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CONCEPTUALISING THE INFLUENCE OF MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS ON WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE: THE MEDIATING ROLES OF ENGAGEMENT AND SELF-PERCEIVED COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract: *This study presents a comprehensive literature review on the impact of motivational factors on willingness to communicate (WTC) through engagement and self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC) among Chinese vocational college students. It examines the interactions among motivational elements, engagement, SPCC, and WTC. Analysing these factors helps to shed light on the processes through which motivation influences students' willingness to communicate in English. The study aims to investigate the influence of motivational factors on vocational college students' WTC in English via engagement and SPCC. The proposed approach uses an online-administered structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. The survey design incorporates established measurement scales from previous research to assess the core constructs - motivational factors, learner engagement, self-perceived communicative competence, and willingness to communicate - thereby ensuring strong content validity. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is proposed as the primary analytic technique to explore the interaction of motivation factors and WTC mediated by engagement and SPCC. This framework is designed to bridge the research gap by contributing insights on how motivation factors influence students' WTC in English through the mediating effect of engagement and SPCC.*

Keywords: *motivation, self-perceived communicative competence, Chinese vocational college students*

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Introduction

English is a compulsory subject in China's standard national curriculum and many Chinese students learn English from early age (Jia & Feng, 2020). In China most students take English class from grade 3 in primary education and some even start from kindergarten (Li, 2022). For a long time, the bilingual kindergarten is very popular in China and many kindergartens claims to offer bilingual education (Yang, 2024). English receives more attention since the language has become a subject in China's national college entrance examination (Gaokao) in 1978 when China started to open up to the world.

Despite the early exposure to the language, EFL learners' proficiency in English remains unsatisfactory. Their struggle with English communicative competence continues to negatively affect their willingness to communicate (WTC). In China, this issue is caused by several factors. Culturally, collectivism can hinder Chinese English learners from expressing themselves in English (Zhang, n.d.). Linguistically, English is an alphabetic language while Chinese uses characters, which makes English acquisition and comprehension difficult. Grammatical differences also affect learners' acquisition; for instance, subject omission in Chinese, the absence of verb conjugation, and varying adverb placement create syntactic challenges and lead to errors during English learning (Liang & Zhang, 2023). Pronunciation is another major challenge, especially because of differences between English and Mandarin vowel systems (Shi, 2024). Finally, limited practice and high anxiety affect motivation for English learning. Since Mandarin is the official and dominant language in China, there are few opportunities to use English as a communicative tool in daily life. English and Chinese also belong to different language families and cultures, which makes acquiring English proficiency in China difficult, affects learners' outcomes, and weakens their learning motivation (Wei & Zhang, 2023).

English proficiency can affect student's willingness to communicate in English, while different communication contexts can affect engagement (Shofiya & Basuni, 2023). There are four contexts of communication: daily interaction, large meetings, small group interaction, and public speaking. The receivers in each context can be separated into three types: strangers, acquaintance and friends (Maruf, 2023). The correlation between willingness to communicate and engagement affects the students' language learning outcomes. As students are struggling with WTC increasing self-efficacy can be an effective method to improve their motivation to speak, therefore enhancing their language abilities (Qu, 2023).

The vocational college students have missed a lot of job opportunities since their ability to communicate in English does not satisfy the standards of their potential employers within the Chine and abroad. It is a tremendous tragedy for them as they cannot land the job in a competitive market (Jiang, 2021; Xing & Rojewski, 2018).

The study examines the impact of motivational factors on vocational college students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English through engagement and self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC) in Chinese vocational college. The study highlights the significance of English communication in vocational education, emphasizing the role of motivation in shaping students' engagement and communicative behaviours.

In Chinese vocational colleges, training and education have an employment-oriented focus. Students, colleges, and their parents all prioritise employment prospects and quality of life. Many Chinese students, especially those enrolled in vocational colleges, find it difficult to apply general English language skills in their workplaces (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021). The researchers

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aim to inspire students' learning and training motivation by enhancing their self-efficacy in EFL speaking within their chosen occupational domains, thereby improving their communicative competence in workplace settings (Xing & Rojewski, 2018).

