

# Culture and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English among Chinese International Learners in a Public University in Malaysia

Qiu Tianyu, Nur Salwa Abd. Wahid.

Language Academy, University Teknologi Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of culture on willingness to communicate (WTC) in English and explores recommendations on how to increase WTC in the target language among Chinese International students at a public university in Malaysia. Utilizing qualitative research method, semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to investigate the primary cultural factors influencing WTC. 5 postgraduate students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSH) and 5 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Computing (FC) were selected for semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that cultural values such as the exam-oriented education system and "cramming" teaching approach have a significant impact on students' English communicative performance. Under the collectivist cultural background of "face first", the concepts of "not showing off" and "not confident" affect students' communicative intentions to some extent. Based on the above results, this study provides reasonable suggestions for educators and policy makers to improve the language communication skills of international learners.

**Keywords:** Willingness to Communicate (WTC); large culture; small culture; English learning; Chinese international learners; Malaysia public universities

## INTRODUCTION

### Introduction to the Study

With the acceleration of globalization, English has developed as an international language. Actually, English is not only the primary language, but also a bridge for cross-culture connections. In recent years, in order to adapt to the rapid economic development in China, Chinese learners and their parents choose to study abroad to satisfy the need for higher quality education resources (Shi, 2019). Securities Times (2024) pointed out that more and more Chinese learners choose to study in Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries. As a Commonwealth country, Malaysia has English as one of its common languages, and its multicultural and high-quality education system attracts a large number of Chinese learners to further their studies (Laowanwenhua, 2023). In Malaysia's bilingual and multicultural education system, English is essential. China Education Online (2024) shows that the level of English can directly influence the academic scores and living quality, and having good English communication skills is crucial for them to adapt to the local environment and achieve academic success.

The study by Ma (2020) shows that Chinese learners often face language and cultural barriers in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. English has traditionally been the medium of teaching and learning at Malaysian tertiary institutions owing to its relevance as the second official language in Malaysia and language of worldwide communication. Malaysia uses English as the medium of instructions (EMI) at most tertiary education institutions, as the language improves the standard of education and student competitiveness. Li (2006) research shows that Chinese international students often grow up as monolinguals, with Mandarin as their first language, as well as being China's official and national language. In China, Mandarin is not only the main communication tool for education, government and media, but also plays an important role as a bond of national identity (Li, 2006). English has received high attention in the field of language education in China, and as the core course of foreign language teaching, it occupies an important position in the college entrance examination, postgraduate entrance examination and other national examinations (Hu, 2005). Although many Chinese learners start learning

English in primary school or even earlier, their language learning is more focused on test-taking skills than actual language communication skills (Zhao, 2023). Under this background, the factors that motivate Chinese international students to be willing or less willing to communicate in English in the context of an international university outside China have not been fully researched.

This study explores willingness to communicate (WTC) among Chinese international learners in a public University in Malaysia. In the context of culture, both the concept of large and small culture factors believed to be influencing student's WTC will also be explored. By examining these factors, this study also provides empirical data and some practical solutions for improving WTC of Chinese international learners in Malaysia Universities.

## Background of the Study

As a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual country, Malaysia offers students an international and competitive learning environment. English has been valued in Malaysia for its high status as a compulsory course and working language at all levels of study (Gill, 2002). This phenomenon not only improves the English proficiency of students studying in Malaysia, but also creates more opportunities for them to integrate into the international community. Malaysia's unique geographical and cultural background combines Asian traditions with English language education, making it one of the most popular study destinations for international students. The Blue Book of China Study Abroad Report (2023-2024) pointed out that with the promotion of the 'Belt and Road Initiative' and the deepening of China-Malaysia education cooperation, China has gradually become one of the main source countries of international students in Malaysia, with a significant proportion of Chinese learners. Institutions of higher learning such as University Malaya (UM) and the University Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) generally adopt English as the primary medium of instruction, and it is also the main destination for Chinese learners choosing schools (Gill, 2002). While this phenomenon reflects the attractiveness of Malaysian education, it also reveals possible challenges in language adaptation and communication in intercultural education for the Chinese International students.

Although Malaysia's education environment provides international students with a vast learning space and opportunities for cultural exchange, there are clear differences between its education system and that of China. Chinese education is famous for its emphasis on test results and academic performance, and students mostly adopt a test-centered learning style (Zhao, 2023). In contrast, Malaysia's education system focuses more on interactive teaching, encourages critical thinking, and celebrates the diverse use of languages (Mosiur, 2021). For Chinese learners, this change in educational concept is not only an opportunity to improve themselves, but also brings certain difficulties. Especially in the university classroom environment where English is the main medium of communication, the lack of language ability and cultural adaptability may make them feel certain pressure (Lv, 2019). Malaysia is a multilingual society, and although Bahasa Malaysia language is the official language, English plays an important role in education, business and daily life (Zhou, 2017). For Chinese learners, English is not only an academic language, but also a key tool for cross-cultural communication. This change of language role will become the main cause of students' anxiety in academic and daily interaction, which will reduce their ability to adapt to the new cultural environment and their enthusiasm or willingness for cross-cultural communication to a certain extent (MacIntyre et al., 1998). In Malaysia's multicultural context, WTC among Chinese international learners is an important topic to study.

Dornyei and Ushioda (2021) pointed out that motivation and WTC are not only related to an individual's language ability, but also influenced by multiple factors such as family, school, social environment and culture, among which culture plays a crucial role. The purpose of this study is to analyze the cultural factors that influence the language expression of English learners in a public university in Malaysia. By gaining a deeper understanding of these factors, teachers can design more effective teaching strategies and create a supportive learning environment, thereby enhancing students' confidence in English communication. In today's era of globalization, this research has important implications for optimizing language education and enhancing students' communication skills.

## Problem Statement

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is one of the key areas in the study of second language acquisition (SLA),

which refers to the tendency of learners to actively participate in communication under voluntary circumstances. This ability needs to be developed consciously. For Chinese learners studying in Malaysia, this phenomenon is particularly prominent in the process of learning English. On the whole, they are usually unwilling to interact with others, especially with people from different cultural backgrounds, which becomes a major obstacle for them to learn and integrate into society. Even if they have enough knowledge and understanding ability, many students still act silent in class and passively participate in questions or discussions (Peng, 2012). This silence is not only reflected in oral speech, but also affects interactive activities such as group work and presentations, where students are often more inclined to take on secondary roles, such as writing speeches (Cao, 2011). The lack of communicative engagement weakens the formation of interactive learning environments that are critical to language acquisition.

In everyday life outside the classroom, Chinese learners' participation in English communication remains limited. Although Malaysia is a country where English is widely spoken as the lingua franca, Chinese learners living and studying here are more inclined to socialize with their compatriots and communicate mainly through their mother tongue. This phenomenon is largely due to their high dependence on their mother tongue (Wen & Clement, 2003). Even in environments where English is dominant, they often communicate in Mandarin or other dialects. This language choice reduces their opportunities to practice oral English, limits their exposure to real language use situations and practical communication exercises, and thus hinders the improvement of language ability. In addition, psychological factors further aggravate the phenomenon of low language sensitivity of Chinese learners. Anxiety and inadequate self-perception play an important role in their communicative behavior. According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), language anxiety significantly reduces WTC, especially among students who are concerned about making mistakes in conversation or being misunderstood by others. This anxiety not only affects the formal academic environment, but also reflects in daily social interactions, causing them to continually avoid the opportunity to use English, thus forming a vicious circle that is not conducive to language development.

Despite the fact that these students are in an environment conducive to English practice, their avoidance behaviors and low participation in English communication are still prevalent. This phenomenon highlights the need for targeted interventions to improve the efficiency of foreign language learning and optimize the overall language learning experience for Chinese English learners. Therefore, it is particularly important to explore the WTC of Chinese learners when learning English in Malaysia. The in-depth study of this problem can not only reveal the complex influencing factors behind it, but also provide a key theoretical basis for future research and policy making in the field of education. By analyzing the communicative behavior and psychological barriers of these learners, educators can design more effective teaching strategies, thus creating a more positive language learning environment and promoting the comprehensive development of Chinese learners' language and communicative abilities in cross-cultural situations.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To explore the cultural factors that influence Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among Chinese international learners in a public university Malaysia.
2. To explore measures to improve the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among Chinese international learners studying in a public university Malaysia.

### **Research Questions**

1. Which large and small cultural factors influence Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among Chinese international learners in a public university Malaysia?
2. What possible measures to increase Chinese international learners' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English in a public university Malaysia?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study aims to explore the cultural factors that influence Chinese learners' English acquisition, including micro-level small culture factors and macro-level large culture factors. Small cultural factors such as peer group and classroom culture play a key role in English communicative competence. For example, the language used

by students in their circle of friends will directly affect their language confidence and communication skills (Crystal, 2003). Similarly, the language environment and interaction patterns in the classroom also significantly affect students' opportunities and initiative to practice English. On the other hand, large cultural factors, such as differences in education systems, social values and national language policies between China and Malaysia, also have a profound impact on students' WTC in English. In China, the test-oriented education system focuses too much on academic results and exams, which makes students lack sufficient confidence in language communication in real situations. In Malaysia, the relatively open education model and multi-lingual cultural environment provide students with more opportunities to practice English, which helps to improve their language ability and communication willingness (Kim, 2001). By analyzing these cultural factors, this study hopes to provide references for improving language teaching strategies, and promote learners' English acquisition and cross-cultural adaptability.

An in-depth understanding of these cultural factors will help to formulate educational policies and programs that are more suitable for different cultural backgrounds and help students overcome barriers in language communication. By improving the willingness and ability of Chinese learners to communicate in English, we can not only support their development in international academic and professional fields, but also enhance China's competitiveness in the process of globalization. This study will also provide new academic value in the field of intercultural communication and language learning. Through systematic investigation and analysis of Chinese learners' WTC and its influencing factors, this study will provide innovative perspectives and empirical support for relevant theoretical research. This will not only deepen the understanding of the interaction between culture and education in language learning, but also provide useful references for educators to design more effective cross-cultural teaching strategies. This research is of great practical significance and academic contribution from both social and cultural aspects.

