A Study of Willingness to Communicate in Physical and Virtual EFL Classroom Using Narrative Frames

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Istraživanje spremnosti na komunikaciju u stvarnim i virtualnim učionicama engleskog kao stranog jezika pomoću narativnih okvira

Diplomski rad

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IZJAVA

Izjavljujem s punom materijalnom i moralnom odgovornošću da sam ovaj rad samostalno napravio te da u njemu nema kopiranih ili prepisanih dijelova teksta tuđih radova, a da nisu označeni kao citati s napisanim izvorom odakle su preneseni. Svojim vlastoručnim potpisom potvrđujem da sam suglasan da Filozofski fakultet Osijek trajno pohrani i javno objavi ovaj moj rad u internetskoj bazi završnih i diplomskih radova knjižnice Filozofskog fakulteta Osijek, knjižnice Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku i Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu.

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Abstract

The present study used a qualitative method of narrative frame to investigate levels of willingness to communicate (WTC) in the physical and virtual English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, as well as the factors influencing possible changes in the level of WTC in the two different settings. More precisely, this study took a closer look at the feelings the participants associated with speaking in two different settings, factors that influenced the participants' willingness to volunteer in both settings, and in which of the two settings participants spoke voluntarily more often. The study was conducted with seventy-five participants in one of the primary schools in Croatia. The analysis of the data gathered from the narrative frames indicated that, even though there was a generally negative perception of online classes among participants, they still associated positive feelings with speaking in both settings. Nevertheless, the results showed that the participants were more likely to speak voluntarily in the physical classroom. One of the possible reasons for low WTC in the virtual classroom were problems with technology and a lack of interpersonal communication. The most important factor influencing participants' high willingness to communicate, especially in the physical classroom, was high-perceived communication competence. Some other factors influencing WTC gathered from the results were classroom setting, classroom atmosphere, group size and interlocutors. Since the levels of WTC changed with the change of setting, the study concluded that WTC in this research acted as a situational variable. This study suggests further investigation of processes hidden behind WTC in an online EFL setting.

Key words: willingness to communicate (WTC), physical classroom, virtual classroom, English as a foreign language (EFL)

Sažetak

Ovo se istraživanje, u kojemu je primijenjen narativni okvir kao metoda istraživanja, bavi razlikama u razinama spremnosti na komunikaciju u stvarnim i virtualnim učionicama engleskog kao stranog jezika te čimbenicima koji utječu na moguće razlike u razinama spremnosti na komunikaciju u dvama kontekstima. Istraživanje je detaljnije proučavalo osjećaje koje ispitanici povezuju s govorenjem u dvama različitim nastavnim kontekstima, čimbenike koji utječu na spremnost ispitanika da dobrovoljno sudjeluju u nastavi te u kojem su od dvaju konteksta ispitanici spremniji na dobrovoljnu komunikaciju. Istraživanje je provedeno u jednoj osnovnoj školi u Republici Hrvatskoj na skupini od sedamdeset i pet sudionika. Detaljna analiza podataka prikupljenih pomoću narativnih okvira pokazala je da, iako postoji negativno viđenje nastave u virtualnom kontekstu, ispitanici su ipak povezivali pozitivne osjećaje s govorenjem u objema tipovima učionica. Unatoč tome, sudionici su ipak bili spremniji na dobrovoljnu komunikaciju u stvarnoj učionici. Jedan od mogućih razloga niže spremnosti na komunikaciju u virtualnoj učionici leži u prirodi online poučavanja koja uključuje probleme s tehnologijom i često se čini manje osobnim jer ne postoji bliski kontakt s ostalim sudionicima. Najvažniji čimbenik spremnosti na komunikaciju u ovom istraživanju bila je samo-percepcija sposobnosti za komunikaciju koja je kod ispitanika bila na vrlo visokoj razini. Ostali čimbenici koji su se pokazali važnima su okolina i atmosfera u učionici, sugovornici i veličina skupine u kojoj se komunicira. Ovo istraživanje predlaže daljnje ispitivanje procesa koji uzrokuju promjene u razinama spremnosti na komunikaciju u virtualnim učionicama engleskog jezika.

Ključne riječi: spremnost na komunikaciju, stvarna učionica, virtualna učionica, nastava engleskog kao stranog jezika

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1. Introduction

According to Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2017), one of the most important skills in the modern world is the ability to communicate in a foreign language. Even the success of foreign or second language education is measured by the learners' ability to participate in spontaneous communication in the target language. However, the process of acquiring the target language and arriving at the point of spontaneous communication is affected by individual differences, which influence every aspect of one's way of thinking and behaving, including second language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2005). Individual differences that can affect one's language acquisition are personality, ability, motivation, temperament, mood, learning styles and strategies, self-regulatory capacity, anxiety, self-esteem, creativity, and learner beliefs (Dörnyei, 2005). One of the relatively recent concepts of individual differences is willingness to communicate (WTC), which is often closely connected with and/or influenced by the other aforementioned individual differences. Considering prior experiences, which showed that some learners will avoid, while others will use every opportunity to communicate, the need to explain this phenomenon appeared. WTC provides an answer to the aforementioned question: why will some students speak when given the opportunity, while some will remain quiet? Individuals with higher WTC are more likely to speak when they see an opportunity to use the target language. While originally developed for use in the native language (L1), the concept of WTC was later adapted for use in a second language (L2) (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998). Even though the early research in the field of WTC presents WTC as a more stable personality trait, later findings claim that WTC is a situation-dependent construct and changes under the influence of different contexts and in different cultures (Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak, 2017). Some researchers (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998) claim that in second language education, high learners' WTC should be the main goal.

Recent events and the COVID-19 pandemic have affected every aspect of living, including education. The sudden need for understanding online education and the processes within it appeared. Online learning, which Hartnett (2016: 7) defines as "a form of distance education mediated by technological tools where learners are geographically separated from the instructor and the main institution", is influenced by two main concepts: transactional distance and learner control. Transactional distance entails psychological separation that learners experience during distance learning, and it arises from the spatial and possible temporal separation between learners and teachers. The structure of the class, as well as the amount of dialogue between the learner and the teacher and classmates, will affect transactional distance. Learner control is about finding a

balance between learners' independence and their power, meaning that learners are able to make decisions without restrictions while taking responsibility and being a part of the learning process. This concept puts learners in the centre while teachers are seen as a source of support during the learning process. According to Dixon 2010, online learning can be as engaging as traditional, but in order to achieve that, it should be cooperative, include active learning, and have a strong teacher's existence.

The contemporary studies of motivation in online learning (Hartnett, 2016; Meşe and Sevilen, 2021; Lin *et al.*, 2017) indicate that the lack of interpersonal communication in online setting can negatively affect learners' motivation which could lead to lowering learners' WTC. These findings prompt the question of whether and how learners' WTC changes in distant learning and which factors affect it. Mikulan *et al.* (2011) observed positive and negative aspects of distance learning in the Croatian setting through working with their students. They state that the main positive aspects of distance learning are easy access to the needed materials, flexibility of classes, the possibility of collaboration between teachers and students, quick feedback, and an easy inclusion of disabled students. On the other hand, the negative aspects of distance learning are a lack of interpersonal communication, incomplete or unreliable information on the internet, slow communication with the teacher, and lack of necessary skills in the field of technology.

The aim of this study is to examine the difference between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' WTC in physical and virtual classrooms. The second chapter of this paper starts with an overview of the development of WTC. It also presents MacIntyre *et al.*'s (1998) pyramid model of WTC, as well as some of the previous studies of WTC in immersion, L2 classroom, and online EFL classroom contexts. The second chapter concludes with an overview of methodological approaches to researching WTC. The qualitative study of differences in WTC in physical and virtual classrooms and the factors influencing them in the Croatian setting is presented in the third chapter. The first part of this chapter deals with the study's aim and methodology. It presents the research questions, the participants, the narrative frame used as the main instrument, and the coding process of the data. The second part of the chapter presents the qualitative data found, while the third part of the chapter presents the main conclusions drawn from the data.