Literature Review

There are many studies on the motivational factors of EFL but they do not specifically address the impact of motivating factors on WTC through engagement and SPCC in EFL. A study by Ma et al. (2019), for example, explores the relationships between learning motivation and L2 WTC in an EFL classroom among Thai EFL learners. It focuses on the correlation between English learning motivation and L2 WTC among Thai EFL learners. The study by Ghani and Azhar (2017) explores the impact of motivation on willingness to communicate (WTC) and self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC) among ESL learners, emphasizing that motivation significantly influences the frequency of English use for oral communication in the Pakistani context. Meanwhile, the study by Rahmanpanah and Mohseni (2017) focuses on humanising coursebooks and self-determination theory's effects on engagement and motivation.

However, despite the extensive evidence of a positive relationship between various motivational factors and L2 WTC, research results obtained in the EFL context have proven to be rather inconclusive or even conflicting. Specifically, although some researchers found a clear direct link between motivation and communication, other studies showed that high levels of motivation do not ensure the readiness to communicate because people who experience high levels of anxiety or fear of negative evaluation in speaking situations are not necessarily willing to communicate. In addition, when controlling for psychological and self-evaluation variables, the effect of classroom motivating factors on WTC becomes much weaker or statistically insignificant. In fact, the indirect nature of the effect of external motivating factors on WTC can be explained by the role of the mediating factors of active involvement of learners and SPCC.

Kikuchi’s demotivating model has attracted significant attention from the academic community. This model identifies six factors contributing to demotivation in L2 learning: grammar-based teaching, teacher behaviour, course content and teaching materials, the effects of low-test scores, classroom environment, and lack of self-confidence and interest. Many scholars have conducted research to validate this theory and address existing challenges in language learning. Krishnan and Pathan’s (2013) study found that these factors were prevalent among Pakistani undergraduates, with teaching methods, lack of facilities, and course content being the most cited. Additionally, a new factor emerged: the negative attitude of society towards the English language (Krishnan & Pathan, 2013).

One of the primary theoretical conflicts within the body of literature revolves around the idea of motivation versus demotivation. Demotivation, traditionally, has been defined and tested for through the presence of negative elements which counteract any pre-existing motivation. However, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) have emphasized the fact that motivation and demotivation are not simply symmetric opposites on a continuum; rather, demotivating elements merely push individuals away from engaging in proactive communication. Demotivating factors tend to work like hygiene factors in that their presence pushes learners away from engaging in activities, while their removal brings about a state of indifference rather than any kind of proactivity. In attempting to reframe the six demotivators outlined by Kikuchi (2011) as motivating factors, alongside teacher immediacy, this study attempts to bridge this

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gap and argue that these factors need to actively motivate engagement to build up self-belief and thereby WTC.

The study makes an attempt to transform the model of demotivations developed by Kikuchi into a framework of positive motivational factors, where WTC will be conceptualized with student engagement and self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC) as mediators. Although earlier research on WTC primarily targeted university level EFL learners, this research takes the concept forward by expanding its theoretical horizon to incorporate vocational college students who generally tend to have low proficiency levels, higher levels of anxiety and unique motivational issues. The findings generated through the study will make it possible to convert the demotivational ideas into positive teaching approaches that will help in improving communicative confidence (Bukhari et al., 2015).

Much of the existing literature on second language (L2) willingness to communicate (WTC) and motivation has focused primarily on university undergraduate students studying at comprehensive universities, where language learning focuses mainly on academic achievement or national standardization tests. In contrast, students in vocational colleges represent a different category of learners who are different from the learners in universities in terms of educational background, orientation, and language needs. It has been empirically found out that learners in vocations are less proficient in English, less self-conceptualized academically, and more anxious about language use, all of which may inhibit WTC. At the same time, students in vocational institutes face unique work-related stresses and occupational demands of tests like Practical English Test for Colleges (PRECO) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). These tests focus on practical communicative skills and not academic grammatical skills. Therefore, motivational models tested on university students may not necessarily apply to vocational institutions.