### Scope and of the Study

The location of this study was selected University Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), which is a public university, and the study subjects included 5 Chinese master's students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSH) and 5 Chinese undergraduates from the Faculty of Computing (FC). The study subjects include students of different grades, and the WTC may vary significantly from undergraduate to postgraduate students. The study was conducted for 4 months encompassing a full semester. This study adopts a qualitative approach via semi-structured interviews that explore how the culture influences students' WTC, their experiences with cross-cultural communication, and strategies for improving WTC.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction to WTC

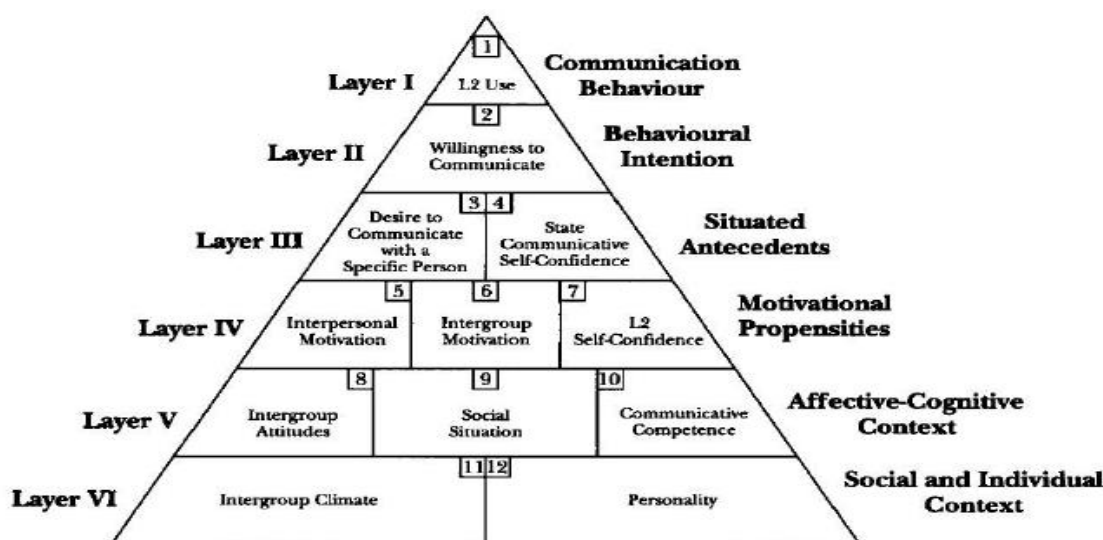


Figure 1: MacIntyre et al. (1998) Heuristic Model of WTC in L2

Figure 1 refers to MacIntyre et al. (1998) Heuristic Model of WTC in the second language (L2). This model is essential for understanding and forecasting an individual's desire to speak in a second language (L2). The model incorporates linguistic, psychological, and societal aspects and graphs the WTC's multi-level structure. Multiple levels and features in the WTC Model Map affect an individual's environmental interaction. Top of the pyramid are contact points. As the pyramid is read, transitory and tangible impacts decrease. The six-layer model is "based on a large number of learner variables that have been well documented to have an impact on second language learning and communication" (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The six-layer model is based on a large number of learner variables that have been well documented to have an impact on second language learning and communication (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Levels 1–3 indicate the immediate context that affects the WTC based on the person, topic, circumstance, and time. Layers 4–6 are the speaker's more robust and enduring qualities and may be utilized in most scenarios.

The model emphasizes that an individual's communicative behavior in a given context depends not only on linguistic competence, but is also influenced by a combination of motivational, self-confidence, attitudinal, and situational factors. Specifically, the social and individual contextual factors at the bottom of the model act further on motivational dispositions by influencing the affective-cognitive context at the inner level, which ultimately affects an individual's communicative intentions and behaviors. This cascading relationship illustrates that WTC is not static, but rather a process of continuous adjustment with changes in context and time. Such as because of the differences between motivation, self-efficacy and attitude, individuals may show a different willingness in different social situations.

MacIntyre's WTC Heuristic Model was adopted as the overarching framework for interpreting semi-structured interview findings in the final stage. This model was chosen for its comprehensive and integrated approach to understanding and analyzing Chinese learners' WTC in foreign language environments, considering both large and small cultural factors. In the context of cultural interactions between China and Malaysia, these cultural dimensions play a crucial role in influencing learners.

The WTC Heuristic Model of MacIntyre has a high degree of multi-dimension, so it is especially applicable to the study of complex intercultural communication. In particular, the model can effectively integrate the psychological factors of self-confidence and anxiety, as well as the environment, such as the atmosphere in the classroom and the real language environment (MacIntyre, 1998). The WTC Heuristic Model has been widely applied and validated in different language learning environments. Not only has it been widely used in Western research, but it has also been validated in the EFL environment in Asia, including Japan, Malaysia, and China. For instance, Yashima (2002) studies on the Japanese EFL environment indicate that international attitudes and culture have great influence on the willingness of English communication. This further supports the applicability of the WTC model in intercultural studies (Yashima, 2002). The application of this model can help this study to better explore the cultural factors affecting Chinese learners' WTC in English in the Malaysian environment.

## Research in WTC in China

Wen and Clement (2003) studied the communicative intention of Chinese learners from the perspective of cultural anthropology and pointed out that two key factors controlling interpersonal relations-other-oriented ego and submissive learning style -would encourage students to actively reduce communication opportunities (Wen & Clement, 2003). Similar to many Asian cultures, the idea of the "other-oriented self" in Chinese culture emphasizes collective interests over individual needs. Liu (2021) further explains that collectivist cultures tend to make individuals choose to passively receive support in the face of stress rather than actively seek help. In addition, Li (2020) 's research shows that when Chinese learners share Chinese cultural values in cross-cultural communication, they pay more attention to group-oriented core concepts such as family and interpersonal relationships. These studies consistently show that in Chinese culture, an individual's self-perception is inextricably linked to his or her relationships with family, community, and even the nation, and that these relationships largely shape an individual's identity and values.

Chinese culture also gives "face" an important status, and an individual's performance directly affects his social evaluation. When students perform poorly or fail in class, they perceive a "loss of face," which negatively affects

WTC. This cultural trait leads Chinese learners to be more sensitive to others' evaluation of them, so they are more inclined to avoid class participation in order to avoid possible embarrassment or negative feedback (Wen & Clement, 2003). Wen and Clement also found that the lack of tolerance of Chinese culture towards "foreign cultures" adds to the challenges of intercultural language communication. This cultural background makes Chinese learners face more psychological barriers and behavioral restrictions when adapting to the new language environment and actively participating in communication.

### **The Influence of Culture onto WTC**

WTC is influenced by individual characteristics, cultural background and specific situation. The influence of cultural values on WTC is particularly significant. According to Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimension theory, there are obvious differences between collectivist culture and individualistic culture in WTC. In collectivist cultures, individuals are more inclined to maintain group harmony and maintain good social relations, so they are more cautious in public, and WTC is generally lower. In contrast, individualistic culture emphasizes individual independence and viewpoint expression, which makes people more willing to participate in communication and have a higher WTC level. Cross-cultural diversity is another important factor affecting WTC. High-context cultures (such as China and Japan) and low-context cultures (such as the United States and the United Kingdom) have significantly different communication styles. In high-context cultures, communication relies more on non-verbal signals and situational cues, and individuals are usually more conservative unless a particular situation explicitly calls for communication. In low-context cultures, verbal communication is more direct and clearer, and individuals are more inclined to take the initiative to express themselves, which makes the WTC level relatively higher. Social norms also play a key role in the formation of WTC. Griner (2014) pointed out that there are clear rules for communication in different cultures, including the timing, method and object of communication. In some cultures, young people are taught to be humble and respectful of their elders, which can limit their WTC at family gatherings or when communicating with superiors. In cultures that emphasize equality and openness, social norms encourage free expression and open communication, thereby increasing an individual's WTC. Cultural background shapes people's communication behavior through multi-faceted influences, making WTC show significant differences in different cultural and social contexts.

According to Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimension theory, the education system has a profound impact on shaping an individual's values and world outlook. In different countries and cultural backgrounds, there are obvious differences in education methods. In some cultures, the education system inherits strict social norms that emphasize authoritative relationships between teachers and students and order in the classroom. This environment will relatively limit students' opportunities for free expression, thereby suppressing their WTC to some extent. In an educational environment that promotes interactive teaching and classroom discussion, students often gain more opportunities and confidence to participate more actively in language communication and significantly improve WTC levels. In addition, cultural factors that cannot be ignored in language learning also have a profound impact on WTC. As pointed out by MacIntyre et al. (1998), the degree of fit between learners' cultural background and the target language culture is directly related to their communicative intention. If there is a large difference between the target language culture and the learner's own culture, adaptation and integration into the new cultural environment may take a longer time and may result in a temporary decrease in WTC. However, when learners show a strong interest in the target language culture, or when cultural differences are small, they tend to be more willing to engage in communication and have higher WTC levels.

