Exploring International School Teachers' Views of Foreign Chinese Students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English

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ABSTRACT

Willingness to communicate (WTC) refers to an individual's intention to speak or remain silent when given a choice (MacIntyre, 2007, 2020). This qualitative study investigates international school teachers' perceptions of the factors influencing foreign Chinese students' willingness to communicate in English, explores teachers' views of these students' WTC, and examines pedagogical practices used to encourage English communication. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six teachers from Malaysian international schools. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal three main themes influencing students' WTC in English: (1) affective factors, particularly anxiety and low self-confidence; (2) cultural influences related to communication norms and classroom behaviour; and (3) instructional practices, including teachers' methods and interactional strategies. Although foreign Chinese students were perceived as generally reluctant to communicate in English voluntarily, teachers reported employing practical classroom strategies to enhance students' WTC. Due to the small sample size, the findings are not intended to be generalisable, and further research involving a larger and more diverse group of teachers is recommended.

Keywords: Willingness to Communicate (WTC), Foreign Chinese Students, International School Teachers, Affective Factors and Teaching Strategies

INTRODUCTION

The significance of the English language, which has been dubbed the global trade language, has grown increasingly evident as a result of globalisation. Since English is the lingua franca of the Internet, proficiency in the language is crucial for attaining worldwide stature in the current information and internet era. English is widely recognised as the world's lingua franca and the most dominant language (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). The language's prevalence is attributed to historical factors, such as colonisation, as well as its modern role in science, technology, and international trade.

The current study, Exploring International School Teachers' Views of Foreign Chinese Students' Willingness to Communicate in English, is conceptually based on the Heuristic Model of Second Language Willingness to Communicate (L2 WTC) developed by MacIntyre et al. (1998). MacIntyre et al. defined L2 WTC as "a willingness to enter into speaking at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (MacIntyre, 2007;). This concept is important because it views WTC as a dynamic and complex construct influenced by a range of interacting elements, including psychological, environmental, and sociolinguistic factors.

The model is envisioned as a six-layered pyramid, with the elements affecting WTC becoming less erratic and more constant as one descends the structure. The top layer (Layer I) depicts actual communication behaviour, whereas the second layer represents the willingness to communicate (WTC) itself. Moving down the model, more enduring variables are incorporated across its subsequent layers, including situated antecedents (Layer III), motivational propensities (Layer IV), affective-cognitive context (Layer V), and stable elements in the social and individual context (LayerVI), such as personality traits and intergroup climate.

The difficulties that students encounter are greatly influenced by the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers when it comes to teaching English, as well as by curriculum activities, teaching practices, and

assessment evaluation. According to Massri (2020), Al-Jamal and Al-Jamal (2014) conducted a mixed-method study with 566 Jordanian students and 66 interviews to better understand ESL learning problems. The results showed that the population of the classroom, less time for studying, and fewer interactions between professors and students were the causes of the respondents' poor speaking skills. While the teachers were engaged, the huge classroom size made close interactions impossible, resulting in a lower attitude towards English among teachers and students. Moreover, teachers can deal with the English-only approach using a variety of ways. Ceo- DiFrancesco (2013) advised educators to regularly update parents and the community on students' progress before the policies (Nguyen, 2024). Teachers should educate community members and officials about language learning objectives and how world language studies help kids succeed academically. Teachers can educate constituents about their effective target language communication strategies through information sessions, newsletters, and meetings.

Furthermore, to promote English, the argument looks for support from parents, the community, and the government. Additionally, the tactics used by teachers are crucial in this situation. CeoDiFrancesco (2013) and Polio (2007) suggest teaching grammar in the target language. Form-meaning connections are facilitated by the use of structured scenarios in combination with presenting tools, animation, and real-world context (Nguyen, 2024). Total Physical Response (TPR) techniques, such as gestures and objects, enhance verbal comprehension. To maintain cultural relevance, use cultural images and set clear classroom rules in the target language. Teachers create an immersive learning environment by using context, gestures, and cognates from the start of the school year.

In teaching language context, language communication is one of the most important phases of a language learner's experience because of the various factors that influence their communication (Zhao & Dersingh, 2022). Thus, considerable effort is required to enhance effective language acquisition by increasing the willingness of foreign Chinese students to communicate in English. The Teachers in these diverse International School settings play a pivotal role in creating a supportive and non-threatening classroom environment necessary to reduce anxiety and enhance WTC. Pedagogical strategies such as using group work, allowing prolonged waiting/thinking time, and employing appropriate elicitation techniques are crucial for accommodating culturally influenced reticence.

Thus, the current study aims to explore international school teachers' views of foreign Chinese students' willingness to communicate in English.

Problem Statement

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is an important concept in the study of second language acquisition (SLA), referring to learners' proclivity to actively participate in communication under voluntary conditions. It is necessary to consciously develop this capacity. This effect is especially noticeable for Chinese students studying in Malaysia during their English learning process. Generally speaking, they are reluctant to socialise, particularly with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, which poses a significant barrier to their education and social integration. Many students remain mute in class and only passively participate in questions or debates, even if they possess sufficient knowledge and comprehension skills.

