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SELF-PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN THE EFL CLASSROOM:

A study of Finnish high school students

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ABSTRACT

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Due to the essential role of communication in achieving second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) proficiency, it has been suggested that cultivating learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) should be the principal goal of language instruction. One significant factor which influences a person's willingness to communicate is their self-perceived communication competence (SPCC). Both SPCC and WTC remain rather unexplored in EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts. Thus, this thesis examines Finnish high school students' SPCC and WTC during English lessons, focusing on variation in different communicative situations, but also considering their overall levels.

The data were collected via an anonymous online questionnaire, to which a total of 40 second-year high school students responded. The respondents were asked to evaluate their SPCC and WTC on a seven-point Likert scale in situations which differ in terms of the number and familiarity of other participants. The data are entirely quantitative and were analyzed statistically by calculating means and standard deviations, as well as percentual distributions.

As for situational variation, SPCC means ranged from 4,83 to 6,48, while WTC means varied between 4,15 and 5,65. It was found that SPCC and WTC were higher in situations including a small number of participants and when communicating with familiar participants. Familiarity seemed to have a more significant effect than the number of participants. The means of overall SPCC and WTC were 5,57 and 4,77, respectively.

Although the results are not representative of all Finnish high school students' or EFL learners' experiences, this thesis will hopefully inspire more research on SPCC and WTC in the Finnish EFL context. With more knowledge relevant to their own environment, teachers may be better equipped to facilitate communication in language instruction and help learners achieve higher proficiency.

Keywords: willingness to communicate, self-perceived communication competence, English as a foreign language, foreign language learning, second language acquisition, language instruction

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1 Introduction

The role of communication in achieving language proficiency is widely recognized in the field of second language acquisition (Kang 2005, 278). However, mere linguistic competence or even communicative competence does not entail that an individual will communicate whenever they have the chance to do so (MacIntyre et al. 1998, 545). It has been proposed that because of this, the principal goal of second language (L2) instruction should be creating and maintaining learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), since it is an immediate antecedent to actual language use. In order to achieve this goal, it is essential to acquire a comprehensive understanding of what influences L2 WTC in a learning environment and how it fluctuates in different situations during lessons. It has been observed that self-perceived communication competence (SPCC) is among the most crucial factors in predicting a person's WTC (e.g. McCroskey et al. 1990, 131; MacIntyre et al. 1998, 549). Researchers also agree that both SPCC and WTC often vary from one situation to another, due to the influence of many situational variables (e.g. Kang 2005, 289; MacIntyre et al. 1998, 547).

Despite the importance of WTC in language learning, it is still rather unexplored as regards learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), especially in Finland, and even less attention has been devoted to SPCC. Motivated by this research gap and the close affiliation between SPCC and WTC, the present study examines Finnish high school students' self-perceived communication competence and willingness to communicate during English lessons. Both SPCC and WTC are considered in specific situations that are characteristic of classroom communication, but also in general in the EFL classroom. Although the results do not represent the experiences of all Finnish high school students or EFL learners, this thesis will hopefully inspire more research on SPCC and WTC in the Finnish EFL context, which may help teachers enhance their students' confidence and willingness to communicate, leading to higher language proficiency.

2 Theoretical background

This section is focused on outlining the theoretical framework of the present study. The first four subsections introduce the key concepts, as well as the main views and models of WTC and SPCC. The fifth subsection discusses previous research and the research gap that this study intends to fill.

2.1 First, second and foreign language

The term *first language* (L1), also referred to as *mother tongue*, is rather unambiguous: it is the first language that an individual acquires as a child. *Second language* and *foreign language*, on the other hand, may cause confusion for many and are therefore essential to define here. It is not surprising, in fact, that these concepts cause confusion, because they are often used interchangeably even in research, and the expression *second language acquisition* is used in relation to the learning and teaching of both second and foreign languages in the field of applied linguistics (Melchers 2019, 8).

According to Oxford and Shearin (1994, 14), a second language is "one that is learned in a location where that language is typically used as the main vehicle of everyday communication for most people", whereas a foreign language is not the standard "medium of ordinary communication". On the basis of these definitions, it seems clear that English is still a foreign language in Finland, and it is also still defined as such in the curriculum (FNAE 2019, 218–219). Nonetheless, the term *second language* is used extensively in the literature that forms the framework for this study, even when referring to what technically is a foreign language. Therefore, it is also used in the present study in some instances to refer to any language that is not one's first language, including English in the Finnish context.

2.2 Willingness to communicate in the L1

WTC was first defined by McCroskey and Baer (1985) from the perspective of L1 communication. Their definition was based on Burgoon's concept of unwillingness to communicate, as well as Mortensen, Arntson and Lustig's research on predispositions toward verbal behavior, and McCroskey and Richmond's research on shyness (McCroskey and Baer 1985, 3–4). On the basis of these studies, they conceptualized WTC in the L1 as "a personality-based, trait-like predisposition [to engage in communication] which is fairly consistent across a variety of communication contexts and types of receivers" (ibid. 1). Although they do note that a person's WTC may be affected by a number of situational variables (ibid. 3), their central claim is that due to differences in personality, certain individuals tend to have higher WTC in general than others (ibid. 6). As a consequence, an individual's WTC in one communication context and with a specific type of receiver correlates with their WTC in other contexts and with other types of receivers (ibid.). McCroskey and Baer developed a measure, the "willingness to communicate scale", to test their hypothesis (ibid. 7). It turned out to be accurate, and they were also able to observe certain trends in the anticipated variation of WTC according to the context and receivers (ibid. 7–8). They found that it tends to be higher in communicative situations that include less participants and more familiar participants, regardless of an individual's overall level of WTC (ibid. 8).

Building on this trait-like conception of L1 WTC, MacIntyre (1994, 135) examined the causal relations of several personality-based variables that may influence WTC (figure 1). According to this study, the two most significant factors in determining a person's WTC are communication apprehension and, to an even larger extent, perceived competence (ibid. 138–139). MacIntyre suggests that though the two constructs are rooted in other personality variables, such as introversion and self-esteem, they are the ultimate cause of L1 WTC (ibid.).

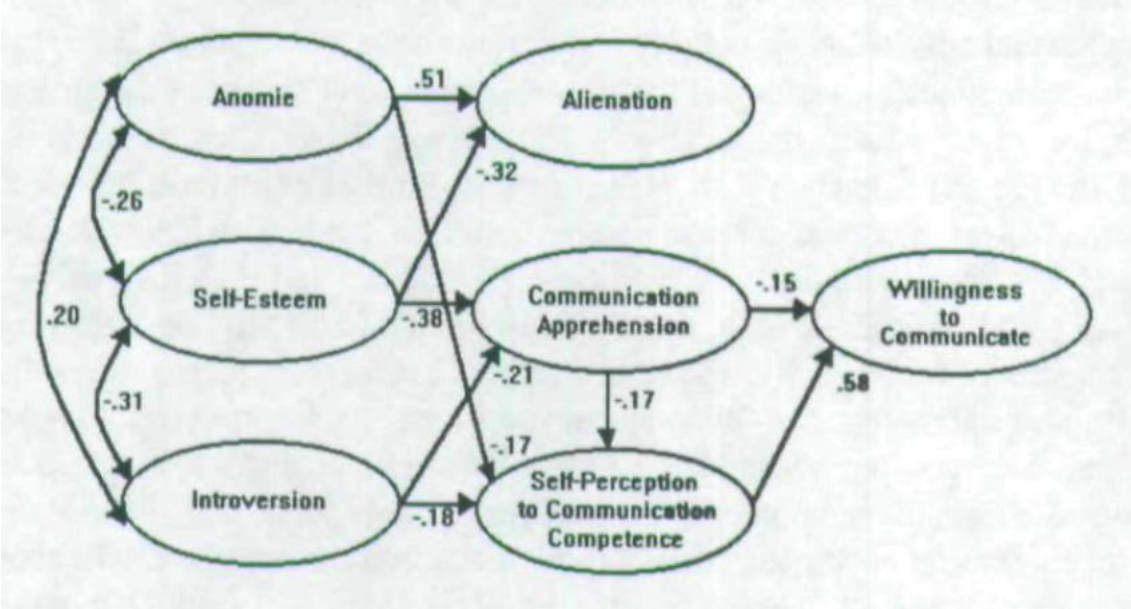

Figure 1: Hypothesized causal sequence for predicting WTC using personality-based variables.

