

High School Students' Willingness to Communicate in L2 and the Impact on Communicative Competence

Theme

My research aims to understand students' willingness to communicate in their L2 while relating it to students' communicative competence and researching how I can best facilitate it and improve my teaching pedagogy.

Introduction/What I Learned/My Background

First, let me shortly explain why I want to research this theme. Being in Japan, I have felt slightly uneasy speaking Japanese (my L2) to others. I am not shy, but I lack what I thought was a keen sense of confidence when communicating in my L2. I had always wondered why I felt this way and the logical reason for this tendency. Before studying at NUFS, I needed to learn the correct terminology. The professors in my Action Research class helped me find what I thought was a confidence issue but more of a willingness to communicate with communicative competence.

What I learned about teaching before being a non-degree-seeking student at NUFS came from my bosses and fellow teachers stuck in their obsolete ways of teaching. Moreover, I was unaware of the teacher-centered versus student-centered classroom dynamic, the essential findings of influential researchers like Savignon (1972), and outdated knowledge of mechanical drills. She was one of the first researchers to find empirical data that showed that more than the behaviorist-based model of the Audio-lingual Method was needed. She discovered that using communicative activities mixed with ALM leads to more communicative competence. (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p.49-52) My approach to education now uses communicative language teaching with communicative activities, drastically improving my students' engagement and overall enjoyment.

My new approach to teaching started during my first semester at NUFS when I was in the Second Language Acquisition and Action Research classes. I learned much from each class. I used to think I understood teaching English well, but I needed to know how much the students learned or acquired the language. Throughout my experience as an English teacher, my teaching method has changed not because I thought it would improve learning but more for my students' enjoyment. I used to teach structured-based classes because it was what my bosses wanted. My students were slightly bored, so I moved to a more conversational-based class. At first, I thought I was doing them a disservice. Still, the second language acquisition class has taught me that communication with others is just as important if not more than explicit teaching, according to Lightbown & Spada (2013) (p. 209-210) Savignon (1997) defines communication as the "expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning." Also, communicative competence is always context-specific, integrating grammar competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence, which Canale and Swain (1980) say are sections that make up communicative competence. This book has made me realize how little my boss knows about language acquisition. I now focus more on implicit teaching. I want my students to talk as much as possible without restraint.

What I learned about my pedagogy

The video clips in my Action research class made me realize I might be too dominant in the conversation. I cut students off a few times with my opinions and thoughts. However, students continued to say what they wanted, which showed a solid willingness to communicate. I must be more careful not to forget the student's thoughts and be more patient. I tend to do that when the number of students in the class is low to keep the conversation moving. This tendency relates to my previous belief in a more teacher-centered classroom. Now, I know a student-centered classroom is more beneficial for everyone.

In my second language teaching class, the class concluded with a final message. I will quote Professor Yoshi's closing comment. "There is no single best method. Actually, CLT is not a method, but an approach, which is based on principles of LL and T. It means we have to modify and develop materials that suit our students. From this point of view, teaching is a creative job. Good teachers challenge students and continue to learn for their lives." This quote summarizes how I feel about teaching. It is also one of the reasons NUFS has helped me. Before taking these

courses, I was winging it based on what my boss and students wanted. Now I have a baseline foundation for what it means to teach English as an L2.

In my second year (first year as a degree-seeking student), I started teaching at a high school where I could apply all my knowledge with a supportive team. At first, I felt overwhelmed by teaching in a completely different environment than the English conversation schools. This led to various constraints I was not used to but allowed me to try my pedagogy in a formal academic setting. It was a steep learning curve for me from for-profit conversational schools.

Short Literature Review

When I began my research for the 2021-2022 year, I was utterly at a loss for how to define a willingness to communicate. Fortunately, I was able to find others' previous research to understand the topic better. According to Yashima (2002), "Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is emerging as a concept to account for individuals' first language (L1) and second language (L2) communication." (p.54). It has also been related to an individual's anxiety (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). WTC may change based on the number of people, topic, environment, and energy levels. This idea is consistent with (Clement, Baker, and MacIntyre, 2003) research, which argues that the WTC in a wide range of topics is linked to communicative confidence. Two variables shape their research. One is how relaxed L2 learners are and how competent or incompetent they feel about their L2 ability. The other is that previous interactions with L2 speakers directly influence one's WTC.