Chinese learners continue to participate in English communication at a low level in their daily lives outside of the classroom. Chinese students who live and study in Malaysia are more likely to interact with their fellow citizens and converse primarily in their native tongue, although English is widely spoken as the lingua franca in this country. According to Tianyu and Wahid (2025), their strong reliance on their mother tongue is a major factor in this phenomenon. They frequently converse in Mandarin or other dialects, even in settings where English is the primary language. This language choice inhibits the development of their language skills by limiting their exposure to real-world language use scenarios, oral English practice chances, and practical communication exercises.

Moreover, according to Tianyu and Wahid's (2025) study, asymmetrical power dynamics have a major detrimental impact on students' anxiety of making mistakes. The conventional idea that "strict teachers produce excellent students"—which maintains that stringent criteria and high-pressure settings are crucial for pupils to succeed—further supports this mindset. However, this environment can put a significant psychological load on

pupils, particularly when it comes to expressing themselves in English, when cultural misunderstandings prompt teachers to abuse authority. Students who are unfamiliar with foreign languages are more likely to be concerned that their lecturers would reject or criticise their linguistic errors.

Also, these students' avoidance behaviours and low involvement in English conversation persist even if they are in an environment that supports English practice. This occurrence emphasises the necessity of focused interventions to maximise Chinese English learners' total language learning experience and increase the effectiveness of foreign language acquisition. Therefore, when learning English in Malaysia, it is especially crucial to investigate the WTC of Chinese learners. In addition to revealing the intricate contributing variables, a thorough analysis of this issue can offer a crucial theoretical foundation for upcoming studies and educational policy decisions.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the factors that International School Teachers perceive as influencing Foreign Chinese Students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in English.

2. To explore International School Teachers' views of WTC among foreign Chinese students in English.

3. To examine the International School Teachers' pedagogical practices and suggested strategies in encouraging the foreign Chinese students to speak English.

Research Questions

1. What factors do International School Teachers believe influence foreign Chinese students' willingness to communicate in English?

2. What are International School Teachers' views of WTC among foreign Chinese students in English?

3. What are the International School Teachers' pedagogical practices and suggested strategies in encouraging the foreign Chinese students to speak English?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section will review the literature that influenced the design of the current investigation. Some learners may find it difficult to be willing to communicate in a second language. This study is based on the views of international school teachers' regarding the willingness of foreign Chinese students to communicate in English. The relationship between this study and WTC (desire to communicate) will make it easier to comprehend this model of theory by MacIntyre et al. (1998).

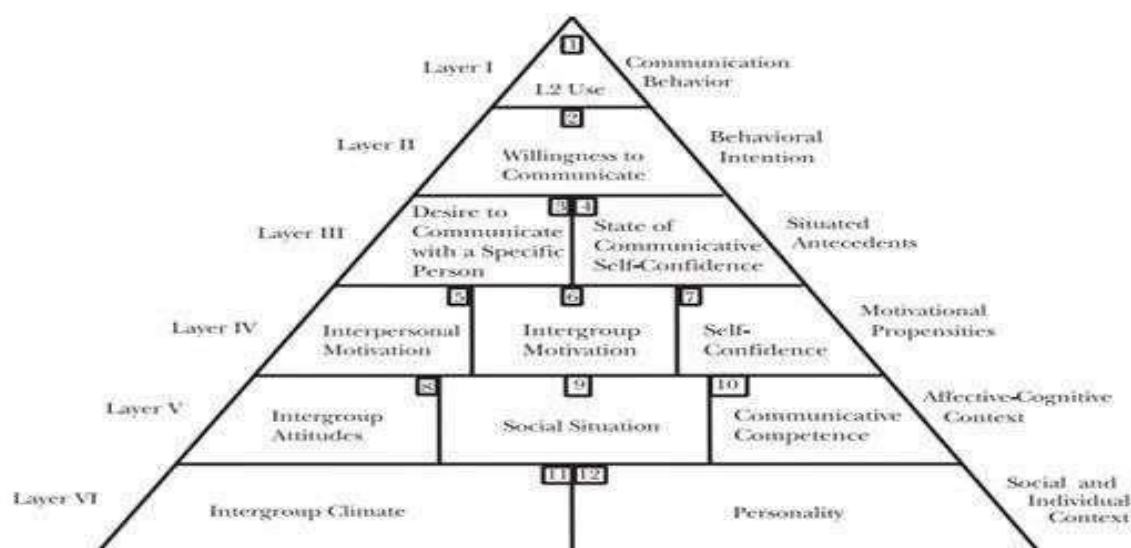**Theoretical Framework: WTC Heuristic Model**

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

McCroskey and Baer introduced the concept of WTC for communication in the first language (referred to as) in MacIntyre et al. later brought it to the public and into L2 after it was first used at the L1 WTC. The term, which was coined by MacIntyre and Charos in 1996, Li 2025 refers to the subject of second language learning."Readiness to enter into discourse at a particular level" for a learner. Using a L2 when spending time with a particular individual or group of people" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547; Li, 2025). Moreover, in English language classes, some students may be hesitant to communicate because English is their second or foreign language, while others are willing to communicate whenever possible. The diversity in talking behaviour is known as Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (McCroskey & Richmond, 1991; Gao et al., 2024).

