Frontiers in Education Technology
Vol. 6, No.3, 2023
www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/fet
ISSN 2576-1846 (Print) ISSN 2576-1854 (Online)

Original Paper

The Relationship between Saudi Cadets' Willingness to Communicate and Their English Language Proficiency

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Received: April 20, 2023 Accepted: May 19, 2023 Online Published: June 8, 2023

doi:10.22158/fet.v6n3p44 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/fet.v6n3p44

Abstract

This study examines a group of Saudi military cadets studying English as a foreign language and their willingness to communicate (WTC) using English. The study investigated the relationship between the cadets' WTC using English and their English vocabulary size, along with the cadets' perceived English competence. In addition, the study looked at the relationship between the Saudi military cadets' WTC using English and their L2 anxiety. A survey was designed for and administered to 113 Saudi military cadets with an average age of 20 years old. Correlation and regression analyses revealed an association between the Saudi cadets' WTC in L2 and the size of their English vocabulary. Furthermore, the study found a strong linear relationship between the students' perception of their competence in English and their WTC in L2. However, the analysis showed a negative relationship between the Saudi cadets' WTC using English and their L2 anxiety.

Keywords

English learning anxiety, vocabulary knowledge, willingness to communicate

1. Introduction

People learn another language (L2) for various reasons. One such reason is to communicate with people who cannot speak the learner's mother tongue. For instance, one of the main reasons why Saudi students learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is to communicate with people around the world who cannot speak Arabic. The L2 learners' desire to communicate in an L2 (i.e., their Willingness To Communicate (WTC)) helps the L2 learners to develop and become competent L2 users. However, if the L2 learners lack the WTC, they are less likely to engage in opportunities to communicate when they arise, which might hinder them from becoming successful L2 users (Alqahtani, 2017).

Nevertheless, L2 learners' WTC does not guarantee effective communication, as L2 learners also need to be competent. In addition, competent L2 users should have a decent vocabulary knowledge to help

them to successfully get through communication situations (Alqahtani, 2020). Therefore, L2 learners who have a WTC and are competent in the L2 usually engage in frequent L2 communication situations, which in turn helps them to develop in the L2 and be more willing to communicate with others. This interactive relationship has been raised by a number of empirical studies in EFL contexts (e.g., Yashima, 2002, 2009).

Following the work of MacIntyre et al. (1998) in conceptualising WTC in L2, a great deal of research has looked at predictors of WTC in L2 from different perspectives. For example, Ghonsooly et al. (2013) investigated the relationship between WTC, self-confidence and classroom environment. In addition, Öz (2014) looked at the relationship between WTC and personality traits. Bursali and Öz (2017) and Öz and Bursali (2018) investigated the relationship between WTC and the L2 Motivational Self System or one of its constructs. This study will employ a different perspective, as the author will focus on the L2 proficiency of a group of Saudi L2 learners of English, as measured by their L2 vocabulary knowledge (VK) and their perception of their L2 competence, and the possible relationship between these factors and the students' L2 WTC. In addition, the study will investigate the possible relationship between L2 WTC and the Saudi L2 learners' anxiety when using English (i.e., L2 anxiety). Another issue that adds to the significance of the study is its context, as the study investigates the L2 WTC construct in an under-researched context: a group of Saudi military cadets studying EFL.

2. Literature Review

2.1 L2 Willingness to Communicate

MacIntyre (2020, p. 115) defines *willingness to communicate* as "the behavioural intention to communicate at a particular time". The WTC construct was initially conceptualised in native language (L1) communication literature as a stable personality disposition (Burgoon, 1976). Basing her work on the idea that some individuals talk more than others, Burgoon proposed a scale to measure unwillingness to communicate (UnWTC), which would examine "restrained communication" (MacIntyre, 2020, p. 112). However, McCroskey and Baer (1985) criticised the UnWTC scale on the grounds that its underlying structure was not clearly defined. They proposed an alternative scale to measure WTC, which was widely used later (Chan & McCroskey, 1987; MacIntyre et al., 1999; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991; Zakahi & McCroskey, 1989). In addition, MacIntyre and Charos (1996) used a path model on their study and found that perceptions of competence and anxiety have the most direct impact on L1 WTC.