(MacIntyre 1994, 137)

2.3 Willingness to communicate in a L2

WTC in a L2, on the other hand, was first conceptualized by MacIntyre et al., who define it as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (1998, 547). In contrast to L1 WTC, they view it as more dependent on situational factors, although they do believe that personality has an effect on it as well (ibid. 546). Thus, WTC in a L2 is distinct from WTC in the L1 (ibid.). As MacIntyre et al. propose, "the most dramatic variable one can change in the communication setting is the language of discourse" (ibid.). Compared to L1 communication, L2 use involves much more uncertainty, which complicates the interrelations of all the variables that may influence WTC (ibid.). For instance, there is much more variation in the level of people's communicative competence in a L2 (ibid.). Moreover, it has been noted that limited ability to communicate in a L2 leads to the experience of inauthenticity (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986, 128). The use of a L2 challenges the "self-concept as a competent communicator" that individuals

tend to possess in L1 communication, which may lead to reticence and negative emotional reactions (ibid.). This observation further explains the difference between L1 WTC and L2 WTC.

MacIntyre et al. developed a pyramid model (figure 2) which depicts both situational and more stable variables influencing WTC and actual L2 use (1998, 547). It is a multilayered structure, in which each layer cumulatively affects all the layers above (ibid. 546). L2 use is at the top of the pyramid, and WTC is directly beneath it, therefore seen as an immediate antecedent of L2 use. Layer III depicts the "situated antecedents" of WTC, while layers IV, V and VI represent more "stable, enduring influences on the process" (ibid. 547). As can be seen in figure 2, personality pertains to layer VI, and as the researchers explain, the variables at this level form the basis of the entire process leading up to L2 use (ibid. 546).

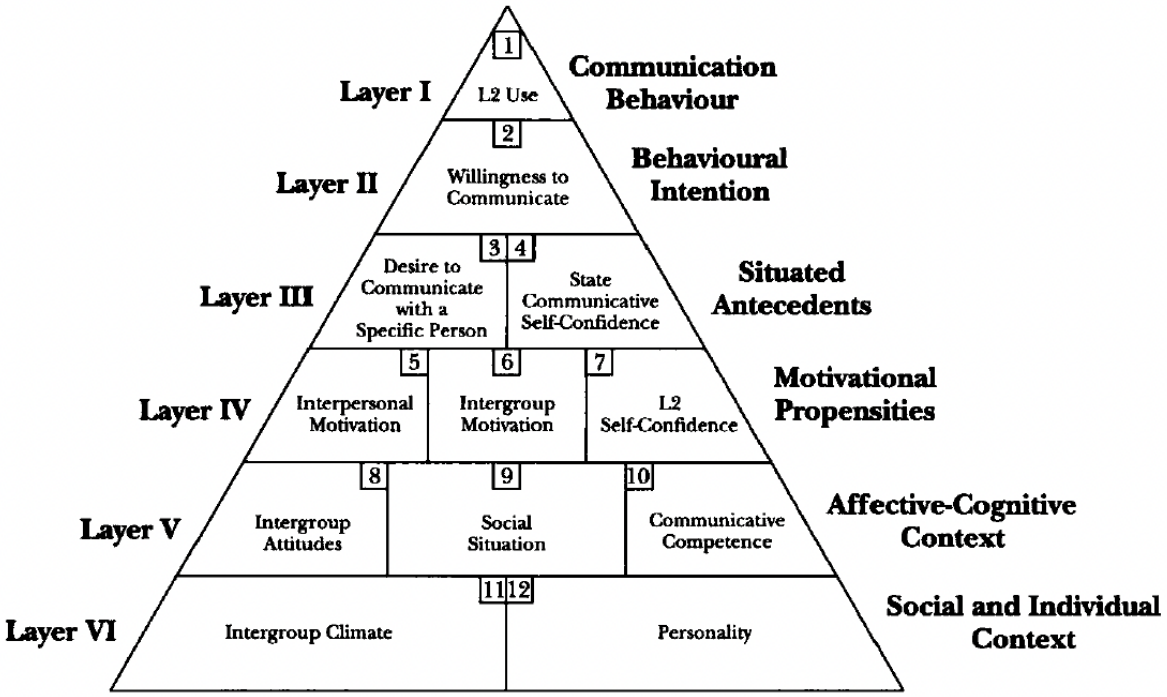

Figure 2: Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC. (MacIntyre et al. 1998, 547)

While MacIntyre et al.'s model incorporates both transient and enduring variables which influence L2 WTC, Kang has focused on the emergence of situational L2 WTC, in particular (2005).

Kang distinguishes three psychological antecedents to situational WTC: security, excitement and responsibility, which are produced by situational variables, such as topic, interlocutor and conversational context (ibid. 282). Situational L2 WTC is thus defined as "an individual's volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables" (ibid. 291). As can be seen in figure 3, however, Kang considers that an individual's ultimate WTC is a result of both situational and trait-like WTC, though the model focuses on the emergence of situational WTC.

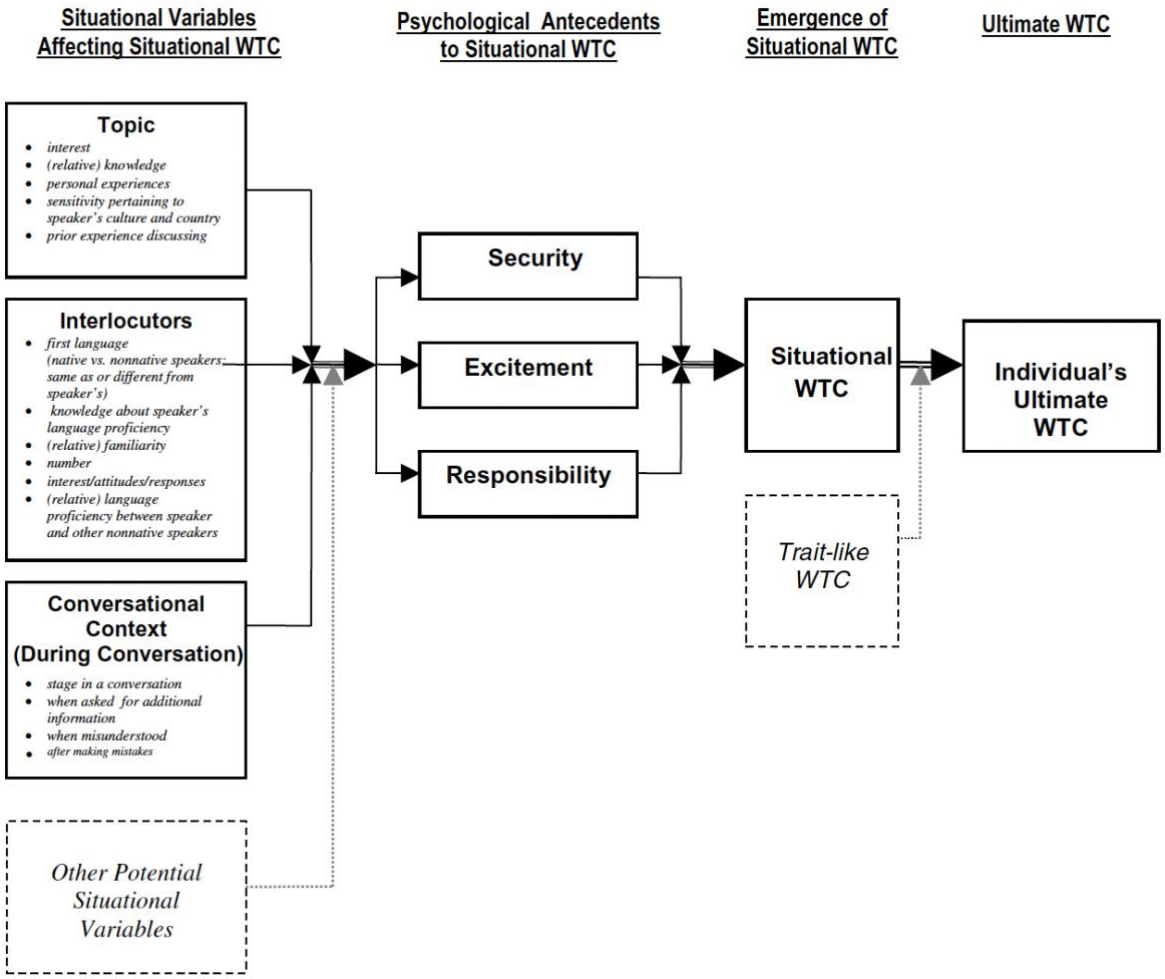

Figure 3: A preliminary construct of situational willingness to communicate (WTC).

