EFL Learners' Perceptions of Interaction-based Learning and Their Willingness to Communicate

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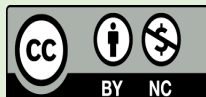
Abstract

It is believed that classroom interaction is essential for learning a second language (L2). Studies on teaching second/foreign language present evidence that affirms the significance of interaction in language learning and its function in facilitating learners' attempts to gain competency in an L2. They also consider learners' affective states and their perceptions of classroom interaction to be as significant as instruction. On the other hand, the notion of willingness to communicate (WTC) in an L2 has attracted interest in L2 research and how to accelerate L2 learners' WTC is gaining importance day by day. Considering the significance of these two constructs in L2 learning, this article reports on an investigation into EFL learners' perceptions of class interactions in English language and how these perceptions are related to their WTC. Applying quantitative methods, the study aims to examine how Iraqi EFL learners' perceptions of interaction inside the class are correlated to their L2 WTC. The data obtained from 112 learners were utilized for analysis. The findings indicated different kinds of learners' perceptions of class interactions in English, including perceptions of interaction with the teacher, perceptions of interaction with group members, perceptions of interaction in pairs, and perceptions of classroom interaction between others, are positively related to WTC. The findings have implications for research and teaching.

Introduction

With reference to making learners ready to employ the L2 language for intergroup and interpersonal communication, interaction is considered to be a crucial component of the process of language learning in which the language class plays a significant part (Long, 1996; Mackey, 2006; Swain, 1985, Wang et al., 2019).Numerous studies have related interaction to language learning and stressed the need of providing chances for students to experience authentic communication in the L2 (e.g., Ellis et al., 1994; Kuhl et al., 2003; Lu, 2010).

The language learning classroom is the focal venue for English as a foreign language (EFL) students to develop their language competencies. This environment is seen as the most appropriate, and even the only, place for students to both learn and practice using English as a language of communication (Ding, 2021). In EFL contexts, such as Iraq, the majority of the students have poor interactional competency compared to their grammatical and structural competency. The absence of an interactional climate in their English classrooms is one main factor contributing to this deficiency. This highlights the urgent need for EFL teachers to improve interpersonal interaction skills through appropriate strategies (Ding, 2021), since currently the purpose of EFL classes goes well beyond the simple presentation of linguistic information. In fact, it serves as a setting for provoking psychological, emotional, and social interactions (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021).

Speakers' knowledge of language and their ability to employ this language in particular contexts are two factors which affect speakers' interactional ability (Celce–Murcia, 2007). However, effective communication depends on both the speakers' ability and their affective states (Van Batenburg et al., 2019). Willingness to communicate (WTC) is one of the most well-known affective variables associated with communication (MacIntyre et al., 2002). In fact, the success of any learning process depends on the learners' positive attitude toward the thing they aim to learn. Such positive attitude is known as willingness that refers to the learner's desire or conscious purpose to learn (Alam et al., 2022).

Generally, it is agreed that the basic aim of language teaching should be to provide the learner with both competency and WTC within and outside language class (Do¨rnyei, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 2001). In fact, L2 communication development is significantly influenced by the learners' WTC (Alam et al., 2022). On the other hand, the learners' views on the helpfulness and value of group work affect their WTC inside the classroom (Fushino, 2010). In other words, a student's WTC level and interaction behaviors within the classroom may likely be predicted by the degree to which he/she considers opportunities for having interaction offered by peers and teacher to be helpful (Wang et al., 2019).

It is stated that learners' perceptions are significant for both teaching and learning (Wang et al., 2019). Williams and Burden (1997) have asserted that the learner's interpretations and perceptions have the greatest impact on achievement. As Peng (2014) states, learner views on language learning and classroom communication have the ability to predict motivation for English language learning and L2 communicative competence, which result in L2 WTC sequentially (Wang et al., 2019). Regarding an interaction-based class, the learners'

perceptions, characterized as the attitudes toward and evaluative judgments of interaction within the class, can be effective in the learners' interaction behaviors, their intentions to negotiate meaning, and the competence level they finally have in the L2 since a teacher's attempts to establish interactions of a high quality do not always guarantee the learners' participation (Wang et al., 2019).