### **Definition of Culture**

#### **The Concept of Large Culture**

Large culture is one of the key theoretical categories in the study of cultural phenomena. The concept of large culture usually involves a wide range of social systems and norms that cut across the interactions of individuals and small groups, influencing the behavioral patterns and values of the society as a whole. Geertz (1973) defined culture as a set of symbolic systems that give meaning to the behavior of the members of a society. His viewpoint emphasizes the wide-ranging influence of culture as a symbolic structure that encompasses all of the society's

levels (Geertz, 1973). Williams (1983) states that the large culture includes the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of a society, which encompasses not only high culture forms such as art, science, and education, but also practices and beliefs in everyday life. His study reveals the multilayered nature of culture, emphasizing that culture is not just the upper class' patents, but a phenomenon pervasive in all corners of society (Williams, 1983). Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions theory explores the influence of culture on social behavior. The six dimensions—power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long-term versus short-term orientation, and hedonism versus restraint—offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing cultural variations across nations and regions. This theory has important applications in cross-cultural management and international business (Hofstede, 1984).

### **The Concept of Small Culture**

Small culture theory focuses on the cultural dynamics within groups and their impact on individual behavior and communicative intentions. The concept was developed by Holliday (1999) to emphasize the process of cultural construction in everyday interactions, especially those that occur within small groups, such as families, circles of friends, school classrooms, and workplaces. Unlike large culture, which focuses on macro-cultural structures and social norms, small culture focuses more on micro-level cultural practices and symbols. The theory of small culture emphasizes that culture is not only determined by macro-social structures, but is also constantly reconfigured and negotiated in everyday interactions (Holliday, 1999). The small culture also emphasizes the dynamic and contextual nature of culture. There are different cultural features in different time and space. Language choices in the workplace reflect not only cultural values, but also the dynamics of power relations and social identities. Language plays an important role in expressing individual and collective identity, and language choice is often a reflection of power balance in cross-cultural work environments (Ng, L. L. et al., 2019).

### **Research in Culture and WTC in English in China**

The deficiencies that Chinese learners face in English learning are closely related to their traditional education model. Traditional English teaching methods mainly focus on exam-oriented education, emphasizing the mechanical memorization of grammar and vocabulary, but ignoring the cultivation of practical communication ability. This exam-oriented teaching model makes students pay more attention to the memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary, and have fewer opportunities to practice English communication in real contexts (Hu, 2002; Cheng, 2008). Therefore, when students need to use English in practical communication scenarios, they often show a lack of confidence and are prone to language anxiety (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). In such an educational environment, students tend to complete their academic tasks according to a fixed pattern, rather than improving their language ability through interaction and practical situational application. This limitation significantly affects their ability to communicate and undermines their confidence in using English to express themselves.

The lack of awareness of the importance of English as a communication tool directly affects students' learning attitude and motivation, and the lack of oral education in schools leads to students not being good at holding conversations in English. In order to improve their children's English level, some parents have adopted mandatory methods, such as requiring children to communicate in English at home or frequently participate in extracurricular English training. However, this forced way of education often backfires, not only can not stimulate students' interest in learning, but may cause disgust and resistance. Wan (2021) points out that excessive coercion will make students lose the fun and intrinsic motivation of learning, leading to an increase in anxiety, which will reduce learning efficiency. Dörnyei & Ushioda (2021) further propose that language learning requires spontaneous motivation, and that external pressure usually runs counter to long-term learning results. Only when students take the initiative to participate, can they really improve their language ability.

In addition, language anxiety and self-cognition play an important role in the formation of English language sense. Students often feel uneasy and nervous when communicating in English for fear of making mistakes or being criticized. The fear of making mistakes or being laughed at in public causes many students to remain silent in class (Yang & Liang, 2023). Such restlessness often stems from the uncertainty of their own English level. When students lack confidence in their ability, they tend to avoid English communication, further reducing

practical opportunities, and thus falling into a vicious circle of lack of practice, continuous anxiety and declining confidence (Li, 2016). To break this cycle, Zheng et al. (2023) suggest creating a supportive classroom environment that enhances students' communication skills by reducing their anxiety.

In Chinese culture, the influence of the concept of "face" makes students more cautious, fearing embarrassment or loss of respect due to mistakes (Hofstede, 1984). This cultural trait makes students more inhibited in language communication. For those Chinese learners who choose to study in non-English speaking countries such as Malaysia, adapting to a multilingual and cross-cultural environment is another challenge. Studies have shown that a cross-cultural learning environment has a significant impact on students' self-confidence and language ability (Gao, 1998). In this diverse environment, students need to adapt to the new language and culture at the same time, and this adaptation process becomes one of the important factors that promote or hinder their English communicative ability.

### **Strategies or Measures to Improve Chinese learners' WTC**

Strategies to improve English learners' language ability can be analyzed from the macro and micro levels. The macro level focuses on the adjustment of large cultural factors, while the micro level focuses on the optimization of small cultural factors. At the macro level, large cultural factors include national policies, education systems and social values. Hofstede's Cultural dimension theory (1984) provides a theoretical framework for analyzing the influence of different cultural backgrounds on language communication. In collectivist cultures (such as China and Japan), students' WTC is generally low. To improve the WTC of students in these cultures, we need to start with the reform of the education system. Compared with the exam-oriented education model, the open and interactive teaching method can stimulate students' learning interest more. Li (2023) proposes that increased classroom interaction and discussion is an effective way to improve WTC. For example, after some schools in Japan adopted interactive teaching mode, students' WTC increased significantly (Yashima, 2002). In addition, policy support at the national level is crucial, and governments can encourage students to participate in international cooperation projects by promoting cross-cultural exchange policies. This can not only improve language skills, but also enhance students' cross-cultural confidence and learning motivation, thus effectively improving WTC (Yashima, 2002).

At the micro level, strategies of small culture focus on individual and group factors such as family, peer relationships, and school classroom culture. Wen and Clement (2003) showed that family atmosphere and social environment have a significant impact on students' WTC. If families attach great importance to English learning and actively support children's language practice, students will generally show stronger WTC. Similarly, in school, a student's social circle plays an important role, and if a student's circle of friends regularly communicates in English, their WTC is usually significantly higher.

Based on these findings, a variety of micro-strategies can be adopted to boost students' WTC. In the home environment, parents can support their children's learning by creating a positive language learning atmosphere, such as communicating in English at home or encouraging the viewing of English videos. Supportive family attitudes are closely related to language learning outcomes (Wen & Clement, 2003). In schools, teachers can help students improve their language confidence by creating an interactive classroom culture. For example, organizing English corner, English speech contest, drama performance and other activities can enable students to apply language skills in practice and gradually improve WTC (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). In addition, through group cooperative learning or English project activities, teachers can further promote communication and cooperation among students, thereby enhancing their ability to use English in real situations.

### **Conclusion**

By combining the perspectives of big culture and small culture, the performance of WTC in specific cultural environments and its optimization strategy are analyzed. Most of the existing studies on language ability focus on the willingness and readiness of individuals to use a second language in specific situations. In the context of China, Wen and Clement (2003) conducted an in-depth discussion on the language learning ability of Chinese learners through the method of cultural anthropology. Their research reveals the profound influence of traditional Chinese values on the language learning process.



## METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This study aims to explore cultural factors that influence willingness to communicate (WTC) in English among Chinese international students in a Malaysian public university. The study also aims at exploring possible measures in increasing WTC in the target language. In order to achieve this goal, the research adopted a qualitative method. To ensure a diverse and representative sample, students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSH) and the Faculty of Computing (FC) were selected to participate. Ethical considerations are highly valued and all participants participating in the investigation are fully informed of the focus and participate on a voluntary basis. In order to safeguard the privacy and information security of participants, the research team strictly follows confidentiality rules and is committed to handling relevant data in a manner that respects privacy.

### Research Design

This research project utilizes a semi-structured interview method to explore the various factors that influence the willingness of Chinese learners to communicate in English during their studies in Malaysia. Via a semi-structured interview, the research aims to obtain qualitative data with more authenticity and depth, so as to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research topic. The semi-structured interview method allows flexibility to adjust the order of questions so that respondents can share more detailed and truthful personal experiences and perspectives. This study design not only reveals the differences of students from different backgrounds, but also summarizes their commonalities, thus ensuring the comprehensiveness and depth of the data analysis. Finally, through this method, this study systematically explores the various influencing factors of Chinese learners in the process of English acquisition, providing a valuable reference for improving relevant teaching strategies.

The sample for this study was selected from UTM's student population, which included 5 graduate students from FSSH and 5 undergraduate students from FC. The semi-structured interview will be based on a carefully designed set of questions to gain insight into the participants' personal experiences and the underlying factors that influence their WTC in English. Descriptions of the research design are summarized in Table I.

Table I Research Design

No	Method	Sampling	Data Analysis
1	Semi-structured Interview	10 UTM Chinese international learners (5 undergraduates; 5 graduate students) for semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis

### Research Instrument: Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured interview is a research method widely used in social sciences, and its flexibility and openness make it an effective tool for collecting qualitative data (Bryman, 2012; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Unlike structured interviews, which strictly follow preset questions, semi-structured interviews allow interviewees to expand their thinking and explore new topics during the answering process. Using this methodology, this study aims to flexibly obtain in-depth information on the cultural factors that influence students' WTC and make corresponding suggestions for improvement. The interview location can be arranged according to the needs of the interviewees, and can be conducted in the classroom familiar to the students or through the online platform to create a relaxed and stress-free communication environment, so as to enhance the interviewees' willingness to express themselves. To ensure that the interviewees were able to express their ideas accurately, the interviews were conducted in their native language, Chinese. This choice of language helps respondents share their personal experiences more naturally, while improving the quality of the interview data. Each interview is expected to last 15 to 25 minutes and uses open-ended questions to guide respondents in depth about their experiences and perspectives. The researchers also adjusted the order and content of the questions according to the interview process to find more valuable information. After obtaining the informed consent of the interviewees, the whole interview was recorded, and the recording contents were then sorted out and used for systematic qualitative

analysis to reveal the key factors affecting Chinese learners' willingness to communicate in English and optimization strategies.