(Kang 2005, 288)

2.4 Self-perceived communication competence

Communication competence has been defined as "adequate ability to pass along or give information, the ability to make known by talking or writing" (McCroskey, quoted in McCroskey and McCroskey 1988, 109). Thus, self-perceived communication competence is an individual's own perception of this ability. As McCroskey and McCroskey argue, "many of the most important decisions people make concerning communication are made on the basis of self-perceived competence rather than actual competence" (ibid. 110). This also applies to the decision of whether or not to engage in conversation, as researchers have noticed in studies concerning L1 WTC (e.g. MacIntyre 1994, 138–139; McCroskey et al. 1990, 131). In the process of conducting the first WTC studies, McCroskey observed that it was also necessary to examine the subjects' perceptions of their communication competence (McCroskey and McCroskey 1988, 111). He therefore developed "The Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale" (ibid.), which involves the same items as the WTC scale, with the exception that no filler items are included. Similar to the WTC scale, then, the SPCC scale takes different types of communication contexts and receivers into account.

Since these early observations of the connection between SPCC and WTC, it has been noted that SPCC is a significant factor influencing L2 WTC as well (e.g. Yashima 2002, 62; Balouchi and Samad 2021, 5931). Although MacIntyre et al.'s model of L2 WTC (figure 2) does not include SPCC, specifically, it involves a similar construct, *L2 self-confidence*, which other researchers (e.g., Lockley 2013, 189; Balouchi and Samad 2021, 5919) have equated with SPCC. MacIntyre et al. define L2 self-confidence as an "overall belief in being able to communicate in the L2 in an adaptive and efficient manner" (1998, 551). It consists of two components: the self-evaluation of L2 skills and language anxiety, which determine the level of L2 self-confidence (ibid.). In addition to this construct, however, the model includes a variable called *state communicative self-confidence*, which is the situational equivalent of L2 self-confidence (ibid. 549). The researchers explain that the level of experienced confidence is likely to vary in different communication settings (ibid.). Hence, state

communicative self-confidence is “the feeling that one has the capacity to communicate effectively at a particular moment” (ibid.). Along with the desire to communicate with a specific person, this variable is an immediate antecedent to WTC in the pyramid model (ibid.). It should also be noted that according to Kang, it is rather similar to security, one of the psychological antecedents in the model of situational WTC (figure 3), since a high level of both confidence and security entails a lack of anxiety or fear (2005, 289). All in all, the research suggests that an individual’s perception of their competence or degree of confidence in the L2 in a given situation has a significant effect on how willing they are to communicate in that situation.

2.5 Previous research on WTC and SPCC

The majority of communication research has been done in mainland USA (McCroskey et al. 1990, 128). However, certain aspects of communication, such as communication apprehension, have been studied more widely around the world, and this research has shown that there are significant differences in communication behavior between cultures (ibid.). This has also been observed with regard to WTC and SPCC. McCroskey et al., for instance, found that Swedish and American students differ in terms of their WTC and SPCC in the L1, which they view as a result of cultural differences in the level of introversion and in the amount of value placed on communication competence (ibid., 134–135). Lockley, on the other hand, found that Japanese EFL students are inclined to make negative evaluations of their L2 skills, causing them to have low levels of SPCC compared to their actual communication competence (2013, 200). He attributes this tendency to the critical self-view characteristic of Japanese culture and notes that the self-view of a given culture is a significant factor in determining communication behavior along with other culture-dependent features (ibid. 189). On the basis of these studies, it seems clear that results acquired in one culture are not generalizable to

other cultures. Thus, more research is needed in as many cultures as possible, especially on the less studied aspects of communication.

As regards studies on WTC and SPCC, there is still a variety of matters related to them that call for more attention, particularly in EFL contexts. Although WTC has gained a prominent position in communication research, it remains a rather unexplored topic in EFL settings. As researchers have suggested, more research is needed on "the fluctuation, related influencing factors, and consequences in various settings" (Kirkpatrick, Vafadar, and Mohebbi 2024, 26). SPCC is an unexplored topic not only in EFL contexts, but also in general, though there is ample research on related topics, such as actual communication competence, communication apprehension and foreign language anxiety. In the Finnish EFL context, there are studies on the teaching and acquisition of speaking skills (e.g. Mäkelä 2005; Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee 1991), but there seems to be no research on either WTC or SPCC, apart from few dissertations (e.g. Elo 2022; Korhonen 2019; Kostiainen 2015; Kuutila 2014; Lyytikäinen 2022), and even these do not examine the constructs exclusively in classroom communication. The premise of this thesis is similar to that of Kostiainen's MA thesis (2015) in some respects, as both examine Finnish EFL learners' WTC in classroom communication. Nonetheless, Kostiainen had a more general approach to exploring how the classroom context influences WTC and included other perspectives in her study, such as the effect of taking an oral skills course on the students' WTC (ibid. 29–30). Ultimately, it appears that at least in the Finnish EFL context, the present study is the first to examine both WTC and SPCC in the same situations, which are characteristic of classroom communication.

3 The present study

This section will describe how the study was conducted. The first subsection states the research question and research aim, whereas the second and third subsections describe the process of collecting and analyzing the data.

3.1 Research questions and research aim

The research questions of the present study are the following:

1) How do Finnish high school students' SPCC and self-reported WTC vary in oral communicative situations in the EFL classroom?
2) What are the overall levels of Finnish high school students' SPCC and self-reported WTC in the EFL classroom?

SPCC is equated with MacIntyre et al.'s definition of state communicative self-confidence: "the feeling that one has the capacity to communicate effectively at a particular moment" (1998, 549). The adopted view of WTC, on the other hand, is closest to Kang's definition, according to which situational L2 WTC is "an individual's volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation . . ." (2005, 291). Both constructs are examined in situations that are characteristic of classroom communication. Certain variables pertaining to these situations are considered to influence SPCC, which, in turn, influences WTC. This view verges on the sequence of situational variables, security and situational WTC in Kang's model (figure 3). In addition to this situation-specific examination, the overall levels of SPCC and WTC are also considered.

As MacIntyre et al. have proposed, creating and fostering students' WTC should be the principal goal of L2 instruction, since it has the most immediate effect in determining actual communication behavior and encouraging L2 use even in authentic situations outside the classroom (1998, 547). Thus, this thesis aims to illustrate the level of SPCC and WTC in a Finnish EFL

classroom in different communicative situations, but also in general. Although the study was conducted using a purposive sample and it is not representative of all Finnish high school students, it may provide insights about the phenomena in the Finnish EFL context and prompt researchers to pay more attention to this area. Once there is more data available on SPCC and WTC in the Finnish EFL context, teachers may be better equipped to increase students' confidence and, therefore, their willingness to communicate in EFL instruction.

3.2 Data collection

The data for the study were collected via an anonymous Microsoft Forms questionnaire (see Appendix), which was distributed to second-year students in a Finnish high school. A total of 40 students from three different groups responded to the questionnaire during their English lessons. Although these were EFL lessons, the instructions involved a remark that only non-native speakers of English are expected to answer, in case some of the students would be bilingual, for instance, but still participate in EFL instruction. It may be assumed, therefore, that all respondents are indeed EFL learners. With this instruction, it was also possible to avoid enquiring about the respondents' first languages and keep the questionnaire entirely anonymous, as no other personal data was needed.