2. Willingness to Communicate

2.1. Willingness to Communicate in Native Language

According to MacIntyre *et al.* (1998), the concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) was first introduced by McCroskey and Baer (1985), and it was originally designed with a reference to one's L1. McCroskey and Baer (1985) built their concept on earlier work by notable researchers: they cite Burgoon (1976), who wrote about unwillingness to communicate, as well as Mortensen et al. (1977), and McCroskey and Richmond (1982) who investigated verbal behaviours when communicating and shyness. McCroskey and Baer (1985) described WTC as a personality trait consistent in every situational context and with every interlocutor. WTC was defined as "personality orientation which explains why one person will communicate and another will not under identical or virtually identical situational-constraints" (McCroskey and Baer, 1985: 3).

After developing their concept, McCroskey and his associates designed the instrument to measure WTC. They applied the instrument to test their WTC concept in the American culture. The first results confirmed the original theory; however, in their later work, McCroskey and Richmond (1990) broadened the concept of WTC with variables that affect it in different situational contexts. They discussed introversion, self-esteem, communication competence, communication apprehension, and cultural diversity as variables that can change the level of one's WTC.

2.2. Willingness to Communicate in L2

According to Katsaris (2019), the concept of WTC was first applied to L2 learning by MacIntyre and Charos (1996). They tested a combination of Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model and MacIntyre's (1994) WTC model, as shown in Figure 1, to see if they apply to L2. The results revealed not only that WTC successfully adapts to L2 but also that it is influenced by motivation for language learning, language anxiety, social context and perceived communicative competence. They also suggested that personality traits influence all of the variables mentioned above (MacIntyre and Charos, 1996).

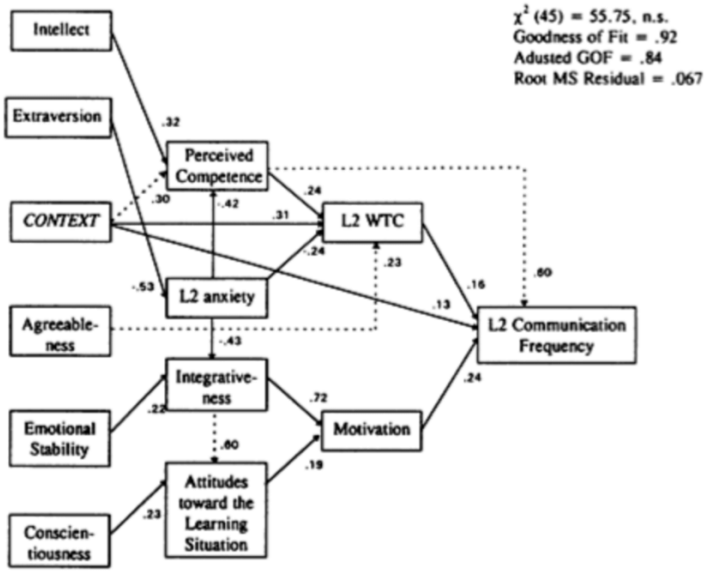

Figure 1: MacIntyre and Charos' (1996) WTC model

MacIntyre *et al.* (1998) conceptualized WTC in L2 using "a theoretical model in which social and individual context, affective cognitive context, motivational propensities, situated antecedents, and behavioral intention are interrelated in influencing WTC in L2 and L2 use" (Simic and Tanaka, 2008: 170). MacIntyre *et al*. (1998: 546) argued that, because of greater range of communicative and language competences in L2, WTC in L2 is not "a simple manifestation of WTC in L1". They claimed that WTC should not be seen as a personality trait but rather as a situational variable which can be influenced by different factors.

To showcase the spectrum of factors influencing WTC, MacIntyre *et al*. (1998) introduced the pyramid model of WTC. They chose the pyramid shape to represent their model of WTC because it allows starting the discussion at the moment of communication. They claimed that WTC in L2 is influenced by two types of factors: immediate situational factors and enduring influences. The pyramid shape enables a transparent display of immediacy and distance of factors from the act of speaking in L2. Embedded into the base of the pyramid are those factors that are enduring and stable, while those factors closer to the top of the pyramid are situational (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998). The model was based on the idea of a specific situation in which there is a willing interlocutor, as well as an individual's self-confidence to speak to the interlocutor (MacIntyre *et al*., 2001).

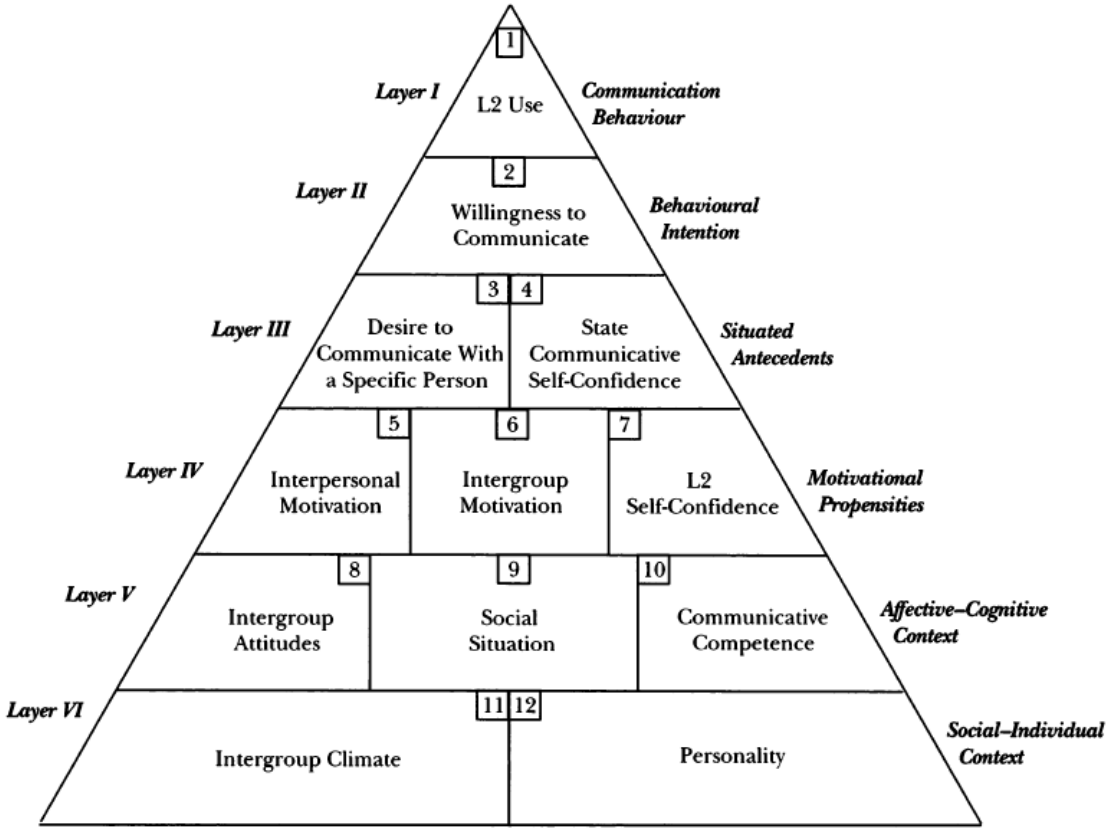

Figure 2: The pyramid model of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998)

The pyramid model (Figure 2) is composed of six categories of variables – six layers of the pyramid. The first three layers represent situational factors, while the last three represent stable influences (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998).

Layer 1 is communication behaviour. They observed communication as a complex process, which is a result of the interrelation of all the variables mentioned in other layers of the model. Communication is not limited to speaking only, but they broadened the term to additional activities such as reading L2 newspapers or watching television in L2 (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998). MacIntyre and associates claimed that the objective of teaching L2 should be to create opportunities for WTC.

Layer 2 is willingness to communicate. MacIntyre *et al*. (1998) defined WTC as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (547). This definition suggests that verbal communication is not always necessary for the WTC. MacIntyre *et al*. (1998) gave an example of a teacher asking questions and students raising their hands. Every student who raised a hand demonstrates WTC regardless of whether they get a chance to speak up or not.

