






Gonbad Kavous University

A Critical Analysis of Communication Factors in Two Different ESL And EFL Learning Contexts



Linguistics Society of Iran

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ABSTRACT

The present study was an attempt to investigate several commonly used measures of communication orientations, namely communication anxiety, communicative competence, willingness to communicate, and international posture of Iranian EFL and Malaysian ESL learners. To this end, samples of Iranian EFL university students were selected to be compared with Malaysian ESL university students through non-probability convenience sampling method. The results of the critical analysis indicated that the differences between Iranian and Malaysian samples do exist, but the differences were primarily restricted to “communication anxiety” and “willingness to communicate”, and the other two measures of “communicative competence” and “international posture” were found to be not significantly different between the learners of the two groups. Hence, the Iranian EFL learners felt as competent to communicate as the Malaysian ESL learners. Furthermore, the Malaysian learners were documented to experience and suffer from more communication anxiety than their Iranian counterparts. However, the Iranian EFL learners expressed more willingness to communicate than those Malay ESL learners. Regarding international posture, however, the participants of both groups showed an equal tendency and readiness to relate themselves to the international community. The findings of the current study had specific implications for instructors, administrators, and learners in both ESL and EFL contexts.

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Introduction

Language proficiency is not considered as the final objective of language education, but it is observed as a tool to accomplish interpersonal and intercultural goals. Therefore, the aim of EFL learning is to enable better communication and understanding among learners. The objective of the current research was to collect data on several commonly used measures of communication orientations, namely communication anxiety, communicative competence, willingness to communicate, and international posture among Iranian EFL and Malaysian ESL learners.

The significance of context in English language learning and its impact on successful education systems around the globe have increasingly been emphasized (Wedell & Malderez, 2013). As stated by Yashima (2002, p. 62), “a careful examination of what it means to learn a language in a particular context is necessary before applying a model developed in a different context.” Different contexts have their own specific features, and such features are seriously considered by educators and planners, not only educational reforms but also new classroom methodologies will be successfully introduced (Wedell & Malderez, 2013). The procedure that wishes to improve, for instance, oral communication skill in Iran, must be cautiously implemented and targeted after further reflection of both theory and practical situations.

In this study, the empirical framework of willingness to communicate (WTC) developed by MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) and especially international posture (IP) as the important component to WTC in ESL/EFL context are used. As denoted by MacIntyre et al. (1998), the avoidance of language learners to speak in English learning context is contributed to their WTC. Hence, a process is formed where English language learners choose to take part or not to take part in oral communication occasions. In the presented model of MacIntyre et al. (1998), communicative, social psychological and linguistic variables are fused together as the elements contributing to WTC in language learning. The model essentially emphasized that a learners' willingness to communicate or not depended on the conditions they were involved in, and was discovered by the persons with whom they interact and the learners' self-reliance in communication opportunities.

In a bilingual setting, there are definitely plenty of opportunities for language students to be optimally exposed to L2. This is unlike the EFL context of Iran in which English is considered as a foreign language, and there are comparatively fewer opportunities for Iranian language learners to make use of it out of the classroom setting. As a result of the dissimilarities in the features of cultural context, Wen and Clément (2003) adapted the WTC Model of MacIntyre et al. (1998) to reflect the nature of Chinese EFL students, focusing on the cultural dimension. The primary source of the adaptation of WTC Model was similar to the Iranian context. At the same time, with the purpose of understanding the ways of improving learners' WTC, the aspects that have great effect on WTC need to be initially distinguished. The main affecting factors comprise communication anxiety (McCroskey & Baer, 1985), frequency of international interactions, and international posture (Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011; Yashima, 2002). Among the afore-mentioned factors, communication anxiety and the

international posture have been considered as significant factors which can influence Asian language learners' WTC to a great deal (Yashima, 2002); nevertheless, the study of Yashima (2002) concentrated just on Japanese English learners.

Regarding previously conducted research, as stated by Ghonsooly et al. (2012), a number of communicative, linguistic, and social variables impact WTC, such as call for communication with a specific person, interpersonal motivation, condition of communicative self-confidence, communicative competence, social stances, between group outlooks, in addition to between group environments. As stated by McCroskey and Richmond (1990), the association between WTC and other variables might not be very similar from one culture to another. Another theoretical L2 WTC Model was developed by MacIntyre et al. (1998) while they considered the L1 WTC Model of McCroskey and Baer (1985). Their model provides explanation on the mental processes contributing to beginning communication in English in a pyramid-shape.

A different model was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) under the influence of their theory of *foreign language classroom anxiety*. They claimed that language anxiety can consist of three performance anxieties: 1) communication apprehension, 2) test anxiety, and 3) fear of negative evaluation. It must be said, however, that the major argument of Horwitz was in opposition with the idea that language anxiety is distinctive from other types of anxiety. Inaccurate learners' views about English learning might largely result in causing language anxiety in students. Horwitz (1988) has suggested that some of the learners' attitudes are due to their perfectionistic and sometimes mistaken opinions about language learning. As is understood from these results, it is rather likely that idealistic views held by learners themselves might lead to greater frustration and anxiety; hence, their beliefs may play another considerable part in creating language anxiety in language students.