Considering the point that interaction is crucial in the process of language learning and that the language class is probably one of the most significant contexts of learning offering chances for learners to have interactions in the L2, it is urgent to find how the learners' evaluations of class interactions and perceptions affect their communication intention and behavior within the L2 class (Wang et al., 2019).Moreover, some studies (e.g., Kuo, 2011; Wang, 2017; Zhou, 2015) have emphasized the learners' perspectives on classroom interaction. Hence, learners' perceptions of classroom interaction are an important area for investigation. Given that the review of literature reveals the inadequate studies done on the learners' perceptions of group interaction and interaction with the teacher and peers, this study aims to investigate the learners' perceptions of class interactions in English language. Moreover, how the learners' perceptions of L2 interactions within the class are connected to L2 WTC has not been sufficiently explored. Hence, this study also explores the interrelationship (if any) between the learners' perceptions of class interactions and L2 WTC. The research question addressed in this study is:

How do the Iraqi EFL learners' perceptions of classroom interactions in English language relate to their L2 WTC?

Literature Review

Interaction in L2/FLF Learning

In second language acquisition (SLA), interaction in the L2 is regarded as highly valuable (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). According to the interaction approach to SLA (Gass & Mackey, 2006; Long, 1996), the blend of modified input, output, and negotiation for meaning through the provision of negative and positive corrective feedback is crucial to the improvement of L2. Since the 1980s, over 100 studies have empirically evaluated the relationship between L2 development and interaction (Abbuhl et al., 2015), and the findings have provided strong support for the positive effects on a range of grammatical and discourse features in different proficiency levels and contexts (Ziegler & Bryfonski, 2018).

In L2/foreign language (FL) research, the function of interaction has often been considered and is backed by several theoretical perspectives (Chen, 2016). All these perspectives emphasize the value of interaction, its cognitive and social aspects (Wang et al., 2019). The interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996) is one of them. This hypothesis advances two key claims about the role of interaction in L2/FL classes (Long, 1996). The first one is that comprehensible input is one of the most important sources of information for L2/FL learning. The second one is that modified interaction that takes place throughout the process of negotiation for meaning can make input comprehensible to L2/FL learners (Chen, 2016).

Swain's output hypothesis is another account which addresses the function of learner–learner interactions in L2/FL learning (Swain, 1999, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Her earlier

studies argued against the interaction hypothesis by asserting that interaction provides learners with comprehensible input, and gives them the chance to employ the L2, namely 'to output' (Swain, 2000). However, the sociocultural theory of mind replaced the earlier information-processing perspective in Swain's subsequent studies (Chen, 2016). According to Swain, knowledge and cognition are 'dialogically constructed' (Swain et al., 2002, 171), and collaborative dialogue isa kind of dialogic interactions (Chen, 2016) through which the learners advance L2/FL learning on account of working together (Swain, 2000).

Whereas the interaction hypothesis has taken a cognitive standpoint and focused on the learner's mind, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory (SCT) argues that all persons are socially situated and that cognitive development, which includes language development, takes place as a consequence of interactions. Moreover, Vygotsky states that when an individual has interactions with a more knowledgeable individual, language development most likely takes place. The notion of "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) serves as the cornerstone of his argument. Via interactions, the more knowledgeable individual provides 'scaffolding,' or guided support, to the other person to assist him/her in reaching a higher level of competency within his/her ZPD (Chen, 2016). Donato (1994), relying on the Vygotskyan theory, states that learner–learner interactions can offer a similar type of guided support as experts offer novice learners.

Two main types of interaction in the language classroom which display unique plans are teacher–learner and learner–learner interactions (Wang & Tseng, 2020). In teacher–learner interaction, the talk of teacher is regarded as the primary source of input (Ellis, 2012). Main patterns examined are the initiation response–feedback pattern (IRF) and the teachers' questioning. IRF is the pattern employed most commonly in approximately every type of language class, however it limits learner's free use of the L2 (Van Lier, 1996), and occasionally facilitates learning (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). Moreover, open or closed, and referential or display questions are among the kinds of questions asked by teachers (Long & Sato, 1983) ones (Wang & Tseng, 2020). The other important type of classroom interaction is learner–learner interaction. To have effective use of this type of interaction, the teacher can alternate between two kinds of teaching tasks, pair work and group work—mostly with the focus on the second kind. Ellis (2012) approved of the group-work interactions in language classrooms. However, Pica (1987) stated that in spite of the classroom focus on group-work interaction, it does not ensure the learners' success in learning L2. In general, the literature in this area supports both learner–learner and teacher–learner interactions since they have been reported to be effective in facilitating language learning (Wang & Tseng, 2020).