Layer 3 encompasses situated antecedents of communication that consist of the desire to communicate with a specific person and state communicative self-confidence. The desire to communicate with a specific person is a result of interindividual and intergroup motivation and is encouraged by the motives of affiliation and control. The research conducted by MacIntyre and associates (1998) claimed that affiliation is one of the strongest motives for L2 WTC in informal settings. On the other hand, control as the main motive for L2 communication appears only when the speaker is confident in their knowledge of L2. MacIntyre *et al*. (1998) distinguished two components of state communicative self-confidence: state anxiety and state perceived competence. State anxiety fluctuates and is dependent on the situation and factors such as unpleasant prior experiences, tension, and a large number of people listening. High state anxiety will negatively influence self-confidence and lower WTC. State perceived competence is a feeling "that one has the capacity to communicate effectively at a particular moment" (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998: 549). If one is confident in their L2 knowledge, their WTC will be high.

Layer 4 consists of motivational propensities divided into three different sets of variables: interindividual or interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, and L2 self-confidence. Interpersonal motivation originates in individual roles within a social group (Simic and Tanaka, 2008), and it can be stimulated by two different factors – affiliation and control. Control is an initiator of communication in hierarchical, interpersonal, and task-based settings. In this type of communication, the more powerful interlocutor will lead the conversation. Affiliation as "the amount of interest in establishing a relationship with the interlocutor" (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998: 550) is influenced by the interlocutor's personal characteristics, such as attractiveness, similarity, repeated exposure… (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998). Intergroup motivation is associated with belonging to a certain group, and, as interpersonal motivation, control, and affiliation are its main triggers. Communication initiated by control is used to maintain and strengthen social positions of groups. Affiliation is a motive for communication when one needs to achieve agreement with the member of another group based solely on the membership to different groups (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998). L2 self-confidence describes a relationship between a person and the L2. It consists of two segments: cognitive and affective segment. The cognitive segment resembles self-evaluation of language skills, while the affective segment resembles language anxiety (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998).

Layer 5 is named affective and cognitive context. This layer consists of three remote and less situation-specific influences: intergroup attitudes, social situation, and communicative competence. Intergroup attitudes can be influenced by three different variables: integrativeness, fear of assimilation, and motivation to learn L2. Integrativeness is the desire to be connected with

the L2 community, which can lead to more frequent and better-quality communication in L2. Contrarily, fear of assimilation is a fear that one will lose identity and place in the L1 community by acquiring L2. Therefore, fear of assimilation will lower the quality and frequency of communication in L2. Motivation to learn L2 is connected with attitudes one has towards L2. Positive attitudes, which can be developed during educational process, will encourage one to communicate using L2 (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998). Social situation describes a setting of a social encounter and consists of five factors: the participants, the setting, the purpose, the topic, and the channel of communication. The most important variables for the participants are age, gender, social class, and relationship between the interlocutors. The setting describes the time and the place of the communication and can be divided into six main domains: business, academic, legal, religious, entertainment, and domestic. The purpose is the goal of the communication. The topic affects the ease of communication – a familiar topic will lead to a boost in L2 self-confidence. The channel of communication is the medium chosen for communication – speaking or writing (MacIntyre *et al.*, 1998). Communicative competence, or L2 proficiency, is a combination of five different competences: linguistic competence, discourse competence, actional competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence. Linguistic competence consists of knowledge of the basic elements of communication, syntactic and morphological rules, lexical resources, and the phonological and orthographic systems, and it is a precondition for WTC. Discourse competence concerns selecting and arranging structures to form unified written or spoken discourse. Actional competence is the ability to match communicative intent with linguistic form. Sociocultural competence is the knowledge of expressing messages using socially and culturally appropriate contexts. Lastly, strategic competence encompasses the knowledge of strategies that help the speaker cope with and overcome language-related problems during communication (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998).

The last layer of the pyramid, layer 6, is the societal and individual context. The societal context is the intergroup climate, while the individual context is the personality of the interlocutor. Intergroup climate consists of structural characteristics of the community and perceptual and affective correlates. Structural characteristics of the community are defined through the ethnolinguistic vitalities, which are demographic representations of communities, such as their socioeconomic power. Higher ethnolinguistic vitality of a community will bring more prestige to its language; therefore, the language will be considered as more attractive and used more frequently. Perceptual and affective correlates are focused on the attitudes toward the L2 community. Positive attitudes toward a certain group will generally lead to positive interactions,

while negative attitudes toward a group will lower the amount of communication with that group (MacIntyre *et al*., 1998). Personality determines how an individual will react to communication and other factors, such as the interlocutor's ethnicity and stress. Personality type will determine whether someone is going to react positively or negatively in certain situations. However, MacIntyre *et al*. (1998) claimed that personality is not a direct influence on L2 communication, and besides intergroup context, it does not directly determine one's WTC in a certain moment.

2.3. Previous Studies on WTC

2.3.1.. WTC in Immersion Context

MacIntyre *et al.* (2002) investigated the effects of sex and age on WTC, anxiety, perceived competence, and L2 motivation. The study was conducted among junior high school French immersion students. The results of the study indicated an increase in WTC in female participants from grade eight and grade nine. On the other hand, male learners WTC remained at the same levels across all grades. According to MacIntyre *et al*. (2002), the possible source of this change is puberty, which starts earlier for girls, meaning that by grade nine, they are past the most anxious phase of puberty. A later study by Donovan and MacIntyre (2004) also investigated the effect of age and sex on learners' WTC. Three age groups took part in this study: junior high, high school and university students. The results showed differences in levels of WTC between male and female participants only on the level of junior high students. The authors attributed the differences in the level of WTC to the type of activities significant for that age group – girls talk intimately, while boys participate in physical activities.

MacInytre and Legatto (2011) continued investigating WTC using a dynamic approach and used the idiodynamic method to illustrate the changing nature of WTC. The study participants were students, not fluent in French, from a French immersion program in Canada. The instrument consisted of a questionnaire about WTC on trait level, anxiety, and extraversion and eight oral tasks. The participants were also asked to rate their WTC while watching a video of them solving the oral tasks and then explain possible changes in the level of their WTC. The authors conclude that WTC is a dynamic system that is based on the four main characteristics of such schemes. The first characteristic is that it changes over time, where each following state transforms the earlier one. The second characteristic is the interconnectedness of factors affecting this dynamic system (e.g., dynamic WTC and vocabulary retrieval). The third characteristic is that these systems are

"self-organizing into preferred states and repeller states" (MacIntyre, Legatto, 2011: 165). The fourth characteristic is non-linearity and the butterfly effect, which is marked by swift declines in levels of WTC.

2.3.2. WTC in L2 Classroom

According to Simic and Tanaka (2008), Wen and Clément were one of the first researchers to add the cultural aspect to the concept of WTC. Wen and Clément (2003) concluded that MacIntyre *et al*.'s (1998) pyramid model of WTC, which was based solely on research on WTC in Western countries, cannot completely describe WTC in other cultures. They claimed that Chinese students are unwilling to communicate because of Chinese philosophy and culture, which are deeply rooted in Confucianism. Some elements of this philosophy, such as face-protected orientation and the insider effect, affect Chinese students' WTC and should be taken into consideration.

Kang (2005) is one of the first researchers to observe WTC from a dynamic instead of a trait-like perspective. Kang conducted a study in order to examine the situational perspective of WTC, the factors that affect it, and how it changes in different communication settings. The results indicated that WTC is affected by three psychological conditions: security, excitement, and responsibility, and can change from moment to moment. Security signifies the lack of L2 anxiety; excitement implies connecting speaking in L2 with extreme happiness, while responsibility is related to the importance of conveying a specific message. Kang stated that the three aforementioned psychological conditions, and therefore learners' WTC, are influenced by other factors like interlocutor, topic, and context. Conversing with familiar interlocutors, with a smaller number of interlocutors, or with interlocutors that offer support causes feelings of security and leads to higher WTC. Native speakers of English and attractive and attentive people as interlocutors will stimulate feelings of excitement. A smaller number of interlocutors who pay attention awakens feelings of responsibility. Discussing familiar and interesting topics will cause a rise in security and excitement. Kang redefined WTC as "an individual's volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables" (Kang, 2005: 291).