EFL instruction has recently focused not on developing students' linguistic competence but more on improving the level of communicative competence. Thus, EFL students are enabled to speak in English naturally in a variety of social settings. With the purpose of meeting this challenge, the role of affective filters such as motivation, personality types, learning styles, etc. that can hinder the process of English language education have been investigated (Azarfam & Baki, 2012). Among affective filters, learner communicative anxiety is accepted as a significant area of research in EFL education due to the adverse effect it can create on learners' language performance. International Posture has also recently been emphasized as a significant variable in EFL context. Despite its weak connection to WTC, as stated by Matsuoka (2006), it has been considered to be a strong predictor of WTC. Therefore, International Posture as a research variable was also included in this study. Meanwhile, the excitement variable which arose from a qualitative examination of WTC among Korean EFL students in the US (Kang, 2005), appeared to be related to the context of this study.

A number of scholars have showed that anxiety can delay success in ESL/EFL learning (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Young, 1991; Ohata, 2005; Williams & Andrade, 2008). It was also found that language learning problems could predict anxiety best in EFL contexts (Chen & Chang, 2004).

The study of Lucas, Miraflores, and Go (2011) examined the causes of anxiety in English language learning of EFL learners in the Philippines. The researchers applied Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horowitz et al. (1986), and Language Strategy Survey (LSS) of Cohen, Oxford and Chi (2001). Specifically, the study targeted EFL learners' studying in tertiary institutions in Manila in which these learners abound. The results of their study suggested that these student types used vocabulary strategy to efficiently learn the English language and to cope with their English class anxiety. The application of this strategy was also found to enable the students to accept the responsibility of their own learning as this served as their basic help to learn other macro skills in the target language.

Regarding communication anxiety, Ekström (2013) examined if levels of various kinds of EFL communication anxiety which Swedish learners experienced in school when interacting in English in their EFL classes had any relationship with sociolinguistic variables like gender, age, performance and multilingual competence. The most noticeable indications of correlation to anxiety were found to be gender, performance, and linguistic competence. It was then concluded that communication as an activity conducted in EFL classroom must be further defined and broken down into specific four language skills, and also be approached accordingly. Concerning international posture, Thurston (2015) conducted a study in Singapore on the attitudes and motivation of mainland Chinese EFL learners in Singapore, analyzing the reasons behind the perceived poor motivation of mainland Chinese EFL learners in Singapore, considering their International Posture. He proposed a new draft motivational framework utilizing the International Posture concept for EFL students studying overseas, claiming that the suggested framework may enable teachers to understand the motivation of EFL students in their specific settings.

In the local context of Iran, there have so far been some studies conducted on the variables studied in this research. In one case, Cheraghpour and Golaghaei (2017) examined the relationships among willingness to communicate, communication apprehension, and self-perceived communication competence in Persian versus English. Their study was similar to the current research in that both investigated communication-related constructs in two different languages, but their study was about the same learners' perceptions in two different L1 and L2, whereas the present study was concerning these constructs in two different contexts related to ESL and EFL learners. The results depicted that among the assigned variables, communication apprehension was more of a trait-like predisposition which was transferred across L1 and L2. WTC in L1 had little predictive effect on WTC in L2. Also, Alemi, Tajeddin, and Mesbah (2013) examined the influence of individual differences on EFL students' WTC. In their study, a number of Iranian EFL learners were surveyed through McCroskey's (1992) questionnaire to measure their WTC. The findings revealed no significant difference among the participants in terms of gender, major, age, and personality types; nevertheless, significant difference was found regarding other variables, such as proficiency level, length of studying, being abroad, and communicating with foreigners. Thus, the effects of individual differences on Iranian EFL

WTC were in part confirmed. Zarrinabadi and Abdi (2011) also examined the relationship between Iranian EFL learners in terms of their WTC, using an adapted version of MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Conrod (2001) WTC questionnaire for measuring learners' WTC to communicate inside and outside the classroom, and their language learning orientations. The results indicated language orientations to be more correlated with WTC outside than inside the classroom.

In a cross-cultural comparative study conducted by Gao and Liu (2013), the personality traits of effective teachers represented in the narratives of American and Chinese preservice teachers were compared. The findings revealed that American preservice teachers attached greater importance to teachers' adaptability, sense of humor, and responsibility while the Chinese attached greater importance to teachers' patience, agreeableness, caring, and friendliness. In another case study, WTC of Iranian emigrants to New Zealand were analyzed by Cameron (2013) who identified six factors, both trait and situational, as having an effect on students' WTC in both countries: self-perceived competence, personality, anxiety, motivation and the importance of English, and the learning context. Based on the background studies conducted and reported in the local context of Iran, though WTC has been examined and reported locally (see Alemi, Tajeddin, & Mesbah, 2013; Aliakbari, Kamangar, & Khany, 2016; Baghaei, 2012; Barjesteh, Vaseghi, & Neissi, 2012), it has not yet been compared with other contexts, and especially with learners in ESL contexts, and we know that, as stated by Oxford and Shearin (1994), the variations between ESL and EFL contexts may influence language students to a great deal. At the same time, knowing about intercultural similarities and differences between the two groups can provide a rich understanding of developing patterns of different cultures while using English as a means of intercultural communication (Dogancay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2012). To enable effective intercultural communication, it is necessary to give language learners insights into their own culture as well as into the values of other cultural groups. In such a context, cross-cultural studies can play a pivotal role in illuminating the major differences between English speakers from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Shishavan & Sharifian, 2016).