Most research on personality variables has been conducted quantitatively (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). However, many researchers argued that more qualitative data is needed to understand better how WTC works. However, Yashima (2002) evaluated 297 Japanese university students using AMOS version 4 (Analysis of Moment Structures) to find a latent variable, international posture, as she coined it. She hypothesized from structural equation modeling that international posture influences motivation causing a result in proficiency in English levels for Japanese students. She also mentions, "Motivation affected self-confidence in L2 communication which led to willingness to communicate in an L2." (p.56). Her data backed this up when she said, "... (The model's fitness to the data was good), which indicates the potential for using the WTC and other constructs to account for L2 communication.

Matsuoka (2006) found that an essential variable in WTC is not English proficiency but language anxiety. She suggests that lowering anxiety levels is paramount to enhancing WTC. She also mentioned a study by MacIntyre (1996) that “Anxiety/apprehension may not be directly related to WTC but via self-confidence” (p.3). Also, that self-confidence is closely related to or may even overlap with anxiety.

In addition, according to Lee & VanPatten (2003), learner beliefs about how a class should be conducted are also related to a student’s willingness to communicate. Some of the antiquated beliefs found contradictory findings. Beliefs, such as believing the way they learned is the correct way, are people’s tendency to generalize their own experiences can be applied to others. Another belief is that drills are practical tools for learning grammar. This belief is true to some extent, but it depends on the type of drills. Lee & VanPatten cited three types of drills: Mechanical, Meaning, and Communicative drills. Mechanical drills are just rote memorization. Meaning drills use the target grammar or vocabulary in their own words. Communicative drills are using the language to express themselves without explicit instructions. Those who think Mechanical drills are the most effective tend to believe they need to receive explicit feedback. Lee & VanPatten also said this is an outdated belief. Mechanical drills may give a focus or sub-goal, but they are not needed to develop abstract rules if the classroom has carefully constructed activities that use Communicative drills.

Teaching Context

- A high school with six different classes twice a week for 50- or 45-minute-long classes, depending on the high school’s schedule.
- Second-year students with up to 20 students in the class. The classes are divided into even and odd-numbered students, so one group I teach, and the Japanese teacher teaches the other group in a different classroom, and we switch groups every unit.
- The primary source of my curriculum is from my senior coworkers. They have the final say in what is taught, but my opinions are heard and considered.

Students have to take the class. I mainly taught in English even though I knew they could not understand everything I said. However, there are a few students who understand my instructions, and they interpret the task requirements in Japanese. This was a great way to provide a teachable moment for both sets of students. However, when there was a communication breakdown, I would try my Japanese to explain what I wanted them to do.

Research Methodology

My research questions have changed entirely from my initial questions throughout my Action Research class. My first questions were these:

1. Should I make a case study of my two focus students?
2. Should I focus on lower L2 speakers too?
3. What are some ways to better research with a small sample size?

In 2021-2022, I had these questions.

1. What role does my teaching pedagogy play in a student's WTC?
2. How are learners' beliefs related to WTC?
3. What personality traits influence WTC?
4. How does WTC relate to communicative competence?

In 2022-2023, I changed the questions again.

1. What role does a Focus on Form pedagogy play in students' WTC?
2. How do students' beliefs in learning styles affect their WTC?
3. What is the impact, if any, of WTC on students' communicative competence in L2 interaction?

My questions need to be sounder and more specific. I am constantly changing what I seek to fit my teaching context.

My Clear and Measurable Objectives in 2021-2022

1. Have students speak in complete sentences. This point is important because students should express themselves with more than one- or two-word responses.
2. Have students self-evaluate their progress and personality through questionnaires.
3. Guide students who are apprehensive by bringing them into the conversation. Hopefully, those kinds of students will be more proactive as time passes.
4. Students talk with little prompting. I allow about 10 seconds of silence, then prompt them.

My goals for 2022-2023 are these.

1. What role does a Focus on Form pedagogy play in students' WTC?
2. How do students' beliefs in learning styles affect their WTC?
3. What is the impact, if any, of WTC on students' communicative competence in L2 interaction?

Classroom Development

I had a different focus group when I started my Action Research Report. I wanted to conduct research in one of my university classes. Unfortunately, my boss told me to stop conducting research during class time because the boss thought it took away time from learning and privacy issues. So, in 2021-2022 my focus group was at an English conversation school. This is my first ARR classroom report.

This is from 2021-2022.

Time	Interaction T-S, S-S	Content
5	T-S S-S	Greetings: Introductions and follow-up questions.

5	S	Questionnaire - Paper A section A
10	T-S	I quickly asked them about their opinions of the questionnaire with follow-up questions.
25	S-S T-S	The conversation led to a free talk with the students talking to each other about their learning experiences and beliefs. I only interjected when a student wanted help phrasing their sentences.
5	T-S	I asked them how they liked learning English and did not want to.