MacIntyre (2007) continues exploring the dynamic state of WTC and describes WTC as a volitional process. He focuses on specific moments in which learners make the decision whether

to speak or not. In each of those moments, driving and restraining forces affect the learners' decision. Learners' motivation to learn and anxiety are conflicted during this process. These "micro-level processes and the sometimes rapid changes" (MacIntyre, 2007: 564) often happen without learners' awareness.

MacIntyre and Doucette (2009) expanded the conceptual framework of WTC with the theory of action control. According to Kuhl (1994, as cited in MacIntyre and Doucette 2009), there are three subscales on the Action Control Scale: hesitation, preoccupation, and volatility. MacIntyre and Doucette (2009) connected these variables with WTC and concluded that hesitation is the most similar to WTC. Learners with higher levels of hesitation were less willing to communicate. MacIntyre and Blackie (2012) also investigated action control in relation to WTC. The results of the later study are in agreement with the previous one and indicate that hesitation can predict learners' WTC, perceived communication competence, and language anxiety. The authors of the study claim that hesitation is a result of "the avoidant trifecta" (MacIntyre and Blackie, 2012: 540), meaning that in one moment, there is a combination of lack of communication competence and willingness to communicate and the presence of language anxiety. MacIntyre and Blackie (2012) accentuate the importance of teachers recognizing the feelings of hesitation in learners, while their issues are with acting on their decision, not with making it. This type of learner should be enabled to practise initiating the action.

In his replication of MacIntyre and Charos's (1996) study, Hashimoto (2002) applied Gardner's (1985) socio-educational and MacIntyre's (1994) WTC model to the L2 classroom and tested the connection between L2 learning and L2 communication. The results of Hashimoto's (2002) study indicated that high motivation leads to more frequent language use in L2 classrooms. Hashimoto (2002) also suggested that certain factors MacIntyre and Charos (1996) claimed to be significant, such as perceived competence, were not significant in this study. However, perceived competence, as his study implies, was closely connected to motivation, meaning that the higher the perceived competence, the higher the level of motivation.

Yashima (2002) applied the construct of WTC in the Japanese EFL classroom to investigate how instructional and linguistic variables affect learners' WTC. Yashima (2002) indicated that the factors with the strongest influence on learners' WTC are communication confidence and international posture. Different cultures and international activities should be included in lessons in order to motivate Japanese learners, reduce anxiety, and spike their WTC.

Cao and Philp (2006) studied how learners' WTC fluctuates in different classroom interactional contexts (pair, group, and whole class work.) The results of their study implied that there are four factors learners most commonly identify as impactful for their WTC: group size, self-confidence, familiarity with interlocutors, and interlocutor participation. Learners' WTC was higher in smaller groups in which they are familiar and can rely on their peers and talk freely with self-confidence.

Peng (2007) investigated the relationship between learners' WTC and integrative motivation in the Chinese setting in which there is limited contact with "authentic integration with the L2 community" (Peng, 2007: 39). The participants of the study were 174 students from medical college which took part in an intensive English program. The instrument used was a questionnaire and contained questions concerning WTC in the EFL classroom, integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation, and motivation. The results of the study implied that there was a strong connection between motivation and WTC, meaning that highly motivated students were more likely to communicate in class. A less strong correlation was found between learners' WTC and integrativeness, while other correlations were not significant.

Peng and Woodrow (2010) applied the ecological perspective in the Chinese EFL context and in a mixed-method study, researched the connections between WTC, communication confidence, motivation to learn, learner beliefs, and classroom environment. The participants of this large-scale study were first- and second-year students from eight Chinese universities who were not English majors. Unlike some previous studies (Yashima, 2002), the results of this study did not show a correlation between motivation to learn and WTC. The authors of the study see the cause for this in the nature of learning English in China, where learners focus on passing exams rather than developing speaking skills. What proved to be an important factor for predicting WTC was communication confidence. Learners who are more confident in their L2 communication skills will be less anxious and therefore more willing to speak freely in class. Because of cultural specifics, classroom environment in China can negatively affect learners' WTC. Since uniformity is an important aspect of their society, learners can feel anxious to speak up too often and attract attention to themselves as individuals.

Zhong (2013) investigated Chinese learners' WTC using the theory of planned behaviour. The participants of the study were Chinese students enrolled in the Certificate Programme in a language school in New Zealand. In the study, Zhong focused on lower-level students. The results indicated that learners' WTC in teacher-fronted contexts is affected by concerns for accuracy, self-efficacy, and fear of losing face or showing off. The participants demonstrated positive opinions toward

communicating in pairs or groups. They see it as a good opportunity to practice what they learned. However, some of the participants consider pair work pointless because they are paired with learners at the same level, and no one can correct their mistakes and, therefore, they do not see it as a good learning opportunity.

Zhang *et al*. (2018) suggested that there are two types of factors influencing WTC in the L2 classroom – situation cues and situation characteristics. Situation cues are interlocutors, classroom atmosphere, topic, and activity. When it comes to interlocutors, studies have shown that WTC will be higher with those learners whose interlocutors are more willing to cooperate and contribute to the conversation. Classroom atmosphere, which ought to be positive and stress-free, is influenced by classmates, class size, and teachers. Classmates can positively affect learner's WTC when they demonstrate active engagement. However, one learner's domination in class interaction will lower other learners' WTC. Similarly to Cao and Philp (2006), Zhang *et al*. (2018) concluded that, to achieve a positive classroom atmosphere, class size should be smaller since a bigger size will lead to anxiety and lower one's WTC. Teachers can affect the classroom atmosphere with their teaching styles and classroom management, which should reduce the distance between the teacher and the learners. Interesting and to learners familiar and attractive topics will raise their WTC and make conversation easier. Learners' WTC will change with the type of activity; game-like activities are more interesting to learners and, therefore, affect their WTC positively. Learners are also more likely to communicate when given some preparation time to formulate their ideas (Zhang *et al*., 2018). Situation characteristics are subjective: they include task-confidence, task-interest and task-usefulness Task confidence is related to MacIntyre's (1998) idea of state communicative self-confidence, meaning that learners' WTC will be higher when they believe they are competent to solve the task correctly. Lack of task confidence is related to fear of making errors and embarrassment (Zhang *et al.*, 2018). Task-interest is "the curiosity in and engagement with a specific task" (Zhang *et al*., 2018), and it preconditions learners' excitement, which then leads to higher WTC. Task-usefulness is related to learners' feelings of responsibility, as well as to their goals, such as L2 proficiency or fulfilling class requirements, which then lead to higher WTC since learners are motivated to fulfil these goals (Zhang *et al*., 2018).

Cao's (2014) research followed Kang's (2005) perspective on WTC and implied that WTC in L2 classrooms is more complex than trait or situation variables. Cao described WTC in L2 classroom as a dynamic, multi-layered construct which is constantly changing under the influence of various factors, such as interlocutor, task type, and topic. An individual's WTC in the L2 classroom could not only be different from one lecture to another but could also change from task to task during

the same lecture. Cao (2014) examined the demonstration of WTC in the L2 classroom and individual and contextual factors that influence L2 classroom WTC. The results revealed that L2 classroom WTC is influenced by factors from three different dimensions: environmental, linguistic, and individual. Participants' WTC in L2 classroom was a product of the correlation of different factors from each of the three dimensions. How these factors influence learners' WTC varied in different situations, leading to WTC in L2 classroom being prominent to change even during one conversation or one lesson. The individual factors that the participants specified as the most likely to influence their WTC are emotion and perceived opportunity to communicate.