In this research, the WTC Heuristic Model has been used as a theoretical framework. MacIntyre et al. (1998) developed a heuristic model that encompasses various social psychological factors that may influence an individual's decision to communicate or remain silent (Figure 1). Based on Figure 1, there are six layers, and communication unfolds each time speakers move from one layer to another. The model's lowest level, the base of the pyramid (Layer 6), is the society and individual communication contexts. Layer 6 has the broadest factors influencing communication, including intergroup climate and learner personalities. As stated by Gardner and Clment (1990), cited in Mostafa (2020), good intergroup relations promote the acquisition of a second language and its subsequent employment, whereas poor intergroup relations may reduce the motivation to study and communicate in a second language. Moreover, the learners' personality is another element that helps to explain how an individual responds and communicates with their cultural group or as well as members of other groups. According to MacIntyre and Charos (1996) as cited in Mostafa (2020), personality factors such as extroversion or introversion, agreeableness or unwillingness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and proclivity to explore new experiences all influence L2 acquisition and the desire to communicate in that language.

Ascending the pyramid, layer 5 is about affective-cognitive context. The elements in layer 5 include intergroup attitudes, social situation, and communicative competence. All these elements have a relationship with second language learners' attitudes. When a learner has a good attitude toward learning a second language, they may be more willing to use the L2 in the future. Furthermore, Gardner (1985) stated that exposure to a language community in diverse circumstances, as well as its frequency, can influence learners' willingness to interact in varied contexts.

Motivational proclivities comprise interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, and self-assurance, and comprise the fourth layer of the pyramid. Interpersonal motivation refers to a learner's relationship with the target language and its native speaker (MacDonald et al., 2003). Intergroup motivation refers to the attitudes and relationships among language users (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Besides, greater levels of self-confidence and potentially a more L2 WTC are correlated with perceived communication skills. If learners do not have great self-confidence, then it will affect their willingness to communicate in a second language. Language users also experience anxiety when they speak a second language. A low level of anxiety will be perceived if the level of competence to use the second language is high.

The pyramid's upper three tiers are about situated antecedents, behavioural intention, and communication behaviour. All these contextual factors result in varying levels of WTC. The third layer of the model focuses on the desire to interact with a specific person and the ability to express communicative self-confidence as contextual to conversing in a second language. The only component of Layer 2 is communication willingness, which is defined as "readiness to enter into a discourse at a particular time with a particular person or persons, using an L2" (MacIntyre et al., p. 547). Finally, WTC is the final psychological stage, the culmination of pressures pushing people toward or away from using volitional language.

WTC Among Foreign Chinese Learners

In contrast to other regions of the world where English is very popular, Asia, specifically China, is finally coming around to the idea of studying the English language (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021). English is now taught as a foreign language in schools as well as educational institutions. Furthermore, as mentioned by Zhai and

Razali (2022), the complexity and depth of communication abilities in English are comparable to those of internationalisation. In order to improve their academic performance, Chinese international students must become proficient in fundamental English communication skills and prepare appropriately before studying overseas. Amoah and Yeboah (2021) also stated that however, there is an inadequate or insufficient practice community. Li (2025) reported in his study that many foreign Chinese students continue to struggle with developing communicative competence in English, despite having had years of instruction in the language.

Speaking is considered the ultimate form of communication that enables learners to share their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and emotions with others. However, speaking in a target language, English, is a difficult task for the majority of Foreign Chinese learners. Furthermore, whether impacted by linguistic and/or psychological issues, it is difficult for foreign Chinese English learners to speak English effectively and correctly. According to Amoah and Yeboah (2021), numerous studies and bodies of knowledge have been conducted to examine the reasons behind learners' difficulties speaking. Li (2025) also added that the willingness to communicate in a second language has been persuasively shown to be a factor in one's ability to communicate in that language.

Factors affecting the foreign Chinese students' WTC in English follows as below:

Interference of the first language on second language acquisition

To express themselves in the target language, second-language learners often resort to using patterns from their native tongue. For example, when students are required to write an essay in English, they will write it in Chinese and then use Google Translate to convert it into English. Second-language users expect the structure of the English language to be the same as their first language because they are used to their native language. According to Derakhshan and Karimi (2015), learners of a second language (L2) often impose their first language's (L1) grammar, vocabulary, and cultural norms on the target language and society as they attempt to communicate. For example, if the second language user's native language is Chinese, then the user tends to translate the meaning of a word directly from their first language to English. This act would affect their English language acquisition because the meaning of the word might not be accurate. Furthermore, bilingualism is an intriguing problem that is affecting foreign Chinese students' willingness to communicate in the English language. There are three types of bilingualism such as compound bilingual, coordinate bilingual, and subcoordinate bilingual (Language Connection, 1995-2021). In this case, second language learners use sub-coordinate bilingualism. When people interpret words from their weaker language using words from their stronger language, they are said to be sub-13 coordinate bilinguals. In addition, when learners encounter gaps in their L2 syntactical structures when writing in L2, they resort to using syntactical structures from their first language. Where there are similarities between the structures of L1 and L2 due to learners' lack of understanding in L1, an error occurs in L2 (Bella, 1999, as cited in Derakhshan and Karimi, 2015). This also shows the interference of L1 on L2 acquisition and communication.

In conclusion, the interference of the first language on second language acquisition is strong.