S-S: 30 minutes

T-Ss: 20 minutes

As of 2022-2023, here is an example of a classroom schedule.

Time	Interaction T-S, S, S-S	Content
3	T-S	Greetings: Introductions with an explanation of participle adjectives
10	S-S T-S	Students fill in the blanks to complete the sentences in pairs. After that, I went over the correct answers.
10	S-S T-S	Students matched the English word to the Japanese word in pairs. I had the students answer out loud.
20	S T-S	The students crossed out the wrong adjective and then, in pairs, asked and answered the questions with at least two different classmates. I assisted when needed.
5	S-S S	Students filled in the blanks for exercise four in pairs.
2	T	I gave them the key so they could check their answers.

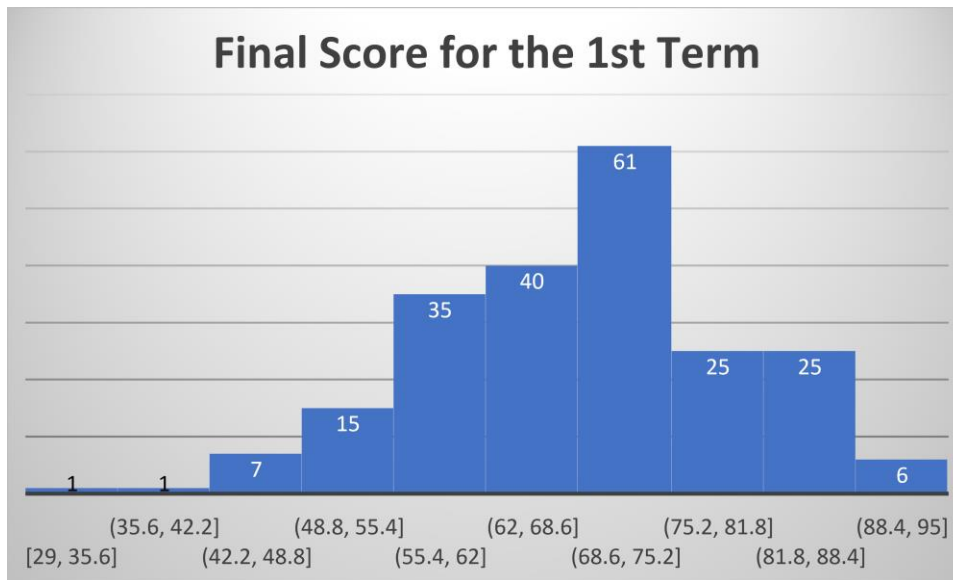
S: 10 minutes

S-S: 35 minutes

T-Ss: 5 minutes

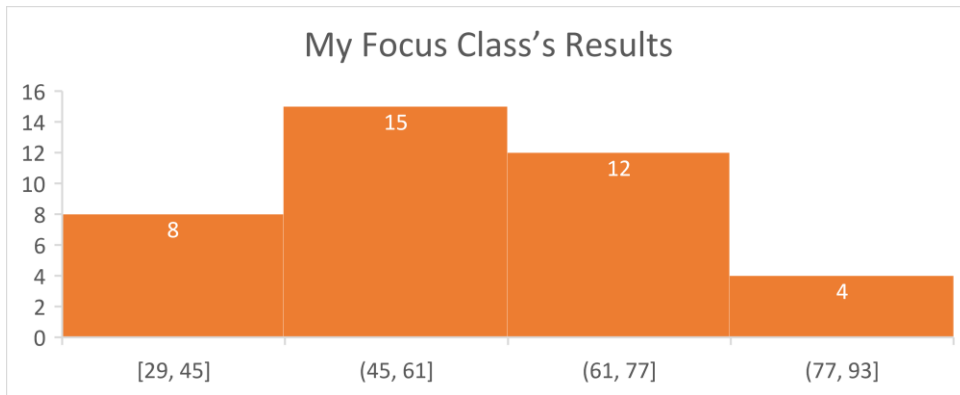
I still tend to pull the focus back to myself, but I am getting used to teaching a more student-centered class. As I mentioned, I am confronted with some learners' beliefs that they still want explicit feedback from me. At first, I tried to find someone who knew the answer or could explain the issue and have the student try to teach the other students in English. If no one understands, I tell them to use their dictionary. If everything fails, I resort back to basic Japanese. In 2022-2023 I did a little better in not drawing attention to myself but letting the students try, I give structured input, but I give them time to process it.