Nevertheless, when an individual is willing to communicate in L1 (i.e., L1 WTC), he or she will not necessarily also be willing to communicate in L2 (i.e., L2 WTC), as some studies (e.g., Charos (1994) have found a negative correlation between L1 WTC and L2 WTC for beginning L2 learners. Such differences between L1 WTC and L2 WTC are likely due to the following:

> [an] uncertainty inherent in L2 use that interacts in a more complex manner with those variables that influence L1 WTC. For example, among most adults, a much greater range in

> communicative competence would be found in the L2, as compared to the L1. (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 546)

One of the most influential works in L2 WTC literature is the heuristic pyramid model of L2 WTC proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998). The pyramid consists of six layers organised by time and breadth of concept. The base of the pyramid "reflects the influence of long-term, stable processes. As one moves upward the pyramid, shorter-term, more situation specific or time-limited processes begin to become relevant" (MacIntyre, 2020, p. 115). See Figure 1 for more details.

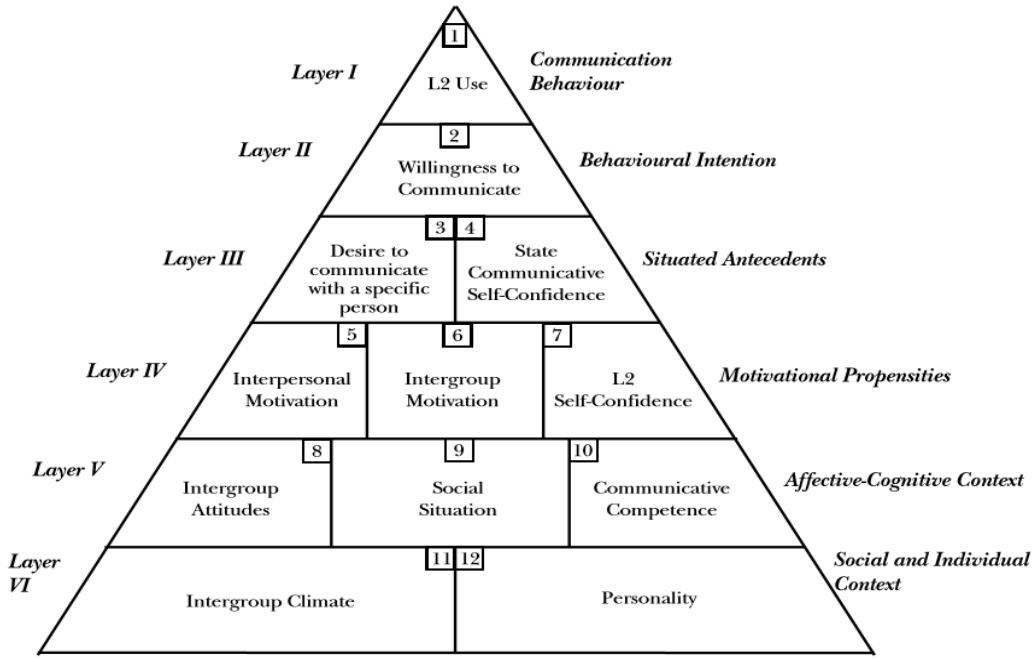

Figure 1. The Pyramid Model of L2 WTC (from MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Following the work of MacIntyre et al. (1998), a number of L2 studies have aimed to identify factors likely to influence WTC in an L2 (e.g., Cao and Philp (2006) and Yashima (2002)). These factors vary, such as the mode of the L2 learner, his or her anxiety, his or her L2 competence and whether there is sufficient time to communicate. Yashima (2002) investigated the relationship between L2 WTC among Japanese university learners of English and their international posture. She found that international posture "affects learners' motivation, which leads to proficiency as well as self-confidence, which, in turn, accounts for L2 WTC" (Yashima, 2009, p. 147). Kim (2004) used MacIntyre et al.'s model to investigate the L2 WTC among South Korean EFL students and found that the students' perceived self-confidence directly impacted their L2 WTC. Similarly, Cetinkaya (2005) examined the relationship between L2 WTC of Turkish L2 students and their perceived communication competence, motivation, anxiety, personality and attitudes. The study revealed a positive relationship between the Turkish L2 students' perceived communication competence and their L2 WTC. Furthermore, the

