



## Investigating Willingness to Communicate of Participants in TikTok English Chat Room

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### Abstract

This study investigates the willingness to communicate (WTC) among English learners in TikTok English chat rooms, a rapidly growing informal digital learning platform. As social media platforms like TikTok transform language learning by offering flexible, immersive, and low-anxiety environments, understanding the factors that influence learners' WTC in these settings is crucial. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study combines quantitative data from 579 participants and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with six TikTok users. The findings reveal that participants generally exhibit a high level of WTC, driven by key factors such as communication confidence, perceived communicative competence, motivation to learn English, and the learning environment. Motivation emerged as the strongest predictor of WTC, with learners reporting that TikTok's informal, engaging environment significantly enhances their communication confidence and reduces anxiety. Correlation analyses confirm strong positive relationships between WTC and these influencing factors. Qualitative interviews further support these findings, highlighting that the quality of the live broadcast room and the attitudes of fellow participants also affect learners' WTC. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on WTC in digital contexts and offers practical insights for language educators seeking to leverage social media platforms to improve learners' communicative skills. The study underscores the potential of TikTok English chat rooms as effective informal learning spaces, fostering intercultural exchange and linguistic competence.

**Key words:** willingness to communicate; TikTok; English chat room

### INTRODUCTION

With social media platforms like TikTok creating new avenues for English acquisition, language learning is undergoing a transformation (Bilki et al., 2023; Dooly & Vinagre, 2022). The informal digital platforms like TikTok have provided multiple inputs and stimuli for foreign language learners (Lee et al., 2023). For example, the TikTok English

chat room connected learners via the internet, offering high flexibility and engagement, enabling learners to interact and collaborate with other participants, which they would seldom encounter in traditional learning environments. The virtual exchanges in TikTok English chat room have been furnishing learners with opportunities to develop intercultural, digital, and even linguistic competencies (Gruber et al., 2023). Therefore, the studies of learning individual differences in digital platform were significant, yet they were less researched. Willingness to communicate (hereafter WTC), a kind of individual differences, has been extensively researched, highlighting the roles of motivation, self-assessment and anxiety in shaping communicative drive. The concept of WTC in first language has evolved, with initial focuses on psychological variables and cultural influences. MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed a heuristic model highlighting diverse causes of WTC, emphasizing socio-psychological variables in WTC. Later, research has gradually shifted to second language WTC, including studies on Chinese, English, and other languages. Now the research focus has turned to WTC in online platform. It was noticeable that Chinese learners' face concerns were noted, and digital tools offered low affective-filter environments. Digital technologies have created less anxiety-provoking environments, enhancing WTC. Immersive programs and online flipped learning approaches improved learners' communicative competence and confidence. Robot-integrated systems and various online environments provided novel opportunities for WTC in English as a foreign language.

Despite the growing research on WTC in digital context, it was lack of research in TikTok context. Therefore, it was extremely urgent to conduct the investigation of participants in TikTok English chat room. To this end, the research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data, to explore the WTC and its underpinnings among TikTok English chat room users. Specifically, the aims of this study were demonstrated as follows: (1) What is the profile of participants' WTC in TikTok chat room? (2) What are influencing factors of participants' WTC in TikTok chat room? By offering an insight about the profile and underlying influencing factors of participants' WTC in TikTok English chat room, the implications of foreign English teaching and adult English learning would be offered. It would also provide significant implications for refining language pedagogy and improving educational outcomes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Second language learning in the extramural digital context**

With the globalization and digitalization, technology has been incorporated into language learning and teaching (Bilki et al., 2023). Many online resources such as digital games, online courses, and chat room offered opportunities and chances for learners to access the English learning. As Lee (2019, p.694) stated that: "There were "terms such as extramural English, out-of-class English learning, online informal learning of English, and informal digital learning of English that explore the emerging phenomenon of L2 learning in the education digital context." TikTok, a popular application, has been providing a technology-enhanced environment for English as foreign language learners to have virtual exchange worldwide (Dooly & Vinagre, 2022). TikTok English chat room

connected learners through internet with high flexibility and engagement, making learners interact and collaborate with other participants that they were less likely to meet in normal learning circumstances. Virtual exchange has been providing opportunities for learners to cultivate intercultural, digital, and even linguistic skills (Gruber et al., 2023). TikTok, an informal digital learning platform, supplied sufficient language inputs that formal language learning did not have, lessening the anxiety, stress and hesitation to use English for learners (Lee et al., 2023).