Zarrinabadi *et al.* (2014) conducted a study in Iran to test whether teachers can help generate learners' WTC by utilising different tools and methods in their classrooms. The results of the study indicate that choosing discussion topics that interest learners, placing learners in smaller groups with other learners at the same level of fluency, creating a friendly surrounding, and leaving error correction for when learners finish talking can positively affect the level of learners' WTC.

Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak's (2014) study of WTC in the Polish context showed that learners' WTC was the highest when they were asked to perform a monologue, which could be the result of avoiding embarrassment, additional questions, and depending only on themselves, meaning that they had greater control. However, this high monologue WTC demonstrated a tendency to lower with time, while initially, low WTC in dialogue tends to rise with task engagement.

Mesgarshahr and Abdollahzadeh (2014) examined how teaching communication strategies can influence EFL learners' WTC. The study was conducted in the Iranian context and involved 120 participants from a private language institute. The instrument was a twenty-seven items questionnaire. The results of the study implied that mastering communication strategies can positively affect learners' WTC. Communication strategies can help learners with communication apprehension, perceived communication competence, self-confidence, initiating communication, and motivation. When they know how to communicate properly, learners are more open to expressing their ideas because they know they possess communication means to overcome most of the problems that can arise during communication (e.g., missing words).

Khajavy *et al*. (2016) investigated L2 WTC in the Iranian classroom context and concluded that two of the most important variables affecting WTC in the Iranian context are communication confidence and autonomous motivation. Learners with higher levels of autonomous motivation appeared more confident, therefore less anxious, and more open to communication.

Mystkowska-Wiertelak's (2016) study of the dynamics of classroom WTC follows advanced students in an intensive English speaking class. The aim of the study was to investigate the dynamic nature of WTC and classify individual and contextual factors that influence changes in WTC. The results showed that learners' WTC fluctuated in the course of lessons but also during activities. The level of its fluctuation changed between classes and depended on individual students. The most prominent factors influencing these fluctuations proved to be class arrangements, interlocutors, topics, tasks, and stage of the class. Pair-work, topics interesting to learners, and game-like activities were more likely to spike levels of WTC.

Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2017) investigated WTC by combining macro- and micro-perspective. The main goal of the two studies conducted for the book was to develop and validate an instrument enabling research of WTC among Polish students. The first study, focusing on macro-perspective, was based on three research questions focusing on the factors of WTC in the Polish context, connections between those factors, and the position those factors have in the formerly known WTC construct. The participants were divided into two groups. The first group consisted of 107 students from bachelor's and master's programmes. The second group consisted of 614 participants from bachelor's and master's programmes in Polish universities but held primarily in English. The study was conducted in several stages. During the first stage of the study, the instrument was developed and tested. The instrument, developed by Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2016), was a questionnaire consisting of 105 questions using a Likert scale. During the research, the instrument was adapted and shortened to eighty-eight questions. The collected data was firstly analysed using a six-factor model which consisted of a positive view of the future/imagined self, communication confidence, classroom environment, international posture, ought-to self, and out-of-class WTC. In the next step, an eight-factor model was applied, and it included communication confidence, ought-to self, classroom environment, international posture – openness to experience, unplanned in-class WTC, international posture – interest in international affairs, practice-seeking WTC, and planned in-class WTC as factors. The results of the study indicated that factors influencing WTC can change in different settings and contexts. For the participants of this study, the most significant factors affecting WTC proved to be planned and unplanned in-class WTC and practice-seeking WTC. The second study on the micro-level focused on speaking classes of forty-eight English majors in one of the Polish universities. They were divided into three groups – two groups of first-year students and one group of second-year students. The researchers examined how the levels of learners' WTC fluctuate during the course of their speaking lessons. The results of the study implied that the levels of learners' WTC are

prominent to considerable change during the duration of one class. This change was influenced by the course of the class and the tasks and activities used. Many different factors appeared to influence the increase and decrease. Some of them are classroom atmosphere, class organization, stage of class, interlocutor, task-related variables, topic, student-related variables, and external factors such as time or weather, all in line with previous research. The authors of the study emphasize the importance of asking learners about their preferences (topics, classroom organization modes, etc.), developing learners' autonomy, and bringing some novelty into classes in order to help learners achieve higher levels of in-class WTC.

Baran-Łucarz (2014) investigated the link between pronunciation anxiety and willingness to communicate in the Polish context. Participants of the study were students from a Polish university who were not majoring in English. The results of the study show that learners with higher levels of pronunciation anxiety are less likely to speak willingly. Learners' pronunciation anxiety seems to increase when speaking in front of classmates, friends, and colleagues, while it proved to be lower when talking to strangers. The results indicate that pronunciation anxiety is the highest in learners at the intermediate level. The author emphasized the importance of incorporating speaking activities as pair work rather than group work in EFL lessons.

As for the Croatian setting, few studies were conducted. For example, Mihaljević Djigunović and Letica (2009) investigated WTC as a situational variable and the connection between WTC FL learning success, length of FL learning period, self-evaluation, and perceived language competence. The participants of the study were 127 FL students from a Croatian university. The results of the study indicated that there is no significant correlation between WTC and other aforementioned factors and that WTC acts as mostly stable trait. However, the authors of the study claimed that there is a difference between general WTC and in class WTC. They redefined WTC as a level of willingness to take a risk during classes, in class social behaviour and the level of FL anxiety in learners that will lead to learners' in class WTC. After adapting their instruments, Mihaljević Djigunović and Letica (2009) tested in class WTC on the same group of participants. The results indicated that in class WTC is under the influence of FL learning and teaching processes. They did not find correlation between WTC and in class WTC. However, the results showed a correlation between in class WTC and other factors. FL learning success, frequent communication with native speakers, length of FL learning period, and perceived language competence proved to an effect on in class WTC. Learners with better grades, frequently communicated with native speakers, had been learning FL longer and perceived their FL competence highly were more likely to communicate in class.

Pavičić Takač and Požega (2012) conducted a study with the global aim of inspecting relations between personality traits, WTC, and oral proficiency in English as L2. They constructed their research around the five factors of the Big Five model (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness) and eight groups of WTC (group discussion, meetings, interpersonal communication, public performance, strangers, acquaintances, friends, and total WTC.) The aforementioned factors were also examined in relation to oral language proficiency. The results of the study indicated that high levels of extraversion, agreeableness, and openness lead to high levels of WTC. Regarding oral language proficiency, learners with good nature who adapt to others more often were more likely to have trouble with oral expression, while those more independent and self-focused were more likely to perform better. Only group discussion correlated positively with oral language proficiency.

2.3.3. WTC in Online EFL Classroom

The research of WTC in online classroom settings became more common after the global pandemic in 2020 when it became necessary to understand better how students behave under new circumstances. However, the research mostly focused on university students.

Altunel (2021) conducted a case study based on university students in Turkey. The goal of the study was to understand perceptions and views on WTC in L2 in an online classroom. It focused on the underlying factors behind students' WTC. It included interviews with twelve students whose age ranged from seventeen to twenty-five and who were equally divided between male and female members. The results of the study indicated that, even though the WTC in online classroom was slightly lower, the difference was not significant. Altunel (2021) stated that the nature of online education (less productive, limited interaction) could be the possible reason for slightly lower WTC in online classroom. The results of the research showed that the majority of students perceived learning a language in an online setting as more difficult because of the limited communication opportunities with the teacher and other students, as well as the various distractions at home. Said *et al*. (2021) examined WTC in online learning in Indonesian EFL students. Seventy-one undergraduate students participated in the research, which was based on a questionnaire in English. Even though the results of the study indicated that the learners did not feel nervous about speaking in online classes, they still preferred listening to speaking. Estrada-Chichón *et al*. (2023) researched how third-year Spanish students sustained their L2 WTC when switching to a remote setting using quantitative methods. The results of the study showed that

there is a slight decrease in WTC in online setting when students work in groups or as a whole class. As the main reasons for the lower WTC in online setting, Estrada-Chichón *et al*. (2023) stated that there is a lack of dynamic in online setting and a more personal and closer relationship with interlocutors in the physical classroom. Topalov *et al.* (2022) investigated the differences in levels of EFL WTC between traditional and online classroom in Serbian setting. The participants of the study were 281 students from the University of Novi Sad. The authors of the study explored WTC in traditional classroom, video-based online classroom, audio-based online classroom, and text-based online classroom. The results indicated that the WTC is the highest in conventional classroom. The levels of WTC in all types of online classrooms were significantly lower than in the conventional classroom, but the lowest levels of WTC were in video-based online classroom. However, the results showed similar patterns for all types of classrooms. In every type of context, learners were the most willing to communicate at the end of the class when asked if there were any questions. They were the least willing to communicate when they had to share their opinions about or paraphrase the topic, volunteer to answer other learners' question, volunteer to answer teacher's question when they were not sure what the correct answers are, or debate about the topic that is unfamiliar to them.

