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The Effects of English Language Classroom Environments on University Students' Willingness to Communicate

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Article information	
Abstract	This paper reports the findings of a mixed-method study that investigated the effects of teacher roles and activity characteristics in English language online classrooms on 406 Thai undergraduate students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. Applying a sequential explanatory research design and multi-stage sampling technique, the participants completed WTC and English language online classroom environment surveys, after which seven participants were selected for in-depth interviews. The results showed statistically significant connections ($p < .001$) between students' WTC levels and characteristics of their online English language classroom environments such as students' perception of teachers' openness to questions, activities that promoted engagement, and ability to navigate their online learning through various technological tools. The study concludes with several implications, including the need to consider code-switching for instructional purposes, integrating technological tools and gamification approaches, and enhancing technological skills of teachers to ensure a seamless online learning experience.
Keywords	willingness to communicate, Thai university students, online English language classrooms

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1. Introduction

Online learning has evolved into a critical element in education (Kaufmann & Vallade, 2022; Kreijns et al., 2022; Kumtepe et al., 2019; Surapanyo, 2022) and its importance has increased with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when all onsite teaching and learning activities had to be seized. Since learning must continue, technologies play a vital role. Educators and students have managed to adjust to the unprecedented situation and continue with classes despite the many obstacles (Puntularb et al., 2021).

While research in the field of online education is not a novel concept, the pandemic has prompted a surge in academic research to understand the impact of online education on both teachers and learners. These increased research activities aim to shed more light on this "new normal" learning platform.

One of the learners' factors that has long been an interest among educators is willingness to communicate (WTC) in L2 since it could determine success in a learner's L2 language proficiency and academic life (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Reinders & Wattana, 2014). WTC has been considered one of the most crucial learner factors in second language acquisition since it was first introduced by MacIntyre et al. in 1998. It is an important factor in language practice as a final step before learners' overt verbal action (MacIntyre et al., 2001). The ultimate goal for any language program, as proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998), is for learners to seek out opportunities to communicate and for teachers to encourage learners to use the language.

Considering the different contexts between face-to-face classrooms and online classrooms, the effect online classroom environments have on WTC may be

substantial. This study, therefore, was designed to explore and explain the effect online classroom environments have towards situational WTC.

Until the present time, no study has investigated the connection between the two factors of WTC and online classroom environments in the Thai educational context. Gaining a deeper understanding of these connections should help improve the effectiveness of online language learning in terms of increasing WTC among learners.

Putting together the increasing importance of online classrooms and the vital role of WTC in English in the context of English language proficiency achievement, this study endeavored to investigate the following inquiries:

1. Which components of online English language classroom environments significantly affect Thai undergraduate students' WTC?
2. How do the components with significant relevance on online English language classroom environments affect Thai undergraduate students' WTC?