After the recordings were collated, all the Chinese text was translated into English. The interview questions were designed around two main themes: how cultural factors affect respondents' English WTC, and strategies and methods to effectively improve English WTC. The specific questions cover the frequency and feelings of using English in class, social situations and daily life; The influence of educational background, social environment and language atmosphere on English ability; And improvements that can be implemented at the individual and school level. The English version of the semi-structured interview guidance questions is shown in Table II. The Chinese version is attached in Appendix A.

Table II Guide Questions for Semi-Structured Interview

Topic	No.	Guided Question
Large cultural factors influencing WTC among Chinese international learners	Q1	What do you think is the difference between Malaysia's language education system and China's? Do these differences make a difference to your willingness to communicate? If so, why?
Large cultural factors influencing WTC among Chinese international learners	Q2	How often do you use English in your daily life outside of school? How is the socio-linguistic environment different between China and Malaysia? Do you think these differences have affected your willingness to use English in Malaysia? If so, why?
	Q3	Do you think your cultural background has an impact on your English learning? If so, why?
Small cultural factors influencing WTC among Chinese international learners	Q1	Can you share your family's attitude towards learning English? How does your family's attitude affect your willingness to communicate in English?
	Q2	Do you take the initiative to use English when communicating with friends? How does the choice of language in your circle of friends affect your willingness to use English?
	Q3	In Malaysian classrooms, do your teachers promote student interaction through special activities or other ways? Have these opportunities for classroom interaction affected your willingness to communicate in English?
Measures to increase learners' WTC	Q1	Are there any activities, classes or support systems that you find helpful in improving your motivation to communicate in English?

### Respondents of the Study

The subjects of this study were Chinese international students studying at UTM, mainly from FSSH and FC. This sample selection not only reflects the diversity of the subject background, but also ensures the representativeness of the learning stage.

### Data Collection

In order to achieve the research objectives, this study adopts the semi-structured interview method to deeply explore the willingness to communicate in English among Chinese learners studying in Malaysia. The study uses open-ended semi-structured interview questions to understand students' willingness to express themselves in English, and collects their views on effective strategies to improve their willingness to express themselves in English. With the consent of the participants, the researchers conducted recorded interviews in person, each lasting 15 to 25 minutes.

After the interviews were completed, all recordings were transcribed into text and a systematic qualitative analysis was conducted to identify major themes and trends. Using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), researchers identify and code key themes and patterns through multiple close readings of

interview texts. The initial analysis phase focused on flagging potential cultural factors that might influence students' WTC. The researchers then conducted an in-depth analysis of these initial markers, summarizing and classifying similar themes into large cultural and small cultural factors. This classification provides a structured framework for the interpretation of data, helps to reveal the key cultural factors affecting Chinese learners' English acquisition, and provides a scientific basis for optimizing the English learning environment.

### Data Analysis

This study uses semi-structured interview data to investigate the WTC in English of Chinese learners. Thematic analysis will be used to interpret the results of semi-structured interviews. Details of the data analysis are shown in Table III.

Table III Data Analysis

No	Method	Sampling	Data Analysis
1	Semi-structured Interview	10 UTM Chinese international students (5 undergraduates; 5 graduate students) for semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis

### Chapter Summary

This chapter mainly describes the design and implementation of research methods and data collection process. Qualitative research methods and semi-structured interviews were used to analyze the relevant factors affecting the use of English by Chinese learners in Malaysia. Through thematic analysis, this study systematically explores the profound influence of cultural factors on communicative intention. The results not only reveal the mechanism of these cultural variables on language use intention, but also provide valuable theoretical basis and practical guidance for improving the teaching practice of English communication skills in Malaysia.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on findings from the semi-structured interviews, with the aim of exploring in depth the influence of cultural factors on the WTC in English among Chinese students studying at a public university in Malaysia. Table IV details the research questions and their corresponding data collection tools to ensure systematic and transparent research processes.

Table IV Research Questions and Instruments

RQs	Instrument
RQ1 What large and small cultural factors significantly affect the WTC in English among Chinese international students in Malaysia?	Semi-structured interview guide questions
RQ2 What measures to increase learners' state of WTC among Chinese international students as perceived by them?	Semi-structured interview guide questions

### Large cultural factors influence WTC among Chinese international learners studying in a public university Malaysia

With the consent of the participants, all semi-structured interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed into text. The researchers then used topic analysis to manually encode and analyze the transcribed texts to extract key content relevant to the study topic. The extraction of these topics is based on the existing literature research, and finally, the analysis of the large cultural factors can be summarized into 3 main themes: national language, Chinese education system, and Chinese traditional culture.

## Influences of the National Language

Mandarin, the national language of China, is considered to be the primary cultural factor affecting students' WTC, and its position in Chinese society is too important to be ignored. Mandarin not only dominates daily communication, but also plays a central role in education, media, government affairs, and business activities. *Student 6* mentioned that when she came to a multilingual environment like Malaysia, it became quite difficult to adapt to the change of language habits.

*Chinese students rarely use a language other than their mother tongue to communicate in private. First of all, it is not necessary. It is more convenient for everyone to speak Chinese. There is no need to speak English to communicate. Moreover, speaking English will affect the speed of our communication. I remember one time my friends and I discussed that we could only speak English for the whole day. We hardly communicated that day. It is still inconvenient to communicate in English. (Semi-structured Interview)*

The language environment in China is highly homogenous, with almost everyone communicating in Mandarin. In this single language environment, students lack the opportunity to contact and practice foreign languages. This situation means that in daily life, students rarely encounter situations where they need to use English to communicate, so they are less willing to use English in a foreign language environment. *Student 2* said that adjusting to different language habits was a challenge after coming to Malaysia.

*I felt awkward communicating in English at first. After all, everyone in China speaks Chinese, and there were very few opportunities for me to use English in my daily life. And my spoken English is not very good. It sounds like very typical Chinglish. In Malaysia, everyone's pronunciation and intonation are very natural. In the beginning, I actually felt a little inferior. But after daily communication, this emotion does not happen now. (Semi-structured Interview)*

The way of expression in Mandarin focuses on semantics rather than strict formal rules, and usually conveys meaning through word order and context, which makes it more flexible in use. English, on the other hand, is a form-based language that requires an accurate grammatical structure and emphasizes the clear order of subject, predicate and object. When using English, students need to consider multiple levels of language information such as verb form, tense, voice and clause structure at the same time, which increases the cognitive burden for learners who are accustomed to the expression of Mandarin. *Student 3* said that *sometimes things that are clearly explained in Chinese cannot be explained clearly in English, which is why her language switching is slow. But this fear of making mistakes can sometimes make her talk very little.* *Student 4* mentioned that when she communicates with her Chinese friends in English, she often encounters inconsistencies or errors in grammatical structure, vocabulary choice and intonation due to the differences in expression modes between Chinese and English.

*Communicating with Chinese friends in Chinese does not improve my willing, and sometimes it diminishes it due to lack of practice. It's not that we don't want to practice, but sometimes in order to pursue efficiency, the mother tongue is the most convenient communication language. If I use English to communicate with Chinese friends, I have to change my thinking and convert Chinese grammar into English grammar before speaking. My friends also have to translate what I say from English into Chinese and then understand and respond, which is really a waste of time. (Semi-structured Interview)*

## Influences of China's Education System

The 2nd important cultural factor that influences students' WTC is the Chinese education system they received before entering UTM. The Chinese educational tradition, centered on examination, has lasted for thousands of years. Although this model has its unique advantages in the Chinese social environment, it shows obvious limitations in English teaching. As a communication tool, the teaching goal of English should focus on the

practical use of the language, but exam-oriented education pays more attention to the examination results rather than the cultivation of practical language ability.

In interviews, many students admitted that their previous educational experience had limited oral practice, resulting in a lack of pronunciation and fluency. This lack of practical background makes them feel less confident in the conversation, which further reduces their willingness to participate in the conversation. For example, *student 5* clearly expressed deep frustration with these issues, which reflects the significant impact of test-oriented education on language ability development and communicative confidence.

*In the past, I had no chance to speak English in China. The teachers only taught me how to solve questions and how to get high scores. There was no one to correct my pronunciation and intonation. It wasn't until I came to Malaysia to study that I realized that my spoken English was so substandard. As soon as I spoke, everyone knew that I was Chinese. Sometimes when communicating with foreigners, they don't even understand what I'm saying because of my accent, and I have to explain myself many times. (Semi-structured Interview)*

Due to the solidification of teaching methods, English education in China often focuses on the cultivation of listening, reading and writing skills, while oral training is relatively low. This test-oriented teaching mode makes oral language ability marginalized in classroom teaching, resulting in a lack of practical language practice opportunities for students. *Student 6* mentioned that *she thinks the Chinese education system is more oriented to the test. Most of the students are not very good at oral English, but they may be relatively good at reading, vocabulary and grammar.* Although this emphasis on written skills improves students' English knowledge to some extent, it fails to effectively promote their practical communication skills. Many students lack practical experience in communicating in English in real situations, and this "one-dimensional" approach to learning makes them feel rusty and less confident in using English in cross-cultural Settings, which lowers their WTC. Test-oriented education takes scores as its core goal, and the neglect of language practice ability is one of its obvious drawbacks. *Students 2, 4 and 5* all mentioned that their main purpose of learning English was to get high marks in exams. This score-oriented model makes English learning formalized and rigid, rather than seeing it as a tool for actual communication. Due to the lack of opportunities to communicate with others in English, their ability to use the language is chronically limited, which further inhibits WTC. For example, *student 1* said that in order to do well in the exam, she often concentrated on memorizing fixed sentence patterns and templates to deal with possible exam content, rather than using flexible language to express her ideas.