2.3.3. Methodological Approaches to Measuring WTC

According to Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2017), the most commonly used instrument in the early research of WTC was a scale developed by McCroskey (1992). Even though it proved to be reliable, there was some dissatisfaction with the way this scale performed in research since not all items were relevant for measuring WTC in L2 classroom. However, researchers continued to use quantitative methods to investigate WTC. MacIntyre and Charos (1996), Hashimoto (2002), Yashima (2002), Peng and Woodrow (2010), MacIntyre and Doucette (2010), *Khajavy et al.* (2016) all relied on quantitative research methods to gather data and investigate WTC in different contexts. With the rise of research that observed WTC as a dynamic and situational trait, researchers started to use mixed-methods approach in their studies. Kang (2005), Cao and Philip (2006), Cao (2011), Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2014, 2017) are some of the studies that used a mixed-method approach, meaning that they combined questionnaires and one of the qualitative methods (e. g., case study) to extract their data. However, researchers rarely relied only on qualitative methods to investigate WTC.

3. Research on Willingness to Communicate in Physical and Virtual EFL Classroom

3.1. Aim

The main aim of this study was to analyse learners' perceptions of the relationship between WTC in physical and virtual EFL classrooms and factors that influence possible differences between levels of WTC in the aforementioned types of classrooms. Willingness to communicate was operationalized as learners' readiness to volunteer to speak.

The study is based on the following research questions:

1. What feelings do participants associate with speaking in the physical and the online classroom?
2. What factors influence participants' willingness to volunteer to speak in the two settings?
3. Do participants prefer speaking voluntarily in a physical classroom to speaking in a virtual classroom, and if so, why?

3.2. Methodology

3.2.1. Sample

The participants of the research were seventy-five learners from a primary school in Osijek, Croatia. Learners were from two sixth and three eighth grades. Their age range was between eleven and fifteen. They had been learning English for between six and ten years. Thirty-two (42.67 %) participants were male, while forty-three (57.33 %) were female. Fifty-six participants (73.33 %) had an excellent (5) grade at the end of the last school year, thirteen participants (17.33 %) had a very good, four participants (5.33 %) had a good, and two participants had a sufficient grade. All the participants had the same English teacher. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they had synchronous online English lessons using Microsoft Teams platform. Learners were rarely required to turn on their cameras and would turn on their microphones only when asked to speak.

3.2.2. Instrument

The data elicitation instrument used in this research was a narrative frame written in learners' L1 (Croatian). Narrative inquiry, according to Barkhuizen *et al*. (2014), is a method that combines storytelling and research. Narrative frame is a template of a story that consists of incomplete sentences that study participants have to fill in so that the story corresponds to their experiences. It provides guidance for the study participants so that the researchers receive wanted data (Barkhuizen *et al*., 2014).

The narrative frame for this study consisted of four segments (for an example of a narrative frame see, Appendix 1). In the first segment, the participants were required to complete the story with their experiences with EFL classes in a physical classroom. The second segment concerned experiences connected to EFL classes in an online setting. The third segment addressed learners' WTC when they are asked to solve a task without volunteering, while the last segment focused on learners' preferences for speaking voluntarily in physical and virtual classrooms.

Before completing the narrative frame, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire with demographic data (name, gender, age, number of years of learning English, and final English grade at the end of the last school year.)

3.2.3. Procedure

Since the participants of the study were all under the age of eighteen, before conducting the study, the headmaster and participants' parents were informed about the aims of the study and asked for permission. Learners whose parents did not sign the consent form did not participate in the study.

Narrative frames were handed out to the participants in class, and they were told to ask additional questions in case certain parts of the frame were not clear enough. Completing the narrative frame lasted up to ten minutes. The completed narrative frames were skimmed by the researchers to check if they elicited the desired data. One of the narrative frames had to be excluded since the participant filled in only the demographic questionnaire. Partially completed narrative frames were kept in the research, and the available data were used in the analysis.

The narrative frames were then carefully read, and the relevant data were coded. The codes used in the coding process were based on the data in the narrative frames completed by the participants (for an example of a completed and coded narrative frame, see Appendix 2). The coded data were

grouped into more general categories. The first category concerned feelings about lessons in the physical classroom and was divided into four sub-categories: positive, negative, neutral, and mixed feelings. The second category included feelings towards speaking in the physical EFL classroom and was divided into three sub-categories: positive, negative, and neutral feelings. The third category were reasons for associating certain type of feelings with speaking in the physical EFL classroom, and it was divided into reasons for negative, positive, and neutral feelings. The next two categories were reasons that make speaking in the physical EFL classroom easier and more difficult. The next set of categories concerned the virtual classroom and were the same as the previously mentioned categories for the physical classroom. The following categories concerned reasons for task-related voluntary speaking, feelings associated when asked to speak involuntarily, frequency of speaking voluntarily in two types of classrooms, and reason for speaking more often in one type of classroom. The last category were future preferences of the classroom type.

3.3. Results

3.3.1. Communication in Physical Classroom

When asked to describe the feelings they connect with the EFL classes in the physical classroom (Table 1), forty-eight participants (64 %) described positive feelings, eighteen participants (24 %) negative, six participants (8 %) neutral feelings, and two participants (2.67 %) reported having mixed feelings. Forty-six participants (61.33 %) had positive feelings toward speaking English in the physical classroom, seventeen participants (22.67 %) had negative feelings, and thirteen participants (17.33 %) have neutral feelings.

Participants stated that the most common reason for having positive feelings towards speaking English in the physical classroom was speaking English well. Reasons connected with negative feelings when speaking English in the physical classroom were more varied, but the most common was participants' belief that they could not speak English well.

Table 1. Causes of positive and negative feelings when speaking English

Causes of positive and negative feelings when speaking English in the classroom			
Positive	*f*	**Negative**	*f*
I speak English well	25	I cannot speak English well	5
I love speaking English	16	I feel insecure when speaking English	2
Speaking English is interesting/exciting	5	Everyone is listening	2
Speaking English is not hard	4	I am bored	2
I feel comfortable	3	I am nervous	2
Teacher is encouraging me	1	Something in the classroom is disturbing me	2
I am used to English classes in physical classroom	1	I am afraid I will make a mistake	1
Total	55	It is not my L1	1
		I feel funny when speaking English	1
		Total	18

Table 2 summarizes factors that influence participants' WTC in the physical classroom. When describing situations in which it was easy for them to speak English in the physical classroom, participants listed quiet surroundings, other students not present, reading, and interesting/well-known topic as the most common factors in creating positive context for the development of their WTC. The most common factors listed as negative influence on participants WTC in the physical classroom were noise and other students present and listening. Twelve participants claimed that they never had trouble when speaking English and were omitted from *Table 2*.