2. Literature Review

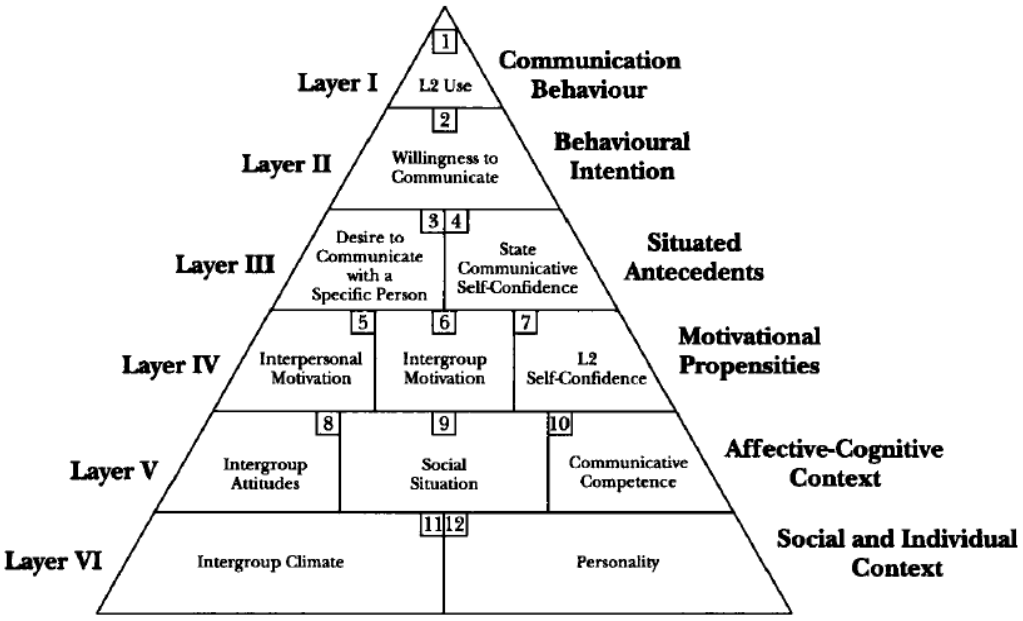
2.1 WTC in L2

WTC in L2 is defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). Early research tended to view WTC as a stable, trait-like factor that could be predicted across various situations (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). However, this view was challenged by MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) claim that when WTC extends to L2 situations, it carries a wider range of social and political implications that are not found in L1 contexts. MacIntyre et al., therefore, conceptualized the Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (Figure 1), which consisted of six categories represented in a pyramid shape exhibiting the combination of situational factors

(social context) and personality factors (affective context) that lead to decision to communicate in L2.

Figure 1

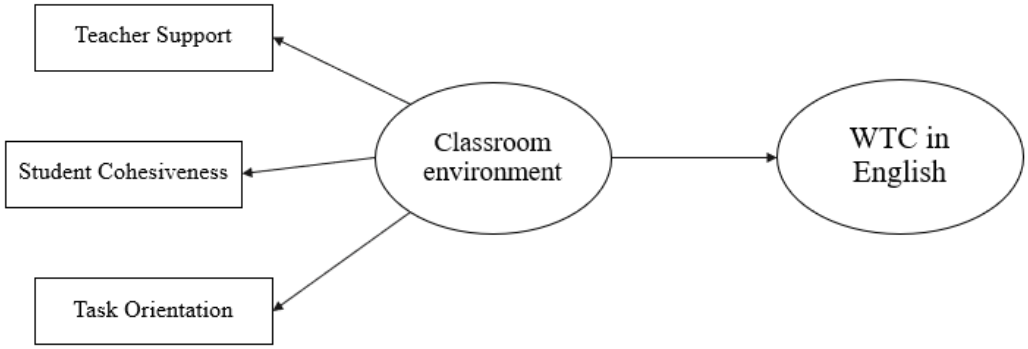
Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998)



Another hypothesized model of WTC in the EFL context was proposed by Peng and Woodrow (2010). This model integrates WTC, communication confidence, motivation, learner beliefs, and classroom environment. Peng and Woodrow's hypothesized model is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The Structural Model of WTC in English in Chinese EFL Classrooms (Peng & Woodrow, 2010)



Another contextual factor that has captured substantial interest is classroom setting, especially digital classroom setting (Cao, 2006; Compton, 2004; Lee & Lee, 2019; Reinders & Wattana, 2014). Compton (2004) conducted an experimental study on how chat messages in computer-mediated communication tools could encourage students to communicate and found that participants who exchanged chat messages with their classmates took more turns to speak in an online classroom because they already constructed the sentence in the chat message, which helped them feel more prepared to talk. Wattana and Reinders (2014), in addition, found the importance of specific learning environments and tasks conductive to the fostering of WTC in learners in digital settings, while Lee and Lee (2019) investigated the extent affective factors (i.e., motivation or speaking anxiety) and virtual intercultural experiences were linked to WTC in three different classroom settings (in-class, out-of-class, and digital settings).