Lack of Confidence

Self-confidence is one of the most significant elements in a second language student's learning. But catastrophically, lack of confidence is another factor that affects the willingness to communicate with students. This factor can be related to the fourth layer in the Heuristic Model WTC pyramid under motivational propensities, as it includes interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, and self-confidence. Murray (2006), as cited in Tridinanti (2018), claims that having confidence in oneself is a firm belief. Students need to have the confidence to communicate in English with confidence. Besides, Lawrence (2006), as cited in Tridinanti (2018), asserts that one's beliefs about their skills and abilities are what determine one's level of self-confidence. Thus, students who are confident succeed in communicating in English, seeing as they start believing in their abilities and never give up. Moreover, according to a study by Zhao and Dersingh (2022), the ability to utilise language accurately enough to convey meaning in both producing and understanding is known as language competency. The explanation for this is that the participants' English skills were rather low, leading to feelings of inferiority. One of the factors for the foreign Chinese students to speak less is this phenomenon.

Teachers' views of WTC among foreign Chinese students in English are as below:

The dominance of affective barriers (Anxiety and Confidence)

Since the development of the psychological theory of second language learning, language anxiety has been seen as a crucial factor in both learning and teaching. Additionally, it has been considered significant in numerous theories of second language acquisition. According to Bao and Liu (2021), self-esteem, inhibition, anxiety, personality, motivation, attitude, and so forth are among the individual aspects of the learners. These intricate psychological aspects undoubtedly limit the students. One of the dominant affective barriers would be anxiety. The most significant affective barrier to language learning is anxiety. Negative affective experiences like stress, melancholy, uneasiness, and so forth are directly linked to it. Also, anxiety in language acquisition mostly relates to students' nervousness and apprehension when they are expected to communicate in a foreign language. Language anxiety and language acquisition are inversely correlated: the less nervous, the more language is learned, or the more anxious, the less language is learned (Bao & Liu, 2021). Additionally, academic performance, self-esteem, oral and written proficiency, and confidence are all inversely correlated with anxiety. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), language anxiety is a complex phenomenon that encompasses self-perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and actions associated with classroom language learning, stemming from the distinctive nature of the process (p. 128). According to Spielberger (1983), linguistic anxiety is "a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p. 1) (Badrasawi et al., 2021). Conversely, situational anxiety is anxiety that a second language learner expresses in certain circumstances (MacIntyre, 1999). In this case, the foreign Chinese language learners often experience anxiety due to unfamiliarity with the context in which they will use the language. The foreign Chinese students become more familiar with it, and their anxiety decreases or disappears. Furthermore, according to Amiri and Puteh (2018), speaking anxiety among international students is caused by a lack of linguistic competency, inadequate knowledge of presentation content, negative views of examiners, and examiners' linguistic deficiency in understanding presentations. In this way, international school teachers believe that Chinese students from abroad experience similar challenges when communicating in English.

Aside from anxiety, teachers believe that the students lack self-confidence in their ability to speak in English. According to Brown (2004), successful activities, including second language acquisition, require a strong sense of self-confidence (Badrasawi et al., 2021). One essential element that can help students effectively articulate and present their thoughts through oral communication is confidence. Students must comprehend the importance of self-confidence because it has a significant impact on their academic path and other activities. MacIntyre (1999) stated that in order to comprehend the question and come up with a response, students must have gained enough confidence in the language in general. Moreover, MacIntyre (1999) also mentioned that prior language learning has resulted in self-confidence and communication ability based on positive L2 experiences. If these prerequisites were not met, the students would be less likely to provide answers in class and may not have the motivation to attend the language class at all. Various instances could be related to what has been stated, since international Chinese students dislike attending English sessions owing to a lack of self-confidence in speaking the language. Bao and Liu (2021) claimed that students with poor subjective initiative may struggle to communicate effectively in the target language. Students' poor self-confidence may be a major obstacle to their participation in class activities and their ability to speak the target language. Thus, students may become less interested in learning a new language if the situation gets worse. Tsou (2005) found a positive correlation between oral performance and high self-confidence and came to the conclusion that learners' desire to speak depends heavily on self-confidence (Badrasawi et al., 2021). Stenstrom (2014) supports the idea that confidence is essential for effective two-way communication (Badrasawi et al., 2021). Teachers believe that the foreign Chinese students can gain self-confidence by implementing several tactics. With this confidence, they will be able to communicate in English freely.

Influence of Cultural Norms

The relationship between culture and language learning has long been debatable. Numerous academics, especially linguists, have highlighted the strong connection between language and culture, which makes it impossible to comprehend one person without also comprehending others. The international school teachers believe that the local culture of a learner can have a significant impact on their acquisition of a second language. According to a study by Serajuddin (2023), for instance, in Bangladesh, a strong sense of cultural identity is linked to the Bengali language, even though English fluency is respected. Some people might place

more importance on maintaining their original language and culture than on learning English well. Moreover, In the process of learning a language, cultural identity is important since it frequently affects how at ease learners feel when speaking a new language. Language anxiety can strike learners, particularly if the language they are learning feels intimidating (Alisoy, 2024). For example, students may be self-conscious about their accents or afraid of making mistakes in front of their peers, which might limit their willingness to participate in class and communicate in the language. Besides, adapting to new cultural norms and adjusting to a different educational environment can be especially difficult for the foreign Chinese students in the Malaysian international school. According to Alisoy (2024), one of the case studies mentioned that the East Asian students, who hailed from cultures that valued authority and indirect communication, were hesitant to join in class discussions and frequently avoided communicating in English with the teacher. They were also afraid to speak English for fear of being mocked by their classmates.