students' L2 WTC was indirectly impacted by the L2 students' motivation through their own self-confidence.

More recently, Mahmoodi and Moazami (2014) studied the L2 WTC of Iranian students learning Arabic and concluded that students with high L2 WTC are high L2 achievers. Furthermore, Saidi (2018) investigated the L2 WTC among Malaysian undergraduate students learning English and found that the L2 WTC of the learners fluctuated in accordance with their L2 proficiency levels and ethnicities. Finally, in a Saudi context, Alqurashi and Althubaiti (2021) found a relationship between L2 WTC of Saudi students learning English and their L2 learning outcomes. They concluded that "students who are reluctant to speak in EFL are influenced by limited lexicon, perceived linguistic inadequacies, and fears from making mistakes in their attempt to speak English" (Alqurashi, 2022, p. 8992).

Saudi culture can be regarded as collectivist (Alqahtani, 2015; Hofstede, 1980). Members of collectivist cultures, such as the Saudis, tend to be sensitive to social judgment; therefore, they usually adopt face-saving strategies, which makes them less tolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty (Obeidat et al., 2012). Learning a foreign language such as English implies a great deal of ambiguity, which negatively impacts the willingness of L2 learners from collectivist cultures (e.g., China (Wen & Clement, 2003), Korea (Kim, 2012), Oman (Al-Amrani, 2021) and Saudi Arabia (Alqahtani, 2015)) to communicate using the target language. Indeed, L2 learners from collectivist cultural backgrounds usually "believe that wrong or inappropriate use of the L2 elements may result in loss of face", which is likely to make them be "seen as ridiculous" (Al-Amrani, 2021, p. 2).

2.2 Vocabulary Knowledge (VK)

VK is a twofold concept, as it covers both breadth of knowledge and depth or quality of knowledge. Anderson and Freebody (1981, p. 92) refer to the breadth of the VK as "the number of the words for which the person knows at least some of the significant aspects of meaning". In contrast, the depth or quality of the VK refers to the learner needing to "know a great deal about each individual lexical item in order to use it well" (Schmitt, 2010, p. 15).

The lexical capability of L2 learners mainly depends on the number of words they know: that is, the breadth of their VK (Alqahtani, 2020). This has been shown in studies such as that of Meara (1996), who found that learners with high levels of vocabulary size were more flexible in comprehension and language use than those with low levels of vocabulary size. In addition, L2 learners' vocabulary size affects their performance on any language test. Therefore, L2 learners' "language ability is to quite a large extent a function of vocabulary size" (Alderson, 2005, p. 88).

L2 learners need to acquire a solid level of vocabulary size (breadth of VK) to function in an L2. Moreover, to use these vocabulary items efficiently, L2 learners need to know more than just a superficial understanding of a word's meaning (the depth of VK). In other words, L2 learners should "develop a rich and specific meaning representation as well as knowledge of the word's formal features, syntactic functioning, collocational possibilities, register characteristics, and so on" (Read, 2004, p.

155). Thus, "in comparison to learners with lower vocabulary proficiency, learners with higher proficiency are more efficient language users and are well organized" (Alqahtani, 2020, p. 3).