A number of studies have aimed to identify other variables that might affect WTC. MacIntyre et al. (2001) have proposed a hypothesis that argued for the importance of instrumental and integrative orientations in supporting—and especially in giving direction to—language-learning motivation, believing that a more positive orientation taken by a student is likely to increase their WTC. Furthermore, they in the same study explored the effect that social support had on

WTC since it was believed that language acquisition was eminently bound to a social context. Later, MacIntyre (2007) examined WTC in the context of volitional acts, which was an extension to the finding that WTC fluctuated rapidly as the situation changed. The study confirmed the importance of language anxiety and language learning motivation as main effects for a leaner's WTC level. MacIntyre's findings also support Lewin's force field theory of social interaction which indicates that the volitional act of speaking requires the coordination of a driving force or energy that is in the direction of the intended goal and a restraining force or energy that impedes the achievement of a goal, which may operate with or without the speaker's explicit awareness (Lewin, 1951).

2.2 Online Classroom Environments

In the beginning of the 21st century, when digital technology had fully peremeated the field of education, the term "e-Learning" was widely adopted, sometimes being referred to as online learning, web-based learning, virtual school, or technology-based learning (Waight et al., 2002). Clark and Dickson (2000) have defined a virtual school as ‘‘a state approved and/or regionally accredited school that offers secondary credit courses through distance learning methods that include Internet-based delivery." Yoon (2003) argues that the term e-learning is sporadically used in higher education to describe online course environments in a corporate training context, while Russell (2004) defines virtual schools as ‘‘a form of schooling that uses online computers to provide some or all of a student's education" (p. 2).

Although the definition of online learning has been redefined and extended in numerous ways, they share similar essential components such as the usage of the Internet as a medium, the use of pedagogical tools that are enabled by the Internet and Web-based technologies, and the purpose to facilitate learning and knowledge building through meaningful action and interaction between instructors and learners (Dabbagh & Bannan-Ritland, 2005).

2.3 Components of an English Online Classroom

1. Student

The different nature between online classroom setting and traditional face-to-face (FtF) classroom settings necessitates that students become active learners to ensure the effectiveness of their education. They construct knowledge by interacting with people and course content through the use of technology to complete learning tasks and achieve learning goals (Eom et al., 2006). Many previous studies have confirmed the significance of self-regulation and self-motivation of students in online learning (Chen, 2014; Eom et al., 2006; Sojayapan & Khlaisang, 2017; Surapanyo, 2022; Ward et al., 2010) since students with these qualities are more capable of completing a certain task, setting learning goals or self-rewards, and utilizing self-control techniques (Chen, 2014). Students also play a central role in online learning. According to Archambault et al. (2022), online classrooms should apply a learner-centered psychological principles framework that honors student voice, accommodates their differences, and treats them as co-creators of knowledge.

2. Teachers

The role of teachers in online learning encompasses a wider range of responsiblities compared to face-to-face classrooms. In distance learning settings, teachers have to become a discussion leader who demonstrates understanding, availability, support, and sympathy, rather than a lecturer who focuses on the delivery of instruction (Kaufmann et al., 2016). To elevate the effectiveness of online education, teachers are also expected to keep up to date with the latest trends and issues, including time management strategies, safety issues, and knowledge of applicable laws. Other responsibilites of online teachers may include engaging in continuous learning opportunities, participating actively in the online community, and acting as global ambassadors in modeling high expectations of digital citizenship for the community and its students (Archambault et al., 2022).

3. Activities

Activites or learning tasks are considered a form of learner-content interaction that results in changes in the learner's understanding (Moore, 1989). The crucial characteristics for activities in an online classroom are to engage students and facilitate the achievement of learning goals (Archambault et al., 2022; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008). According to Chen (2014), effective activities for online classrooms should increase the level, frequency, and amount of scaffolding in instructional materials and procedures to assist in learning engagement and task completion, and should align the design of task engagement, learning activities, and assessment to bring about a seamless learning experience.