### WTC in second language learning

Reticence (Phillips, 1995), unwillingness to communicate (Burgoon, 1976), and shyness (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982) were introduced first in communication field. The psychological variables were thought to be accounted for the first language WTC (Phillips, 1965; McCroskey, 1992). Culture was also an essential factor for communication orientation. Therefore, different research was conducted to perceive the cultural influences in first language WTC (Barracough et al., 1998; Hackman & Barthel-Hackman, 1993). MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed the heuristic model (e.g., Figure 1), emphasizing that the causes of WTC were diverse and various including social and individual context, affective-cognitive context, motivational propensities, situated antecedents, and behavioural intention. WTC was influenced by social-cultural and psychological factors. Gradually, researchers (e.g., Liu, 2018; Lee et al., 2021; ) have been shifting their attention to second language WTC. The targeted second languages studied were inclusive including Chinese, English and so on (Liu, 2018; Lee et al., 2021; Zarrinabadi, 2023). Kruk (2021) emphasized that virtual communication offered a less anxiety-provoking environment than an ordinary class, resulting to higher WTC.

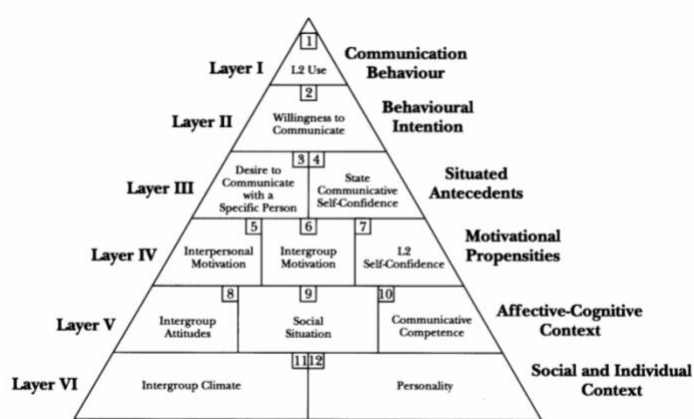


Figure 1. Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p.547)

Wen and Clément (2003) stated that Chinese people were concerned more about their face, resulting in low WTC. Lee and Liu (2022) emphasized that the digital technology has provided low affective-filter environment for learners, which led to high WTC. Grant (2020) emphasized that the opportunities provided by the immersive programme made students increase their perceived communicative competence and decrease their anxiety, resulting the increase of WTC. WTC was defined as learners' "readiness to enter into

discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). WTC is an individual difference variable which determines the likelihood of a person voluntarily engaging in discourse (Grant, 2020). "The accelerated development of digital technologies has created novel opportunities for augmenting learners' WTC." (Hsieh et al., 2023, p.2) Online flipped learning approach made learners improve their English learning confidence. Robot integrated learning system to avoid the face hurting situation for human beings for its patient and non-judgemental features. Different forms of online environments such as chatting, online course, and digital games provided different ecological condition for English as foreign language learners (Lee, 2019). Therefore, it was worthwhile to conduct research about WTC in informal digital learning environment and its potential underpinning factors.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research questions

- (1) What's the profile of WTC in TikTok English chat room?
- (2) What's the influencing factors of WTC in TikTok English chat room?