This study uses the concept of VK to refer to the L2 learners' recognition of word form. The scale used in the study to measure the participants' vocabulary size reflects the number of vocabulary items known by the L2 learners (Masrai & Milton, 2017). It has been found that there is a relationship between English-language learners' ability as well as their academic achievement and their VK, which affects L2 learners' success in English (Daller & Phelan, 2013; Roche & Harrington, 2013). For instance, Saville-Troike (1984) examined the VK of school children studying English as an L2 and concluded that it "is the single most important area of L2 competence" (p. 199). In addition, a number of researchers have found moderate to high correlations between the number of vocabulary items known by the language learners and language skills of the language they learn; for example, reading comprehension (Qian, 1999); writing ability (Stæhr, 2008); and oral fluency (Milton et al., 2010). Vocabulary size was responsible for "over 50% of variance in scores in foreign language performance" in these studies (Masrai & Milton, 2017, p. 129).

2.3 L2 Anxiety

MacIntyre and Gardner (1989, p. 284) define L2 anxiety as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning". This feeling negatively affects the L2 learning process, with some studies (e.g., Coulombe (2001) revealing a negative impact of L2 anxiety on language learners' achievements. In addition, Horwitz et al. (1986) found that anxious L2 learners showed avoidance behaviours such as missing classes. Moreover, in comparison with other L2 learners in the same class, anxious L2 learners normally take more time to learn and recall new L2 vocabulary items (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Moreover, anxious L2 learners usually hesitate to volunteer answers in oral activities more than other L2 learners in the same class (Ely, 1986).

L2 anxiety can be separated into two main divisions: 1) 'state anxiety' vs. 'trait anxiety' (Spielberger & Gorsuch, 1983); and 2) 'debilitating anxiety' vs 'facilitating anxiety' (Scovel, 1978). State anxiety refers to the anxiety being temporary and passing, while trait anxiety refers to the anxiety being stable and not fluctuating across different situations. Debilitating anxiety negatively impacts L2 learners' behaviour and hinders their performance, whereas facilitating anxiety improves the L2 learners' behaviour and enhances their performance. Thus, L2 anxiety is a multi-faceted concept, a "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

In an attempt to measure L2 anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 127) have suggested that L2 anxiety has three distinct performance-related levels (communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation), and they developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure these distinct levels of L2 anxiety. Alqahtani (2018) recently developed a similar scale, which

he used in a Saudi context. The scale focuses on the connection between anxiety and interaction in EFL, and this scale is used in this study.

2.4 Research Questions

1) What is the relationship between the Saudi cadets' L2 WTC and their English language proficiency?
2) Is there a statistically significant correlation between L2 WTC and vocabulary size among the Saudi cadets?
3) Is there a statistically significant correlation between L2 WTC and perceived L2 competence among the Saudi cadets?
4) What is the relationship between the Saudi cadets' L2 WTC and their L2 anxiety?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The population of the study was Saudi cadets at a military academy. The academy accepts male students with a high school certificate. Therefore, the sample of the study was only males. Cadets spend three years (two terms a year) at the academy, studying a range of civilian and military subjects. To graduate from the academy, cadets must pass in all subjects. Cadets study EFL in each of the six terms, and the curriculum covers a wide range of topics, from general English to military English. Based on their performance in English tests, cadets may receive a scholarship to study abroad. This means that English is essential for the future of these Saudi cadets. The sample of the study was randomly selected from cadets in their second year at the academy. The average age of the participants was 20 years old. The number of the cadets who volunteered to participate in the study was 113 (16.5%) of the 684 second-year cadets.

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 L2 WTC and L2 Anxiety Questionnaire

The author used a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire to measure the students' L2 WTC, L2 communication frequency, perceived L2 competence and L2 anxiety. The questionnaire was adapted from a number of previous scales: the L2 WTC scale (MacIntyre et al., 2001); the L2 communication frequency scale (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996); the perceived L2 competence (Alqahtani, 2020) scale; and the L2 anxiety scale (Alqahtani, 2018). The cadets participated in the study on a voluntary basis. The author assured the anonymity of the participants before distributing the questionnaires. The scales of the study are defined below, and an example is given for each scale:

The L2 WTC scale consisted of 26 items that referred to the willingness of the cadets to engage in English (L2) communication tasks during class time. On a scale from 1 to 5, the cadets were asked to indicate how willing they would be to communicate in English, with 1 = almost never willing; 2 = sometimes willing; 3 = willing half of the time; 4 = usually willing; and 5 = almost always willing. The

26 items covered four major L2 skills areas to get a better understanding of both the more receptive (e.g., reading) and more active (e.g., speaking) engagement with the L2:

1) Speaking (8 items): "Speaking in a group about your summer vacation"
2) Comprehension (5 items): "Listen to instructions and complete a task"
3) Reading (5 items): "Read a novel"
4) Writing (8 items): "Write an advertisement to sell an old bike".

The L2 communication frequency scale consisted of nine communication contexts involving speaking in English (L2) to friends, acquaintances, and strangers in three settings: dyads, small groups and formal meetings. On a scale from 1 to 5, the students were asked to indicate how frequently they would communicate in English, with 1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often and 5 = many, many times. An example item is "talk with an acquaintance".

The perceived L2 competence scale was a self-rating scale, with the cadets assessing their own English (L2) competence in the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). The respondents were asked to rate themselves in each skill on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest value and 5 being the highest. Such a self-rating scale is common in second-language acquisition (SLA) studies (e.g., Alqahtani (2020); Zhou (2016)).

The L2 anxiety scale was made up of six items that referred to how anxious the students would feel when speaking English (L2). On a scale from 1 to 5, the cadets were asked to indicate how anxious they would feel when communicating in English, with 1 = almost never, 2 = seldom, 3 = half of the time, 4 = usually and 5 = almost always. An example item is "I feel nervous and confused when I speak English in my English class."

Testing vocabulary size

To measure the vocabulary size of this sample of Saudi EFL learners, the author used the X-Lex vocabulary test (Meara & Milton, 2003), which measures the most frequent 5000 receptive words in English in written modality. The X-Lex is composed of 120 words: 100 real English words and 20 pseudowords (non-words) that are used as a control for guesswork. The participants were simply asked to tick the vocabulary items they knew and to leave the vocabulary items they did not know unticked. The maximum possible score of 5000 would be obtained when the student ticked all the 100 real English words and left the 20 pseudowords unticked.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS 20 software. First, the coefficient of the internal consistency for the scales used was measured to examine the reliability of these scales. After that, descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and skewness were calculated to help the author describe the characteristics of the sample and check possible violation of the variables (Pallant, 2010). At last, the author administered correlation and regression analyses to investigate the relationships between the scales used in the study.

To proceed further with statistical tests such as correlation and regression for the vocabulary size of the sample of the study, the participants were divided, based on their score in the vocabulary test, into five groups (i.e., levels) ranging from 1 (the lowest value) to 5 (the highest value). The length of the category was calculated based on the highest score (4200), as it was divided by the levels of the score (5): 4200/5 = 840. For more details, see the tables below:

Table 1. Levels of Participants Based on Their L2 Vocabulary Size Test

Degree	Level	VS Test Score	Frequency	Percentage
1	Very poor	0–840	26	23
2	Poor	841–1680	37	32.7
3	Good	1681–2520	33	29.2
4	Very good	2521–3360	11	9.7
5	Excellent	3361–4200	6	5.3
Total			113	100

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' L2 Vocabulary Size Score

Descriptive statistics	Value
Mean	2.42
Median	2.0
Standard deviation	1.11
Skewness	.52
Kurtosis	-.29

4. Results

4.1 Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

The reliability of the items used in the study questionnaire can be claimed based on the values of the Cronbach's alpha. The questionnaire attained internal consistency, as the Cronbach's alpha values for all the scales were above the minimum accepted value in social sciences studies, which is 0.60 (Pallant, 2010). See Table 3 for the Cronbach's alpha values of the scales used. Next, for the purpose of assessing the normality of the obtained data, the skewness and kurtosis data were calculated. The perfect normal distribution of the data takes place when the values of the skewness and kurtosis are 0, which is difficult to achieve in social sciences studies (Pallant, 2010). However, the data can be claimed normal if skewness values do not exceed 2.0, and kurtosis values do not exceed 7.0 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The data of this study can be regarded as normal, as the values of skewness did not exceed 2.0, and the values of kurtosis did not exceed 7.0. See Table 3 for details.