Interaction in Language Learning and Learners' Perceptions

Interaction is considered as a vital component in the process of language learning (Wang et al., 2019). Research carried out on target language teaching also presents results that back the significance of interaction in learning a language (e.g., Kuhl et al., 2003; Lu, 2010; Mackey, 1999). For instance, Lu (2010) compared the interactions of two 8th-grade classes, measuring the degree to which the learners took turns in class interactions, to investigate the effect of class interactions on language learning. The findings indicated that the learners in Class A, who experienced more interactions than did those in Class B, could outperform the latter on a mock

General English Proficiency Test (GEPT). Based on this finding, the significance of interaction in language learning was theoretically and empirically supported.

As MacIntyre et al. (1998) have pointed out, the shortage of communication opportunities in the language class may suggest failure in language teaching. However, some factors may prevent learners from participating in the classroom. In other words, a learner may be affectively demotivated, socio-culturally discouraged, and cognitively unready. Taken as a whole, learners' perceptions are a topic of considerable significance in both learning and teaching (Wang et al., 2019) and their perceptions of the classroom interaction is not an exception.

Since the teachers' attempts to provide high-quality interactions do not essentially ensure the learners' participation, learners' perceptions, known as attitudes toward and evaluations of interaction in the class, may influence the learners' interaction behaviors, their aims to negotiate meaning, and even the level of competency they finally attain in the L2. Numerous studies have demonstrated that learners' and teachers' perceptions of classroom focus may vary (e.g., Brown, 2009; Hawkey, 2006; Kuo, 2011). There are also studies which have emphasized learners' viewpoints regarding interactions inside the classroom (e.g., Kuo, 2011; Wang, 2017; Zhou, 2015).

According to Kuo (2011), there were a number of reasons why students in a British EFL context were dissatisfied with the learner-learner interactions they had experienced. The teacher was mentioned as the main factor affecting their perceptions. In a similar vein, the participants in Zhou's (2015) qualitative research done in a Chinese EFL context endorsed speaking activities inside and outside the class and were not satisfied about how teachers taught English in their university. The findings in Wang's (2017) study indicated that the students' perceptions of interactions in the class were extremely favorable and associated with their communication apprehension and communication motivation, of which merely the latter acted as a predictive factor of the perceptions of students (Wang et al., 2019).

WTC: the Objective of Language Instruction

The concept of WTC was firstly suggested by McCroskey and his collaborators in the field of L1 acquisition (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). They regarded this concept as a trait of personality (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). Later on, it drew the attention of the researchers conducting studies on various notions and theoretical dimensions of L2 learning (Asmalı, 2016). Considering the point that WTC is a significant area of research on L2 development, research is being done on this concept emphasizing its different aspects and novel theories (MacIntyre, 2020) and during the past decades, because of the importance of WTC in developing language learners' communication ability, many EFL researchers have paid special attention to it (Cai, 2021).

Many L2 learners, as Dornyei (2003) states, have a tendency to avoid L2 communication. Drawing on this point, Kang (2005) contends that the majority of L2 learners might overlook the chance to learn language via authentic communication. According to MacIntyre (2007), conflicting processes serve as both the driving forces for initiating communication and inhibitors of this process. By engaging learners in emotional variables like anxiety, these

processes have the power to make learners motivated and direct them to effective learning or prevent them from learning effectively (Cai, 2021).

As MacIntyre et al. (1998) state, establishing WTC is an essential element of modern language teaching. Kang (2005) believes that learners who enjoy high WTC more probably employ L2 in real-world interactions and act as autonomous learners by making their language-learning attempts independently. Moreover, he states that the learners who have high WTC will have opportunities for learning and become engaged in learning activities both within and beyond the class.

WTC is so significant that scholars such as Dornyei (2005) refer to it as the "ultimate goal of instruction" (Zarrinabadi & Abdi, 2011). Given that one main motivation for L2 learning is to employ it for communicative objectives with individuals from another speech community (MacIntyre, 2007), L2 WTC—which research suggests has a causal relationship with the use of L2 (Hashimoto, 2002)—is regarded as a crucial individual difference factor in L2 learning (MacIntyre, 2007).