The questionnaire is based on two previously used measures: the SPCC scale (McCroskey and McCroskey 1988, 111) and the WTC scale (McCroskey and Baer 1985, 10–11), both of which were adapted to fit the context of an EFL lesson. They were considered particularly suitable for this study, as they involve the same situations, which differ only in the number and familiarity of participants and, therefore, enable the comparison of SPCC and WTC levels in identical circumstances. As for the number of participants, the original scales include four distinct situations in which communication may take place: dyad, small group, large meeting and public context. In terms of familiarity, there are three types of interlocutors, with whom one may communicate: friend, acquaintance and stranger

(McCroskey and McCroskey 1988, 111; McCroskey and Baer 1985, 10–11). The items were adapted to correspond to the most common circumstances students encounter in English lessons. Thus, the final settings depicted in the questionnaire are a) pair discussion, b) small group discussion, c) answering the teacher's question in class, and d) giving a presentation. The last two of these involve the same number of participants yet differ in terms of spontaneity and the individual's amount of engagement. Nonetheless, the respondents evaluated their SPCC and WTC in all situations with different levels of familiarity. As it is rather unlikely that in situations with several participants everyone included would be one's friends, the original categories were narrowed down to a) familiar participants, and b) unfamiliar participants.

In pursuance of presenting the SPCC scale, McCroskey and McCroskey assessed the usefulness of self-report in measuring SPCC (1988, 110). They concluded that self-report measures are "most appropriate when they are directed toward matters of affect and/or perception in circumstances where the respondent has no reason to fear negative consequences from any answer given" (ibid.). Hence, self-report is a viable method when the goal is to discover how the respondents *perceive* their communicative competence (ibid.), particularly in an anonymous study. While other methods, such as observation, are likely more suitable for measuring actual communicative competence (ibid.), subjective phenomena, like SPCC, cannot be evaluated reliably by simply observing the subjects of the study. This applies to WTC as well: MacIntyre et al. note that although "WTC strongly implies a behavioral intention [to engage in communication]" (1998, 548), "the intention to perform a behaviour does not guarantee its occurrence because circumstances may intervene between intention and action" (Ajzen, quoted in MacIntyre et al. 1998, 548). Thus, simply observing students' communication in class is not sufficient to examine their WTC. It is possible to observe certain expressions of WTC, such as raising one's hand, but in most situations, the students are not able to explicitly express their WTC and much less the specific level of it. Consequently, a self-report questionnaire is also suitable for examining WTC in classroom communication.

3.3 Data analysis

As already established, the questionnaire is based on McCroskey's SPCC scale and WTC scale (McCroskey and McCroskey 1988, 111; McCroskey and Baer 1985, 10–11). Thus, there are two parts that involve the same situations, but in the first part, the respondents evaluated their SPCC, and in the second, their WTC in each situation. The questions were answered on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from very low (1) to very high (7). The data are entirely quantitative and were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Means and standard deviations were calculated for different situations and for the total level of SPCC and WTC, similar to McCroskey's example (McCroskey and McCroskey 1988, 112; McCroskey and Baer 1985, 10). In addition, to examine the data more specifically, the percentual distribution of answers was calculated for each question, but also for the four contexts involving a different number of participants and for situations involving either familiar or unfamiliar participants.

4 Results

This section is focused on outlining the results of the study. This will be done in three subsections. The first two are aimed at providing answers to the research questions, while the third provides a brief summary of the results. The findings and their implications will be discussed in more detail in section 5.

4.1 Situational variation of SPCC and WTC

The respondents assessed their SPCC and WTC in eight situations on a seven-point Likert scale. They were able to choose between very low (1), low (2), fairly low (3), average (4), fairly high (5), high (6), and very high (7). Tables 1 and 2 show the means of SPCC and WTC in each situation, ordered from the situation with the highest mean to the one with the lowest. As can be seen in table 1, the

means of SPCC vary from 4,83 to 6,48, which indicates that depending on the situation, the mean value of self-perceived communication competence was average, fairly high or high. However, it should be noted that the standard deviation increases along with the number of participants as well as unfamiliarity, which implies that the answers are distributed more evenly among the different options in some questions.

SPCC	Mean	Standard deviation
Pair discussion with a familiar interlocutor	6,48	0,85
Small group discussion with familiar participants	6,18	1,15
Presentation in a class with familiar participants	5,85	1,33
Answering a question in a class with familiar participants	5,85	1,44
Pair discussion with an unfamiliar interlocutor	5,40	1,66
Small group discussion with unfamiliar participants	5,13	1,80
Answering a question in a class with unfamiliar participants	4,88	1,95
Presentation in a class with unfamiliar participants	4,83	1,89

Table 1: Situation-specific SPCC from highest to lowest mean

Compared to SPCC, the means of WTC are slightly lower in each situation, as illustrated in table 2. They vary from 4,15 to 5,65, indicating that the mean value of the students' willingness to communicate was average or fairly high. There is a similar trend in the standard deviations as in the case of SPCC, which implies that there is more variation in the students' experiences when more participants or unfamiliar participants are involved in communication.

WTC	Mean	Standard deviation
Pair discussion with a familiar interlocutor	5,65	1,49
Small group discussion with familiar participants	5,45	1,48
Answering a question in a class with familiar participants	5,13	1,56
Presentation in a class with familiar participants	4,88	1,71
Pair discussion with an unfamiliar interlocutor	4,43	1,78
Small group discussion with unfamiliar participants	4,28	1,88
Answering a question in a class with unfamiliar participants	4,20	1,88
Presentation in a class with unfamiliar participants	4,15	1,98

Table 2: Situation-specific WTC from highest to lowest mean

Although the calculated means are lower for WTC than SPCC in all of the included situations, there seems to be a clear connection between the constructs. Namely, when the situations are ordered from highest to lowest mean, the order is almost identical. The only difference can be found in the situations placed third and fourth, which are in reverse order in tables 1 and 2. However, the means for these two situations are the same in table 1 and the order is based on the slight difference in standard deviation. All in all, it may be concluded that familiarity and a smaller number of participants are connected to higher levels of SPCC and WTC. This is further illustrated in tables 3 and 4, in which means and standard deviations have been calculated by combining certain data in order to reflect the levels in the four types of communication contexts (pair discussions, small group discussions, answering the teacher's question and giving a presentation), as well as with the two types of participants (familiar and unfamiliar).

SPCC	Mean	Standard deviation
Pair	5,94	1,42
Small group	5,65	1,59
Question	5,36	1,77
Presentation	5,34	1,71
Familiar participant(s)	6,09	1,23
Unfamiliar participant(s)	5,06	1,83

Table 3: SPCC according to number and familiarity of participants

WTC	Mean	Standard deviation
Pair	5,04	1,75
Small group	4,86	1,78
Question	4,66	1,78
Presentation	4,51	1,88
Familiar participant(s)	5,28	1,58
Unfamiliar participant(s)	4,26	1,87

Table 4: WTC according to number and familiarity of participants

4.1.1 Variation according to number of participants

Though tables 3 and 4 comprise the mean values of SPCC and WTC according to both number and familiarity of participants, it is more illustrative to examine the percentual distribution of the answers in each context. Figures 4 and 5 reflect the students' evaluations as regards pair discussions. A vast majority, 88% of students reported that their SPCC is either very high, high or fairly high. It should be noted that nearly half of the students perceived their communication competence as very high when communicating with only one interlocutor. As for WTC, there is more variation in how the answers are distributed, but a clear majority, 66%, still reported levels ranging from fairly high to very high, though only 24% of all respondents reported having very high WTC. Compared to the reported levels of SPCC, the percentage of students that evaluated their WTC as average is much higher, while the proportion of answers below average is quite low for both SPCC and WTC.