Unlike most of the studies in the field, this research applied the model in both ESL and EFL settings simultaneously so as to draw conclusions regarding the differences in the perceptions of these two groups. This comparison allows the scholars and practitioners to gain a better knowledge of language teaching and learning in a context in which English is not the medium of communication in the students' daily life. At the same time, the findings of the current study could cause the instructors to predict students' communication behavior and encourage their language use in their ESL/EFL setting. The main research questions posed for the current study were as follows:

1. Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL learners and Malaysian ESL learners in terms of communication anxiety?
2. Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL learners and Malaysian ESL learners in terms of communicative competence?

3. Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL learners and Malaysian ESL learners in terms of willingness to communicate?
4. Is there any significant difference between Iranian EFL learners and Malaysian ESL learners in terms of international posture?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of the present study were from two different ESL and EFL contexts of Malaysia and Iran, respectively. The Iranian sample consisted of fourth semester undergraduate EFL students attending Islamic Azad University (IAU) of Iran, Tabriz Branch, whereas the Malaysian participants were the fourth semester undergraduate ESL students of University Putra Malaysia (UPM) in Malaysia. The target samples of 62 learners from among 140 students were then selected through non-probability convenience sampling method for each group.

Research Design

While trying to discover the relationship between the two groups of learners in terms of certain factors, the current study adopted a quantitative research design. This research relied upon illustrating certain phenomena and investigating the differences between student groups based on the study variables. The main variables of the study were also communication anxiety, communicative competence, willingness to Communicate (WTC), and international posture to be investigated among Iranian EFL and Malaysian ESL learners.

Instruments

In order to answer the research questions of the present study and for the purpose of collecting the required data for critical analysis, four questionnaires were applied, namely Communication Anxiety Inventory, Communicative Competence Scale, Willingness to Communicate Scale, and International Posture Scale.

1. Communication Anxiety Inventory (CAI): This 21-item inventory developed by Booth-Butterfield and Gould (1986) is composed of 21 statements that describe various communication events. The respondents were asked to respond in terms of how they generally felt about these events by marking their response in the appropriate blank.
2. Communicative Competence Scale (CCS): This thirty-six-item scale from Wiemann (1977) was used to measure communicative competence, an ability "to choose among available communicative behaviors" to accomplish one's own "interpersonal goals during an encounter while maintaining the face and line" of "fellow interactants within the constraints of the situation" (p. 198). Subjects use the CCS to assess another person's communicative competence by responding to 36 items using Likert scales. The researcher adapted the other-report format to self-report.
3. Willingness to Communicate Scale: This 20-item scale developed by McCroskey and Richmond (2013) was used to assess participants' willingness to communicate in English in terms of the

communication context (public speaking, talking in meetings, group discussions, and interpersonal conversations) and types of receivers (stranger, acquaintance, and friend). Respondents were supposed to rate the likelihood of choosing to communicate in each type of situation on a scale from 0 to 10.

4. International Posture Scale: This 20-item scale, adapted from Yashima (2002), includes the Approach-Avoidance Tendency to measure the respondents' tendency to approach or avoid English-speaking foreigners, international vocation or activities, international news, and having things to communicate to the world. So, the respondents indicated their degree of agreement and rated the likelihood of being involved in each type of situation on a scale from 0 to 10.

In all questionnaire items, the required minor modifications were made in the items of the scales to make them more appropriate to apply in Iranian EFL as well as Malaysian ESL settings.

Procedure

The process of administering the instruments of the present study so as to run the research went through successive stages as follows:

Questionnaires containing measures of the aforementioned communication anxiety, communicative competence, willingness to communicate, and international posture in English language were simultaneously administered to Iranian EFL and Malaysian ESL learners. Since the target Iranian EFL university students were easily available, the researcher was able to collect the required data in the determined time limit. However, the access to the target Malaysian ESL university students was a bit difficult since the researcher resided in Iran and had no easy access to them. By the way, through the help of a university faculty member in the university Putra Malaysia, as a research assistant, she could collect the required data in ESL context but in a longer period of time.

The questions in various forms and scales were keyed in Microsoft Forms (Figure 1) an online survey creator and part of Office 365 which was released by Microsoft. The different questionnaires had their own designated scales, and the respondents needed to make the options in Likert Scale form, determine the percentage, or decide on 1-10 scale. This online Software made it possible for the researcher to export the collected data to Microsoft Excel, and then enter them into SPSS Software to be analyzed. The respondents in both groups were asked to click on the separate provided links and start answering the questions. After finishing the job, they were required to click on the submit button within the set time limit. The concept WTC in English as well as communication anxiety, communicative competence, and international posture were considered an indicator variables, so to specify each indicator variable, values of all the items were aggregated. Values of negative items were also reversed before aggregation.

After the researchers collected the required data for the study, they scrutinized them for any missing information. Based on the collected information, they had to leave out three cases from each group, as some sections of the questionnaires were left untouched and without answers. Hence, the number of questionnaires for analysis was determined to be 62 in each group.