### Participants and procedures

According to Table 1, there were 579 participants enrolled in this study. Most of them occupied a job in the society. 265 male participants were recruited, accounting for 45.8% of the sample. 314 female participants (54.2%) participated in this research. Obviously, there were more female participants than male participants. As indicated in Table 2, the average age of the sample was 29 years old. The youngest participant was 17 years old. The oldest participant was 56 years old. The duration of participants' English learning was among 0 to 30 years, with the mean level of 13.43 years old. The average frequency of participants' English communication was 2.04, which is slightly below the medium level. Participants perceived their English ability with above the medium level ( $M=3.64$ ). They thought that the interaction of the chat room was good ( $M=3.17$ ).

**Table 1.** Gender of Participants

	Frequency	Percent
Male	265	45.8
Female	314	54.2
Total	579	100

**Table 2.** The Variables of Participants

	Min	Max	M	SD
Interaction of chat room	1	4	3.17	0.894
Perceived English ability	1	5	3.64	1.128
Frequency of communication in Chat room	1	4	2.04	0.851
Duration of learning English	0	30	13.43	4.025
Age	17	56	29	4.095

## Instruments

The quantitative data were collected by using an adapted questionnaire. The first part was the background information of participants including gender, age, interaction of chat room, perceived English ability, frequency of communication in Chat room, duration of learning English. The second part included WTC scale and its influencing scales such as communication confidence, perceived communication competence, motivation to learn English, and environment. The design of the second part was based on Peng and Woodrow (2010). In this study, as shown in Table 3 and Table 4, WTC scale and other scales were identified with high reliability and validity.

**Table 3.** Reliability Statistics of Scales

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
WTC	0.866	8
CC	0.799	6
PCC	0.797	5
MTLE	0.894	11
E	0.903	13

**Table 4.** Validity of Scales

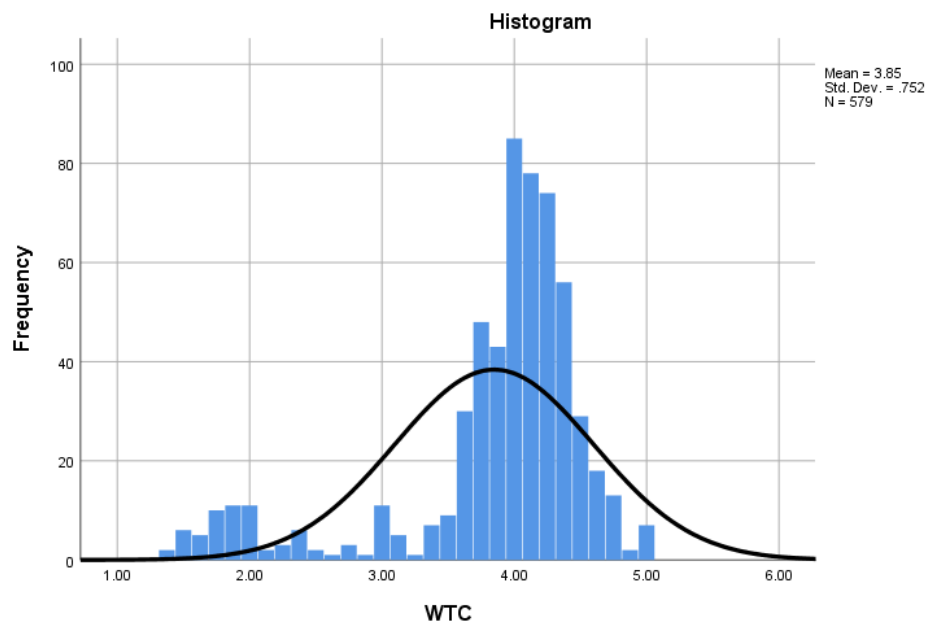
KMO and Bartlett's Test	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	Sig.
WTC	0.925	1594.851	28	0.000
CC	0.839	917.191	15	0.000
PCC	0.831	777.206	10	0.000
MTLE	0.95	2376.015	55	0.000
E	0.96	2762.503	78	0.000