4. Interaction

Moore (1989) suggests three types of interaction that distance educators need to agree on: learner-content interaction, learner-instructor interaction, and learner-learner interaction. Although many educators have questioned the comparability of quality and frequency of interaction in online classrooms versus traditional face-to-face classrooms, many studies have found that it is possible to achieve levels of effectiveness in an online instructional format similar to those that are realized in face-to-face delivery (Kumtepe et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2010). A study undertaken by Hathaway (2009) showed that, with effective online tasks and encouragement, the frequency of interactions between students and teachers can be increased and this can lead to higher levels of participation among students. A higher participation rate, according to Hay et al. (2004), can be a predictor of effectiveness of online courses. In other words, interaction in the online environment is an essential dimension to consider when assessing online classroom quality and effectiveness.

5. Accessibility

Since online learning requires a specific level of technological proficiency, insufficient technological skills and background knowledge can lead to anxiety, frustration, confusion, and disorganization for both instructors and students.

Faculties and institutes, therefore, should provide helpful resources such as FAQ, helpdesk contact information, and technical support pages on their websites to provide assistance and to ensure continuity in online learning for students. Orientation sessions to train instructors, students, and university staff have also been found to increase students' comfort level with technology and learning efficiency (Chen, 2014).

3. Methodology

This study implemented a mixed-method, sequential explanatory design which combined quantitative and qualitative approaches sequentially in a two-phase process. The independent variable was English language online classroom environments, while the dependent variable was undergraduate students' WTC in English. In the initial phase, quantitative data on online classroom environments and levels of WTC were obtained using a survey questionnaire. This phase aimed to address the first research question, focusing on identifying the specific components of online English language classroom environments that significantly impacted WTC. Subsequently, upon confirmation of the effects observed in the quantitative data, qualitative data were collected. This was achieved through semi-structured interviews with a group of purposively selected participants. The purpose of the qualitative inquiry was to provide insights into the findings derived from the quantitative data, thereby addressing the second research question regarding how the identified components influenced the WTC of Thai undergraduate students.

3.1 Population and Participants

The study's population comprised Thai undergraduate students enrolled in regular programs who had participated in an online English language classroom through synchronous mediated channels within the two years prior to the data collection period. This study centered on English language classrooms for undergraduate students. To maintain a consistent focus, participants exclusively educated in English language online classrooms during their K-12 schooling were

excluded. Consequently, the study's cohort comprised third-year and fourth-year undergraduates who engaged in English language online classrooms during their freshman or sophomore year.

The participants of this study were undergraduate students in medium to large universities situated in Bangkok metropolitan area. Three types of universities were included in this study: government universities, Rajabhat universities (former teachers' colleges), and private universities (Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, 2021). The participants were randomly selected using the multi-stage sampling technique. This study involved two groups of participants: participants in the survey phrase and participants in the interview phase. The following sub-section provides information regarding the selection process of each group.

3.1.1 Participant Selection for the Quantitative Phase

To obtain a good representation of the population, a list of universities was screened to obtain the shortlisted government universities, Rajabhat universities, and private universities situated in the Bangkok metropolitan area that were comparable in terms of size, learning outcomes of English subjects, and availability of online classes administered in the past two years. Then, the number of participants needed for each type of university was calculated based on the proportion of undergraduate students.

3.1.2 Participant Selection for the Qualitative Phase

To ensure a thorough investigation into the reasons that influenced WTC levels in online English language classrooms, participants were chosen by means of purposive sampling. This method specifically targeted students with the highest and the lowest levels of WTC as identified by the WTC survey. Additionally, participants were required to willingly consent to participation in the interviews.

3.2 Research Tools

There were three research tools used in this study as follows:

1. WTC survey: This study adapted the WTC questionnaire from Weaver (2005). The modification included deletion of unrelated items, item modification, and translation from English to Thai. The survey consisted of 12 statements describing various speaking activities that could occur in an English language online classroom. Students were asked about their likelihood of being willing to communicate in each activity by responding to a 4-point rating scale. The scale ranked from 1 = definitely not willing, 2 = probably not willing, 3 = probably willing, to 4 = definitely willing.