Later, descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation) for the scales used were calculated to compare the values of the scales used and to have a comprehensive interpretation of the results. For instance, it was found that the L2 vocabulary size score of the students was low (2.42 out of 5), as more than half of the students scored below 1680 words out of 5000. Moreover, in comparison, students' perception of their L2 competence could be considered as high (3.27 out of 5), and their score in L2 anxiety was low (2.20 out of 5). Such values combined might have indicated that despite the fact that the participants' L2 vocabulary size was poor, their perception of their competence in English was high, as their anxiety was low.

Table 3. Reliability and Descriptive Statistics of the Scales

	Name of the scale	Cronbach's alpha value	Mean	Median	Std. deviation	Skewness value	Kurtosis value
1	L2 WTC	.94	2.88	2.77	.855	.31	-.58
2	L2 Communication frequency	.93	2.53	2.33	1.09	.62	-.47
3	L2 Anxiety	.80	2.20	2.17	.875	.69	.19
4	Perceived L2 competence	.74	3.27	3.25	.866	.01	-.57
5	L2 Vocabulary size		2.42	2.00	1.11	.52	-.29

4.2 Correlation

The correlation analysis was used to help explore possible linear relationships between the scales used in the study. Based on the instructions of Cohen (1988), the correlation between scales could be regarded as strong if the values of the correlation coefficient exceeded .49. Half of the correlation coefficient values were strong. Another issue to mention was that all correlation coefficient values between L2 anxiety and other scales were negative, which might have indicated the negative influence of anxiety on the L2 learning process. See Table 4 for more details.

The L2 WTC had a strong linear correlation with the L2 communication frequency (.738), as well as a strong linear correlation with the students' perception of their L2 competence (.685). This might have indicated that when L2 learners had a serious willingness to communicate in L2, this would possibly help them to have more frequent communication in L2, which in turn likely helped them to gain a positive perception of their competence in L2.

Table 4. Correlation Coefficient Values for the Scales

Scales	1	2	3	4	5
L2 WTC	__				
L2 communication frequency	.738**	__			
L2 Anxiety	-.343**	-.385**	__		
Perceived L2 competence	.685**	.591**	-.491**	__	
L2 vocabulary size	.355**	.227*	-.285**	.460**	__

**p < .01

* p < .05

4.3 Regression

A stepwise multiple regression was administered to a) determine the scales contributing to the willingness of the designated group of Saudi cadets to communicate in English and b) predict the frequency of their communication with others using English. The assumptions of normality and multicollinearity were tested for violation. When the independent variables show high correlation (r = .9 and above), multicollinearity exists. Another indicator is the values of "tolerance" and "VIF" (variance inflation factor). Multicollinearity exists when the values are below (.10) for tolerance and above (10) for VIF. See Pallant (2010, pp. 151-158) for more details. The values of the scales used did not show any violation of the multicollinearity assumption.

First, the model of the best predictors for the frequency of the communication of the Saudi cadets in English explains 56% of the variance in their communication with others using English. The mentioned value can be regarded as exceptionally high in the field of social sciences studies (Alqahtani, 2020; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). The model showed that the L2 WTC scale and the L2 anxiety scale respectively contributed significantly to predicting the frequency of the communication of the Saudi L2 learners in English. While the L2 WTC scale contributed positively to the designated group of Saudi L2 learners' frequent L2 communication, the anxiety that the Saudi L2 learners experienced when using English contributed negatively to these learners' frequency of communication in English with others. See Table 5 for details.