*In China, education is mainly cramming and there is no opportunity to speak English. Only students who have been preparing to study abroad since childhood will deliberately learn spoken English. Other ordinary students, like me, had not expected to study abroad before and only viewed English learning as a tool to get high grades. I can memorize vocabulary and phrases, and even compositions have special templates for me to recite. All students also feel that the secret to getting high scores in English is to memorize sentence patterns and advanced vocabulary. Memory has become the most critical part of English learning. (Semi-structured Interview)*

## The Influence of Collectivism

The 3rd large cultural factor affecting students' WTC is Chinese traditional culture, especially collectivist values. This culture emphasizes the need for the individual to submit to the good of the group and focuses on maintaining group harmony. From an early age, Chinese children are taught by their parents to "fit in" and get along well with other children; At school, teachers emphasize the cultivation of a sense of collective honor; After entering

the workplace, leaders require employees to show team spirit. Collectivism is deeply embedded in the Chinese way of life, especially in school education and social interaction. Chinese learners are usually encouraged to blend in with the group and not to stand out too much to avoid being perceived as "self-oriented" or disrupting group harmony. This cultural tendency directly affects their language use behavior. In English communication, many students are often reluctant to express themselves actively for fear of being separated from group resonance or being negatively evaluated by peers. Especially in class discussion or public interaction, students are more inclined to keep a low profile to avoid the attention and risk that may be brought by speaking. Several of the students interviewed mentioned the word "weird," indicating a strong psychological resistance to behavior that is seen as different or eye-catching. Such collectivist mentality has formed a significant cultural restriction for students to express themselves confidently and actively in English. When talking about speaking English in public, *Student 6* said, *In China, people who inexplicably start speaking English are very strange. Student 7* also suffers from implicit exclusion from the group.

*In school, I would only speak English when the teacher called on me, otherwise I would be regarded as asocial by my classmates. I was not a student who passively answered questions at the beginning. When I was in middle school, I took the initiative to answer the teacher's questions in class. After class, I would be called a "diplomat" by my classmates. These did not seem to me to be well-intentioned statements, and their expressions and tone made me feel uncomfortable. Over time, I will reduce the number of times I speak in English classes, as it seems that this is the only way I can integrate into the silent classroom. (Semi-structured Interview)*

The collectivist culture makes many Chinese learners pay special attention to group identity in the cross-cultural environment of Malaysia, tend to follow the crowd and avoid acting alone, and students' English WTC is limited. However, collectivism does not completely suppress individual behavior; its main function is to facilitate the adaptation of individuals to other members of the group. This adaptability is often reflected in peer support and understanding. Under the influence of collectivism, the common mentality of Chinese learners also has an impact on their English learning. Conformity psychology emphasizes the consistency of the group, so that students tend to imitate the words and deeds of others in English communication to avoid appearing "different" or different from the majority of people. Although this behavior helps them integrate into the group, it also limits their opportunities to actively explore and improve their English communication skills. During the interview, *Student 8* mentioned, *in class, if other students do not actively speak or communicate in our mother tongue, I will also remain silent or not actively communicate in English.* Their high dependence on the external environment and over-adaptation to group behavior largely inhibits their ability to express individuality and independent opinions, thus significantly reducing their WTC in English.

### **The influences of Modesty and Politeness**

Another important cultural factor affecting students' WTC in English is Confucian culture. This traditional Chinese culture always advocates modesty and courtesy, emphasizing a low profile and avoiding "overly aggressive" behavior. Therefore, in the Chinese classroom environment, students are usually inclined to choose modest and cautious ways of expression, rather than taking the initiative to show their language ability. This culture of modesty makes Chinese learners more cautious when communicating in English, especially in public. They tend to avoid appearing too confident or too prominent for fear of being seen as less modest or appearing to boast about themselves. This mentality makes them take a passive or avoidant attitude in cross-cultural communication, which affects the improvement of their English communicative competence. Under the influence of this humble culture for a long time, the code of conduct of "not showing off" is deeply rooted in the way of thinking of Chinese learners. In interviews, some students admitted that even though they have a good command of English, they are still reluctant to actively demonstrate their language skills in public or in unfamiliar environments. They worry that they may appear "too pushy" or be mistaken by their peers for showing

off their linguistic superiority.

*The traditional Chinese culture tends to be modest and serious, but lacks ability in application. When I was in China, my oral English was far worse than it is now. Even if I had a strong oral English ability, I would not choose to communicate in English, because I was afraid of being said to show off. Because of China's score-oriented grading mechanism, when faced with truly major exams, there is almost no collective benefit, only individual benefit. Sometimes when you show your abilities, you will be jealous of some classmates. Although most classmates are very friendly, there are always some students who don't want others to be better than themselves. In order to avoid being targeted by these people, I tend to conserve my strength. (Semi-structured Interview)*

Such cultural values tend to encourage students to be humble in groups and avoid the pursuit of individual performance. Even in situations where they need to communicate in English, they may choose to remain silent or use only brief sentences to avoid drawing too much attention from others or inviting unwanted comments. This inhibition of self-expression to some extent limits their ability to express themselves deeply in English communication. At the same time, the Chinese education system's excessive focus on individual performance and assessment results reinforces this trend. In such an environment, in order to avoid being seen as too aggressive or causing competitive conflicts, many learners will take the initiative to act quietly and deliberately keep an inconspicuous state in English communication. *Student 8* mentioned that she developed a habit of blending into her peer group and not attracting attention from the wrong competition mechanism in middle school, which directly affected her initiative and willingness to express herself in language communication.

*Sometimes in Chinese classes, if I take the initiative to answer the teacher's questions, my competitors will see me. In middle school, the teacher would set up a one-on-one competition mode. I would sometimes pretend not to know the answer to a question to make my opponent relax their vigilance, so I rarely spoke in class. (Semi-structured Interview)*

### **The influences of Hierarchy and Power Dynamics**

In traditional Chinese education culture, teachers are given a very high position of authority and are regarded as the only source of knowledge and the model of morality. Since Confucius advocated the concept of "respecting teachers and respecting the way" during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, this concept has been deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Over time, the teacher-student relationship evolved into a distinctly unequal power structure, with students generally viewing the teacher's opinions and instructions as unshakable truths. Challenging or questioning a teacher's views is often interpreted as an affront to authority. As a result, students often prefer to be passive "listeners" rather than active participants in the classroom. This power imbalance may be used by some teachers who lack ethics to suppress students' independence and initiative by strengthening their own status. As a result, students often feel inhibited in classroom communication, especially in situations where they need to ask questions or participate in discussions. They may choose to reduce interaction with teachers to avoid triggering unnecessary consequences. Such inhibitions seriously affect students' willingness to communicate in English in a classroom setting.

*Student 10* mentioned that some teachers use the authority conferred by traditional culture to exercise the right to "unconditionally deny" students. This phenomenon means that teachers' evaluations are seen as infallible and students have no way to dispute or disagree, further limiting their space for expression and self-confidence.

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*Chinese culture values respect for teachers. Even in the classroom, where I am most exposed to English, I still don't want to communicate in English. Because of the seriousness and inviolable status of teachers, teachers seem to have the unconditional right to deny students. As long as I am disobedient in class, even if I answer the question correctly, some teachers will take advantage of my opportunity to stand up and teach me a lesson, which embarrasses me. These behaviors made me afraid to talk to teachers and made me feel embarrassed if I said something wrong. (Semi-structured Interview)*

A significant negative effect of asymmetrical power relationships is that students' fear of making mistakes increases. This mentality is further reinforced by the traditional concept of "strict teachers produce excellent students", which holds that strict requirements and high-pressure environments are important conditions for students to succeed. However, when cultural misunderstandings lead teachers to abuse authority, this atmosphere can place a heavy psychological burden on students, especially when it comes to expressing themselves in English. Since they are not familiar with foreign languages, students are more likely to worry that their language mistakes may be criticized or denied by teachers. This fear of making a mistake drives them to stay silent in class to avoid embarrassment or humiliation. This cautious attitude further inhibits their willingness to actively use English in the classroom, leading to a significant decline in English WTC.

*Students 8* mentioned that they felt anxious about speaking in English in class because they feared that if they made language mistakes, they might be criticized by the teacher. This sense of anxiety makes them prefer to give up the opportunity to express themselves rather than take a risk, which weakens their confidence and motivation to participate in English communication.

*Except for some specific circumstances, such as reading texts in class or performing at an English festival, there is no occasion for me to use English. Even in English classes, I don't have a strong desire to communicate. Sometimes I am afraid that I will be criticized by the teacher if I make a mistake, so even if my answer is correct, I will not take the initiative to answer the question. (Semi-structured Interview)*

China's education model usually emphasizes teacher-led, students' role is mainly to receive and memorize knowledge, and the lack of opportunities to interact with teachers and classmates, this structure limits students' free expression. Under such a hierarchy, students usually have fewer opportunities to participate in class discussions, and often need to be approved or encouraged by the teacher to express their opinions, which further reduces the incentive for students to express themselves in English classes. At the same time, students are taught from an early age to be "modest" and "follow the rules," avoiding questioning the authority of teachers or overexpressing themselves in public. This cultural habit over time may lead students to develop a more introverted personality, especially in English classes, which is often manifested by avoiding communication with others. Instead of actively participating in discussions, they tend to listen quietly, rely on the teacher's instructions, and do not actively seek opportunities to express their views.

### **The influences of the 'Face'**

Some Chinese learners are taught from an early age by their parents, such as "dressing well is better than eating well," which emphasizes the importance of outward appearance and respectability, regardless of what is going on behind the scenes. This idea echoes the proverb "to get ahead, one must suffer behind others' backs." These words, passed down from generation to generation, are deeply rooted in the minds of many Chinese learners, reinforcing the cultural concept of "face first". This way of thinking makes students feel a great fear of making mistakes in English communication, fearing that their image will be damaged. It is because of this emphasis on



"face" that they are often hesitant to express English for fear of making mistakes. Students often feel nervous and uneasy when they use English in public, because they worry that they may be laughed at by their classmates and lose face if they give wrong answers. Because of this, they often choose to remain silent in order to avoid exposing their inadequacies. In group activities, they tend to listen rather than actively participate, for fear of being the center of attention or being judged negatively. *Student 2* mentioned that for fear of embarrassment and shame, she often gave up the opportunity to answer questions voluntarily.