Teachers' practices and suggestions in encouraging WTC

Effective communication is an essential skill for success in both academic and professional settings. However, many foreign Chinese students struggle with communication, whether it be due to shyness, lack of confidence, or difficulty expressing themselves. The good news is that the willingness to communicate can be developed and improved through various strategies and techniques.

One suggestion to enhance the willingness to communicate in a second language among foreign Chinese students is to implement collaborative learning in classrooms. The term "collaborative activities" is used to describe any situation in which students work together in a pair or small group. In addition, pair and group work activities can provide opportunities for students to practice their language skills and engage in communicative tasks in a less threatening and more supportive environment (Aeni, 2020). Moreover, the study found that these activities can increase students' willingness to communicate, especially among shy or less confident students. One of the key benefits of pair and group activities is that they provide opportunities for students to practice their language skills in a less formal and more interactive setting. Besides, students will be able to engage in conversations and other communicative tasks with their peers, which can help to build their confidence and improve their fluency in the English language. Another benefit of group work for improving willingness to communicate in English is that it provides opportunities for students to engage in authentic communicative tasks. According to a study by Abbasi and Anthony (2024), group work activities can expose students to real-life situations and challenges that require them to use the language in meaningful ways. This can help to increase their motivation and engagement, which in turn can lead to an increase in their willingness to communicate.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs descriptive research with a qualitative methodology. Data is used in descriptive research to characterise conditions, symptoms, and present situations. According to Valtakoski and Glaa (2024), "Descriptive is data in the form of words and not numbers." According to Elo and Kyngäs (2008), descriptive research is typically conducted with the primary goal of documenting the facts and characteristics of the objects and persons under study. This study focuses on describing instructors' difficulties in teaching English and how they might deal with them.

Sampling Method and Participants

The subjects in this research are six teachers teaching in a Malaysian international school. All the teachers selected for this study are experienced teachers. The teachers were selected through purposive sampling to fulfil this research's specific criteria relevant to the research questions. Also, these six teachers were chosen specifically for this study since they had been teaching the foreign Chinese students for quite some time. The teachers' views are on foreign Chinese students who came from China to Malaysia and are now attending Malaysian international schools. All syllabuses in these schools are in English.

Their views on the students' WTC would therefore be suitable for this study. The interview involved only six teachers because with a smaller sample size, the researcher has more flexibility in terms of adjusting the

interview guide or approach as needed.

Teachers	Years of experience	Subject taught	Grade levels	Number of foreign Chinese students taught	Curriculum
Teacher 1	15 years	English	Grade 4,5,6	7	Cambridge
Teacher 2	23 years	English	Grade 5,6,7	10	Cambridge
Teacher 3	16 years	ICT	Grade 7,8,9	8	Cambridge
Teacher 4	25 years	Science	Grade 3,4,5	13	Cambridge
Teacher 5	13 years	Maths	Grade 1,2,3	9	Cambridge
Teacher 6	18 years	English	Grade 8,9,10	14	Cambridge

Table 1: Teachers' background

Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining consent and a little bibliographic information, the interviewer invited the participants to review the semi-structured interview questions. The interview was conducted through an online platform. Semi-structured interviews, which incorporate aspects of both structured and unstructured interviews, were employed in this study. The interviewer is permitted to ask for an explanation and even ask extra questions if he feels the answers are not adequate, even if the questions have been predetermined. Semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data from interviews were analysed thematically. Thematic analysis is utilised to generate various codes and categories for the six teachers' responses. Mihas (2019) states that in qualitative research analysis, "coding" refers to a brief phrase or a keyword that is significant, capturing, summative, and displays an evocative quality of the replies. The six teachers who took part in the study provided the responses used in this study. But it can also relate to visual data, transcripts, field notes, participant observations, literature reviews, papers, letters, and more. According to Stuckey (2015), developing codes may need the utilisation of two or more cycles. In order to construct themes, codes are first created in the form of words, sentences, or phrases. In the second cycle, codes with code reconfiguration are inserted within the lengthier text; these are referred to as code categories. The primary content is indicated by the category.

Ethics Statement

Consent forms were created and distributed to the participants. The department head and school administrators have approved the participants' participation in this study.

Pilot Study

A pilot study (also called a "feasibility study," "feasibility test," "pilot experiment," or "pilot trial") is a preliminary inquiry aimed at assessing the feasibility and design of a larger, more extensive study. Before collecting the primary data, a pilot study was conducted to validate the research instruments (in this case, the interview guide) and ensure their clarity and relevance. Two experienced Malaysian international school teachers were invited to participate in the study. This selection aimed to gather feedback from individuals who were familiar with the targeted group (foreign Chinese students) and the study's context. The pilot study was conducted through an interview session. The actual research instruments were tested.