Table 2. Factors influencing participants' WTC in the physical classroom

Factors influencing participants' WTC in the physical classroom			
Positive	*f*	**Negative**	*f*
Quiet surroundings	9	Somebody/a lot of people are listening	13
Other Ss not present	8	Noise	8
Reading	8	New/complicated vocabulary	5

Interesting/well-known topic	8	Don't know the answer/how to say something	4
It is always easy to speak English	6	Unknown/new topic	4
Working with other Ss	5	I have to speak (in English)	3
When I studied/know the answer	4	Not feeling well	3
Answering questions	3	Oral exam	2
Talking openly and freely	2	Working alone	2
The task is clear	2	Presenting projects	1
I am feeling well	2	Talking about grammar	1
I have to talk	2	I have to explain something	1
Talking to others/teacher	2	I am quick to judge	1
Student teachers teaching	2	I am bored	1
Not talking to the teacher	1	Working in groups	1
Not talking a lot	1	I didn't study	1
Oral exam	1	I have to speak a lot	1
Friends are helping me	1	*Total*	52
New lesson	1		
Retelling something	1		
Total	69		

3.3.2. Communication in the Virtual Classroom

When describing feelings towards English classes held in the virtual classroom (Table 3), thirty-eight participants (50.67 %) expressed negative feelings, twenty-nine participants (38.67 %) positive feelings, ten participants (13.33 %) neutral feelings, and one participant (1.33 %) mixed feelings. Forty participants (53.33 %) connected positive feelings with speaking in the online EFL classroom, twenty-one participants (28 %) with negative feelings, and thirteen participants (17.33 %) had neutral feelings towards speaking in the online EFL classroom. The most prominent reasons for developing positive feelings towards speaking in the online EFL classroom were the participants' belief that they speak English well and the feeling of relaxation connected with being at home. When it comes to the negative feelings associated with speaking in the online EFL classroom, the factors that were mentioned the most were that online classes were different and participants' impressions that they were talking to themselves.

Table 3. Reasons for positive and negative feelings when speaking English

Reasons for positive and negative feelings when speaking English			
Positive	*f*	**Negative**	*f*
I speak English well	17	It is different	7
I am at home and alone	9	Nobody is listening	4
Nobody is listening and/or watching me	5	It is boring	4
I like it	5	Bad connection	2
It is easy	3	Everybody is listening/watching me	2
I feel proud/chosen by the teacher	2	Others can mute me	1
I can look up answers	1	I do not feel like participating	1
It is less boring than in physical classroom	1	We can learn less	1
I have no fear	1	Teacher often cannot hear me well	1
I speak English often	1	*Total*	23
Total	45		

When asked to describe situations in which it is easy for them to speak English in the virtual classroom (see Table 4), participants most often listed no troubles with technology (good internet connection, devices working properly) and their camera being turned off. The most common factors that make speaking English in the virtual classroom harder for participants were troubles with technology (bad connection, devices not working properly) and being asked something without raising their hand.

Table 4. Factors influencing participants' WTC in virtual EFL classroom

Factors influencing participants' WTC in virtual EFL classroom			
Positive	*f*	**Negative**	*f*
It is always easy to speak English	9	It is never hard to speak English	14
No difficulties with technology	5	Difficulties with technology	10
Camera off	5	Don't know/understand how/what to say/pronounce	9
Asked by the teacher	5	Asked without raising a hand	4

Talking to others	4	Talking to/in front of others	5
It is never easy to speak English in virtual classroom	4	Camera is on	3
Reading	4	I don't feel like it	2
I know the answer	4	Expressing opinion/explaining something	2
I am answering questions	3	Unknown/complicated topic	2
Known topic	3	Oral exam	1
I have my textbook	2	Talking to the teacher	1
Nobody else is in the meeting	2	Teacher explaining too fast	1
Nobody else is talking	2	I feel like I am disturbing the teacher	1
Oral exam	2	My textbook is closed	1
We have a task	2	I am in a rush	1
I am in the mood	2	It is always hard	1
I am happy	2	Noise	1
I have to	1	I am tired	1
I am asking questions	1	When I don't have to speak	1
We are doing interesting games	1	It is rarely hard	1
I am working on tasks alone	1	When I am reading from the presentation	1
We are talking in groups	1	*Total*	63
Friends are helping	1		
Retelling stories	1		
New lesson	1		
Total	68		

3.3.3. Willingness to Volunteer in EFL Classes

The most common reason participants volunteered to communicate in task-related situations was being sure of the answer (forty-three participants). A look at participants' individual responses revealed that eight participants would volunteer when they felt like it, five participants were always

ready to volunteer, five volunteered when the task or topic they were working on was interesting, and four volunteered when the teacher asked a question. Two participants answered that they would never volunteer to speak in the EFL class. Other answers included participants' teacher being absent, easy questions, coming to class prepared, nobody else volunteering, participation being graded, starting a new lesson, and reading texts.

If asked to speak when they did not volunteer (i.e., raise their hand), twenty-six participants reported that their feelings would not be affected. Fourteen participants expressed positive feelings, such as pride, relaxation, or feeling comfortable with the situation, while thirty-one participants had negative feelings in this context. They reported often feeling shy, stressed, puzzled, uncomfortable, scared, insecure, confused, and stupid when asked to speak when not volunteering to speak. However, when prompted to report what they did in similar situations, forty-eight participants wrote that they tried to answer the question or solve the task and offered the solution they thought was correct. Only six participants stated that they would say they did not know the answer, while only three participants would stay silent in this situation. If answering the question incorrectly, twenty-three participants would not be affected and continued to have neutral feelings. However, forty-four participants reported they would have negative feelings in this situation. Most of them would struggle and feel ashamed, sad, nervous, uncomfortable, stupid, insecure, unhappy, and surprised. Only eight participants expressed positive feelings toward this situation.

3.3.4. Participants' Preferences of Speaking Voluntarily in Online or Physical Classroom

In the last part of the narrative frame, participants were guided to describe in which type of classroom they were more likely to volunteer to speak. The results are presented in Table 5. Fifty-nine participants (78.67 %) stated that they were more likely to participate voluntarily in EFL classes held in the physical classroom. Only nine participants (12 %) claimed that they were more likely to participate voluntarily in EFL classes held in the virtual classroom. Three participants (4 %) would not participate voluntarily in either of the classrooms, while one participant (1.33 %) claimed they participated equally in both types of classrooms.

Some of the main reasons participants listed for volunteering more in the physical classroom were that it was easier, classes were better, they felt safer, and they were following the classes more actively. Participants who would be more likely to volunteer in a virtual classroom listed not being

afraid as their main reason, while participants who would not participate voluntarily in either of the classes stated that the reasons were being lazy or simply not wanting to participate.

Table 5. Reasons for voluntary participation in class

Reasons for voluntary participation in class			
Physical classroom	*f*	**Virtual classroom**	*f*
It is easier	15	I am not afraid	2
Physical classroom is better	11	I am at home	1
I feel safer/more comfortable	6	We are working less	1
It is more interesting	5	I understand more	1
I follow the class more actively	4	I feel like others are not present	1
My friends are present	2	Teacher makes me do it	1
I love it	2	It is easier	1
I am there in person	2	*Total*	8
Teacher understands me better	2		
I speak English well	1		
Teacher can see me	1		
Fewer distractions than in a virtual classroom	1		
I feel like I have to	1		
We are working less	1		
I can speak more clearly	1		
No difficulties with technology	1		
Others are listening	1		
Teacher asks me more often	1		
Teacher can help me	1		
I am in a better mood	1		
Total	60		

At the end of the narrative frame, participants were asked in which type of the classroom they would like to have EFL classes in the future. Fifty-nine participants declared they would prefer having EFL classes in the physical classroom, while twelve participants would like future classes to be held in the virtual classroom.

3.4. Discussion

The results of the study indicated that, even though there was a negative perception of EFL classes held in the virtual classroom, most participants associated positive feelings with speaking in both types of classrooms. What should be taken into consideration is that the participants of this study were mainly excellent students who are confident in their proficiency levels and enjoy speaking English. This factor can be connected with Hashimoto's (2002) conclusion that perceived competence affects learners' motivation. Since a great number of the participants of the study perceived themselves as confident of successfully communicating in English, they were highly motivated to do so, and the change of setting did not influence it in a negative way. Those participants who did associate negative feelings with speaking in the physical classroom mostly reported low perceived competence or speaking anxiety. Negative feelings associated with speaking in an online setting proved to be a result of a change of setting, which led to a decrease in feelings of security.