Then, the author conducted a stepwise multiple regression analysis to determine the scales that contributed to the L2 Saudi learners' perception of their competence in English. The model explained 58% of the variance in the Saudi L2 learners' perceived competence. Three scales contributed significantly to predicting the Saudi cadets' perception of their competence in English, which were L2 WTC, L2 anxiety and L2 vocabulary size, respectively. The strongest predictor was the willingness of these learners to communicate in English, which explained 53% of the variance in their perception of their competence in English. In addition, the L2 vocabulary size that the participants obtained positively contributed to their perceived L2 competence. However, the anxiety that the Saudi learners

experienced when using English negatively contributed to their perception of their competence in English. See Table 6 for details.

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was then conducted to determine the scales that contributed to the students' L2 vocabulary size. The regression model explained 21% of the variance in the English vocabulary size of these Saudi L2 learners. The students' perception of their competence in English was the only scale that contributed significantly to predicting the students' English vocabulary size. See Table 7 for more details.

Finally, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted, based on the Saudi L2 learners' WTC in English. The regression model explained 64% of the variance in the Saudi students' WTC in English. The model showed that the L2 communication frequency scale and perceived L2 competence scales respectively contributed significantly to predicting the Saudi L2 learners' WTC in English. The Saudi cadets' frequent communication in English explained 51% of the variance to their WTC in English, and their perception of their competence in English explained 38% of the variance. For more details, see Table 8.

Table 5. Regression Model Based on L2 Communication Frequency as the Dependent Variable

Variable	Final model		
	B	SE B	β
L2 WTC	.88	.09	.69*
L2 Anxiety	-.19	.08	-.15*
R^2		.56	
F for change in R^2		4.98*	

*p < .05

Table 6. Regression Model Based on Perceived L2 Competence as the Dependent Variable

Variable	Final model		
	B	SE B	β
L2 WTC	.53	.07	.53*
L2 Anxiety	-.25	.07	-.25*
L2 vocabulary size	.16	.05	.20*
R^2		.58	
F for change in R^2		8.76*	

*p < .05

Table 7. Regression Model Based on L2 Vocabulary Size as the Dependent Variable

Variable	Final model		
	B	SEB	β
Perceived L2 competence	.59	.11	.46*
R^2	.21		
F for change in R^2	29.81*		

*p < .05

Table 8. Regression Model Based on L2 WTC as the Dependent Variable

Variable	Final model		
	B	SE B	β
L2 Communication Frequency	40	.06	.51*
Perceived L2 competence	.38	.07	.38*
R^2		.64	
F for change in R^2		29.12*	

*p < .05

5. Discussion

The vast majority of the participants had poor L2 proficiency, with only 17 (15%) out of the 113 students scoring above the average 2500 out of 5000 that the X-Lex vocabulary test (Meara & Milton, 2003) measured. This mirrored the findings of recent studies conducted in similar Saudi contexts (e.g., Alqahtani, 2020; Alqurashi and Althubaiti (2021)). There is a consensus among these studies that Saudi EFL learners suffer from a limited lexicon and have linguistic inadequacies.

By combining the results of the correlation analysis and regression analysis, some interesting findings can be noted. For example, the correlation analysis showed that the relationship between the L2 vocabulary size of the designated Saudi English learners and their WTC in English was moderate (r = .355), and the relationship between the learners' L2 vocabulary size and their perception of their competence in English was also moderate (r = .460). The correlation analysis also revealed a strong linear relationship between the students' perception of their competence and their WTC in English (r = .685), as well as the frequency of their communication with others using the target language (r = .591). In addition, the regression analyses revealed that the L2 vocabulary size contributed significantly (explaining 20% of the variance) to the prediction of the Saudi L2 learners' perception of their competence in English, which in turn significantly contributed (explaining 38% of the variance) to

the prediction of the willingness of these Saudi English learners to communicate in L2. This possibly indicates that the L2 proficiency of the L2 learners impacts their WTC using the target language, which is in line with the findings of other studies conducted in other Asian EFL contexts, such as Saidi (2018) in Malaysia and Yashima (2002) in Japan. Nevertheless, the results of this current study suggest that such influence was mediated by the learners' perception of their competence in English, which coincides with the findings of Al-Amrani (2019), who concluded that the Omani L2 learners' perception of their competence had a significant and direct influence on their WTC in English.

