this willingness.”

P37: “That teachers become more understanding has a more effective role in this situation [WTC].”

Theme 5: Classroom-related suggestions

The fifth theme is classroom-related suggestions because online English language classrooms appear to have an impact on the maintenance of the participants’ WTC through its environment, its size, and the rate of student participation since the responses of the participants concentrate on these three classroom-related issues. As a result, the followings are placed under this theme as its sub-themes: (a) creating intimacy in online English language lessons, (b) reducing the number of students in online English language lessons, and (c) increasing student participation.

Sub-theme 1: Creating intimacy in online English language lessons

Three participants mentioned that if the environment or atmosphere in an online English language lesson is not intimate, they may not maintain their WTC in that lesson because intimacy in an online lesson seems to trigger student WTC in that lesson. Thus, creating intimacy in online English language lessons was suggested by three participants. To demonstrate:

P12: “I think ... and forming an intimate environment like a face-to-face classroom environment will be good.”

P16: “There may be a more intimate environment.”

Sub-theme 2: Reducing the number of students in online English language lessons

The size of the classroom seems to influence two participants’ WTC negatively in online English language lessons if it is crowded, so these participants suggested

reducing the number of students in online English language lessons to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. The quotations below indicate this.

P11: “Talking with fewer students...”

P12: “I think having lessons with fewer students and ... will be good”

Sub-theme 3: Increasing student participation

Low student participation in online English language lessons appears to reduce the WTC of two participants in such lessons, high student participation seems to contribute to their WTC. Hence, to maintain WTC in online English language lessons, they recommended increasing student participation in online English language lessons. To indicate:

P10: “I wish there had been a more active class.”

P13: “Lessons become more fun when more students participate.”

Theme 6: Assignment-related suggestions

The sixth theme is assignment-related suggestions because like the topics studied and activities used in online English language lessons, assignments appear to influence three participants’ WTC in such classes depending on their number, content, and being given. Since the participants’ responses focus on the number of assignments, their content, and whether they are given or not, this theme is sub-themed as (a) reducing the number of assignments, (b) giving assignments, and (c) changing the nature of the assignments.

Sub-theme 1: Reducing the number of assignments

If the number of assignments is high in online English language lessons, the WTC of P22 who wrote “... and I am not in favor of giving many assignments. When many assignments are given, we get bored” is affected negatively and so is the maintenance of her WTC in online English language lessons. Thus, reducing the number of assignments was recommended to maintain her WTC in online English language lessons.

Sub-theme 2: Giving assignments

When assignments are not given in online English language lessons, the WTC of P31 who wrote “Assignments can be given” may be affected negatively, and so may the maintenance of her WTC in online English language lessons. Thus, giving assignments was suggested for the maintenance of WTC in online English language lessons.

Sub-theme 3: Changing the nature of the assignments

The nature of the assignments seems to affect WTC in online English language lessons because P9 who wrote “I think that assignments should be based on practice more” wanted to be given practice-based assignments to maintain her WTC in online English language lessons. Hence, changing the nature of the assignments could be recommended for the maintenance of WTC in online English language lessons.

Theme 7: Program-related suggestion

The last theme is the program-related suggestion because like the other parts of online English language lessons, such as topics, activities, and assignments, an English language program applied in an online English language lesson seems to impact one participant's WTC in online English language lessons. Depending on the response of P38, one sub-theme is placed under this theme. It is designing an English language program relevant to students' level of English.

Sub-theme 1: Designing an English language program relevant to students' level of English

If the level of an English language program used in an online English language lesson is not relevant to the English levels of the students, the WTC of P38 is influenced negatively because she wrote “I think designing a program according to the level of the class after determining it is necessary.” Thus, she suggested designing an English language program relevant to students' level of English to maintain her WTC in online English language classes.

Discussion

To maintain their WTC in online English language lessons, the participants offered some lesson-related suggestions such as using diverse techniques to relieve the monotony, making lessons more interesting and fun, comforting students, and teaching at a faster pace in a shorter lesson time to avoid boredom. The response related to using diverse techniques to relieve the monotony shows the importance of methods and strategies applied in language teaching in increasing WTC (Cao, 2011; Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019; Kruk, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022) because the use of different methods and strategies can avoid monotony in lessons and make lessons more fun and interesting. Also, long online English language lessons might distract the participants, so they might be demotivated to communicate in English. Consequently, English language teachers may follow the lesson-related suggestions in their online English language teaching practices to promote their students' WTC.