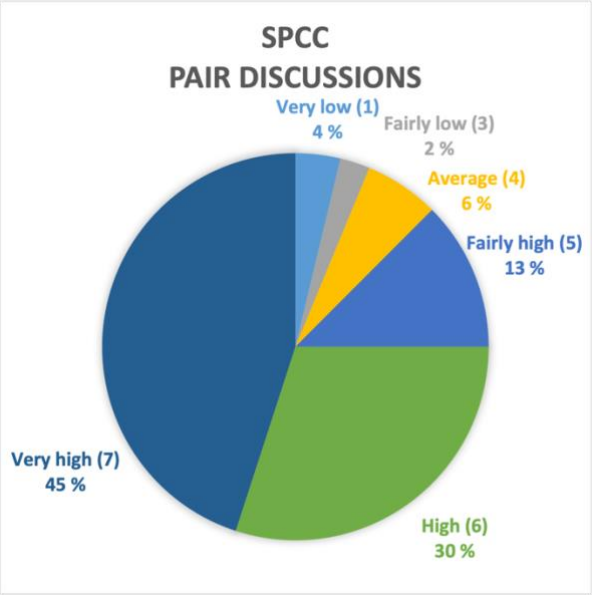

Figure 4: SPCC in pair discussions

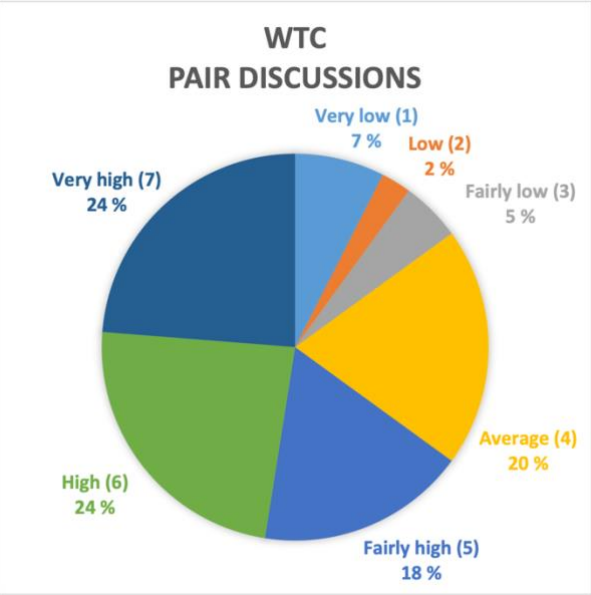

Figure 5: WTC in pair discussions

Figures 6 and 7 represent the distribution of answers to questions regarding small group discussions, which is very similar to that in questions related to pair discussions, especially in the case of WTC. The majority of students reported SPCC and WTC levels above average, but again, this percentage was higher in the evaluation of SPCC.

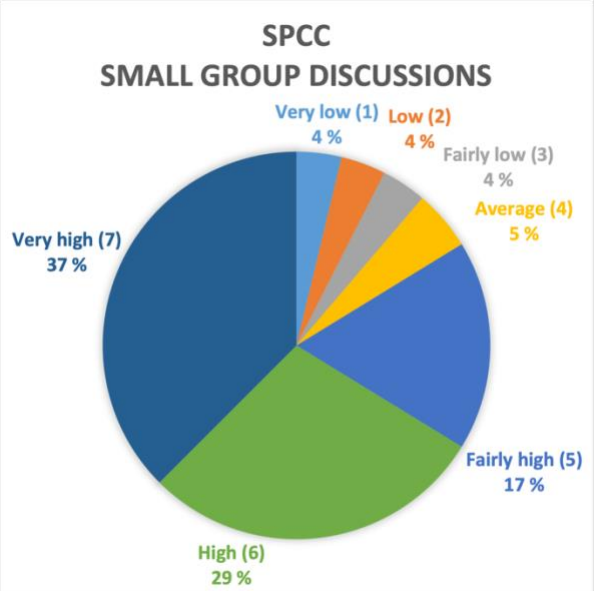

Figure 6: SPCC in small group discussions

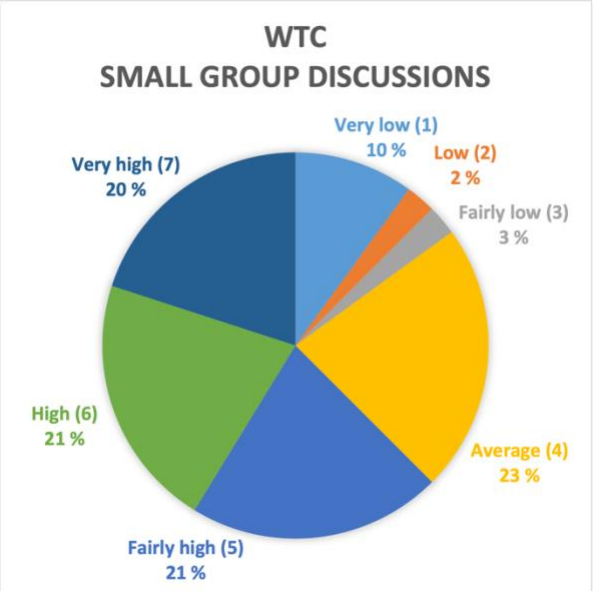

Figure 7: WTC in small group discussions

Finally, figures 8–11 show the distribution of answers regarding the two remaining settings: answering the teacher's question and giving a presentation in front of the entire class. These two contexts include the same number of participants, but since they differ in terms of how spontaneous the communication is and how much engagement is required of the individual, they were analyzed separately. Nonetheless, the results are similar in both contexts, as can be seen by comparing figures 8 and 10, and figures 9 and 11, respectively. 76% of students perceived their communication competence as very high, high or fairly high when answering a question in class, while the equivalent proportion was 78% in giving a presentation. Interestingly, the distribution between the different options is much more even in the reported levels of WTC, but even so, the majority of students did choose one of the options above average. Similar to pair and small group discussions, the proportion

of students who reported their SPCC levels as above average is higher than the equivalent proportion in the case of WTC.