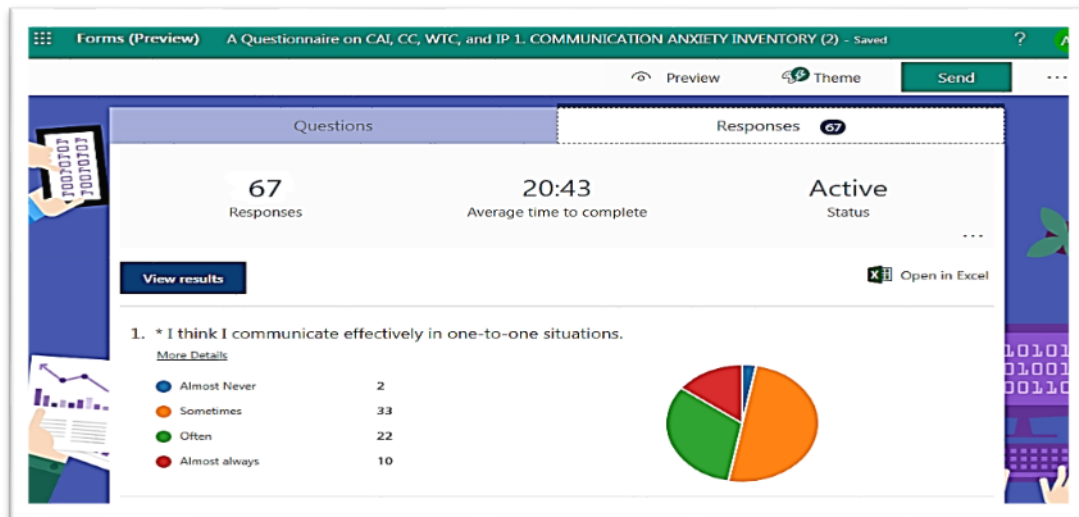


Figure 1. Screenshot of questionnaire responses in Microsoft Word Forms

The data collection procedure took about eight weeks to be accomplished. In the process of analyzing the collected data, after collecting and tabulating them, all the data from the scales were run through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v.23) to work out descriptive statistics. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaires. Hence, the collected data, after being converted into a computer file, were screened and cleaned to gain a fully-crossed dataset. The difference between EFL and ESL groups in terms of the examined elements were then investigated through running four independent-samples t-test, one for each research question.

FINDINGS

In the phase of data analysis, descriptive statistics was described by measures, such as mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum obtained data values, while inferential statistics through independent samples t-test analyzed the collected data and assessed the hypotheses. It should be noted that the required statistical processing of the data were performed using SPSS Software, version 23. As shown in the Table 1, in the present study, the data from a total of 62 university English students were involved in the critical data analysis.

Table 1. Group Statistics: Communication Anxiety Inventory

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Subject Score	Iranian	62	21.56	5.38	0.95
	Malaysian	62	24.72	5.34	0.94

Before running independent samples t-test, the Anderson Darling test was used in order to check for the normality of the collected data. It tested the normality of the data related to the corresponding scores of respondents in Question 1.

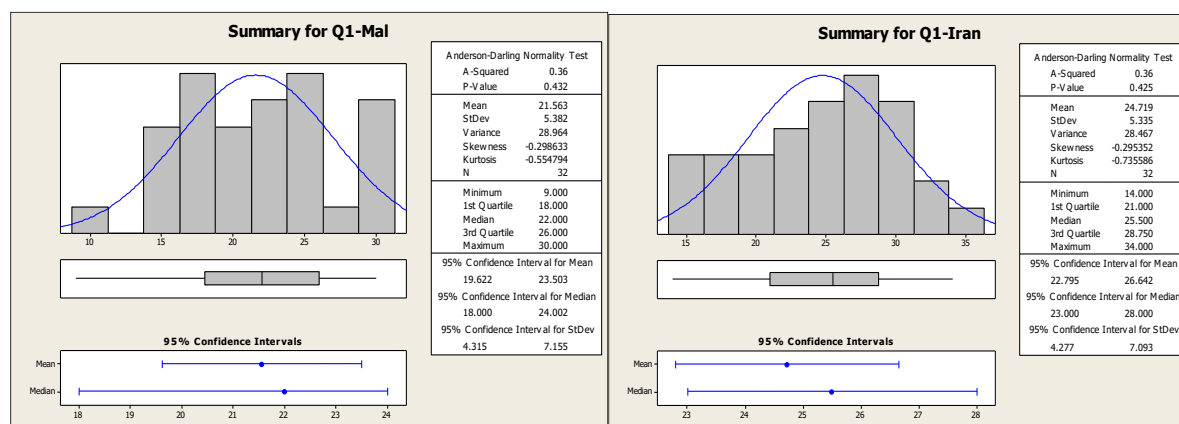


Figure 2. Graph of normal distribution of data about Question 1

According to the above graphs, by obtaining p-value equal to 0.425 and 0.432 (more than 0.05), the assumption of normal distribution of data was met. In order to answer the Research Question 1 in this study, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. The main objective was to compare the responses of two different Malaysian ESL and Iranian EFL groups of English students to the “Communication Anxiety Inventory”. The results are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Paired-Sample T-Tests: Communication Anxiety Inventory

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of means					
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.0	.714	2.36	62	0.022	3.16	0.48	5.83
Equal variances not assumed			2.36	61	0.022	3.16	0.48	5.84

As indicated in Table 2, the equality of variances for the gained results of the questionnaire for the two groups was assessed, and since the level of significance was more than 0.05, the equal variances were assumed, and the researcher considered the first row of the table for answering the related research question. Meanwhile, the results revealed significant difference between the mean scores of Malaysian respondents (M= 24.72, SD = 5.34) and Iranian respondents (M= 21.56, SD =

5.38); $t(62) = 2.36$, $p = 0.022$. The mean difference in statistics scores was 3.16 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.48 to 5.83.