This study aims to understand how important motivating elements such classroom environment, teacher behavior, class material, experience of difficulty, loss of interest, characteristics of class and teacher immediacy, improve students' engagement and communicative competency. The study also looks at the mediating effects of participation and SPCC, therefore offering insightful analysis of how to promote good English communication in vocational education.

English Language Learning and Teaching in China

The English education curriculum in China has undergone substantial change, depending on the period and the circumstances in which it operated. From the late Qing Dynasty to the twenty-first century, the English curriculum has been strongly influenced by China's changing environment. During the late Qing and early Republican eras, English education was primarily intended to serve diplomatic and translation purposes. Institutions such as the Tongwenguan (Translation Institution) were mainly concerned with the language skills needed to communicate with foreign nations. The curriculum paid little attention to communicative competence and context, focusing instead on reading and translating official documents (Xiaohong, 2017; Pellin, 2019). During those years, English education was widely practised in metropolitan schools and included among the liberal arts subjects at prestigious universities in the Republican period. In addition, the focus shifted to include literature and composition, which were closer to Western concepts of language teaching. However, the curriculum remained exam-based and allowed little room for active use of the language (Zhang, 2017).

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After 1949, the English curriculum underwent a profound ideological transformation. Political aims were prioritised over language teaching, and education became more political than pedagogical. During the Cultural Revolution, the curriculum was radicalised, and revolutionary slogans replaced English texts, restricting the development of language skills (Gil, 2016). English education was reintroduced into the national curriculum as a basic subject in 1978, during Deng Xiaoping's reforms. Policies in the 1980s and 1990s standardised English education nationwide. The curriculum began to focus on communicative competence and intercultural awareness, emphasising listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In many areas, English education became compulsory from elementary and junior high school; moreover, entrance examinations for high schools and colleges placed significant emphasis on English (Hu, 2005; Xiaohong, 2017).

Currently, changes in the curriculum promote communicative and task-based approaches. The curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education is aimed at using the language in real-life situations and includes international materials. Moreover, teaching methods have become more diverse with the introduction of technologies such as language laboratories and online classes. At the same time, the curriculum remains exam-based, and class priorities are determined by the Gaokao (National College Entrance Examination).

The recent changes in the curriculum, especially the requirements of the 2022 English curriculum for compulsory education, emphasise the development of core competencies such as language proficiency, intercultural awareness, critical thinking, and the ability to learn how to learn. This shift reflects a focus on education that fosters global citizenship and lifelong learning skills. At the same time, the tension between curricular goals and classroom practices remains a problem, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas. In addition, the 2021 "Double Reduction" policy has affected the curriculum by limiting after-school education and reducing the amount of homework. This policy, intended to promote equality in education, has restricted extracurricular education, prompting public schools to place greater emphasis on in-class English teaching (Wang & Maniam, 2024).

Additionally, the government has also introduced PRECO (Practical English Test for Colleges), which is a standardised English proficiency test specifically designed for students in vocational and technical colleges in China. It aims to assess the practical English skills of students who are not majoring in English but are expected to use English in their future professional environments. The test focuses on practical language abilities, especially in contexts related to daily communication and workplace scenarios. The skills assessed typically include listening comprehension, reading comprehension, cloze tests (vocabulary and grammar in context), translation (mainly English to Chinese, and writing (short messages, business correspondence, etc.). Oral communication is not compulsory and varies depending on the province.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

A major component of language acquisition, willingness to communicate (WTC) determines how often and how effectively students use a second language (L2). It is shaped by a range of psychological, situational, and contextual factors and is therefore very important for the effectiveness of language learning. Studies have indicated that WTC not only predicts language proficiency but also influences how students participate in communicative activities.

The concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) describes a person's readiness to participate in conversation when given the opportunity. Developed primarily with a focus on first language

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learning, WTC was introduced by McCroskey and Baer in 1985. It suggests that various contextual factors, including familiarity with the interlocutor, the number of people present, the formality of the setting, and the topic of discussion, affect the likelihood that a speaker will participate in conversation. Henry et al. (2024) examined the relationship between willingness to speak and communicative confidence, finding that self-perceived communicative competence (Ramachandran, 2021) is positively associated with readiness to communicate. Conversely, communication anxiety is negatively associated with willingness to communicate. This review will examine the factors influencing WTC, their consequences for language acquisition, and approaches to enhancing it.

Motivating Factors in Second Language Learning

In the present study, seven motivating factors will be measured, and an overview of these will be presented individually as follows:

Teacher Behaviour

Teacher behaviour encompasses everything a teacher does in the classroom that shapes the learning environment. This includes classroom management, affective behaviour, and instructional behaviour. Student learning and motivation are strongly influenced by teacher behaviour, which spans a spectrum of actions, attitudes, and traits that can either enhance or undermine learning outcomes. Teachers' behaviour is shaped, among other factors, by their beliefs, emotional investment, professional development, and psychological qualities. Teacher behaviour is therefore the combination of instructional strategies, interpersonal skills, and emotional stance, and it greatly influences pupils' eagerness to study languages (Dörnyei, 2001).

Characteristics of Class

Engaging classroom activities such as discussions, role-playing and project-based learning enhance students' motivation to communicate in English (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). A structured yet flexible learning approach that allows students to interact meaningfully improves both engagement and WTC (Kang, 2005). Recent studies indicate that peer collaboration and social interaction in classrooms further strengthen communicative confidence (Fathi et al., 2023).

Classes with active participation (discussions, debates, project-based work) give students real opportunities to practice speaking. A good class matches the pace to students' abilities — too fast and creates frustration, too slow leads to boredom. Clear goals for each class session help students focus and feel achievement.

Class characteristics include structure, activities, and goal clarity. Dynamic classes sustain attention (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). Studies have shown that different interaction types, such as group work, individual work, and full-class activities, significantly affect student attention. For instance, attention levels vary between teacher talking time and more interactive group activities, suggesting that dynamic interaction can help sustain attention (Allison, 2020).

Class Environment

A positive and supportive class environment fosters engagement and encourages risk-taking in communication. Studies suggest that classrooms with a collaborative and student-centered approach improve learners' confidence and participation (Reeve, 1996). A well-managed environment that reduces anxiety leads to a higher likelihood of initiating conversations in

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English (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011). Furthermore, a psychologically safe classroom atmosphere has been found to enhance SPCC, particularly among students with higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Khajavy et al., 2016).

Recent studies highlight the integration of digital learning environments in fostering motivation and engagement. Researchers suggest that technology-mediated communication, such as virtual language exchanges, mobile applications, and online learning platforms, has expanded the ways in which students develop WTC (Wang & Xu, 2024). This further emphasizes the evolving nature of the conceptual framework, incorporating both traditional and contemporary approaches to motivation for language learning.

Students are more likely to try speaking English if they know they won't be laughed at or scolded for mistakes. Friendly, respectful classmates make it easier to speak up. Strong peer competition or teasing lowers speaking willingness. Personal connections, where teachers show genuine interest in students' lives, create a community feeling that encourages communication. The physical and psychological learning space affects comfort and risk-taking (Arnold, 1999).

Class Material

Class material refers to how the content used in a classroom can influence students' interest, engagement, and willingness to learn especially in second or foreign language learning. Relevant and engaging learning materials, particularly those tailored to students' professional fields, play a crucial role in sustaining motivation. English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) courses that align with students' future careers enhance their perception of relevance, thereby increasing engagement and WTC (Sutini et al., 2021). Research suggests that multimodal learning materials, including digital media and task-based learning resources, contribute significantly to motivation and sustained interest (Liu & SwaranSingh, 2024).

Class materials are any tools, resources, or instructional content teachers and students employ. Class resources are crucial in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom for helping English language abilities to grow in hearing, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. Class materials are a range of tools used to improve educational environments' learning opportunities. Recent advances in instructional methods and technology have produced creative strategies for efficiently managing and using these resources.