The semi-structured interview served as a research or survey tool aimed at gaining insights into individuals' WTC and experiences of using English in specific social contexts, particularly within TikTok's English chat rooms. The researcher crafted a set of 12 questions and randomly chose six participants from various themed English chat rooms on TikTok for interviews. These six participants had prior exposure to a survey questionnaire, thus familiarizing them with the research's scope, which facilitated smoother conversations. Below is the English rendition of the interview questions:

- (1) Are you willing to communicate in English within the TikTok English chat room?
- (2) On a scale ranging from 1 to 10, how would you assess your willingness to engage in English communication?
- (3) How often do you utilize the TikTok English chat room? (Daily, a few times a week, etc.)
- (4) What elements do you believe could impact your WTC in English?
- (5) Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were reluctant to communicate in English?

## Data analysis

With the aid of Statistical Product Service Solutions 26 (SPSS 26), participants' background, the descriptive analysis, and correlation analysis were processed. First, the frequency analysis method was utilized to deal with the background information. The mean levels and standard deviation of different variables were reported according to the descriptive analysis. Secondly, the correlation analysis was adopted to explore whether there were correlations between the different variables Communication Confidence (CC), Perceived Communication Competence (PCC), Motivation to Learn English (MTLE), Environment (E) and WTC. According to the skewness, kurtosis statistics, and the histogram of WTC (Seen in Fig 1, Table 5), WTC and other scales confirmed the normal distribution, demonstrating that the data were good to have further analysis.



**Figure 2.** The Normal Distribution of WTC

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics of normal distribution

	WTC	CC	PCC	MTLE	E
Skewness	-1.709	-1.496	-1.583	-1.796	-1.857
Std. Error of Skewness	.102	.102	.102	.102	.102
Kurtosis	2.432	1.563	2.041	2.389	2.675
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.203	.203	.203	.203	.203

## RESULTS

### The mean levels of WTC and other variables

**Table 6.** The mean levels

Variables	Min	Max	M	SD
WTC	1.38	5	3.8478	0.75203
CC	1	4.83	3.7683	0.79326

PCC	1.2	5	3.838	0.78556
MTLE	1.45	5	3.8413	0.74629
E	1.38	5	3.8234	0.71612

Notably, all these factors had mean values exceeding 3, indicating favorable outcomes. Participants perceived that they had excellent English competence. It was reasonable to state so because most of them could speak fluent and natural English. Participants thought that they had good TikTok communication environment, high motivation to learn English, good communication confidence. These data provided a sound profile of participants in TikTok, indicating their high value of WTC.

### The correlations between WTC and other variables

**Table 7.** the correlations between variables

Variables		Interaction	Ability	Time	CC	PCC	MTLE	E
WTC	Pearson Correlation	.108**	.172**	.101*	.779**	.793**	.861**	.843**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.01	0.000	0.015	.779**	.793**	.861**	.843**

With the enthusiastic participation of TikTok English chat room participants, an analysis of 579 questionnaires conducted using SPSS 26 has revealed the factors influencing their WTC. These factors include perceived communication competence in English, communication confidence, motivation to learn English, and the environment. Among these, learning motivation stood out as the most influential factor. Moreover, these factors exhibit positive correlations with each other. Specifically, WTC positively correlates with communication confidence ( $r = .779$ ) and perceived communication competence ( $r = .793$ ). It also positively correlated with motivation to learn English ( $r = .861$ ). The environment showed a significant positive correlation ( $r = .843$ ). Although there was a positive correlation between time and WTC, it is relatively weak. The TikTok English Chat Room offers a low-anxiety, high-engagement learning environment. Learners' interactions on the TikTok platform bolstered their communication confidence and perceived skills, thereby enhancing their WTC. Learning motivation played a pivotal role in boosting communication willingness, while the live broadcast quality and environment of the TikTok English chat room sparked learners' interest and motivation. Numerous researchers and language educators concurred that foreign language learners' progress in a digital setting could be effectively accelerated by nurturing emotional factors like linguistic motivation, self-confidence, and perseverance, while mitigating oral anxiety. A study examining learners' communication willingness in extracurricular activities found task-based foreign language learning activities, including online role-playing games, educational online games, and computer-mediated communication, to be effective in fostering learners' WTC. To elevate the WTC of TikTok English chat room participants, teaching methods can be innovated with the help of digital online platforms. As an informal digital learning platform, the TikTok English Chat Room effectively enhances learners' WTC by providing abundant language input and cultural experiences. The findings underscored the significance of sociocultural and psychological factors in language learning.