Themes	Participant 1	Participant 2
Language anxiety and confidence	*"My foreign Chinese students can score on their grammar papers. But when it comes to speaking the language, they tend to struggle. They are not confident in communicating in English as it is not their mother tongue. They hesitate to speak in English even when they understand*	*"The foreign Chinese students in my class hate classroom presentations. They feel nervous about presenting in English. They told me that they are scared of making mistakes and they are not confident enough to put the words in order and present them in English."*

	the conversation.”	
Cultural Norms	*“The foreign Chinese students in my class hesitate to speak in English because they fear making mistakes. The students told me once that in their culture, they always want to be right. They feel ashamed to make mistakes in front of others.”*	*“Sometimes they just fear making mistakes when they use the English language because of their accent.”*
Teaching and learning methodologies, and flexibility	*“So it's always like assigning them to different students and different groups.”* *“So in that way, like buddy to buddy, they can learn very fast.”*	*“I normally put them into groups for better team collaboration. They will be able to get one another's feedback.”*

Language anxiety and confidence: Responses emphasised the students' difficulty speaking and nervousness during presentations, and lack of confidence despite potential grammatical and speaking ability.

Cultural norms: Data revealed that cultural issues, such as the fear of "losing face" or making mistakes in front of others, contributed to their unwillingness to communicate in English.

Teaching and learning methodologies, and flexibility: According to the responses, peer-based techniques, such as buddy-to-buddy interactions and group projects, are used to support students' language practice and provide feedback.

The pilot study found three basic themes that influence foreign Chinese students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English: language anxiety and confidence, cultural norms, and teaching and learning approaches. These themes roughly resembled the original study's conclusions, but they were improved and extended upon. The pilot theme of language anxiety and confidence was consistent with the full study's affective barriers theme, which distinguished between various types of anxiety, such as fear of linguistic error, peer evaluation, presentation-related anxiety, and poor self-confidence associated with perceived skill. Cultural norms emerged in both periods, but the primary study went beyond a broad cultural explanation, differentiating cultural values from parental expectations, prior educational experiences, and limited English exposure. The pilot topic on teaching approaches corresponds to the main study's focus on teacher communication style and classroom environment, with the latter clearly distinguishing between actions viewed as supporting and those perceived as discouraging. The pilot study's findings influenced adjustments to the interview guide, prompting more targeted questions about specific affective aspects, complex cultural influences, and both effective and inefficient pedagogical techniques, resulting in richer and more analytically robust data in the main study.

RESULTS

Three primary findings were identified among international school teachers regarding the willingness of foreign Chinese students to speak English, based on information obtained during interview sessions. These findings are discussed in this section.

Theme	Description	Teacher Quotations
Affective Barriers: Anxiety and Self-confidence	Foreign Chinese students experience affective obstacles such as anxiety and low self-confidence, which hinder their willingness to communicate in English. They also	**Teacher 1:** "My foreign Chinese students in the class dislike speaking lessons. On some days, they would skip school to avoid the speaking lessons. I would say that this is primarily caused by their lack of self-confidence in speaking the

	fear condemnation and judgement from others.	language."**Teacher 2:** "Students rarely participate if they are unsure about their answers. I have to call their names to get some responses. Most of the foreign Chinese students do this in my class. They prefer remaining silent to saying something."**Teacher 3:** "A few of my students always whisper the answers to their friends rather than saying them out loud. Many students are afraid of giving the wrong answers or pronouncing something incorrectly."**Teacher 4:** "I love doing classroom presentations. I believe it is a great way for students to build their speaking confidence. What I notice frequently during the presentations is that students always look down when they present. Their anxiety is visible and worrying."**Teacher 5:** "In my classroom, after speaking lessons, I prefer to provide quick feedback to my students. I've found that the foreign Chinese dislike it when I make comments in front of their classmates. They fear that their classmates would judge them."**Teacher 6:** "I give my students a topic and at least three minutes to get ready to present it. Even after stepping forward to present, my international Chinese students were hesitant to talk. I must ask their buddies to translate and find out what the problem is."
Influence of Cultural Norms	The communication behaviours of foreign Chinese students are strongly shaped by cultural values, family expectations, fear of losing face, and concern for dignity.	**Teacher 1:** "One of my foreign Chinese students expressed concern that speaking English might jeopardise her understanding of Chinese and her values."**Teacher 2:** "There are about seven international Chinese students in my class. They frequently claim that making blunders in public embarrasses them and their families. They seem to be losing 'face' in this way."**Teacher 3:** "I frequently thought that foreign Chinese parents put too much pressure on their children. The majority of my kids don't even know the fundamentals of English. However, their parents anticipate that they will speak English well right away."**Teacher 4:** "I've often wondered why foreign Chinese students are so hesitant to talk in English. Even for those who can speak basic English, I discovered that they are afraid of losing their dignity if they make mistakes."**Teacher 5:** "According to what my students told me, English is more complicated than their own language. They worry that they are not as proficient as others. For this reason, they refuse to speak English voluntarily."**Teacher 6:** "My Chinese international students frequently struggle to accept that their English proficiency is superior to that of their peers. They fear parental comparison, which is common in China. They therefore prefer to remain quiet."