2. Online classroom environment survey: The survey was developed based on a literature review of components within online classrooms, with the goal of assessing students' perception towards five components of English language online classroom environments. Students were asked about the frequency of specific events in their past experiences in English online classrooms. The survey consisted of 30 questioning items categorized into five groups, applying a 5-point rating scale which ranged from 1 = rarely to never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, to 5 = almost always. Both survey questionnaires underwent a content validity and reliability procedure. Content validity was assessed by three experts in the field of second language acquisition using Item Objective Congruence. Following this, pilot testing was conducted with 30 students with the same characteristics as the population of this study. The questionnaire's item reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a high coefficient at 0.954 for the WTC survey and 0.961 for the online classroom environment survey.

3. Semi-structured interview questions: Semi-structured interview questions were used to explore how online classroom environments affected undergraduate students' WTC in English. Questions in the interview were based on the five online classroom components investigated in the online classroom environment survey.

3.3 Research Procedure

Following the sequential explanatory design, the study was divided into two phases. First, the quantitative phase involved deploying the WTC survey and online classroom survey simultaneously. Both surveys were administered online. Using the multi-stage sampling approach, three medium- and large-sized universities in Bangkok were randomly selected, including one government university, one private university, and one Rajabhat university. Once permission for data collection was obtained, both online surveys were distributed to third- and fourth-year students with the assistance of the respective faculties and language institutions. At the end of the data collection period, 467 responses were received. A total of 61 surveys were excluded from the analysis due to not meeting inclusion criteria, resulting in 406 completed surveys for data analysis. The WTC mean score was analyzed for purposive selection of students for the qualitative phase to ensure students with high WTC and low WTC were both included in the qualitative phase.

Afterwards, qualitative data collection was performed using semi-structured interviews. A total of seven students were purposively selected and interviewed. The following list shows characteristics of the seven participants, including their gender, type of university, and their WTC level (high/low):

1. Female, Private university, High
2. Female, Private university, High
3. Female, Rajabhat university, High
4. Male, Rajabhat university, High
5. Not specified, Private university, Low
6. Female, Government university, Low
7. Female, Government university, Low

The quantitative data were analyzed for descriptive statistics (frequencies and mean scores) and inferential statistics (correlation) using statistical software. The qualitative data were analyzed using the content analysis method.

4. Results

Research Question 1: Which components of online English language classroom environments significantly affect Thai undergraduate students' WTC?

In order to reveal the relationship between WTC level and online classroom environments, Pearson correlation analysis was performed, and the findings are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. The effect of the correlation specifies the effect sizes of the correlation coefficients (r) as follows: $r = .10$ indicates a small effect size, $r = .30$ represents a medium effect size, and $r = .50$ signifies a large effect size.

Table 1

*Correlation between WTC Mean Frequency and Online Classroom Environment Variables (*n *= 406)*

		Activity	Interaction	Teacher	Student	Accessibility
WTC	Pearson's Correlation	.403**	.373**	.343**	.340**	.318**
mean	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00**	.00**	.00**	.00**	.00**

**$p < .01$

Based on these significance values, the results indicated that Thai undergraduate students' willingness to communucate level significantly and moderately related to their perception of each element of the online classroom environment. Put differently, the more positively the students perceived their online classrooms, the more willing they were to communicate in English.

Table 2

Correlation between WTC Mean Frequency and Online Classroom Environment Questioning Items (n = 406)