Experience of Success

Success in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning is a complex experience that spans personal, social, and academic spheres. Effective EFL students typically display certain traits and follow particular strategies to improve their language development. These include positive experiences of communication, efficient use of linguistic input, strong motivation, and a supportive classroom environment.

Good communication experiences help successful EFL students to increase their self-perceived competency and willingness to communicate (WTC). One can classify these encounters into either positive classroom interactions or practical English communication. High-profile students often cite effective communication experiences, which are linked favorably with their WTC (Fujii, 2024). Particularly in speaking assignments, critical positive events and perceived success in using the language can greatly increase students' self-efficacy and emotional involvement (Diert-Boté, n.d.).

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A successful EFL student depends mostly on internal motivation, a good attitude towards English, and the social setting. Emphasizing the need of motivation and attitude in language learning, these elements fit with ideas on second language acquisition (Pariyanto & Pradipta, 2020). Successful learners often maintain a strong motivation to learn English, driven by the perceived importance of the language for their future and supported by a conducive academic environment (Nugroho et al., 2020). Teachers play a crucial role in fostering success in EFL learners by enhancing motivation and providing effective learning strategies, particularly in challenging areas like academic listening (Suwandi, 2023).

Sustained Interest

In the context of EFL classrooms, a "sustained interest" typically means that students are becoming more engaged and motivated to learn English. The interest in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has seen a notable increase, driven by various innovative teaching methods and technological advancements. This growing interest is reflected in the diverse strategies employed to enhance student engagement and motivation in EFL learning environments. These strategies include the use of podcasts, digital learning, flipped classrooms, and gamification, each contributing uniquely to fostering interest in EFL.

Many times, adolescent EFL students use interest-enhancing techniques to keep on tasks they find less interesting. Usually goal-oriented and instrumental, these techniques help students stay motivated even if their initial enthusiasm in certain tasks is modest (Wiśniewska, 2013). Strategies include contests, pithy formula repeating, and interest-stirring activities can inspire pupils in EFL learning, therefore enhancing the effectiveness of the instruction. Especially in speaking sessions, the flipped classroom approach has been found to greatly raise EFL learners' attention and good dispositions. Key elements in increasing interest are self-confidence and a tough yet effective learning environment this approach produces. Particularly in academic writing, allowing students to self-assign writing subjects might increase their own motivation. This strategy helps students interact with subjects they find personally intriguing, therefore improving their motivation and writing ability (Alzubi & Nazim, 2024).

Teacher Immediacy

Teacher immediacy is the actions and communication techniques used to lower the psychological distance separating instructors from their pupils, therefore promoting a connection and involvement. In educational environments especially, this idea is very important as it has been demonstrated to improve student involvement, drive, and learning results. Teacher immediacy encompasses a spectrum of actions that show warmth and approachability and can be vocal or nonverbal. Teachers and students find approachability and rapport created by both verbal and nonverbal actions (Mehrabian, 1969). Increased student involvement and motivation connected with high instructor immediacy results in more WTC (Christophel, 1990). Online and hybrid learning settings, according to recent studies, need appropriate immediacy behaviours as digital immediacy significantly influences participation (Wang & Xu, 2024).

Teacher immediacy consists of verbal immediacy, non-verbal immediacy and accessibility. Verbal Immediacy is like using students' names, encouraging personal sharing expressing care increases connection. Smiling, nodding while students speak, maintaining eye contact, using expressive gestures — all show students that their communication is valued, which is Non-Verbal Immediacy. Being approachable outside of class hours makes students feel supported and willing to take speaking risks. Verbal immediacy includes behaviors such as addressing students by name, providing feedback, asking questions, and using inclusive language like

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personal pronouns. These actions help create a more interactive and engaging learning environment (Dong et al., 2022).

The strengths of classroom motivators for communication are hindered by certain boundary conditions. While very interactive classroom activities and high teacher immediacy are generally thought to increase participation, their efficacy is affected by conditions like class size, institutional norms, and collectivist environment. For example, in collectivist instructional settings characterized by China, too much verbal immediacy on the part of the teacher and unexpected public speaking assignments may paradoxically increase anxiety about performance and worries about saving face in front of other people who are not prepared for it. The same applies when the instructional content focuses more on grammar than on profession-specific tasks performed at work. Therefore, the conditions that encourage people to communicate are psychologically safe and task-relevant.