The findings of some studies (e.g., Alam et al., 2022; Basöz & Erten, 2019; Léger & Storch, 2009) indicate that the learners' WTC significantly affects L2 development (Alam et al., 2022). Therefore, the question of how to speed up L2 learners' WTC is becoming more important day by day and research has been done in this regard as well to develop strategies to improve L2 learners' WTC (Peng, 2019). Researchers have been making attempts to identify numerous variables that are significantly important in developing L2 learners' WTC (Alam et al., 2022). In light of the salience of the learners' L2 WTC, the literature has indicated that a variety of factors, such as learners' and teachers' socioeconomic status (Liu, 2017), personality (MacIntyre et al., 1999), academic self-concept (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021), beliefs and attitudes (Fushino, 2010; Peng, 2014; Wang et al., 2019), the atmosphere of learning environment (Heckel & Ringeisen, 2019), methods of teaching (Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010) and teacher-related factors (Cai, 2021) can affect the learners' WTC.

Learner Interaction and WTC

WTC is defined as "a situation-based variable representing an intention to communicate at a specific time to a specific person'' (p. 559) in MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) L2 WTC model. This model exemplifies the connection between L2 WTC and communication behavior and theoretically predictive variables. It positions L2 WTC as directly impacting L2 use with ten key sources hypothesized. Given that the social context and self-confidence have been empirically proved to be important in L2 WTC, MacIntyre et al. suggested further research to examine the hypothesized associations of the variables to WTC.

Numerous research studies have considered the connections between L2 WTC and other variables in light of MacIntyre et al.'s model. Perceived competence, motivation, L2 anxiety (Hashimoto, 2002), time spent abroad, length of study, proficiency level, having communication with foreign language speakers (Alemi & Pashmforoosh, 2013), group work in the classroom, the teacher (Sun, 2008), and other factors have been recognized as contributing to WTC. Khajavy et al. (2016) also identified two direct predictors of L2 WTC, namely communication confidence and classroom environment, as well as two indirect

predictors, namely English language proficiency and motivation, which indirectly influenced L2 WTC via communication confidence.

Furthermore, Peng (2014) and Fushino (2010) came to the conclusion that learners' beliefs had indirect impact on L2 WTC. Peng's (2014) research indicated that student views on both classroom communication and language learning have the ability to predict L2 communicative competence and English learning motivation, both of which in turn result in WTC (Wang et al., 2019). According to Fushino's (2010) study, students who enjoyed group work tended to participate more than those who were less in favor of it.

Some research studies have also explored the relationship between reported communication frequency and L2 WTC. WTC was shown to be related to communication behaviors in Do¨rnyei and Kormos's (2000) study, but merely for students who had a favorable attitude toward the activity. In their study, communication behaviors were evaluated with reference to the students' utterances and the turns they took in communicative activities. In Hashimoto's (2002) research, besides the results related to the three factors that affected L2 WTC, it was shown that L2 WTC impacted reported communication frequency within the class. However, the relationship between the L2WTC and learners' perceptions of L2 interaction in the classroom has not been sufficiently explored. As Do¨rnyei and Kormos (2000) showed, L2 WTC was associated with communication behaviors merely for the learners feeling positively about the communicative activities they were instructed to do. This finding implies that one's attitudes toward interaction can play a part in promoting WTC (Wang et al., 2019).

Relevant Research

As the literature review indicates, there is a paucity of research focusing on three issues of interaction, perceptions, and WTC in EFL contexts. In a study, Wang and Tseng (2020) examined teachers' attitudes toward class interaction sin relation to the use of English as an L2 in their instruction and the connection of this factor with their WTC, their willingness to make available opportunities for interaction within the class, and their teaching behaviors. The empirical data were obtained from a survey administered to 410 English teachers in Taiwanese high schools. The results of structural equation modeling (SEM) indicated that the attitudes of teachers toward L2 interactions were influential in their own WTC. Both the instructional form and general form of WTC significantly mediated the causal associations between their perceptions of class interactions and their L2 teaching behaviors. With regard to learner–learner interactions, and more importantly regarding teacher–learner interactions, teachers' perceptions of classroom interaction were found to be the main cause of interactional teaching. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that the two types of WTC played a more outstanding mediating part in the teaching of senior teachers whose teaching experience was over 10 years than in the teaching of junior teachers having 10 years of teaching experience or less than that.