The main factor influencing the participants' willingness to volunteer to speak in this study was their self-confidence and perceived communicative competence. The importance of this factor was highlighted in many previous studies (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Hashimoto, 2002; Cao and Philp, 2006; Yashima, 2002; Peng and Woodrow, 2010; Zhang *et al*., 2018; Khajavy *et al*., 2016) and it proved to be as important for the results of this study as well. Since the participants' confidence and perceived competence were at such high levels, other factors could not significantly affect their WTC. Their high-perceived competence is illustrated by the fact that most of them would try to answer the question even when they are not sure whether they have the correct answer. However, a factor that can negatively affect the participants' WTC, especially in the physical classroom, is the classroom setting and classroom atmosphere. Many participants' WTC was affected by quiet or noisy classroom, confirming Zhang *et al*.'s (2018) observation that classroom setting and classroom management are important factors for WTC. Classroom setting proved to be particularly important when it comes to the virtual classroom. Since technology is the main part of the classroom setting in the virtual classroom, it is important for it to function properly in order not to distract the learners. The results of this study indicate that the main factor negatively affecting participants' WTC in the virtual classroom was the technology, i. e., difficulties with using the technology or poor internet connection. These factors decrease learners' motivation, which then negatively affects their WTC. Some participants also reported that their WTC was negatively affected by the number of other students in the classroom, which leads to the conclusion

that even individuals with high levels of perceived competence prefer speaking in smaller groups. On the other hand, the perceived lack of interlocutors in the virtual classroom also negatively affected the participants' WTC, which could be connected with Kang's (2005) findings, which emphasized the importance of a supportive interlocutor for one's WTC. Baran-Łucarz's (2014) theory about pronunciation anxiety also proved to be important for this study, while pronunciation anxiety was one of the main factors the participants listed as negatively affecting their WTC in an online setting. Interestingly, this factor did not appear among factors for the physical classroom. Mihaljević Djigunović and Letica's (2009) connection between learning success and WTC can also be found in this study. Since the demographic data proved that most of the participants were excellent students, it could be taken into consideration as one of the important factors causing such high WTC.

The results showed that the participants were more likely to speak voluntarily in the physical classroom. Since the main reason the participants stated for higher WTC in the physical classroom was that it was easier for them, the main reason could, as Altunel (2021) stated in her study, originate from the nature of online education. Many participants of the current study claimed that they worried about difficulties with technology during online classes. Since they could not know how well their teacher or classmates could hear them, they felt less confident to speak. Communicating in the virtual classroom, especially with cameras turned off, can often feel less personal, and while for some this leads to higher WTC, for many, this feels less motivating and lowers their WTC. Many participants that perceived speaking in a virtual classroom negatively also listed that a virtual classroom felt different to them and that they had a feeling as if no one was listening, which could mean that they felt a lack of security (Kang, 2005) in an online setting which lowered their WTC. This could also be connected with Zhang et al.'s (2018) view about situational cues, meaning that participants do not perceive online setting as positive since other interlocutors cannot contribute as much as they would in the physical classroom.

Since the participants' willingness to volunteer significantly changed with the change of the classroom setting, the results of this research go in favour of Kang's (2005) and MacIntyre's (2007) understanding of WTC as a volitional process, and Cao's (2014) idea of complex L2 classroom WTC. Even though the participants mainly reported positive feelings towards speaking in both types of the classroom, most of them were less likely to volunteer to speak in an online setting, meaning that their WTC decreased in the virtual classroom. Levels of some of the participants' WTC were also reported to be affected by other factors, such as interlocutor, topic, number of people present, and mood, meaning that WTC is prominent to change even during the

same class if the context changes (shifting from discussing with peers to discussing with the teacher).

4. Conclusion

This paper attempted to discover which feelings participants associate with speaking in the physical and virtual classrooms, factors influencing participants' willingness to volunteer to speak in the two settings, as well as in which setting participants prefer to speak voluntarily. The analysis of the data showed that, even though the participants negatively perceived the lessons conducted in the virtual classroom, they still associated positive feelings towards speaking in both types of classrooms. Participants' perceived competence, classroom setting and interlocutors, proved to be the most influential factors in participants' willingness to volunteer in EFL classrooms in this study. Even though the participants reported positive feelings towards speaking in the virtual classroom, the data analysis indicated that they were less willing to speak voluntarily in the virtual classroom, which could be the result of difficulties with technology and a lack of interpersonal communication. Following many previous studies (Kang, 2005; MacIntyre, 2007; Cao, 2014; Msytkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak, 2017), WTC in this study demonstrated dynamic properties, meaning that it did not act like a stable trait but instead changed with the change of the setting.

The results of this study emphasize the importance for teachers to find a way to make the classroom atmosphere in virtual classrooms more positive for learners to feel more secure and, therefore more willing to communicate in such settings.

A possible weakness of the study is that it was conducted after students had been back in the physical classrooms for a few months, meaning that they were retrospectively thinking about their feelings towards EFL classes in the virtual classroom. Another possible weakness is that the participants were mostly excellent students confident in their knowledge. A more versatile group when it comes to proficiency level could affect the results and offer more versatile insight into factors affecting WTC. The last possible weakness is that the narrative frame written for this study could have asked for more details in order to understand some of the answers better.

Future research could examine how to change the virtual classroom atmosphere so that students can feel more secure and relaxed. Since the current study showed a discrepancy between levels of pronunciation anxiety, future research could investigate the possible differences in pronunciation anxiety in physical and virtual EFL classrooms. Furthermore, since online education is becoming

more available, and to this date, there are not many studies investigating WTC in online EFL lessons, future research should take a closer look at it in order to better understand the underlying processes and help teachers create an online setting that will encourage learners' WTC.

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Appendix 1

The narrative frame used in the study

I think that EFL classes in the physical classroom are _____. When I have to speak in English in the physical classroom, I feel _____ because _____. It is the easiest for me to speak English in the physical classroom when _____ and I have difficulties when _____.

I think that EFL classes in the virtual classroom are _____. When I have to speak English in the virtual classroom, I feel _____ because _____. It is the easiest for me to speak English in the virtual classroom when _____ and I have difficulties when _____.

During EFL classes, I will volunteer to speak when _____. If my teacher calls me when I did not raise my hand, I will feel _____. When I am not sure what the correct answer is, and my teacher called me I _____. If I say something wrong I feel _____.

I will more often willingly participate in _____ (choose between physical and virtual EFL classroom) because _____ and I would like future EFL classes to be held _____.

Appendix 2

An example of a completed and coded narrative frame

I think that EFL classes in the physical classroom are **interesting (ECL_pos)**. When I have to speak in English in the physical classroom, I feel **excited (ECLsp_pos)** because **it is not my native language (ECLspR_L2)**. It is the easiest for me to speak English in the physical classroom when **it is quiet (ECLspEas_quiet)** and I have difficulties when **it is noisy (ECLspDiff_noise)**.

I think that EFL classes in virtual the classroom are **less interesting (EOL_neg)**. When I have to speak English in virtual the classroom, I feel **calm (EOLsp_pos)** because **I am alone (EOLspR_alone)**. It is the easiest for me to speak English in the virtual classroom when **I have my textbook with me (EOLspEas_book)** and I have difficulties when **there are difficulties with my internet connection (EOLspDiff_tech)**.

During EFL classes, I will volunteer to speak when **I know the answer (volu_knans)**. If my teacher calls me when I did not raise my hand, I will feel **surprised (involu_neg)**. When I am not sure what the correct answer is, and my teacher called me I **say the answer I think is correct (nosure_try)**. If I say something wrong I feel **surprised and anxious (mist_neg)**.

I will more often willingly participate in the **physical classroom (voluFreq_ECL)** (choose between physical and virtual EFL classroom) because **there are no troubles with technology (VoluFreq_ECLnotech)** and I would like future EFL classes to be held **in the physical classroom (FutPref_ECL)**.