As shown in Table 3, in the current study, 62 cases from each ESL and EFL groups were found suitable to be involved in data analysis of “Communicative Competence Scale”.

Table 3. Group Statistics: Communicative Competence Scale (CCS)

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Subject Score	Iranian	62	17.8	12.2	2.2
	Malaysian	62	19.81	9.72	1.7

The Anderson Darling test was also used in order to check for the normality of the collected data resulting in the assumption of normal distribution of data to be met by calculating p-value to be equal to $0.556 > 0.05$ and $0.824 > 0.05$.

In order to answer the Research Question 2, an independent-samples t-test was conducted, the results of which are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Paired-Sample T-Tests: Communicative Competence Scale (CCS)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of means					
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	0.16	.974	-0.75	62	0.458	-2.06	-7.58	3.45
Equal variances not assumed			-0.75	59	0.458	-2.06	-7.58	3.46

After the equality of variances was assumed, as is illustrated in Table 4, the main results revealed no significant difference between the mean scores of Iranian respondents ($M = 17.8$, $SD = 12.2$) and Malaysian respondents ($M = 19.81$, $SD = 9.72$); $t(62) = -0.75$, $p = 0.458$. The mean difference in statistics scores was -2.06 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -7.58 to 3.45. Meanwhile, as indicated in Table 5, the same number of students from among ESL and EFL learners was involved in the data analysis of Willingness to Communicate Scale.

Table 5. Group Statistics: Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Scale

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Subject Score	Iranian	62	126.4	13.5	2.4
	Malaysian	62	115.5	25.7	4.5

The normality of the data was again checked by Anderson Darling test for question 3. Based on the result, p-value equaled 0.204 and 0.219 (more than 0.05) resulting in the assumption of normal distribution of data to be met. For answering the Research Question 3, an independent-samples t-test was also conducted. (Table 6).

Table 6. Paired-Sample T-Tests: Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Scale

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of means					
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	16.97	0.000	2.13	62	0.037	10.97	0.70	21.24
Equal variances not assumed			2.13	46	0.038	10.97	0.63	21.31

Based on the Table 6 information, the equality of variances was not assumed for the gained results, so the second row of the table was considered to answer the related research question. The results revealed a significant difference between the mean scores of Iranian respondents ($M = 126.4$, $SD = 13.5$) and Malaysian respondents ($M = 115.5$, $SD = 25.7$); $t(62) = 2.13$, $p = 0.037$. The mean difference in statistics scores was 10.97 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.63 to 21.31. And finally, as indicated in Table 7, in the current study, 62 participants from each ESL and EFL groups answered the questionnaire and were involved in the data analysis of "International Posture Scale".

Table 7. Group Statistics: International Posture Scale (IPS)

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Subject Score	Iranian	62	84.2	19.8	3.5
	Malaysian	62	84.9	17.6	3.1

Before running independent samples t-test to answer the second research question, the Anderson Darling test was used in order to check for the normality of the collected data. It tested the normality of the data related to the corresponding scores of respondents in Question 4. The test results confirmed the assumption of normal distribution of data.

For answering the Research Question 4 in this study, an independent-samples t-test was also conducted. The main goal was to compare the responses of two different Malaysian ESL and Iranian EFL groups of English students to the "International Posture Scale" (IPS). The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Paired-Sample T-Tests: International Posture Scale (IPS)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of means					
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.22	0.391	-0.15	62	0.879	-0.72	-10.10	8.66
Equal variances not assumed			-0.15	61	0.879	-0.72	-10.10	8.67

As is shown in Table 8, the equal variances for both groups were assumed, and the findings revealed not a significant difference between the mean scores of Iranian respondents (M= 84.2, SD = 19.8) and Malaysian respondents (M= 84.9, SD = 17.6); $t(62) = -0.15, p = 0.879$. The mean difference in statistics scores was -0.72 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -10.10 to 8.66. Therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected. The differences between the mean scores of Malaysian and Iranian respondents in terms of all four research variables are vividly illustrated in Figures 3 and 4.