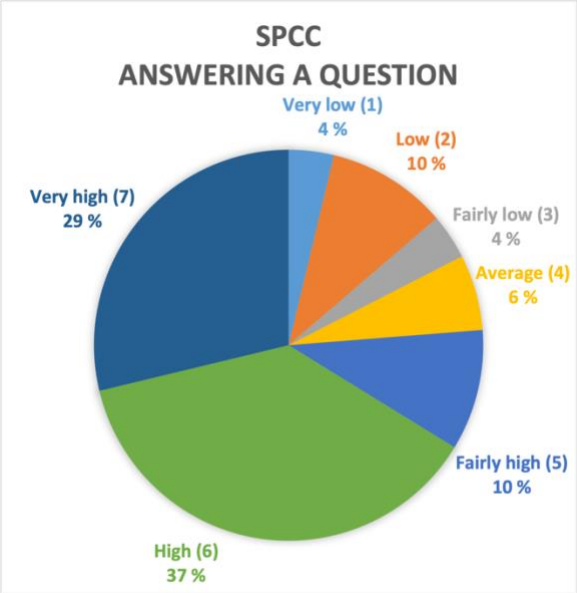

Figure 8: SPCC when answering a question

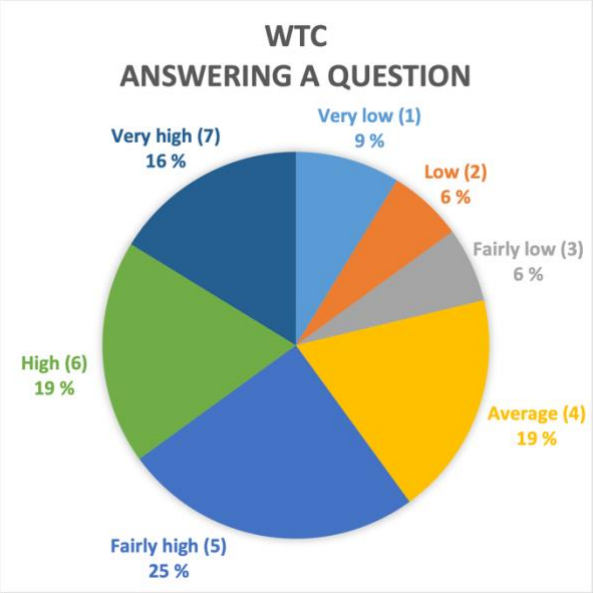

Figure 9: WTC when answering a question

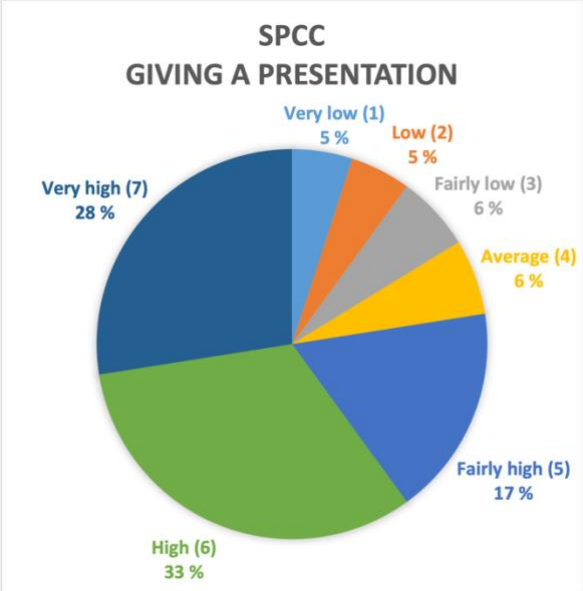

Figure 10: SPCC when giving a presentation

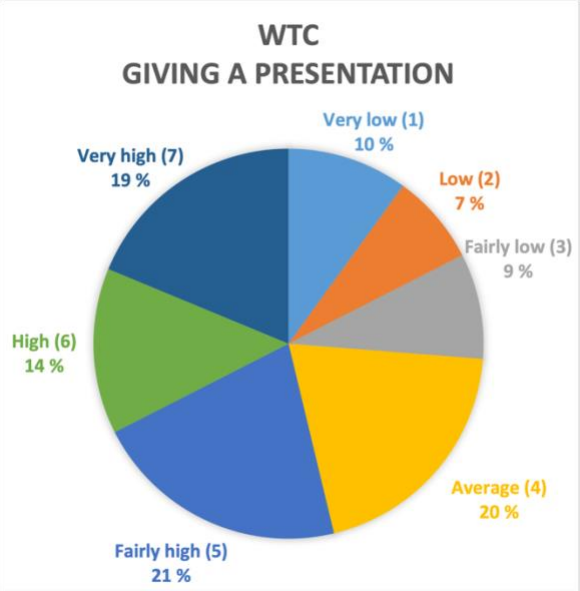

Figure 11: WTC when giving a presentation

4.1.2 Variation according to familiarity of participants

As can be seen in tables 3 and 4, presented in section 4.1, the difference in both SPCC and WTC is more significant between situations involving familiar and unfamiliar participants than between the contexts with a varying number of participants. In addition, the mean values describing SPCC and WTC when communicating with familiar participants are the highest in the tables, while those related to communicating with unfamiliar participants are the lowest. These differences are further illustrated in the figures below. Figure 12 shows that a notable majority, 82% of students, perceive their communication competence as very high or high in situations with participants that are familiar to them. Adding those who reported it to be fairly high, the proportion ascends to 91%. When communicating with unfamiliar participants, the corresponding figures are 52% and 72%, respectively, as shown in figure 14. Similar to all the contexts analyzed thus far, the answers are distributed more evenly among the different options in questions regarding WTC, as can be seen in figures 13 and 15. As for communication with familiar participants, there is still a clear majority, 74%, that evaluated their WTC as very high, high or fairly high. With unfamiliar participants, this proportion is significantly lower, only 47%.

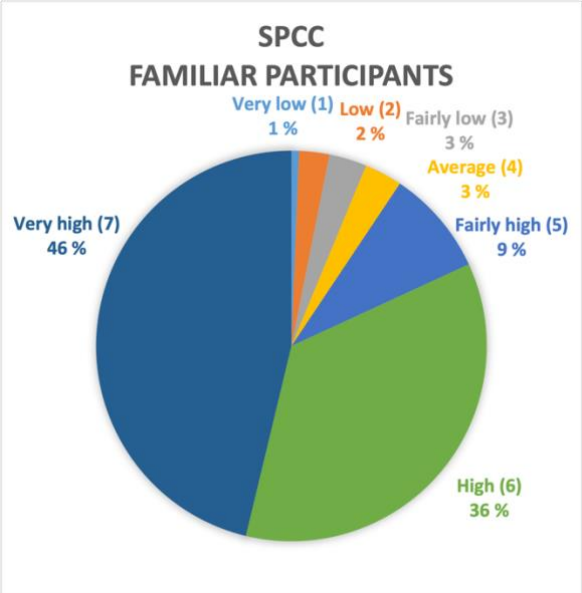

Figure 12: SPCC with familiar participants

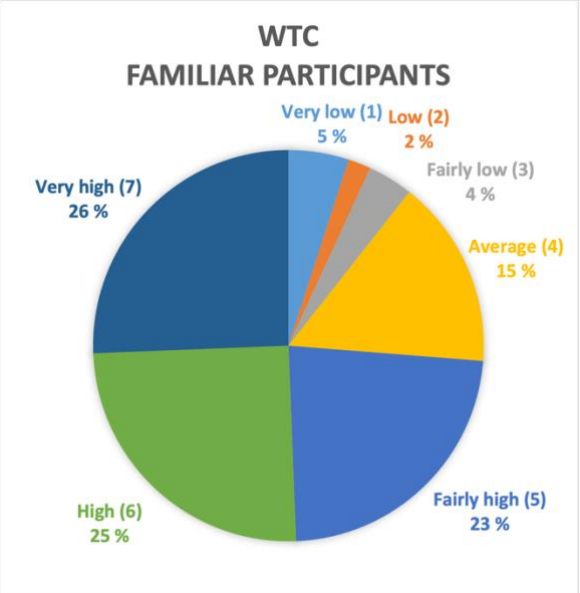

Figure 13: WTC with familiar participants

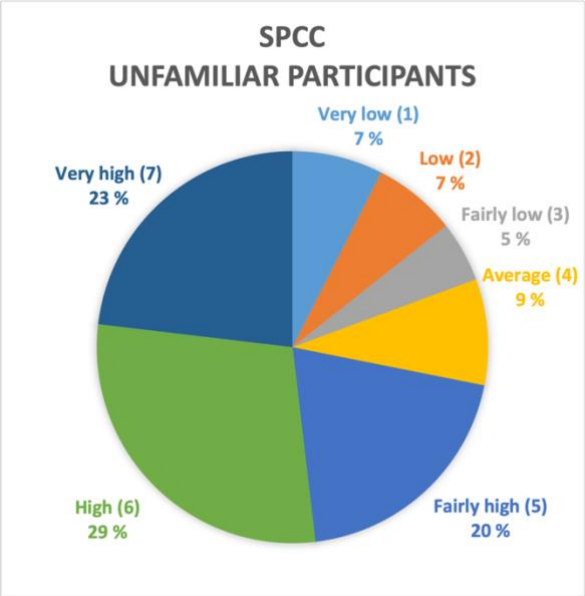

Figure 14: SPCC with unfamiliar participants

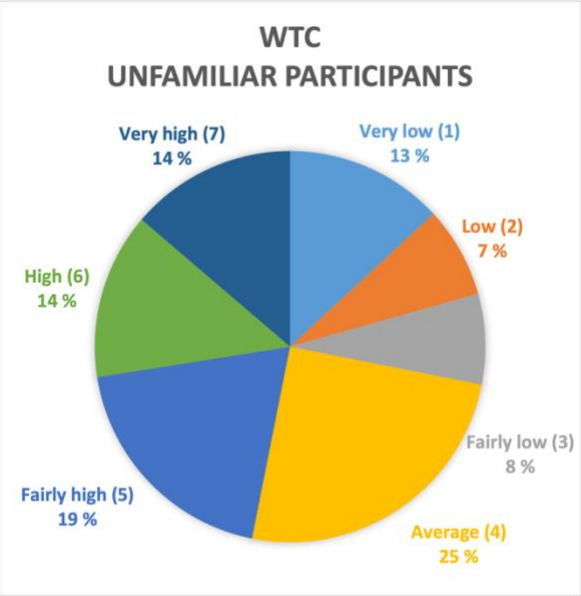

Figure 15: WTC with unfamiliar participants

4.2 Overall levels of SPCC and WTC

In order to answer the second research question, the overall levels of SPCC and WTC were calculated by combining all of the data related to each construct. As can be seen in figure 16, the mean value of SPCC is 5,57 and that of WTC is 4,77, while the standard deviations are 1,64 and 1,80, respectively. Based on these values, it appears that in general, the students perceive themselves as fairly competent or competent in the most common communicative situations of English lessons. Their willingness to communicate, on the other hand, tends to be slightly lower, but in general, it is still above average. It should also be noted that since the standard deviation is higher for overall WTC, there is more variation in how the students evaluated their WTC levels.