For this interview, six participants from various TikTok English chat rooms were selected. Initially, all six participants expressed their eagerness to communicate in English within the TikTok English chat room. Based on a self-assessment scale ranging from 5 to 8, according to their English proficiency, participants rated their WTC, highlighting varying levels of confidence in their communicative skills. Secondly, regarding the frequency of their communication, participants provided mixed feedback. Some frequently entered the TikTok English chat room, while others did so less often.

When discussing factors affecting their WTC, participants cited various reasons, such as their English proficiency, learning motivation, and the quality of the live broadcast room. The majority of participants attributed their reluctance to communicate in English to the quality of the live broadcast room. Additionally, they expressed concerns about not being able to articulate themselves clearly during communication, encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, and feeling that their English skills were inadequate for effective communication, particularly their speaking abilities.

Furthermore, within the TikTok English chat room, participants displayed a positive attitude towards learning English. They also believed that the attitudes of other chat room participants influenced their own WTC. Warm and friendly interactions increased their WTC, while negative attitudes decreased it. Moreover, some participants felt anxious in the TikTok English chat room. This anxiety stemmed from fears of inadequate English proficiency and difficulties in understanding fast or unclear speech from others. Ultimately, participants felt more inclined to communicate in the TikTok chat room than in their daily lives. Most participants provided positive feedback on the TikTok chat room environment, considering it conducive to cross-language communication.

Through qualitative analysis, it was discovered that TikTok English chat room users exhibited varying levels of WTC and anxiety when communicating in English. Their attitudes towards English, self-perceived English proficiency, communication environment, and feedback from others significantly impacted their WTC.

## **DISCUSSION**

Driven by globalization and digitalization, the integration of technology and language learning is intensifying. Popular apps such as TikTok offer a global virtual platform for English language learners to engage in communication. Utilizing quantitative data analysis, this study endeavors to uncover the factors that influence the WTC (WTC) among users of TikTok English chat rooms.

The analysis of 579 valid questionnaires using SPSS 26 revealed that several factors, including WTC in English, communication confidence, motivation, and the English learning environment, significantly and positively correlated with WTC among TikTok English chat users. Notably, learning motivation exhibited the strongest effect. This aligns with the heuristic model proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998), which underscores the impact of sociocultural and psychological factors on WTC.

As an informal digital learning platform, TikTok English Chat Room effectively boosts learners' WTC by providing abundant language input and cultural immersion. This



finding mirrors the research by Lee et al. (2023), which suggests that informal digital learning environments can alleviate learners' anxiety and enhance their willingness to use English.

Learning motivation stands as a pivotal factor in augmenting WTC, echoing the perspective of Dooly and Vinagre (2022) that motivation is a crucial predictor of language learning success. The quality of live streams and the ambiance of TikTok English chat rooms ignite learners' interest and motivation, highlighting the importance of fostering an engaging learning environment to elevate motivation.

Semi-structured interviews delved deeper into users' communication experiences within TikTok English chat rooms and the internal and external factors influencing their WTC. The interviews revealed that all participants expressed a desire to communicate in English within the chat rooms, albeit with varying levels of confidence in their communicative abilities. This resonates with Wen and Clément's (2003) findings that cultural context significantly influences communicative intentions.

Participants attributed their WTC to factors such as personal English proficiency, learning motivation, and the quality of live broadcast rooms. These factors are consonant with Phillips' (1965) proposition that WTC is swayed by individual psychological variables. Generally, participants felt that the TikTok English chat room environment fosters a higher WTC compared to everyday life, aligning with Gruber et al.'s (2023) assertion that virtual communication environments offer learners more practice opportunities, thereby boosting their WTC.