	Questioning Item	Pearson Correlation
Student	Getting a certain amount of work done would be important to me.	.351**
	I know how to use my computer/electronic device/ software to navigate my own learning.	.318**
	I pay attention during this class.	.236**
	I am trying to achieve completing tasks in class.	.216**
	I am ready to start this class on time.	.154**
Teacher	The teacher's questions help me understand.	.321**
	The teacher provides helpful feedback.	.306**
	The teacher pays attention to my problems.	.275**
	The teacher encourages me to talk.	.265**
	My teacher is always available when I have trouble with my work.	.259**
Activity	I feel that my classmates with different skills or efficiency can collaborate equally in most class activities.	.366**
	I know how much time I have to complete each class activity or task.	.364**
	Activities in class require me to use problem-solving skills to seek answers.	.348**
	Activities in class require me to discuss/brainstorm/negotiate with my classmates.	.301**
	The teacher encourages peer feedback evaluation during or after class activities.	.288**
Interaction	When my classmates and I discuss/brainstorm/negotiate, I rarely have to wait for others to respond.	.347**
	Class activities provide me and my classmates with opportunities to discuss/brainstorm/negotiate together.	.334**
	I can feel my teacher's presence when my classmates and I are discussing/negotiating/ brainstorming.	.323**
	I can feel that my classmates participate in our discussion actively and enthusiastically.	.270**

	Questioning Item	Pearson Correlation
	The teacher participates in our discussion.	.269**
Accessibility	The online classroom program/application is easy to use.	.320**
	The learning management system provided for the classroom is easy to use.	.314**
	I know where to find support if I face technical problems.	.234**
	The institute provides me with training and guidelines to use technologies for online learning.	.231**
	The institute provides me with prompt assistance whenever I need it.	.203**

* $p > .01$

** $p < .01$

Examining each of the components, those with notably higher correlations compared to other items are “Getting a certain amount of work done would be important to me.” (Student, $r = .377$**), “The teacher’s questions help me understand” (Teacher, $r = .321$**), “I feel that my classmates with different skills or efficiency can collaborate equally in most class activities.” (Activity, $r = .366$**), and “Online classroom program/application is easy to use.” (Accessibility, $r = .320$**).

Research Question 2: How do the components with significant relevance on online English language classroom environment affect Thai undergraduate students’ WTC?

Content analysis from the qualitative semi-structured interviews is elaborated into five items based on the five components as follows.

1. Student Component

Following the correlation analysis results, which indicated moderately strong relationships between WTC levels and students’ self-regulation, and technological background, the qualitative analysis gave further insight into the

connection between students' self-regulation and their academic motivation.The excerpt below suggests that stronger motivation in studying English can lead to a great degree of WTC in an online classroom:

> "My goal for studying nursing is to really understand this profession in order to give the best care to my future patients. When I was in high school (I wasn't sure back then about my career goal) I didn't pay much attention in online classrooms, but now (in university), I give every class 100%" (Female, Government University, Low WTC)

2. Teacher Component

The correlation analysis result indicated moderately strong relationships between WTC levels and teacher feedback and teacher questioning. The qualitative analysis elaborates on this by suggesting that online English language classroom instructors who provided opportunities for students to ask questions, corrected student mistakes without making them feel intimidated, and regularly asked questions to check student understanding could increase students' WTC in English with the instructors, as can be seen below.

> "(I like to communicate with) instructors who talk at a slower pace and constantly ask students whether they understand the lesson...when we give incorrect answers, some instructors can find a way to correct us without making us feel ashamed..." (Female, Private university, High WTC)

Additional information found in qualitative data indicated that students with lower English proficiency preferred to communicate with instructors who were able to engage in translanguaging between their L1 and English:

> "I feel more comfortable talking to Thai instructors because they can explain to me in Thai when I give incorrect answers...I often

> feel intimidated around foreign teachers, which prevents me from wanting to communicate with them." (Female, Government university, Low WTC)

3. Acitivity Component

The correlation analysis results indicated moderately strong relationships between WTC levels and students' perceptions of activity time constraints and opporunities for collaboration between students with diverse skills when performing activties. Interview data suggested that students felt more at ease communicating in English if they had time to prepare. Collaborating with classmates who were more advanced or possessed different skills that they believed they lacked could also encourage them to communicate more. Further analysis also indicated that for online English language classrooms, applying a gamification approach which integrated game-like elements into a non-game context could encourage students to communicate more since it was more entertaining and encouraged a sense of competition, as one of the participants described:

> "There was once an activity where I could be in a group with higher proficiency students, and we played a game and whichever team created sentences the fastest won. It helped me be more engaged in the class compared to just listening to lectures." (Not specified, Private university, Low WTC)

4. Interaction Component

The correlation analysis results indicated a moderately strong relationship between WTC and the availability of interaction opportunities in English online classrooms and the quality of the interaction. Following this, the qualitative findings indicated a connection between the types of activities in online English language classrooms and opportunities such activities provided for students to create communication. It is also noteworthy that once communication was

generated, the perceived WTC of other students played a vital role in encouraging students to communicate in English, as evident in the following excerpt:

> "I like it when we (me and my classmates) debated ideas together during online class activities. Compared to classmates who often said things like 'whatever' or 'up to you,' it was more fun when you had a conversation with a classmate who was active in class." (Male, Rajabhat university, High WTC).

5. Accessibility Component

The only item within the accessibility component where the correlation analysis showed a moderate connection with WTC was the learning management system's (LMS) ease of use. Qualitative analysis suggested that being able to navigate their own online learning with the online meeting program, online applications and LMS helped students ensure that regardless of any unexpected technical issues happening during the online class, they would be able to catch up with the class without depending on external support. One participant explained:

> "Because we had studied online for two years straight, at first I still needed support from the institutes, but now I can manage almost any technical problems in online classrooms by myself." (Female, Government university, Low WTC)

5. Discussion

This study aimed to explore the effects of online English language classroom environments on WTC among Thai undergraduate students. The results not only revealed the significant impact each component had on encouraging students to communicate with their peers and their instructors in English but also demonstrated how teachers and educational institutes may be able to enhance students' WTC by the adjustment of the teacher's role, the design of instructional activities, and the ease of technological use for both students and teachers.

1. Students felt more at ease with teachers who constantly checked their understanding through questions and feedback. This may involve offering clarification to students in their L1 when necessary.

The findings revealed that, as in face-to-face classrooms, students would feel more at ease communicating in English with instructors who were more open to questions and provided positive feedback without making students feel humiliated. Interestingly, since students in online classrooms reported that they had problems concentrating, they would prefer instructors who constantly checked on their understanding by asking questions and by providing instant feedback on their answers. This finding confirms the result from Dennen et al. (2007) that indicated a connection between learner performance and instructor actions in online courses, especially when learners felt the existence of interpersonal communication between them and their instructors. The finding also aligns with Hathaway's study (2009) which emphasized the necessity of interactions between instructors and learners in providing meaningful learning experiences in online classrooms.

Furthermore, when students encountered difficulties comprehending the lesson, instructors who could offer explanations or clarification in students' native language (L1) could positively influence students' WTC by fostering an environment where students felt comfortable asking for clarification when needed. Previous studies conducted in both face-to-face and online classroom settings have shown significant relationships between teachers' code-switching and learners' affective support in foreign language classrooms (Ahmad & Jusoff, 2009). Another study discovered that foreign language teachers who carried out some code-switching for instructional purposes believed that it enhanced students' engagement and facilitated smoother online classroom activities (Putri et al., 2022).

2. Students were more inclined to communicate in activities that incorporated game mechanics. The ability to work in smaller groups and the quality of interaction through the heterogenous nature of group members also played a crucial role.

Among various English online classroom activities, it was found that those using a gamification approach, such as charades, group quizzes, or other games that made use of online applications, could encourage students' WTC in English with their peers and their instructor. This was achieved through the competitive aspect, a student-centered approach, and the overall enjoyment of the activities. Furthermore, giving students information on how much time they had to complete a task appeared to enable them to prepare before communicating, leading to more WTC through enhanced self-confidence. This finding is further evidence for the effectiveness of applying gamification and rewards systems to activate attention, build social connections, and motivate players (Wang & Sun, 2011). The finding also supports the effectiveness of a gamification approach in online classrooms where students are geographically apart, which aligns with another study from Janu et al. (2022). Furthermore, the finding is in accordance with the study from Barreto and Maritza (2018), which found that combining a gamification approach with mobile technology not only motivated students to work collaboratively with their classmates but also helped foster their language skills.