The findings of the present study have also indicated that the topics studied in online English language teaching matter. The participants asked for different and fun content that involves interesting and up-to-date topics. This finding is in line with the literature which argues that students tend to speak more if they are provided with interesting topics and tasks (Cao, 2011; Kruk, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Therefore, English language teachers may opt for topics that are both engaging and interesting to maintain their students' WTC in online English language lessons.

Moreover, the findings of the present study have shown that choosing attractive topics is not complete without delivering them through interesting, fun, diverse, up-to-date, and engaging activities. The activity-related suggestions made by the participants could increase students' motivation, which is required for keeping WTC high (Lee & Liu, 2022; Ma et al., 2019) and is in line with literature that stresses the significance of interactive activities for WTC in English language lessons (Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019). Similarly, English language teachers may explore various interesting and engaging activities to boost motivation and keep their students' WTC high in online English language lessons.

Probably the largest responsibility lies on the shoulders of English language teachers. The findings of this study have clearly illustrated that they have a pivotal role in increasing their students' WTC in online English language lessons by being understanding, providing easiness, giving students adequate time and opportunities to talk and express their opinions, encouraging them to speak more, building trust, and making students turn on their microphones in online English teaching. This finding serves as a contributor to building a classroom community because such behaviors can help students feel more secure and comfortable, so their belonging to the classroom community can enhance, which can increase and maintain their WTC in online English language lessons.

In addition to English language teachers, classroom size and atmosphere matter. According to the findings of the present study, the suggestions of the participants related to classrooms involved an intimate classroom atmosphere, small class size, and an active learning environment. This finding supports the importance of a pleasant classroom atmosphere which can increase L2 students' WTC (Aomr et al., 2020; Cao, 2011; Punyaporn & Soontornwipast, 2022). Similarly, by following the classroom-related suggestions of the participants, English language teachers can create a pleasant classroom atmosphere in their classes, which can motivate the participants to communicate more.

The final remarks made by participants involve the features of assignments and the program to be followed. As understood from the findings of the present study, the participants preferred to be given assignments, especially the ones that are practical and that would not be an overload. They also added that the program (i.e., the syllabus or curriculum) should be designed in accordance with their English levels. Easy tasks

may be boring, and more difficult ones may be demotivating. To build self-confidence, students need to see that they progress and can achieve things in English. This finding matters as students with L2 self-confidence tend to have high WTC (Cao, 2011; Kruk, 2021; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Mulyono & Saskia, 2021). As a result, English language teachers should be well aware of the levels of their students and apply differentiated instruction which may include interactive assignments to build the L2 confidence of their students at different L2 competencies.

To sum up, though the participants' suggestions focus on different aspects of online English language lessons, it can be said that these aspects are interrelated. That is, an English language program decides the topic to be studied in an online English language lesson which determines the activities to be done, the assignment to be given, and the instructional methods to be used for teaching, so if the topic does not catch the attention of students, the assignment and the activities may also be uninteresting for students, which may lead to a boring classroom atmosphere. As a result, students may not maintain their WTC in that online English language lesson. Therefore, the aspects of online English language lessons on which participants' suggestions focus can be said to have a sort of joint effect on students' WTC in online English language lessons, so their suggestions should be considered as a whole.

Conclusion

The focus of the present study has been on the suggestions that EFL students made to maintain their WTC in online English language lessons. The findings of the present study have indicated that the suggestions of the participants to be used for maintaining their WTC in online English language lessons were related to lessons, topics, activities, teachers, classrooms, assignments, and programs.

The present study has two weaknesses/limitations. The first one is its research context (i.e., at a university), and the second one is the number of participants (i.e., 40 participants). Future studies can be conducted with more participants in different research contexts by using the same methodology so that a more comprehensive understanding of the issue under investigation in the present study can be obtained.

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