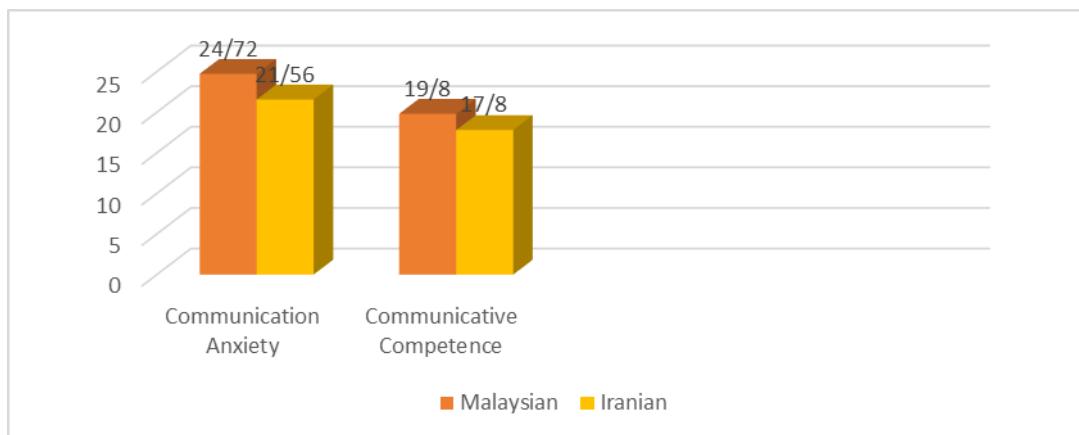


Figure 3. Mean comparison of Malaysian and Iranian learners regarding CA and CC

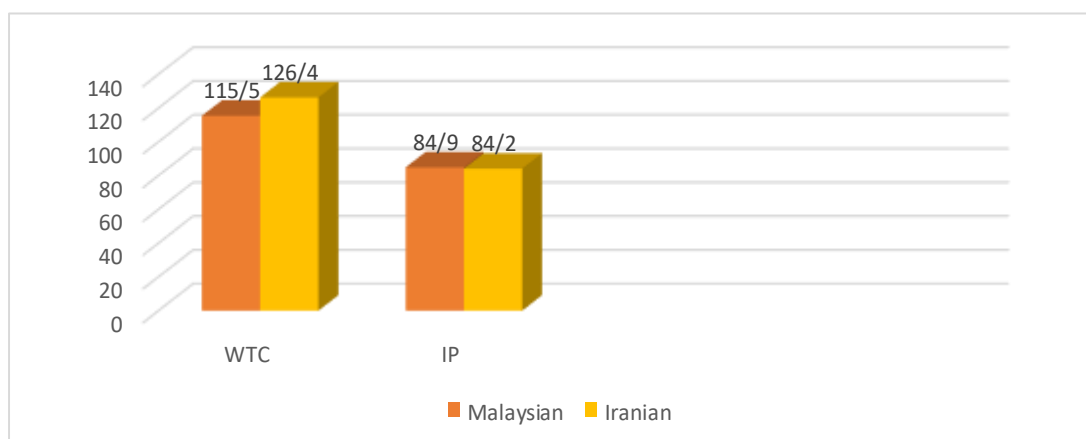


Figure 4. Mean comparison of Malaysian and Iranian learners regarding WTC and IP

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the factors involved in effective communication in English language in two different EFL context of Iran and ESL context of Malaysia. The findings showed that Malaysian university students experienced higher levels of communication anxiety as compared to their Iranian peers. However, in terms of “Communicative Competence”, no significant difference was documented between Malaysian and Iranian students, which meant they have been in the same competence level regarding the competence to communicate in English in their ESL and EFL contexts, respectively.

Iranian EFL students as compared to their Malaysian ESL counterparts were more willing to take part in communicative events based on the results of the questionnaire. This result was obtained while the Malaysian university students claimed to experience higher level of communication anxiety which is usually considered as a hinder in communication process; hence, it was in fact a quite expected result in this study. The critical analysis of descriptive as well as inferential statistics revealed that both groups demonstrated to take the same psychological stance regarding the cultures associated with the language being learned. Thus, the Malaysian ESL learners exhibited as much readiness as Iranian EFL learners to engage in international communication.

The results of this study were found to be in line with a few of research studies (see Aliakbari, Kamangar, & Khany, 2016; Dörnyei, 2003; Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Horwitz et al., 1986; McCroskey, 1987; Thurston, 2015; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009; Yashima, 2002; Yashima, 2009) while the findings of few other investigations were documented to be not consistent with the findings of the current study regarding certain constructs (see Backman, 1976; Horwitz, 2001; Scovel, 1978). Though the levels of communicative competence of both groups were not significantly different, the descriptive comparison of their means – 19.81 for Malay and 17.80 for Iranian – showed a minor difference. One probable reason for this difference could be that ESL learners were provided with ample opportunities to participate in communicative event and activities in their different school and

social experiences, and they were frequently exposed to English in their ESL context, although they were found to be less willing to communicate than EFL ones.

Although Malaysian ESL learners had descriptively a rather higher level of communicative competence, they were comparatively less willing to communicate in English with others. This finding could be supported with the finding of Yamat, Fisher, and Rich (2013), who found Malaysian ESL learners introvert, resulting in their being less confident to be involved in interaction with others. Thus, it was, for instance, found that ESL learners possessed a good amount of vocabulary, as they were aware of the appropriate use of them, but encountered communication apprehension and avoided direct interaction with either their classmates or other peers. This lack of willingness to communicate among Malay students could also be contributed to the specific characteristic of Malay students as introvert learners. According to Yamat, Fisher, and Rich (2013), the teacher's perception and observation of Malay students indicated that they were not as much active as they were expected, for instance, in raising their hands to volunteer answers. It was then believed that their lack of confidence or attempt to make sense before speaking was the main reason for their less involvement in interaction with the others. It was also presumably considered to be a cultural driven behavior among Malaysian ESL learners, who were being polite and considerate (Yamat, Fisher, & Rich, 2013). At the same time, the difference between ESL and EFL learners was not documented to be significantly high regarding L2 International Posture, which meant that they were both equally ready to be involved in communication with English natives. As a matter of fact, ESL learners are typically expected to have more frequent exposure to native English speakers in an ESL context like Malaysia in comparison to Iranian EFL learners regarding L2 International Posture, although they experienced less WTC in English.