3. Although students could navigate their online learning successfully, the availability of technical support when needed and ensuring the user-friendliness of LMS could promote students' WTC by reducing stress or anxiety that technological issues may have caused.

From the study, most students did not need external support from faculties or institutes in case of technological issues occurring during online classes, since they were able to navigate their own learning through different devices and programs. However, it was found that the more familiar students were with online

meeting applications and LMSs used for the course, the less problematic it was for them to catch up with the lessons and assigned tasks in case of any technical issues occurring. This finding aligns with Blaine's (2019) study, which revealed that students also need guidance on how to conduct effective interaction in online courses despite their skills in navigating digital technologies autonomously. Moreover, when students feel that they lack clarification regarding ambiguous instructions for online course navigation, this can cause feelings of anxiety, frustration, and stress (Hara & Kling, 2001).

6. Implications

The results of this study have several practical implications for instructors in conducting Engling online classrooms.

Based on the findings, apart from applying a student-centered learning approach, the teacher's role in English language online classrooms should include ensuring a seamless and worry-free experience for students. This can be achieved through regular checking on student understanding through asking questions, providing feedback, and explanation or clarification in students' L1 if necessary. A worry-free online learning experience can also be attained through the assurance that teachers and students can promptly solve technical issues they encounter or seek immediate assistance when needed; therefore, teachers should acquire the necessary skills to effectively manage their online teaching and utilize a user-friendly LMS. This not only ensures the smooth operation of their sessions but also enables them to assist students when required.

Although a gamification approach was found to be one of the most effective methods in promoting students' engagement and increasing their WTC level, an EFL teacher cannot simply implement a gamification activity without a carefully planned and technologically integrated approach. With the incorporation of various online tools such as Kahoot, Padlet, or Mentimeters, students can better grasp and visualize the progression of the activities. This aids in recreating the atmosphere

of a face-to-face classroom, which enhances the positive experience in online learning. Regarding activities that require students' production, such as verbal presentations, incorporating the PPP (Presentation, Practice, and Production) teaching method can provide students with the opportunity to practice and prepare their communication skills. This, in turn, can enhance their confidence and contribute to a greater WTC.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the effect of online English language classroom environments on WTC among Thai undergraduate students through a mixed-method research design. The results not only indicate that online English language classroom environment significantly affects student's WTC but also sheds light on how each element of an online English language classroom impacts students' WTC. Furthermore, it suggests that a seamless and worry-free online experience can be achieved with the following three areas of implementation. First, teachers should ensure students' comprehension by asking questions, providing regular feedback, and offering clarification in L1 when necessary. Secondly, teachers should apply a gamification approach with the assistance of online tools and make use of the PPP method to improve students' communicative confidence. Finally, teachers should establish a stress-free environment by offering students prompt technological assistance, which necessitates support from the educational institution.

This study, like many others, has several limitations. Firstly, the study was proposed in 2021, while data collection took place almost two years later. During this time gap, some students reported that they had not participated in any online classes for two consecutive years. This might raise questions about their ability to recall specific details about the online classroom experiences. Secondly, while the study employed a sequential explanatory design that connected quantitative data and qualitative data, it could not definitively guarantee an increase in students' WTC even if the online classroom environment closely resembled what they

desired. Therefore, it is highly recommended that experimental research be conducted to confirm the potential increase in students' WTC when implementing the procedures suggested in the implications. Additionally, incorporating class observations in future research might help uncover potential hindering factors in online classrooms that self-reported surveys and interviews alone may not reveal.

8. About the Author

Koravick Thiangtham is a full-time lecturer at Business Communication International program, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University. She received her first Masters of Science degree in Marketing from Thammasat Business School in 2012. Her current research interests focus specifically on the role of leaner's factors in English online classrooms.

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9. References

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