Engagement and SPCC as Mediator

In this research model, the mediating effects of engagement and self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC) are analysed in relation to motivation determinants and willingness to communicate (WTC) in the process of second language (L2) acquisition, concentrating on Chinese vocational college students.

Engagement acts as an essential factor through which the effect of motivation is mediated into participation (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Evidence shows that engaged individuals exhibit higher interaction, persistence, and enthusiasm for language learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Engagement in second language acquisition usually refers to engaging social interaction and positive learning environment (Khajavy et al., 2016). Besides, SPCC plays an important role in influencing the communication ability of students as a channel between engagement and WTC. As a result, students who feel themselves to be competent communicators are likely to become more engaged in communication and use their linguistic knowledge in practical situations. Engagement shows how motivated and active students are in the learning process. SPCC shows how confident students feel about using English. Both are critical bridges linking external classroom conditions to internal willingness to speak.

Working with the link between motivation variables and willingness to communicate (WTC), the Mediating Roles of Engagement and Self-Perceived Communicative Competence (SPCC) help to explain. A learner's willingness to participate in L2 communication when free to choose, that is, their WTC, is what MacIntyre et al., 1998 mean. Anxiety, drive, SPCC, and social setting all play a part. A learner's self-perceived communicative competency (SPCC) is their belief of their capacity to communicate in the L2 (Clément, 1986.). Higher SPCC → Higher WTC is hypothesized to be In learning, engagement is behavioral, cognitive, and emotional participation (Fredricks et al., 2004). It has stood as a link between WTC and inspiration.

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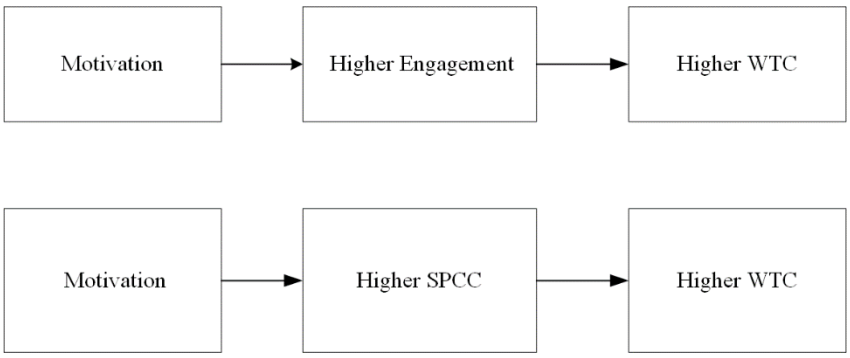


Figure 1: Motivation affects WTC through the mediating of Engagement and SPCC

It is imperative to distinguish between direct sources of motivation and indirect pathways of mediation when explaining differences in communicative results due to the application of motivational resources by the learners. While teacher's behaviour, learning content, and the environment itself provide the impetus for the motivation process, they do not have a direct impact on a student's situational decision to communicate. Instead, the process takes place in a consecutive order of mediation; where motivational stimuli present in the classroom cause multi-faceted involvement of learners in terms of behaviour, emotion, and cognition to provide interaction which will help in achieving self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC). It is SPCC rather than external classroom conditions which will influence the decision to communicate. The serial indirect model explains uncertainties of previous direct effect models.

Conceptual Framework

Based on Kikuchi's (2011) paradigm, the conceptual framework of this research reconceptualises demotivating elements as stimulating elements. The framework illustrates the links among motivational elements, engagement, SPCC and WTC. Engagement is initially treated as the first mediator. SPCC is considered as the second mediator, ultimately leading to WTC as the dependent variable. Motivational factors are positioned as the independent variable. Second language acquisition depends heavily on motivation, which also shapes students' desire to interact in the target language (WTC). Although demotivating elements have been thoroughly investigated, it is crucial to identify what actively promotes communication. Six demotivating elements for language acquisition were identified by Kikuchi (2009): classroom atmosphere, teacher conduct, course contents (or materials), experience of difficulties, loss of interest, and class characteristics. This study, however, reframes these demotivating factors as motivating factors so that it can more thoroughly evaluate those that encourage communication among Chinese vocational college students. This change makes it possible to investigate the factors that foster Willingness to Communicate (WTC) through the mediating effects of student engagement and self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC).