Data

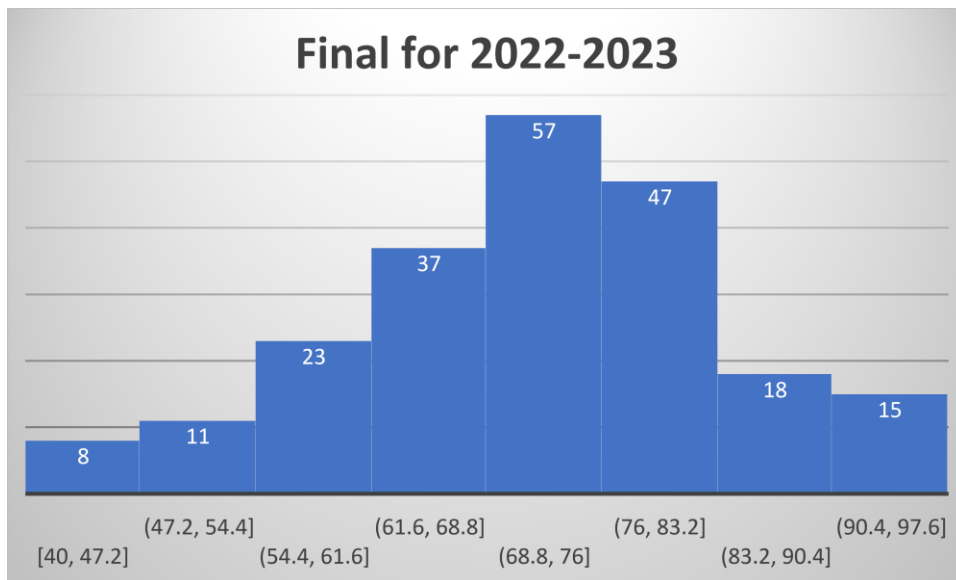


What happened: First, let me show the final score for the term for the students I teach.

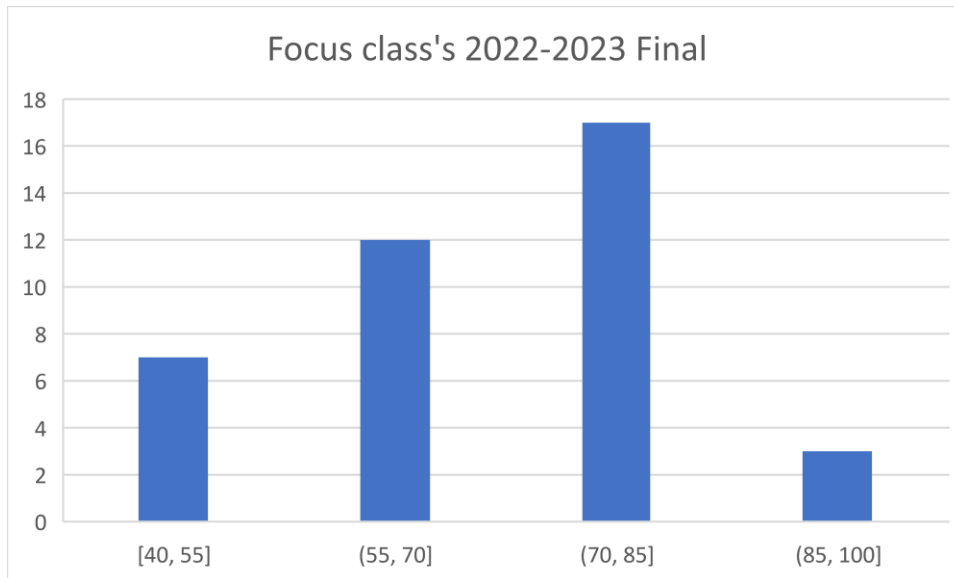
The mode is 68.9-75.2, an acceptable score at my school. My focus group scored a little lower.



Since most lesson plans were made to ensure a high score on their final exam, the test and end-of-the-term scores were what I expected. The mode of the test scores was in the C to B range which surprised me because the survey responses were mainly negative about their perceived ability and attitude towards English.



These are the results of all the classes I teach.



This is my focus group.

I am not good with excel, and I am sure there is a way to show if there is a statistical significance between the first term and final term, but by looking at it, the students improved overall.

However, my question is, did I play a part in this growth? I do not know how to answer that, but I believe I played a role in their development.

Moving Forward

This year was challenging for many reasons. Such as adapting to a new school, working as a team, learning to compromise and balance the differences of opinions, finding the right questions to address, and what I can do to provide empirical data to back up my reports. These are just a few, but I can get a firmer grasp of balancing AR with teaching. I have to find my way to keep progressing.

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