Teacher Communication Style and Classroom Atmosphere	Teachers' communication styles and classroom environments significantly influence students' willingness to speak English, especially among international Chinese students. Effective strategies foster participation and confidence.	**Teacher 1:** "I find that using positive reinforcement during speaking classes is the most effective. When I mention that I will grant ClassDojo points if you participate voluntarily, the foreign Chinese students attempt to participate and talk in English."**Teacher 2:** "Building rapport between teachers and students is crucial, particularly concerning international students. Students will voluntarily begin speaking once a rapport has been established."**Teacher 3:** "When I correct them in front of others or too bluntly, my students become defensive."**Teacher 4:** "I enjoy utilising technology in my English-speaking classes. Foreign Chinese students welcomed technology for providing a quiet and non-judgemental environment for self-improvement and learning."**Teacher 5:** "When I slow down my lessons and explain in slow English, my pupils get more engaged and ask me questions."**Teacher 6:** "I am very mindful of how I react in my classrooms. Students are keen observers. They may be hesitant to speak up if they perceive their teachers are not approachable."

Affective Barriers

Teachers identified affective barriers as the primary factor influencing foreign Chinese students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. Anxiety about linguistic accuracy, fear of peer evaluation, presentation-specific anxiety, and a lack of self-confidence in perceived language competency were among them. Several teachers observed that pupils avoided engagement when they were doubtful about their answers. As Teacher 2 explained, students "prefer remaining silent to saying something" when uncertain. Others observed that fear of public error led students to whisper responses rather than speak aloud (Teacher 3). Presentation contexts appeared particularly anxiety-inducing; Teacher 4 reported that students showed visible nervousness during presentations, often avoiding eye contact. Low self-confidence was also linked to perceived language ability, with Teacher 1 noting that some students avoided speaking lessons entirely due to a lack of confidence.

Influence of cultural norms

Teachers typically blamed students' unwillingness to speak English on cultural factors; however, their descriptions included a mix of cultural beliefs, prior educational experiences, and family expectations. Concerns about public humiliation and loss of face were frequently expressed. Teacher 2 noted that students feared making mistakes publicly because it could embarrass both themselves and their families. Other teachers emphasised parental pressure and comparison practices, suggesting that students felt anxious about meeting high expectations despite limited English foundations (Teacher 3; Teacher 6). In contrast, some teachers linked students' silence to limited exposure to English rather than cultural resistance. Teacher 5 explained that students who had been educated primarily in their mother tongue felt less proficient and therefore avoided voluntary participation.

Teacher communication style and classroom atmosphere

Teachers reported that classroom interactional practices significantly shaped students' WTC. Supportive strategies such as positive reinforcement, rapport-building, and creating non-judgmental environments were perceived as effective. Teacher 1 found that encouragement increased voluntary participation, while Teacher 2 emphasised the importance of building trust with international students. Adjusting instructional delivery, such as slowing speech or using technology, was also reported to reduce anxiety (Teacher 4; Teacher 5).

Conversely, teachers acknowledged that overly blunt or public correction could discourage participation. Teacher 3 reflected that correcting students too directly made them defensive and less willing to speak, highlighting the impact of teacher communication style on students' affective responses.

DISCUSSION

The study's main findings provide a detailed picture of factors influencing Chinese international students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. Teachers identified affective barriers, including anxiety, fear of peer evaluation, and low self-confidence, as primary factors limiting students' classroom participation. Cultural norms related to face-saving and family expectations further influenced students' reluctance to speak. Additionally, teacher communication style and classroom atmosphere, including supportive strategies such as positive reinforcement, rapport-building, and non-judgmental feedback, were found to play a critical role in either facilitating or constraining students' WTC.

According to the results, the most important factor influencing Chinese international students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English was affective barriers. Teachers stated that worry, fear of peer criticism, and a lack of self-confidence regularly caused pupils to remain mute, especially when they were unsure about their responses. This behaviour reflects a tendency to emphasise error avoidance over communicative risk-taking, which has been well documented in WTC research (MacIntyre, 1999). The results also show that presentation assignments made students feel more anxious. Teachers noticed obvious symptoms of anxiety, such as avoidance of eye contact and decreased verbal production, indicating that formal speaking situations are a high- stakes communication scenario for these students. This corroborates earlier research demonstrating the detrimental effects of speaking anxiety on students' oral engagement and performance (Badrasawi et al., 2021;Salem & Al Dyiar, 2014). Furthermore, teachers' findings that students with lower perceived language proficiency were more reluctant to talk emphasise how crucial self-confidence is in moderating WTC. Learners who questioned their linguistic competence were less likely to participate, even when given opportunities to talk. Moreover, participants in this study note that the desire of foreign Chinese students to communicate in class varies. WTC is generally higher in people who are proficient in learning English. Students' confidence levels, general language proficiency, majors, class dynamics, and communication willingness have all been found to be strongly correlated by teachers. The participants also stated that international Chinese students experienced anxiety and worry before speaking. Students are afraid of being judged by their peers, according to the participants. This lowers their self-esteem and makes them nervous when speaking in English. However, the current study shows that risk-taking is not universally high among Chinese EFL students, since emotional obstacles (e.g., fear of judgement) and individual differences remain considerable. Learners who have firmer beliefs about their communicative skills tend not to view challenges as threats to their learning process, instead setting learning goals rather than performance goals. Consequently, they are less afraid to take the risk of initiating interactions with their peers and teachers (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2024).