*I will not take the initiative to answer questions in class, because if I answer wrong, it will be embarrassing, and my classmates and teachers may laugh at me. Whenever a student answers a question incorrectly, the class is always extremely quiet and everyone looks at that student. Some teachers will point out the mistake tactfully, but some teachers will criticize the student who made the mistake in front of the whole class. I'm afraid that this will happen to me, so I don't want to communicate in English in class. (Semi-structured Interview)*

Just like the concern expressed by *student 2*, the teacher's criticism is closely related to the cultural concept of "face", which further aggravates the students' fear in English communication. Although the teacher's criticism may be for teaching purposes, the experience often brings feelings of shame and embarrassment to the students, thus directly affecting their "face". To avoid this situation, students often choose to remain as silent as possible in class or avoid speaking up. *Student 1* noted that her WTC in English had improved in the Malaysian teaching environment. In addition to a positive classroom atmosphere, the presence of open-ended questions also helps students express themselves more freely when there are no standard answers.

*Sometimes the teacher would let us watch movies and share our opinions about them. I think it's very relaxed and makes the class less stressful. There is no right or wrong way to share my opinion on some questions, and I don't have to worry about making a mistake and embarrassing myself. The relaxed atmosphere makes me feel less pressure from teachers and classes. (Semi-structured Interview)*

The concept of face in Chinese traditional culture has a profound impact on learners' language self-confidence. Face culture makes students pay close attention to others' opinions when communicating in English. When they use English, they tend to think twice about whether their expression is accurate and how others might react, fearing that mistakes will lead to embarrassment, criticism, and possibly even being looked down upon by others. This mentality of paying too much attention to others' evaluation consumes a lot of students' psychological energy and increases their pressure in language use. In the long run, students will make mistakes and "loss of face" closely linked, gradually reducing the evaluation of their own language ability, the formation of a lack of confidence in the psychological state. *Student 5* mentioned that her WTC in English in China was significantly lower than in Malaysia because she was afraid of making mistakes in front of people better than herself and being laughed at.

*I'm embarrassed to speak English in China because sometimes I'm regarded as a weird person. I don't say it in my daily life or in class, not only because I'm afraid of making mistakes, but also because there are many people who are better than me, but they don't say it, so I won't show off. If I say something wrong, I will be regarded as a "clown", and some people will laugh at me in their hearts. Because I'm not very good at it, I think it's not necessary to speak English in China. (Semi-structured Interview)*

In the absence of confidence, many students tend to underestimate their own language ability. Even if they are

familiar with some common English expressions, they are still afraid to try them for fear of making mistakes. Especially in public or when communicating with non-native Chinese speakers, this fear becomes more pronounced, causing them to be more passive. This excessive doubt about their own language ability and fear of mistakes further limits their opportunities to actively practice, so that their self-confidence continues to decline, and finally forms a vicious circle of "the more afraid the more afraid to practice, the less confident the more afraid to practice."

## Small cultural factors influence WTC among Chinese international learners studying in a public university Malaysia

### Influences of Family Culture

In the context of Chinese family culture, many parents mainly focus on their children's test scores, especially in skills such as listening, reading and writing that are directly related to the test. This educational orientation usually neglects the cultivation of oral English skills. As a result, the lack of practical English communication training during the growth of students leads to a lack of confidence in actual language communication, showing a tendency of avoidance and unwillingness to participate. *Student 8* mentioned that as her parents placed too much emphasis on grades and neglected the training of oral English, this situation affected her mindset in the first semester in Malaysia and her WTC in English was low. She said:

*My family is very supportive of me learning English, but they don't pay enough attention to communicating in English. In their opinion, getting high marks in exams is the most important thing. This also resulted in me not having experienced any special training in speaking. During the first semester of studying in Malaysia, I felt a little helpless both in class and outside of class. At the beginning, my WTC in English was not as high as it is now. After two semesters of training, I became more and more courageous to speak. (Semi-structured Interview)*

Although some parents do not pay special attention to the cultivation of their children's oral ability, they often strongly require their children to communicate with foreigners in English in social occasions, and even require their children to perform in English, such as reciting texts or singing. This kind of behavior may be more to meet the parents' own "face" needs, but ignores the students' own psychological feelings. *Student 8* mentioned in the interview that these forced actions made them feel uncomfortable and anxious, especially when their language skills were insufficient. This kind of public "performance" often intensifies their resistance to English and further makes them afraid of using English in public.

*Celebrations are held at the mid-term and end of each semester, and students can sign up for performances. I was always forced to perform by my parents, and I was a very reluctant person to attract attention in public, but no one cared what I thought. My spoken English has not been systematically trained, but I am still required to teach myself without a teacher. One time I was pushed onto the stage unprepared and almost burst into tears. Someone was recording the performance below. I was so embarrassed, and ever since that time, I've been terrified of speaking English in public. (Semi-structured Interview)*

Parents' coercive behavior sometimes stimulates students' reverse psychology. *Student 5* mentioned that her parents were too strict with her, forcing her to memorize words and constantly urging her to speak English, which often backfired. Excessive external pressure not only failed to improve her oral English effectively, but triggered a rebellious mood. Therefore, students began to resist English learning and even deliberately avoided using English in actual communication. Such reverse psychology not only reduces students' interest and enthusiasm in learning, but also has a negative impact on language learning, and eventually leads them to avoid communicating with others in the target language. *Student 6* also mentioned:

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*But sometimes being too concerned about my English learning progress will make me feel a lot of pressure. In the case of too much pressure, I will have some mindset issues, like I will not want to learn English. Sometimes at family parties they ask me to sing English songs, perform shows and so on, which makes me a little bored and I don't want to do it. (Semi-structured Interview)*

### **Influences of the Social Constructions**

Influenced by collectivist culture, Chinese learners often tend to establish social circles with classmates from the same country. Since most members of these social circles are accustomed to using Chinese, the use of English is usually limited to classrooms or specific occasions. Therefore, students lack the need to actually use English in daily life, and there are not enough language environments and interaction opportunities to practice oral English. This makes them often uncomfortable when communicating with people from non-Chinese backgrounds and reluctant to actively use English. What's more, in these Chinese-dominated friend circles, actively using English may be seen as showing off or being out of step with the group, so students usually choose to follow the group's norms of behavior to avoid being isolated. This herd mentality not only reduces the opportunity of students to use English, but also directly affects their language communication willingness. *Student 3* also said that she often felt uncomfortable speaking English in a social circle full of Chinese students.

*I don't use English when I communicate with my Chinese friends. Everyone uses Chinese. Sometimes speaking English will be laughed at, laugh at why I suddenly speak English, some friends will say "you really become a foreigner" these words. Although I know they are joking, I will not continue to inexplicably start speaking English. Because if other friends suddenly speak English, I will have the same reaction, feeling so sudden, inexplicable. (Semi-structured Interview)*

The language used in friends and group discussions actually reflects a microcosm of Chinese society. Despite the importance of English as a global language, it is still one of the few foreign languages in China. As English is relatively rare, many Chinese learners think it is not important or practical in daily life. *Student 1* mentioned that especially when interacting with Chinese friends, everyone speaks the same mother tongue, which makes English seem less appropriate in the social circle of Chinese learners.

*Chinese students rarely use a language other than their mother tongue to communicate in private. First of all, it is not necessary. It is more convenient for everyone to speak Chinese. There is no need to speak English to communicate. Moreover, speaking English will affect the speed of our communication. I remember one time my friends and I discussed that we could only speak English for the whole day. We hardly communicated that day. It is still inconvenient to communicate in English. (Semi-structured Interview)*

### **Influences of Classroom Culture**

China's education evaluation system has always focused on standardized tests and test scores, which has largely created a teacher-centered, student-passive classroom model. Students are usually so focused on how to deal with the exam that they neglect the ability to use the language in real life. This test-oriented approach to teaching makes students less confident and inexperienced in a real language environment, which affects their WTC. In addition, Chinese classroom culture places great emphasis on discipline and order, and students are expected to be quiet, follow rules, and obey the teacher's instructions. While this strict discipline helps maintain order in the classroom and improves teaching efficiency, it also inhibits students' self-expression. Silence in the classroom not only limits behavior, but also suppresses students' thinking and language skills. In such an environment,

students are often accustomed to silence and avoid taking the initiative to speak or ask questions, so as not to break the order or attract unwanted attention. This self-inhibition is especially evident in English classrooms, where language learning requires a lot of oral practice, but in highly disciplined environments, students may be overly cautious and fear making mistakes that lead to negative evaluation or criticism, which makes them more passive. Even if they are able to express themselves, they often choose to remain silent until they are explicitly invited or directed by the teacher. In addition, this inhibitive habit also permeates into informal communication situations, making it difficult for students to actively use English to communicate with others in daily life. *Student 8* mentioned:

*And in English class, the exercise of foreign language is lacking, the teacher also does not let us speak freely, we must raise our hands to speak. I was embarrassed when I raised my hand and the whole class looked at me. Therefore, I have been forced to learn English since I was a child. If the teacher does not let me speak English in class, I will not want to speak English. (Semi-structured Interview)*

#### **Result of RQ4: What possible measures to increase Chinese international learners' WTC in English in a public university Malaysia?**

In the research of RQ4, semi-structured interview is still adopted. The interviewer encourages students to express freely what they think will help improve their English WTC according to their personal situation, and provides suggestions on educational policies and teaching methods. According to the transcribed interviews, most students believe that speaking in class, discussing group assignments with foreign friends, or participating in community activities help to enhance their desire to communicate in English.