The decision to move from a demotivational model to a motivational model is based on the idea that motivation and demotivation are not simply two ends of the same spectrum, but distinct constructs that warrant separate investigation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). While demotivation focuses on barriers to language learning, a motivational model sheds light on what actively promotes engagement and communicative competence. By rephrasing negative statements as positive ones (e.g. "It is demotivating when the teacher does not give feedback" becomes "It is

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motivating when the teacher gives feedback"), this study aims to identify factors that increase students' willingness to communicate in English.

Furthermore, introducing "teacher immediacy" as another variable in the model can be justified from a cultural perspective. Studies conducted in the field of education in China have shown that teacher–student interaction significantly affects students' learning experience (Zhang & Oetzel, 2006). The concept of teacher immediacy, which includes verbal and non-verbal behaviours by the teacher that reduce the psychological distance between instructor and learner (Mehrabian, 1971), will serve as a motivating factor in the present study.

The concept of the present study is supported by previous research that has demonstrated the mediating effect of engagement on the formation of self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC). For example, a study conducted with students from UiTM in Malaysia showed that engagement has a significant impact on the development of SPCC, indicating that participation in communication activities and classroom discussions increases learners' confidence in their communicative skills. This is consistent with engagement theory (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004), which identifies three dimensions of engagement that are necessary for success in language learning: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive.

Finally, it is important to note that the link between SPCC and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is already well known. For example, MacIntyre et al. (1998) suggested that people who are willing to communicate are usually those who perceive themselves as competent communicators. Several studies conducted in different linguistic and cultural settings have confirmed the connection between the two constructs, showing that SPCC is a powerful predictor of WTC (Yashima, 2002; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). Thus, the model for the present study will include engagement as the first-level mediator and SPCC as the second-level mediator. Based on the theoretical foundation and empirical evidence, this study proposes the following conceptual framework:

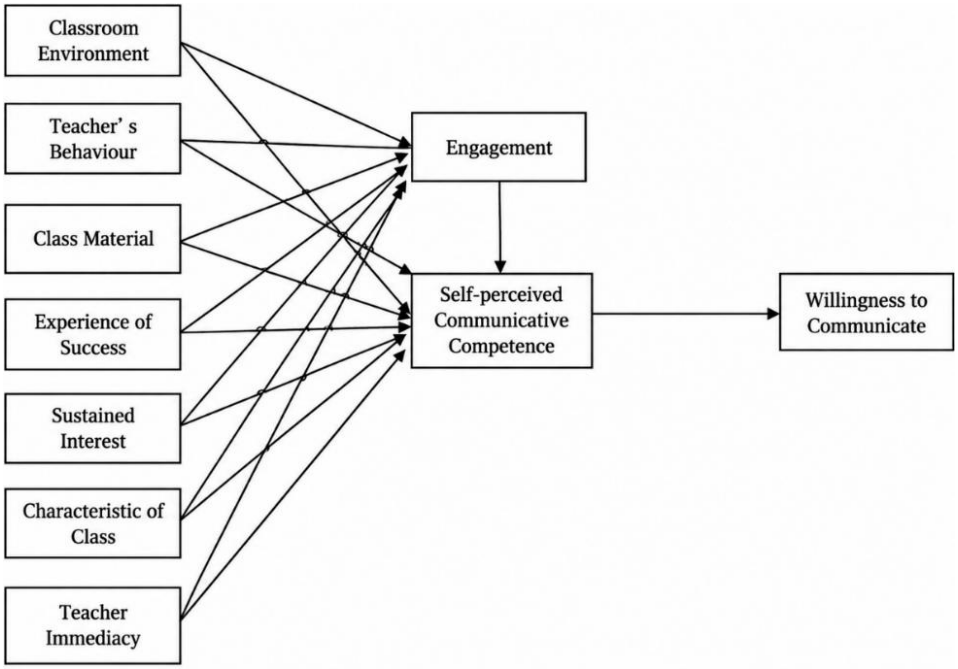


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

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This paradigm captures the incremental impact of motivation on student involvement, which in turn increases their perceived communication competence and ultimately results in greater readiness to communicate. This study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of language learning motivation in the Chinese context by reframing motivation in a positive way and integrating instructor immediacy as a key component.

Conclusion

The purpose of this concept paper is to propose a conceptual framework that reinterprets Kikuchi's (2011) demotivation model as a motivational one in order to explore the impact of motivational factors on Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English among Chinese vocational college students, with student engagement and Self-Perceived Communicative Competence (SPCC) acting as sequential mediators. According to the framework, seven motivational factors including teacher behavior, class characteristics, class environment, class materials, experience of success, sustained interest, and teacher immediacy will act as independent variables influencing the WTC of Chinese vocational college students via the mediating mechanisms of engagement and SPCC.

The conceptual framework suggested here contributes to the theory of WTC in three major ways. Firstly, it changes the angle from which the motivational factors inhibiting language learning are viewed, suggesting that these factors can be reconsidered as motivational factors that, when applied properly, motivate learners to be willing to communicate. This approach is consistent with the assertion of Dornyei and Ushioda (2011) that motivation and demotivation are two different concepts rather than opposites of each other. Secondly, it suggests that engagement and SPCC serve as sequential mediators in the transformation of motivational factors into WTC, filling the gap in the literature that has mostly focused on exploring the relationship between motivation and WTC without giving due consideration to any mediating factors. Thirdly, the inclusion of the motivational factor of teacher immediacy in the framework corresponds with the unique teacher-student relations that exist in the Chinese educational environment (Zhang & Oetzel, 2006).

Specifically, the concept paper will be helpful for exploring the issues related to Chinese vocational college students, which are understudied in spite of the distinctive features that these students possess. Such students often experience high anxiety levels, lower English proficiency levels and lack of communication opportunities, which makes them less employable in today's competitive job market (Jiang, 2021; Xing & Rojewski, 2018). By identifying the motivational factors that facilitate engagement and SPCC of Chinese vocational college students, the framework proposed in this paper can provide useful recommendations for the improvement of their vocational English classes. Namely, the intervention that would target teacher behavior, class environment, and class materials relevant to the students' occupations will increase the communicative competence of learners and their willingness to communicate in English. It is planned to use the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis technique for testing the hypotheses.

While the framework suggested here has theoretical and practical value, there are some limitations that restrict its applicability. It should be emphasized that the framework applies only to Chinese vocational college students who have already completed at least one English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) program. Thus, it cannot be generalized to university-level learners or other educational settings. Cross-sectional design does not allow investigating the long-term effects, while self-reported measures can suffer from social desirability bias.

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Additionally, the framework ignores all the external factors including peer pressure, family background, SES, personal characteristics and online learning environment, among others, as well as does not include qualitative information on the learners' experience.

In order to deal with the limitations mentioned above, future research can test the framework in various educational settings, cultures, and countries. Moreover, longitudinal designs would allow tracing the interrelationship between the motivational factors, engagement, SPCC, and WTC over time. The mixed-method design can help to triangulate quantitative findings with qualitative ones. Comparative studies aimed at comparing vocational and university students would give answers to the question whether educational tracking influences the motivational factors of language learning.

In conclusion, this concept paper presents a theoretically-grounded and empirically-testable framework for explaining the effect of motivational factors on WTC among Chinese vocational college students. By reinterpreting demotivating factors as motivating ones and treating engagement and SPCC as mediating factors, the framework provides both theoretical and practical contribution to the literature on language learning motivation. It is expected that the framework will prompt further research and inform pedagogical practices allowing vocational students to communicate effectively in English.

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