The findings of the present research were, then, found to be in line with the findings of McCroskey and Richmond (1990), who revealed that a lack of English proficiency might lead to not a higher degree of communication competence as a robust predictor of WTC, in addition to the research results of Hashimoto (2002) who claimed that observed competence is the reason for stronger willingness to communicate. In the current research, it was found that EFL students were more enthusiastic to communicate than their ESL counterparts, whereas they were documented to experience less anxiety and show less competence than the other members of the other group. Likewise, Riasati (2012), examining Iranian EFL learners' insight toward factors that affect their WTC in language classrooms, characterized self-perceived speaking ability among numerous other factors, like topic of discussion, class atmosphere, task type, interlocutor, instructor, and personality contributing to WTC, which can be taken as in line with the findings of the current research.

While descriptions of typical individuals living in Iran include such descriptions as "outgoing," "talkative," and "extroverted," descriptions of Malaysian more characteristically include such terms as "reserved," "quiet," and "introverted." If indeed these commonly used descriptions accurately distinguish between the peoples representative of these two cultures, we might expect representative

samples of persons from these two cultures to make considerable difference regarding their reports of WTC – the findings which were consistent with the present study. Lower competence in English might be the reason for the formation of communication apprehension in EFL students which can result in their decision not to take part in communication. As stated by Yu, Li and Gou (2011), a learner with lower degree of communication apprehension and higher amount of communication competence is definitely more willing to communicate. To be exact, both increasing perceived competence and reducing anxiety level aid learners to raise their WTC (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan, 2003).

Furthermore, as the findings of the present study showed, EFL learners were more willing to communicate with native speakers of English and less willing to communicate with nonnative speakers of English. Perhaps EFL learners believed that they could learn more from native speakers of English than from nonnative ones (Baghaei, 2012). So, they might have seen no point in communicating with nonnatives. The findings of the present study confirmed Yashima's (2002) conclusion that to encourage EFL learners to be more willing to communicate in English language, their exposure to different cultures and international affairs should be increased in contexts, such as the classroom. The profound influence of culture on WTC implies that instructors should be aware of learners' cultural backgrounds when designing classroom tasks and activities, in order to enhance WTC in English and promote English communication among them.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The current research was conducted with the aim of deciding on the difference between Malaysian ESL learners and Iranian EFL learners in terms of certain constructs of communication in English, namely communication anxiety, communicative competence, willing to communicate, and international posture. Based on the results, the level of WTC was found to serve as a good indicator of the students' success in different study methods, and an instructor may decide on the learning tasks that best fit the students' inclinations to reduce their communication anxiety.

The possible findings of the study can be used in language institutes and universities of two different ESL and EFL contexts. They can also be utilized by ESL/EFL instructors, teacher trainers, and ESL/EFL material developers. Since in an EFL context like Iran learners typically learn in the classroom setting in which English teaching and learning mainly occur, EFL instructors and their students should understand that the best way to enhance WTC is to communicate and interact with one another. Therefore, Iranian EFL teachers need to devote much effort to encourage their students to apply their L2 in their classrooms and work together to enhance their willingness to communicate as a significant component of modern pedagogy in English language. According to the results, ESL learners were generally less willing to communicate and appeared to have low levels of WTC in English as compared to EFL learners who were relatively more prepared to communicate in English language. Thus, Malaysian ESL teachers could be advised to improve their communicative language

teaching methods and curriculum design to provide language learners with more communication opportunities. They are suggested to encourage their students to use their L2 when the opportunity arises, inside or outside the classroom, to foster their students' willingness to communicate. Furthermore, as ESL students were found to have lower degree of willingness to communicate in class context, the researcher of the study suggested that ESL teachers in Malaysia make efforts to create a positive classroom atmosphere to help students engage in communication activities and carry out investigations in their own classrooms in order to further their knowledge of the conditions and contexts that will be more likely to motivate students to use target language more actively.

A fruitful area of further studies in the field of communication constructs could take other forms. Longitudinal research may serve as a crucial factor on the way of being able to generalize the findings of the study. On the other hand, along with having a longer study, taking into account various subjects, such as non-English major classes may be fruitful. At the same time, with the purpose of exploring learners' WTC in EFL context, it is possible to examine instructors' perceptions to know about the reasons and procedure of creating a classroom teaching environment by instructors to encourage learners' willingness to communicate.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed significantly to the research process.

Declaration

We declare that this manuscript is original and has not been submitted to any other journal for publication

Transparency Statements

The authors affirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article. Any additional data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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APPENDIX

1. COMMUNICATION ANXIETY INVENTORY

Instructions

This is a self-report test. It is only as accurate as (a) how well you know yourself, and (b) how honestly you are willing to respond to the items. Please consider each item, think about yourself and answer as honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers. Learning about yourself through tests such as these can help you develop knowledge and skills in communication.

Directions: This inventory is composed of 21 statements that describe various communication events. You are asked to respond in terms of how you generally feel about these events. Please mark your response in the appropriate blank on the answer sheet. Be sure to give the response that best describes how you generally feel.

Almost Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
1	2	3	4

1. * I think I communicate effectively in one-to-one situations.
2. My heart beats faster than usual when I speak out in a small group meeting.
3. * I enjoy speaking in public.
4. I avoid talking with individuals I don't know very well.
5. I think I make a poor impression when I speak at a small group meeting.
6. I feel disappointed in myself after speaking in public.
7. * I enjoy talking with someone I've just met.
8. * My body feels relaxed when I speak during a small group meeting.
9. I avoid speaking in public if possible.
10. My body feels tense when I talk with someone I don't know very well.
11. * I speak out during small group meetings. '
12. I am terrified at the thought of speaking in public.
13. My heart beats faster than usual when I talk with someone I've just met.
14. * I enjoy talking at a small group meeting.
15. * I make a good impression when I speak in public.
16. * I would like to have a job that requires me to talk often on a one-to-one basis.
17. I feel disappointed in my efforts to communicate at a small group meeting.
18. My body feels tense and stiff when I speak in public.
19. When conversing with someone on a one-to-one basis, I prefer to listen rather than to talk.