In the same vein, after examining the relationship between the L2 proficiency scales (L2 vocabulary size and perceived L2 competence) and the communication-related variables (L2 WTC and L2 communication frequency), it is notable that the regression analysis showed that the L2 vocabulary size contributed significantly to the prediction of the perceived L2 competence (explaining 20% of the variance). Furthermore, the perceived L2 competence contributed significantly to the prediction of the Saudi English learners' WTC with others using the target language (explaining 38% of the variance). Moreover, the L2 WTC significantly contributed to the prediction of the Saudi learners' frequency of communication using English (explaining 69% of the variance). This possibly means that the more English vocabulary items that the Saudi L2 learners acquire, the more proficient in English they are likely to feel, which in turn might help them to be more WTC in English with others, which also might help them to have more frequent communication with others using the target language. Such a conclusion lends more support to the findings of MacIntyre and Charos (1996) in their study in a Canadian context: namely, that adult French learners' perceived L2 competence positively contributed to their WTC in French, which in turn positively contributed to their frequent communication in French.

Furthermore, the correlation analysis in this study showed negative relationships between 1) L2 anxiety and L2 WTC ($r = -.343$), which was moderate; 2) L2 anxiety and L2 communication frequency ($r = -.385$), which was also moderate; and 3) L2 anxiety and perceived L2 competence ($r = -.491$), which was strong. In addition, the regression analysis revealed that L2 anxiety made a significant negative contribution to the prediction of the Saudi students' frequency of communication with others using English (explaining 15% of the variance), as well as to the prediction of learners' perception of their competence in English (explaining 25% of the variance). Moreover, the regression analysis revealed that L2 anxiety was not among the scales that contributed to the designated Saudi EFL learners' WTC with others using English. This might have suggested that the influence of L2 anxiety on the Saudi L2 learners' WTC with others using the target language was mediated by the students' perception of their competence in English, as well as the frequency of their communication with others using the target language. In other words, as the Saudi EFL students perceived their own linguistic inadequacies and were aware of their limited lexicon, this might have made them afraid of making mistakes while communicating with others using English. In turn, this might have made the students less WTC in

English, which supports the findings of Alqurashi and Althubaiti (2021) in a similar Saudi EFL context.

Another issue that might have influenced the Saudi EFL learners' WTC using the target language, despite their high perception of their competence in English, was the impact of the Arab collectivist culture. Namely, L2 learners from collectivist cultures are often low risk takers and adopt face-saving strategies (Al-Amrani & Harrington, 2020; Kim, 2012; Wen & Clement, 2003). Therefore, Arab L2 learners such as the Saudis "prefer to be reticent and silent rather than enter into discourse" when "they are not certain about the language elements (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, structure, pronunciation and meaning)" (Al-Amrani, 2021, p. 3).

6. Conclusion

In relation to the research questions of the study, a relationship was found between the willingness of the Saudi cadets to communicate with others using English and their proficiency in the target language. The relationship between the cadets' perception of their competence in English and their WTC with others using English was strong. However, the relationship between the size of the L2 vocabulary items they had acquired and their willingness to communicate with others using English was not strong. In addition, the analysis of the data showed that L2 anxiety negatively influenced the designated sample of Saudi English learners' frequency of communication with others using English, as well as their perception of their competence in English, which in turn affected their WTC in English.

Last but not least, I acknowledge, based on the sample of the study, the gender bias of the survey, since the military academy admission is restricted to male students. Therefore, the generalisation of the findings to the wider Saudi English learners is limited. Nevertheless, the study might help researchers, readers, and/or teachers to get a better understanding of English learners from EFL contexts and, more specifically, those from collectivist cultures such as the Saudis.

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