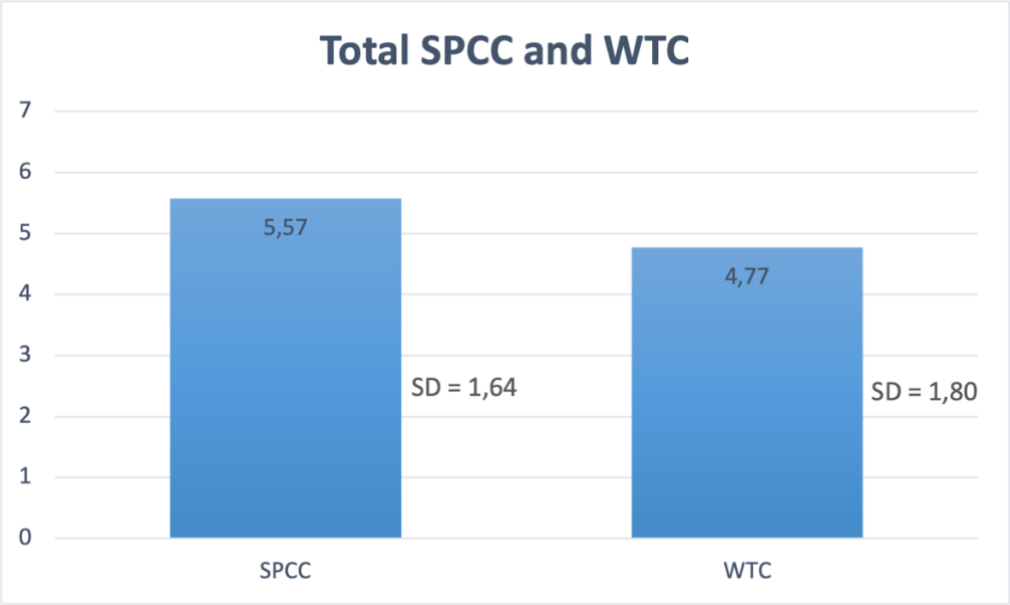

Figure 16: Means and standard deviations of overall SPCC and WTC

4.3 Summary of the results

Based on the more detailed examination of the data, the results can be summarized into a few main points. First, the number and familiarity of participants seem to be connected to the level of SPCC and WTC. As the means in figure 17 demonstrate, both SPCC and WTC are higher when less participants are involved and when communicating with familiar participants. Second, SPCC and WTC appear to be connected to each other. Namely, by comparing the variation of the mean values, it can be observed that they change in parallel, meaning that when the different contexts are ordered from the one with the highest mean to that with the lowest, the order is the same for both SPCC and WTC. The connections between the situational variables, SPCC and WTC were described in section 3.1, on the basis of previous research. Though it may be presumed that SPCC affects WTC, the reported levels of SPCC were consistently higher than those of WTC, indicating that the level of perceived competence to communicate does not entail an equal willingness to do so. Finally, to sum up the general levels of SPCC and WTC, it can be stated that the students' SPCC was fairly high or high, and their WTC was average or fairly high.

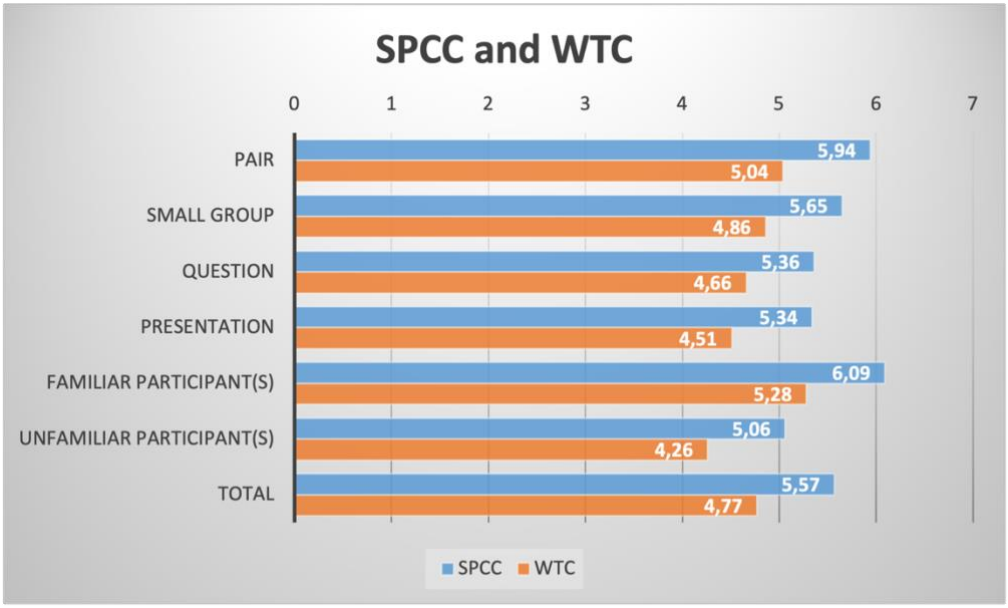

Figure 17: Summary of SPCC and WTC means

5 Discussion

In this section, the main findings and implications will be discussed along with relevant findings of earlier studies. In addition, the discussion involves suggestions for future research and states the limitations of the present study.

5.1 Main findings and implications

As was established in section 3.1, the aim of the present study is to illustrate the level of SPCC and WTC in a Finnish EFL classroom in different communicative situations, but also in general, as well as to prompt more research in this specific context, so that in the future, teachers will have a better understanding of the phenomena as experienced by Finnish students and be able to increase their confidence and willingness to communicate. In order to reflect the students' experiences in specific situations and overall in classroom communication, mean values were calculated with different foci.

All of the calculated means were above average, ranging from 4,15 to 6,48. The mean values for overall SPCC and WTC were 5,57 and 4,77, respectively.

Though there is a research gap of studies on SPCC and WTC in Finland, the results regarding WTC may be compared to those of Kostiainen's study, in which high school students' WTC was examined in pair work, small group discussions and in situations involving the entire class, but also overall inside and outside the classroom (2015, 31). Kostiainen calculated mean values for each context for both male and female respondents (ibid. 37). It should be noted, however, that a five-point Likert scale was used (ibid. 32), while the WTC scale of the present study is seven-point. Taking this difference into consideration, though, it appears that the level of total WTC was similar in both studies, as it was slightly above average. In Kostiainen's study, the mean value was 3,44 for female respondents and 3,51 for their male counterparts (ibid. 37), and 4,77 in the present study with no distinction made regarding the sex of the respondents. Nonetheless, the means for specific contexts with a different number of participants were relatively lower in Kostiainen's study, ranging from 2,69 to 4,24 (ibid.). In the present study, all the equivalent values were above average, varying between 4,51 and 5,04, as can be seen in table 4, in section 4.1. Naturally, the findings of these two studies do not represent all Finnish high school students', let alone all Finnish learners' experiences as regards WTC in EFL instruction. Moreover, it appears that SPCC or L2 self-confidence has not been studied at all from the perspective of Finnish EFL learners themselves. However, preliminary studies such as the present study and that of Kostiainen will hopefully inspire more research on SPCC and WTC in this specific context.