*Student 3: Don't be afraid to make speeches in class. And the group members should also actively discuss in English. Teachers and classmates should not laugh at us when we make mistakes, but encourage us more. (Semi-structured Interview)*

*Student 2: I think we can do more group work with our foreign friends. In this environment where you have to communicate in English, I think the WTC will increase. (Semi-structured Interview)*

*Student 7: We can participate in extracurricular club activities and communicate with foreign students, which can help us exercise courage. (Semi-structured Interview)*

*Student 6: In our class, there will be a lot of presentation assignments, so this kind of homework can be a good exercise. Also, we can actively participate in cultural exchange evenings and English clubs, which can enhance your enthusiasm. (Semi-structured Interview)*

*Student 4: Don't be afraid to be laughed at. Join more school clubs and communicate with foreign friends. Schools can also hold English corner activities specifically for international students to promote students' social interaction. (Semi-structured Interview)*

Some students believe that participating in Model United Nations, debating competitions, or performing in English can improve WTC.

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*Student 8: The language classes at school are good. Or join a school club to improve. Or participate in a Model United Nations event to increase the WTC. (Semi-structured Interview)*

*Student 10: Active participation in debating competitions and other activities can improve my thinking ability and oral ability. (Semi-structured Interview)*

*Student 1: Schools can hold more celebration parties and set up rich rewards to attract more students to sign up for participation. The process of preparing the program is also a process of building confidence and enhancing the WTC. (Semi-structured Interview)*

Some students also suggested that the appropriate reward and punishment system and point exchange reward system also had a positive impact on learners' WTC in English.

*Student 5: I was thinking about the reward and punishment system one of the teachers set up when I was in the language class. Reward and punishment, but in a funny way. At that time, there were many students from different countries in the class, and everyone liked to get together and communicate in their own mother tongue, but this did not help improve their oral English. So teachers would ask students who were caught communicating in a language other than English to sing an English song before class the next day as a punishment. I have a friend who was punished. She even went to learn an English song, which also helped us improve our English level. (Semi-structured Interview)*

*Student 8: Schools may set up a points-based reward system. If we actively speak in class, or take the initiative to speak, we can take appropriate points. These points can be exchanged for rewards at the end of the semester, and the reward mechanism can appropriately improve students' willingness to exchange. (Semi-structured Interview)*

To sum up, communication is the focus of language. Only by speaking more English in daily life and in class and increasing the frequency of English communication can the quality of English communication be gradually improved. The improvement of spoken English level can in turn affect the WTC in English.

## Summary of the Chapter

Through thematic analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts, this chapter explores the influence of large and small cultural factors on English as a foreign language WTC. Specifically, the study focuses on the influence of traditional culture, national language policy, family cultural background and the uniqueness of the education system. This paper summarizes and deeply analyzes the core viewpoints of the students in the interview, in order to fully explain the influence of these factors on the willingness to communicate in English.

## Discussion

### Large cultural factors impact WTC in English among Chinese international learners in a public university Malaysia

It can be seen from the findings that the large cultural factors influencing the WTC in English of Chinese students in Malaysia include the national language policy, the characteristics of the Chinese education system and the influence of traditional culture. Among them, national language policy is the core factor that affects learners' language ability. Although China is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, with various ethnic languages (such as Tibetan, Zhuang, Dai, and Uyghur) playing an important role in its specific regions and cultures, the influence

of these languages is relatively limited. Mandarin has become a major language tool for cross-regional and cross-ethnic communication. In the vast majority of areas, whether in education, professional environment or daily life, Mandarin is widely used, becoming the most commonly used medium of communication. Even in some areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, the popularity of Mandarin is increasing, and it plays an indispensable role as an important bridge to promote information transmission, cultural communication and economic cooperation. The popularization of Mandarin not only enhances the unity among ethnic groups, but also provides strong support for the economic growth of ethnic minority areas (Wang & Phillion, 2009). At the same time, the popularization of Mandarin also plays a key role in improving the education level and social mobility of residents in ethnic minority areas, and is one of the key factors to promote the overall progress of society (Postiglione, 2015). It can be seen that through the continuous promotion of language policies, the status of Mandarin has been consolidated and become an irreplaceable "universal language" in the whole Chinese society.

China's language environment is highly homogeneous, which poses a potential constraint on the use of English. Due to the overwhelming status of Chinese in the country, foreign languages such as English are often seen as instrumental languages rather than necessities for daily communication. English is not widely used in daily social situations and informal communication in China, so most Chinese learners grow up without a real English language environment and have few opportunities to communicate in English in natural situations. This single language environment also limits the development of students' intercultural communication ability. At most Chinese social events, Mandarin meets all communication needs, leaving students with fewer opportunities to interact with foreign language speakers. Wen and Clement (2003) pointed out in their research that it is precisely because of the limited application of English in daily life and informal communication that most Chinese students have few opportunities to use English in natural contexts when growing up. This homogeneity of the language environment results in a lack of experience in interacting with foreign language speakers. When Chinese students enter an international environment, especially when they need to communicate in English, their WTC level is often affected. This phenomenon is not only related to the English level, but also closely related to the homogenization of the domestic language environment, the lack of real interactive scenes and the language usage habits under the cultural background.

The influence of mother tongue is one of the key challenges Chinese learners faces in the process of English acquisition. Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, while English belongs to the Indo-European family (Pulley blank, 1996). There are significant differences in grammatical rules, syntactic structures and expression habits between the two languages. The effect of mother tongue transfer on second language acquisition may be either positive or negative. However, due to the significant differences between English and Chinese language systems, negative transfer is more common (Odlin, 2003). For example, the syntax of Chinese is relatively flexible, the change of word order is limited, and the tense and subject information mainly depend on the context. In contrast, English has stricter requirements for tense, subject-verb agreement, and grammatical rules. These differences lead to greater difficulties for Chinese learners in learning English syntax, grammar and vocabulary, thus affecting their self-confidence and willingness to express themselves in language communication (Liu & Jackson, 2008). In addition, the differences between Chinese and English phonetic systems also bring significant challenges to learners. Chinese is a tonal language, while English is a stressed language, and this difference in pronunciation habits leads to Chinese learners being prone to problems in English pronunciation and intonation (Swan & Smith, 2001). The sentence structure of Mandarin is relatively simple, and the tense and subject information usually depend on the context. English, on the other hand, requires strict grammatical forms to express this information. Learners often make mistakes in the use of tenses, subject-verb agreement and syntactic structures in English (Shiu, 2011).

As Lado (1957) mentioned in the contrastive analysis hypothesis, the difficulty of language acquisition will increase significantly when there is a large structural difference between the mother tongue and the target language. Ellis (1997) further pointed out that Chinese lacks complex rules for tense change, while English strictly requires verb conjugation and subject-verb agreement, which makes grammar learning more challenging for Chinese learners. This cross-language difference is not only reflected in grammar and syntax, but also in vocabulary and phonetics, which adds difficulty to learners' English acquisition process.

Another large cultural factor affecting Chinese learners' WTC in English is China's education system. Under the

framework of test-oriented education, schools and society generally pay more attention to students' ability to achieve excellent results in high-stakes tests rather than improving their practical language application ability. Cheng (2002) pointed out test-oriented education has significantly affected the focus of classroom teaching, and teachers and students tend to focus on skills that can improve test scores, while ignoring the actual language communication training. Hu (2005) further pointed out that Chinese language education has long been influenced by test-oriented, and the cultivation of oral ability is usually given a low priority, and students have few opportunities to practice their language application skills in practical situations. The research of Qi (2004) shows that due to the great pressure of college entrance examination and other large exams, educational resources and classroom time usually tend to improve exam-related abilities, while language practice and expression abilities are ignored. This test-oriented education has led many students to perform well in exams, but appear less confident in actual language use scenarios. They are often good at understanding expressions they are familiar with, but find it difficult to communicate with others. This feature of English education in China makes students pay more attention to "learning" and "remembering" rather than "using" and "speaking", thus lacking confidence in English communication. With the passage of time, exam-oriented education causes the alienation of students' learning motivation. They tend to aim at high scores, but ignore the practical meaning of language communication. As Cheng (2008) points out, the test-oriented educational philosophy focuses on mechanical memorization and skill training rather than developing the ability to use English as a practical communication tool. This mode also easily leads to students' learning burnout and anxiety, which further weakens their confidence and ability to use language in practical communication.

China's collectivist culture has also had a profound impact on the WTC. In such cultures, individuals tend to obey group norms and rules of behavior rather than actively express themselves (Hofstede, 1984). This collectivist thinking makes students more willing to keep a low profile in their studies and reluctant to stand out in public. In the classroom, the impact of collectivism is manifested as students are more willing to cooperate with peers or familiar classmates, and are less willing to actively communicate with strangers or foreign students. In the English learning environment, this tendency further limits students' language practice opportunities and makes them generally less willing to communicate in English in the Chinese environment. Even in group tasks, Chinese learners are more inclined to choose familiar partners rather than communicate and discuss with new groups, which significantly affects the development of their language communication skills.

Modesty and politeness are the key factors that influence students' enthusiasm to speak in class. In the Chinese classroom environment, even if students clearly know the answer to a question, they often choose to hide their strengths to avoid being perceived as immodest or impolite (Cheng, 2000). Wei (2016) further highlighted the core role of politeness in classroom interaction by studying politeness strategies of middle school English classroom teachers' discourse. Such cultural norms lead students to participate more passively in the classroom rather than actively answering questions. In addition, the hierarchy and power dynamics in Chinese culture have a profound impact on students' communicative intention (WTC). Since ancient times, China has advocated the tradition of "respecting teachers and valuing education". This cultural origin is clearly reflected in the *Analects of Confucius*, it is mentioned that *teachers, therefore, preach, teach and dispel doubts*, which clearly defines the high status of teachers in knowledge transmission and moral education (Confucius, 2001). This tradition continues in China's education system, creating a highly authoritative role for teachers in the classroom. Students usually believe that the teacher's views are absolutely correct, and rarely raise objections even if they find mistakes, but doubt their own ability. This authority-centered classroom culture suppresses students' active participation and critical thinking skills, thereby reducing their willingness to speak up in class (Cortazzi, 1996).