20. I avoid talking during small group meetings.
21. * I look forward to speaking in public.

This inventory is composed of 21 statements that describe various communication events. You are asked to respond in terms of how you generally feel about these events. Be sure to give the response that best describes how you generally feel.

2. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE SCALE

Instructions: Complete the following questionnaire. Write in one of the sets of letters before each numbered question based upon whether you:

strongly agree (SA), agree (A), are undecided or neutral (?), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD).

Always keep the subject in mind as you answer.

- _____ 1. I find it easy to get along with others.
- _____ 2. I can adapt to changing situations.
- _____ 3. I treat people as individuals.
- _____ 4. I interrupt others too much.
- _____ 5. I am "rewarding" to talk to.
- _____ 6. I can deal with others effectively.
- _____ 7. I am a good listener.
- _____ 8. My personal relations are cold and distant.
- _____ 9. I am easy to talk to.
- _____ 10. I won't argue with someone just to prove I am right.
- _____ 11. My conversation behavior is not "smooth."
- _____ 12. I ignore other people's feelings.
- _____ 13. I generally know how others feel.
- _____ 14. I let others know I understand them.
- _____ 15. I understand other people.
- _____ 16. I am relaxed and comfortable when speaking.
- _____ 17. I listen to what people say to me.
- _____ 18. I like to be close and personal with people.
- _____ 19. I generally know what type of behavior is appropriate in any given situation.
- _____ 20. I usually do not make unusual demands on my friends.
- _____ 21. I am an effective conversationalist.
- _____ 22. I am supportive of others.
- _____ 23. I do not mind meeting strangers.

- _____ 24. I can easily put myself in another person's shoes.
- _____ 25. I pay attention to the conversation.
- _____ 26. I am generally relaxed when conversing with a new acquaintance.
- _____ 27. I am interested in what others have to say.
- _____ 27. I don't follow the conversation very well.
- _____ 28. I enjoy social gatherings where I can meet new people.
- _____ 29. I am a likeable person.
- _____ 30. I am flexible.
- _____ 31. I am not afraid to speak with people in authority.
- _____ 32. People can come to me with their problems.
- _____ 33. I generally say the right thing at the right time.
- _____ 34. I like to use my voice and body expressively.
- _____ 35. I am sensitive to others' needs of the moment.

3. WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE SCALE

Directions: Below are 20 situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate. Presume you have completely free choice. Indicate the percentage of times you would choose to communicate in each type of situation. Indicate in the space at the left of the item what percent of the time you would choose to communicate. (0 = Never to 100 = Always)

- ___ 1. Talk with a service station attendant.
- ___ 2. Talk with a physician.
- ___ 3. Present a talk to a group of strangers.
- ___ 4. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.
- ___ 5. Talk with a salesperson in a store.
- ___ 6. Talk in a large meeting of friends.
- ___ 7. Talk with a police officer.
- ___ 8. Talk in a small group of strangers.
- ___ 9. Talk with a friend while standing in line.
- ___ 10. Talk with a waiter/waitress in a restaurant.
- ___ 11. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.
- ___ 12. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.
- ___ 13. Talk with a secretary.
- ___ 14. Present a talk to a group of friends.
- ___ 15. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.
- ___ 16. Talk with a garbage collector.
- ___ 17. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.

- ___18. Talk with a spouse (or girl/boyfriend).
- ___19. Talk in a small group of friends.
- ___20. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.

4. INTERNATIONAL POSTURE SCALE

Scales Used to Explore International Posture and WTC

*negatively-worded items

International Posture (an updated version)

INTERGROUP APPROACH-AVOIDANCE TENDENCY

- 1) I want to make friends with international students studying in Japan.
- 2) *I try to avoid talking with foreigners if I can.
- 3) I would talk to an international student if there was one at school.
- 4) I wouldn't mind sharing an apartment or room with an international student.
- 5) I want to participate in a volunteer activity to help foreigners living in the surrounding community.
- 6) *I would feel somewhat uncomfortable if a foreigner moved in next door.

INTEREST IN INTERNATIONAL VOCATION OR ACTIVITIES

- 1) *I would rather stay in my hometown.
- 2) I want to work in a foreign country.
- 3) I want to work in an international organization such as the United Nations.
- 4) I'm interested in an international career.
- 5) *I don't think what's happening overseas has much to do with my daily life.
- 6) *I'd rather avoid the kind of work that sends me overseas frequently.

INTEREST IN INTERNATIONAL NEWS

- 1) I often read and watch news about foreign countries.
- 2) I often talk about situations and events in foreign countries with my family and/or friends.
- 3) I have a strong interest in international affairs.
- 4) *I'm not much interested in overseas news.

Having Things to Communicate to the World (a =0.78)

- 1) I have thoughts that I want to share with people from other parts of the world.
- 2) I have issues to address with people in the world.
- 3) I have ideas about international issues, such as environmental issues and north-south issues.
- 4) *I have no clear opinions about international issue