In addition to measuring the actual levels of SPCC and WTC, the present study aimed to examine how they vary in different communicative situations. This entails an interest toward the connections between situational variables, SPCC and WTC, which were summarized in section 3.1: certain situational variables are considered to influence SPCC, which, in turn, influences WTC. As was already established in section 4, this view is supported by the results. Both SPCC and WTC were

higher in situations with less participants and familiar participants, but familiarity seemed to have a more significant effect. Moreover, it was found that although WTC was consistently lower than SPCC, the levels varied in parallel when they were compared in all of the included contexts. Thus, it may be concluded that the higher the respondents' SPCC was, the higher their WTC was as well.

These results indicate that in order to increase and foster students' WTC in EFL lessons, it is essential to enhance their SPCC in situations where it is lower, but also provide opportunities to communicate in settings where students tend to feel more comfortable. Since it was found that familiarity had a greater effect on SPCC than the number of participants, one logical solution would be to help the students become more acquainted with each other, perhaps by devoting more time for this at the beginning of each course, so that unfamiliarity would not reduce their perceived competence, and consequently, their willingness to communicate with each other. As Cao and Philp suggest, a sense of cohesiveness is significant in creating a secure environment for students to communicate (2006, 488). Moreover, since the number of participants did influence SPCC as well, it should be considered when planning communicative exercises. As researchers have proposed, it might be beneficial to favor pair work at the beginning of courses and gradually proceed to exercises with a greater number of participants (Anyadubalu; Andrade and Williams; De Saint Léger and Storch, quoted in Lockley 2013, 191). This may also help the students to get better acquainted before they are expected to participate in communication that involves the entire group. Many other solutions for increasing SPCC and WTC have also been suggested in previous studies (e.g. Lockley 2013, 191–194, 202–204; Kang 2005, 290–291). Nonetheless, more research is needed before concluding which pedagogical measures are most relevant specifically in the Finnish EFL context.

5.2 Limitations of the study

Due to the limited scope of this thesis, there are certain limitations that must be considered when discussing the findings and implications. First, it was necessary to examine SPCC and WTC from a rather exclusive viewpoint. As was illustrated in section 2, both of these constructs are complex and affected by a number of variables, many of which could not be taken into account in the present study. This applies particularly to WTC, as it is influenced by more factors than SPCC, which may also explain why the responses were distributed more evenly in the evaluations of WTC. Second, since a relatively small purposive sample was used instead of a representative sample, the results cannot be generalized to all Finnish high school students' experiences. However, this study may prompt more research on SPCC and WTC in the Finnish EFL context, and future studies may aspire to generalizability, enabling reliable comparisons between studies conducted in different cultures. With a broader viewpoint and a larger, representative sample, future research may also be able to discover stronger tendencies in Finnish EFL learners' SPCC and WTC.

6 Conclusion

The present study examined Finnish high school students' self-reported levels of SPCC and WTC, and their variation in situations that students typically encounter in English lessons. The mean value of overall SPCC was 5,57, while the equivalent value of WTC was 4,77, both of which were evaluated on a seven-point scale. As for situational variation, SPCC means ranged from 4,83 to 6,48, and WTC means varied between 4,15 and 5,65. The situations included in the questionnaire differed in terms of the number and familiarity of participants. It was found that higher levels of SPCC and WTC were connected to a smaller number of participants and to one's familiarity with the participants. Familiarity seemed to have a more significant effect on both SPCC and WTC, however.

Due to the existing research gap on SPCC and WTC in the Finnish EFL context, the primary objective of the present study was to produce preliminary results of the constructs by focusing on a group of Finnish high school students. Though some suggestions for increasing SPCC and WTC levels were presented, more research is needed in order to make final judgements on how teachers can best enhance and foster students' confidence and willingness to engage in communication. While many pedagogical measures have been proposed in previous research, results acquired in one culture are not automatically applicable to another. Thus, SPCC and WTC should be studied in as many cultures and language learning contexts as possible, so that teachers can apply the knowledge that is relevant to their environment to facilitate communication in language instruction and help learners achieve higher proficiency.

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8 Appendix

Kommunikointikyky

Alla on kahdeksan erilaista tilannetta, jotka liittyvät puhumiseen englannin oppitunnilla. Arvioi, kuinka hyvin pystyt kommunikoimaan **englanniksi** kussakin tilanteessa.

1. Parikeskustelu oppitunnilla tutun ihmisen kanssa *

	erittäin heikko	heikko	jokseenkin heikko	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin hyvä	hyvä	erittäin hyvä
Kommunikointi kykyni on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

2. Parikeskustelu oppitunnilla tuntemattoman ihmisen kanssa *

	erittäin heikko	heikko	jokseenkin heikko	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin hyvä	hyvä	erittäin hyvä
Kommunikointi kykyni on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

3. Pienryhmäkeskustelu oppitunnilla tuttujen ihmisten kanssa *

	erittäin heikko	heikko	jokseenkin heikko	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin hyvä	hyvä	erittäin hyvä
Kommunikointi kykyni on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

4. Pienryhmäkeskustelu oppitunnilla tuntemattomien ihmisten kanssa *

	erittäin heikko	heikko	jokseenkin heikko	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin hyvä	hyvä	erittäin hyvä
Kommunikointi kykyni on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

5. Opettajan kysymykseen vastaaminen oppitunnilla, jolla on vain tuttuja ihmisiä *

	erittäin heikko	heikko	jokseenkin heikko	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin hyvä	hyvä	erittäin hyvä
Kommunikointi kykyni on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

6. Opettajan kysymykseen vastaaminen oppitunnilla, jolla on vain tuntemattomia ihmisiä *

	erittäin heikko	heikko	jokseenkin heikko	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin hyvä	hyvä	erittäin hyvä
Kommunikointi kykyni on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

7. Esitelmän pitäminen oppitunnilla, jolla on vain tuttuja ihmisiä *

	erittäin heikko	heikko	jokseenkin heikko	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin hyvä	hyvä	erittäin hyvä
Kommunikointi kykyni on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

8. Esitelmän pitäminen oppitunnilla, jolla on vain tuntemattomia ihmisiä *

	erittäin heikko	heikko	jokseenkin heikko	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin hyvä	hyvä	erittäin hyvä
Kommunikointi kykyni on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Kommunikointihalukkuus

Arvioi seuraavaksi, kuinka mielelläsi osallistut vuorovaikutukseen **englanniksi** kussakin tilanteessa englannin oppitunnilla.

9. Parikeskustelu oppitunnilla tutun ihmisen kanssa *

	erittäin matala	matala	jokseenkin matala	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin korkea	korkea	erittäin korkea
Halukkuuteni puhua englantia on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

10. Parikeskustelu oppitunnilla tuntemattoman ihmisen kanssa *

	erittäin matala	matala	jokseenkin matala	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin korkea	korkea	erittäin korkea
Halukkuuteni puhua englantia on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

11. Pienryhmäkeskustelu oppitunnilla tuttujen ihmisten kanssa *

	erittäin matala	matala	jokseenkin matala	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin korkea	korkea	erittäin korkea
Halukkuuteni puhua englantia on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

12. Pienryhmäkeskustelu oppitunnilla tuntemattomien ihmisten kanssa *

	erittäin matala	matala	jokseenkin matala	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin korkea	korkea	erittäin korkea
Halukkuuteni puhua englantia on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

13. Opettajan kysymykseen vastaaminen oppitunnilla, jolla on vain tuttuja ihmisiä *

	erittäin matala	matala	jokseenkin matala	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin korkea	korkea	erittäin korkea
Halukkuuteni puhua englantia on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

14. Opettajan kysymykseen vastaaminen oppitunnilla, jolla on vain tuntemattomia ihmisiä *

	erittäin matala	matala	jokseenkin matala	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin korkea	korkea	erittäin korkea
Halukkuuteni puhua englantia on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

15. Esitelmän pitäminen oppitunnilla, jolla on vain tuttuja ihmisiä *

	erittäin matala	matala	jokseenkin matala	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin korkea	korkea	erittäin korkea
Halukkuuteni puhua englantia on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

16. Esitelmän pitäminen oppitunnilla, jolla on vain tuntemattomia ihmisiä *

	erittäin matala	matala	jokseenkin matala	keskitasoinen	jokseenkin korkea	korkea	erittäin korkea
Halukkuuteni puhua englantia on	○	○	○	○	○	○	○