Furthermore, cultural background has a significant impact on how pupils perceive language acquisition, affecting their feelings, mental processes, and anxiety levels (Karlik, 2023). The results also show that cultural norms have a big influence on how students communicate in the classroom. Teachers sometimes blamed students' silence on feelings of humiliation and embarrassment, especially when there was a public error. Fear of failing family members or harming one's reputation was viewed as a substantial deterrent to speaking, consistent with research on face-saving practices in Chinese educational environments (Bakar et al., 2021; Chan & Smith, 2024). The findings, however, imply that cultural explanations by themselves are inadequate.

Teachers also cited previous school experiences and limited exposure to English-medium instruction as important factors. Students who had previously studied solely in their first language were viewed as less confident and thus less likely to engage voluntarily. This suggests that WTC is influenced by a combination of language readiness, familial pressure, and cultural expectations. Crucially, this discovery casts doubt on oversimplified cultural explanations of silence and emphasises the importance of taking learners' educational backgrounds into account in addition to cultural norms. Also, according to the participants, the strong emphasis on respect for authority and adherence to social hierarchy created a reluctance to participate in class discussions. Liang and Alavi (2025) labelled this a stereotyped threat (e.g., dread of being perceived as a "know-it-all") since Chinese students are expected to be humble and sensitive about the sentiments of others (Chan & Smith, 2024). Students are frequently compared to determine who is the best. Bakar et al. (2021)

mentioned that fear of making mistakes, along with the expectation to protect family honour, can make pupils afraid to speak in class, adding to their nervousness. Also, the study revealed that the foreign Chinese students frequently compare themselves to other English speakers, resulting in low self-esteem. Furthermore, participants saw that students struggle to catch up English language as the students find L2 more complex linguistically than their L1. For instance, languages without verb conjugations to indicate tense, such as Mandarin Chinese, might cause problems in English, where tense marking is required (Biju, 2024). Chinese learners of English might produce sentences like "She go to school yesterday" instead of "She went to school yesterday" due to the absence of tense markers in their L1 (Guo, 2023).

Finally, the study underlined the importance of teacher communication style and the classroom atmosphere. According to the findings, teacher communication style and classroom atmosphere are important contextual elements that influence students' WTC. Supportive techniques, such as rapport-building, positive reinforcement, and the development of nonjudgmental environments, were found to increase student participation, according to teachers. These techniques seemed to lessen anxiety and promote psychological safety, both of which are critical for oral communication in a second language. In line with the results, Chinese foreign students' willingness to communicate (WTC) was found to be significantly influenced by the classroom environment and the teacher's communication style. Supportive strategies, including rapport-building, encouragement, and positive reinforcement, according to teachers, boosted students' involvement in speaking exercises. Specifically, the usage of digital reward systems like ClassDojo was thought to be a successful tactic for encouraging voluntary engagement. These reward systems are categorised as pleasure, and as a positive emotion would lead to a lower emotional filter, which would be beneficial for language acquisition, according to Lee & Lee (2020). Krashen (1982) emphasised the importance of emotions in learning, arguing that they either help or hinder it. One of the international school teachers stressed the importance of developing a solid rapport with students, particularly foreign students. Another educator continued by saying that a supportive atmosphere will facilitate the teaching and learning process. Wright-Gallo et al. (2006) stated that the instructor must build a classroom environment where all students feel safe, comfortable, and welcome, and the participants agreed with this statement. Teachers' reactions to student behaviour might help to set the tone. Furthermore, teachers stressed the value of using technology in the classroom. Incorporating technology into English classes is crucial in the twenty-first century. Learning English as a foreign language is positively impacted by the prudent and balanced use of technology. As a result, technology tools can help students achieve the intended pedagogical goal of learning English by enhancing their language and communication abilities.

Overall, the results show that affective barriers like anxiety and self-confidence are significant in the lives of international students, particularly when they are eager to use English as a second language. Also, cultural influences limit foreign students' readiness to communicate in English, but with self-confidence and motivation to talk, students should not be hesitant. This study focused on Chinese foreign students and the perspectives of international school teachers on their WTC. Furthermore, it is clear from the results that teachers and parents have a significant influence on students' willingness to communicate, in addition to their affective traits. especially educators who can collaborate with kids and accomplish amazing things.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated Malaysian international school teachers' attitudes towards Chinese international students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. The results show that cultural norms like face-saving and family expectations further affect students' communicative behaviour, but affective barriers—specifically, fear and low self-confidence—are the primary determinants restricting students' engagement in class. Importantly, teachers' communicative methods, including as positive reinforcement, rapport-building, and the construction of nonjudgmental classroom environments, were discovered to facilitate students' WTC, with digital tools like ClassDojo offering additional motivational support. By emphasising the interaction between affective, cultural, and instructional elements in international school situations, these findings advance WTC scholarship.

Limitations

This study had a small sample size. Due to the small sample size, the results may not accurately reflect the views of all international teachers on the willingness of foreign Chinese students to speak English.

Furthermore, no direct observations were made in the classroom. As a result, the study was unable to confirm the degrees of dread, anxiety, and confidence during English conversation.

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Conflict Of Interest

The authors confirmed that there is no conflict of interest involved with any party in this research study.

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