Wang et al. (2019) set out to examine the causal links between learners' perceptions of class interactions in the L2 (L2 PCI), L2 WTC, and interaction behavior in a study on validating a causal SEM model. These researchers proposed a structural equation model which theorized the causal relationships among the three factors for empirical testing based on a critical review of literature. There were 329 university students as participants in this study. The learners' learning behaviors and L2 WTC were shown to be differentially impacted by their views about

teacher–learner interactions and learner–learner interactions. The findings implied that classroom communication in the target language and L2 WTC were significantly predicted by the learners' perceptions of interaction with the group and teacher.

Fushino (2010) also investigated the causal relationships between three factors of views on group work, communication confidence, and WTC. A questionnaire was filled out by 729 first-year university students in Japan. The findings indicated that the learners' perceptions of the effectiveness and significance of group work can impact their WTC inside the classroom. In other words, a student's interaction behaviors and WTC level in the class are likely to be determined by the degree to which a learner believes opportunities for interaction provided by the peers and/or teacher to be helpful.

Although many studies have examined WTC and interaction or the factors affecting them, the interrelationship between these two variables has not been considered in EFL contexts like Iraq. The ways in which non-communication variables, for example learners' perceptions and attitudes toward classroom interactions, can affect their WTC remain largely vague and await thorough empirical analysis. In fact, these studies in the EFL contexts are still at an emerging stage and there still exist some gaps which need to be tackled.

Method

To establish the relationship between perceptions of classroom interaction with English (PCIE) and WTC, the present research relied on a quantitative design employing questionnaires.

Participants

As part of a larger research project, 130 EFL learners studying at two universities and a language institute in Iraq were asked to respond to two questionnaires. Eighteen outliers were excluded and the data obtained from 112 learners were utilized for analysis. All the participants of this study were native speakers of Arabic and were taking General English courses with the main emphasis on the two skills of listening and speaking. In terms of gender, 49 (43.8%) of the participants were male and 63 learners (56.3%) were female. Their ages ranged from 13 to 23. Thirty-eight (33.9%) of them were teenagers and 74 (66.1%) learners were adults. Regarding language proficiency, 49 (43.8%) learners belonged to low-proficiency levels (including basic, elementary, and pre-intermediate) and 63 learners (56.3%) to high-proficiency levels (including intermediate, high-intermediate, and advanced). The participants were invited to take part in this research with the assistance of the professors and teachers of the university and language institute selected on the basis of convenience sampling.

Instruments

Two questionnaires were used to collect data. The researcher adopted the scales from the existing literature.

WTC in English inside the classroom questionnaire. To examine the extent to which the learners were willing to communicate in English, WTC in English within the class questionnaire from Zarrinabadi and Abdi (2011, adapted from MacIntyre et al., 2001) was employed. This questionnaire measures the frequency of times the learners select to use English in each classroom situation. The 27 items of this questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha= .89) consist

of statements regarding one's feelings about communication in four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), which measure students' willingness to comprehend in the classroom, speak in the classroom, to read in the classroom, and to write in the classroom. These 27 items address students to assess their willingness to participate in classroom activities. The items contain statements from four main L2 skill areas to recognize the receptive and productive skill engagement. The items range from 1 to 5. Respondents are required to specify their willingness to communicate on a scale which is anchored at one end by 1 (almost never willing), and 5 (almost always willing) at the other end. Higher scores indicate higher levels of WTC in English within the class.

MacIntyre, et al. (2001) considered this questionnaire as a reliable and valid one, based on the alpha levels which represent reliability estimates: speaking (8 items, α= 0.81), comprehension (5 items, α=0.83), reading (6 items, α=0.83), and writing (8 items, α=0.88).

The questionnaire used in this study (Zarrinabadi & Abdi, 2011) has been developed for the Iranian context. The present researchers revalidated it for the Iraqi context and ensured the construct validity of the questionnaire via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). To this end, they administered the questionnaire to 140 Iraqi EFL learners. The reliability was also estimated through Cronbach alpha. Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire in the present study was 0.721and for the subscales was as follows: speaking (8items, α=0.724), reading (6 items, α=0.807), writing (8items, α=0.748), and comprehension (5 items, α= 0.701).

Moreover, a part was designated for the participants' demographic information. The aim was to collect information as to the participants' age, gender, and language proficiency. This questionnaire was translated to Arabic to increase the return rate. Back translation, i.e. translating the original instrument into Arabic and translating it back to English, was used to ensure the translation accuracy. For participants, answering all questions took approximately 15 minutes (see Appendix I for the questionnaire used).