At the same time, the concept of "Face" also restricts the classroom performance of Chinese learners to a large extent. Since childhood, parents often emphasize the importance of external performance and face in children's education, which is deeply rooted in culture and has a significant impact on students' behavior in the classroom. The research of Liu and Littlewood (1997) shows that face culture occupies an important position in Chinese society and directly affects the level of learners' classroom participation. Many students choose to minimize their speaking to avoid "losing face" by making mistakes. In addition, some teachers may use inappropriate ways to correct students' mistakes, which will further increase students' anxiety and make them more cautious and insecure about classroom performance. Together, these factors make students tend to be silent in class, which further weakens their English communicative intention and language expression ability.

## **Small cultural factors impact WTC in English among Chinese international learners in a public university Malaysia**

There are also 3 key small cultural factors affecting the English acquisition of Chinese learners in Malaysia: family culture, social structure and classroom culture. As the saying goes, "Parents are their children's first teachers." Parents' values and behaviors have a direct impact on students' learning habits and attitudes. Many parents have extremely high expectations of their children, not only for them to perform well in academic tests, but also for them to be fluent in English for everyday communication. However, in reality, due to the lack of language practice opportunities in the family environment, students are rarely exposed to real oral English application situations. Some parents even ask their children to demonstrate their spoken English ability in public, which often embarrasses students and weakens their WTC in English. In addition, China's social structure is relatively homogeneous and homogeneous, which makes the opportunities for learners to use foreign languages in daily life more limited. When Chinese learners enter a multicultural classroom in Malaysia, they are often more inclined to interact with other students who share their native language, rather than taking the initiative to communicate with classmates from other cultural backgrounds. This behavior pattern further reduces their chances of practicing English. At the same time, the limitation of classroom culture also limits the development of oral training. The lack of appropriate language use platforms leads to a gradual decline in learners' English ability, which ultimately negatively affects their confidence and willingness to communicate in English (Shi, 2019). Together, these factors constitute an important barrier to WTC for Chinese learners.

Classroom culture has an important impact on students' WTC, and Chinese classroom education has traditionally adopted a teacher-centered teaching model. In this model, teachers control the classroom as the main transmitter of knowledge, and students participate in learning in a passive role. Affected by this kind of education for a long time, students gradually form a high degree of dependence on teachers, and lack of active learning awareness and motivation. Traditional teaching methods pay more attention to the transmission and infusion of knowledge, but pay less attention to the cultivation of students' active participation and independent thinking ability (Hu, 2002). This has led many students to become accustomed to following the teacher's instructions rather than actively thinking or expressing their opinions, even in English classes. In this classroom culture, even if students are willing to express themselves, they are more likely to wait for questions or guidance from teachers rather than actively participate in discussions or speeches. This low initiative limits students' opportunities to use English in the classroom, while also undermining their ability to use the language spontaneously in a wider range of social situations. English learning needs to enhance language skills through continuous practice and communication, but the teacher-centered teaching environment is difficult to provide enough interaction opportunities. As a result, students' autonomous learning ability is inhibited, and their willingness to communicate and express self-confidence are negatively affected (Liu, 2023).

Mahall (2011) further pointed out that under traditional teaching concepts, teachers are regarded as the main input of classroom knowledge, while students passively accept information and lack the motivation for active participation and deep learning. This mode not only weakens students' practical ability to use language, but also limits their ability to think critically and apply knowledge independently, which has a negative impact on their English learning effectiveness and communicative intention. To improve students' WTC, it is urgent to introduce more interactive and student-centered teaching strategies into the classroom culture to stimulate students' learning initiative and enhance their language practice ability.

## **RQ4: Measures to increase Chinese international learners' WTC in English in a public university Malaysia**

Studies have shown that students generally believe that participating in various forms of English extracurricular activities, taking the initiative to speak in class, public speaking, and communicating with foreign friends in English can significantly improve their WTC. These activities not only provide students with the opportunity to practice language, but also enable them to enhance language confidence and proficiency in real communication situations. Relevant studies have pointed out that extracurricular activities and language practice play a positive role in improving learners' language affinity and intercultural communication ability (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). In addition, MacIntyre et al. (1998) also emphasized the influence of language ability on WTC, arguing that the



improvement of oral English can enhance learners' confidence in expressing their views and make them more willing to use English in a variety of occasions.

Joining English clubs and other extra-curricular activities can also create a supportive environment that helps students ease anxiety about making mistakes. Horwitz et al. (1986) proposed that language anxiety is an important factor affecting learners' WTC, and that students can gradually overcome this anxiety by interacting with others. In addition, repeated practice and feedback in language activities enables students to act more confident in real communication, thus improving WTC (Cao & Philp, 2006). Class speaking and public speaking also provide students with the opportunity to exercise, so that they can adapt to different communicative situations. According to the output hypothesis theory of Swain (1985), students can not only internalize language rules, but also effectively improve their language ability through the actual output of the target language. These output activities further increase their self-confidence in daily communication. Language output in formal Settings, such as classroom or public speaking, is an important way to improve learners' WTC (Wen & Clement, 2003). These activities not only help students gradually adapt to diverse communication situations, but also further consolidate their confidence and ability to use the language through continuous practice and feedback.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

The influence of large and small cultural factors on Chinese international students' WTC in English have been evident in this study, and students have proposed feasible strategies to improve their WTC. Findings not only emphasizes the importance of the research, but also highlights its contribution in the academic field, and provides practical suggestions for research work.

### Implications of the Research

This study focuses on the influence of cultural factors on WTC in English of Chinese international students, and explores how cultural background shapes learners' language communication behavior and psychological tendency in a cross-cultural environment. The study emphasizes that the external cultural environment plays an important role in shaping language behavior, especially in the context of cross-cultural learning. Different from previous studies that focused on individual psychological mechanisms, this study analyzes the multiple effects of culture on WTC from two aspects: large culture factors (such as social norms, education system, national language, etc.) and small culture factors (such as family influence, classroom atmosphere, language environment of friends, etc.). This analytical framework not only reveals the cultural roots of Chinese international learners' willingness to communicate, but also provides important implications for relevant research methods and teaching practices. Incorporating the unique Chinese cultural factors into the vision of language behavior research provides a new way to deeply understand language behavior in cross-cultural learning environments. Future studies can further explore the specific influence of Chinese culture on English learning, especially the dual role of learners' psychological factors and language behavior. This study takes the influence of large and small cultures on WTC as the starting point, and opens up a new perspective for understanding how culture shapes the intention of language communication. This perspective is not only applicable to Chinese learners, but also can be extended to language learners in other cultural backgrounds, helping to reveal the rules of language learning and communication in different cultural environments.

Through semi-structured interviews, this study deeply analyzes the specific influences of large and small cultural factors on learners' English learning. This kind of interview design enables the research to comprehensively analyze the role of cultural factors on language behavior with students' real experiences as the core. In addition, the interviews also collected feedback from learners on teaching suggestions and educational policy changes, which provided a valuable basis for actual teaching practice and policy formulation.

The study suggests that teachers create a supportive atmosphere in teaching, such as patiently listening to students' opinions, providing targeted guidance, helping learners get rid of traditional cultural constraints, and gradually strengthening their WTC. At the same time, curriculum design should fully consider learners' cultural

background and language ability, and relieve students' language communication anxiety through progressive teaching content. The traditional dependent learning model inhibits students' language acquisition potential to some extent. To solve this problem, teachers can adopt task-based teaching methods to encourage students to use English in practical tasks, so as to enhance their autonomous learning ability and language expression confidence. Based on the results of this study, it is suggested to design special language courses and teaching training programs for international learners. For example, Model United Nations meetings or English festivals are set up in extracurricular activities to provide students with interesting and practical cross-cultural communication opportunities, helping them to improve their communication willingness and language level in a relaxed environment.

### Recommendations for Research

Researchers could broaden the sample size and increase its diversity by incorporating a wider range of schools, academic disciplines, and participants from various age groups, genders, educational backgrounds, and geographic regions. This approach would enhance the sample's representativeness and improve the generalizability of the findings. To address potential self-reporting biases, studies might employ a combination of methodologies, such as observational techniques, experimental designs, or third-party evaluations, to complement and mitigate the limitations associated with the interviews.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A - Chinese Version of the Guide Questions for Semi-structured Interview

主题	序号	引导问题
影响外语学习者的英语交流意愿的大文化因素	问题 1	你认为马来西亚的语言教育体系和中国的有什么不同？这些差异会影响你沟通的意愿吗？如果是，为什么？
	问题 2	你在学校以外的日常生活中多久使用一次英语？中国和马来西亚的社会语言环境有何不同？你认为这些差异是否影响了你在马来西亚使用英语的意愿？如果是，为什么？
	问题 3	你认为你的文化背景对你的英语学习有影响吗？如果是，为什么？
影响外语学习者的英语交流意愿的小文化因素	问题 1	你能分享一下你家人对学习英语的态度吗？你家人的态度如何影响你用英语交流的意愿？
	问题 2	与朋友交流时，你会主动使用英语吗？你朋友圈的语言选择是如何影响你使用英语的意愿的？
	问题 3	在马来西亚的教室里，你的老师是否通过特别的活动或其他方式促进学生的互动？这些课堂互动的机会是否影响了你用英语交流的意愿？
提高英语学习者英语交流意愿的措施	问题 1	你觉得有什么活动、课程或支持系统有助于提高你用英语交流的动力吗？