The quantitative and qualitative results of this study align with the cross-cultural findings of Barraclough et al. (1998) and Hackman and Barthel-Hackman (1993), which indicate variations in learners' WTC across different cultural contexts. As a cross-cultural communication platform, TikTok English Chat Room facilitates communication among learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, thereby enhancing their WTC.

The study's findings further corroborate the strong link between learning motivation and WTC, consistent with the research by Liu (2018) and Lee et al. (2021). By cultivating a supportive and encouraging learning environment, learners are motivated to learn, which subsequently increases their WTC.

Synthesizing the quantitative and qualitative analysis, this study concludes as follows:

Both the quantitative and qualitative results underscore TikTok English Chat Room's potential as an emerging informal learning platform to enhance the WTC of English L2 learners. By presenting a low-anxiety, high-engagement environment, TikTok English chat rooms motivate learners, boost their communication confidence, and offer ample opportunities for cross-cultural interaction. These insights offer fresh perspectives and implications for language teaching's future, particularly regarding the utilization of social media and digital technologies to facilitate language acquisition.

Future research could delve deeper into WTC across various cultural contexts and explore methods to optimize technological tools for language learning. Additionally, this study provides valuable insights for language educators, emphasizing the importance of

cultivating a positive and supportive learning environment in teaching practices to promote learners' WTC and linguistic proficiency.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

With the intensifying globalization and digitalization, the landscape of language learning is undergoing transformational shifts unparalleled in history. The emergence of social media platforms, exemplified by TikTok, has furnished language learners with novel avenues for communication and study. In this evolving scenario, examining the communication readiness of TikTok English chat room users for language acquisition holds immense significance.

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques, to gather data via questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire's design was grounded in Peng and Woodrow's (2010) scale, encompassing various facets like WTC, communication confidence, motivations to learn English, and the learning environment. Participants consisted of 579 active TikTok English chat room users from diverse professional backgrounds, exhibiting varying proficiency levels and usage frequencies in English.

Quantitative analysis revealed that TikTok English chat room users exhibit positive attitudes towards their WTC, communication confidence, learning motivation, and the learning environment. Notably, learning motivation emerged as the paramount factor influencing WTC. Qualitative insights shed light on both internal and external factors shaping users' communication experiences within the TikTok English chat room and their WTC. Factors such as users' attitudes, self-perceived English proficiency, communication setting, and peer feedback were found to substantially influence WTC.

As an informal digital learning sphere, the TikTok English Chat Room has demonstrated considerable potential in fostering WTC and enhancing second language proficiency. To harness this platform's full potential, it is imperative to ignite learners' interest and motivation through engaging content and interactive formats. Moreover, fostering a supportive and encouraging communication atmosphere can alleviate learners' communication anxiety.

Our findings underscore that the TikTok English chat room offers learners abundant language exposure and cultural immersion, effectively bolstering their WTC. This underscores the vital role of sociocultural and psychological factors in language learning. The TikTok English Chat Room, with its distinctive social attributes and real-time interaction capabilities, provides an innovative communication milieu that positively impacts learners' WTC. Our research emphasizes the pivotal role of learning motivation in language acquisition, suggesting that future studies should delve deeper into WTC across various cultural contexts and explore optimal utilization of technological tools to augment language learning.

The study surveyed 579 active users, analyzing their WTC, perceived English competence, learning motivation, and environmental factors. The findings reveal that

WTC is influenced by multiple factors, including personal motivations, self-efficacy, confidence levels, and perceptions of the learning environment.

The study offers empirical evidence and new perspectives on the WTC of second language learners in TikTok English chat rooms. However, it is limited to active users and primarily focuses on influencing factors, suggesting a need for further research on enhancement strategies. Ultimately, this study contributes to the understanding of WTC in informal digital platform and environment, with significant implications for refining language pedagogy and improving educational outcomes.

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