Perception of classroom interaction with English (PCIE). This scale, which has four dimensions, was adopted from Wang (2017). Perceptions of Interaction with the Teacher (PCIEtea) is composed of two items (Items 1 and 2; α = 0.87) and investigate the learners' attitudes toward having interactions with English teacher within the class. Perceptions of Interaction with Group Members (PCIEgp) consists of three items (Items 3, 4, and 5; α = 0.87) and examines attitudes toward class interactions with group members. Perceptions of interaction in pairs (PCIEpr) is composed of three items (Items 6, 7, and 8; α = 0.88) and assesses views of class interactions in pairs. Perceptions of classroom interaction between others (PCIEob) has two items (Items 9 and 10; α = 0.92) and measures beliefs of seeing the interaction between other individuals within the class (Wang et al., 2019).

The total reliability coefficient of this scale is 0.89. It has a 5-point Likert Scale, 1 indicates strongly disagree, 2disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. This scale was also translated to Arabic to increase the return rate.

The questionnaire used in this study has been developed for the Taiwanese context. The present researchers revalidated it for the Iraqi context and ensured the construct validity of the questionnaire through CFA. To this end, they administered the questionnaire to 54 Iraqi EFL

learners. The reliability was also estimated through Cronbach alpha. Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the present study was 0.948 and for the subscales was as follows: PCIEtea (2 items, α= 0.726), PCIEgp (3 items, α= 0.919), PCIEpr (3 items, α= 0.879, and PCIEob (2 items, α= 0.779).

A section was also designed for the participants' demographic information. For participants, answering all questions took approximately 10 minutes (see Appendix II for the questionnaire used).

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

To do the research, the permission of two university professors and two instructors at language institutes was secured to administer the questionnaires among the participants. Prior to the beginning of the class, one of the researchers talked to the learners in the class and asked them to take part in the study. She clarified how they should fill out the questionnaires. The learners were free to participate if they were willing to do so. They responded to the Arabic version of the questionnaires.

The questionnaires data were subsequently analyzed employing descriptive statistics. Since the results of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests for PCIE and WTC showed that the data were normally distributed, the parametric test of Pearson correlation was employed to measure the relationship between the learners' perceptions of class interactions and their L2 WTC.

Results

As stated above, this study aimed to examine the relationship between PCIE and WTC among Iraqi EFL learners. In order to investigate such a relationship, the correlation was computed using Pearson correlation analysis. Table 1 shows the results of correlation amongWTC and PCIE along with its subscales.

Table 1. *Correlations Among WTC and PCIE Along with its Subscales*

		PCIEtea	PCIEgp	PCIEpr	PCIEob	PCIE
WTC	PearsonCorrelation	.539*	.683*	.568*	.532*	.592*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	112	112	112	112	112

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

According to Table 1, Pearson correlation coefficient between WTC and PCIEtea is 0.539 which is positive and almost large (p= 0.000 <0.05, r = 0.539). Hence, it can be concluded at 95% confidence level that there is a positive and significant relationship between WTC and PCITtea.

Pearson correlation coefficient between WTC and PCIEgp equals 0.683 which is positive and almost large (p = 0.000 < 0.05, r = 0.683). Therefore, it can be said that at 95% confidence level a positive and significant relation exists between WTC and PCIEgp.

Concerning the relationship between WTC and PCIEpr, the correlation coefficient is 0.568 which is positive and almost large (p= 0.000 <0.05, r = 0.568). Based on this finding, it can be

stated at 95% confidence level that there is a positive and significant relationship between WTC and PCIEpr.

Like other subscales, the correlation coefficient between WTC and PCIEob is positive and almost large (p= 0.000 <0.05, r = 0.532). Thus, it can be inferred with 95% confidence that a positive and significant correlation is seen between them.

Table 1 reveals that there is a positive and significant correlation between WTC and PCIE. Based on the results demonstrated in this table, the correlation coefficient for these two variables is 0.592 which is positive and almost large (p = 0.000 < 0.05, r = 0.592). So, at 95% confidence level, the relation between WTC and PCIE is positive and significant.

In Figure 1 below, the linear and direct positive relationship between WTC and the components of PCIE is shown.
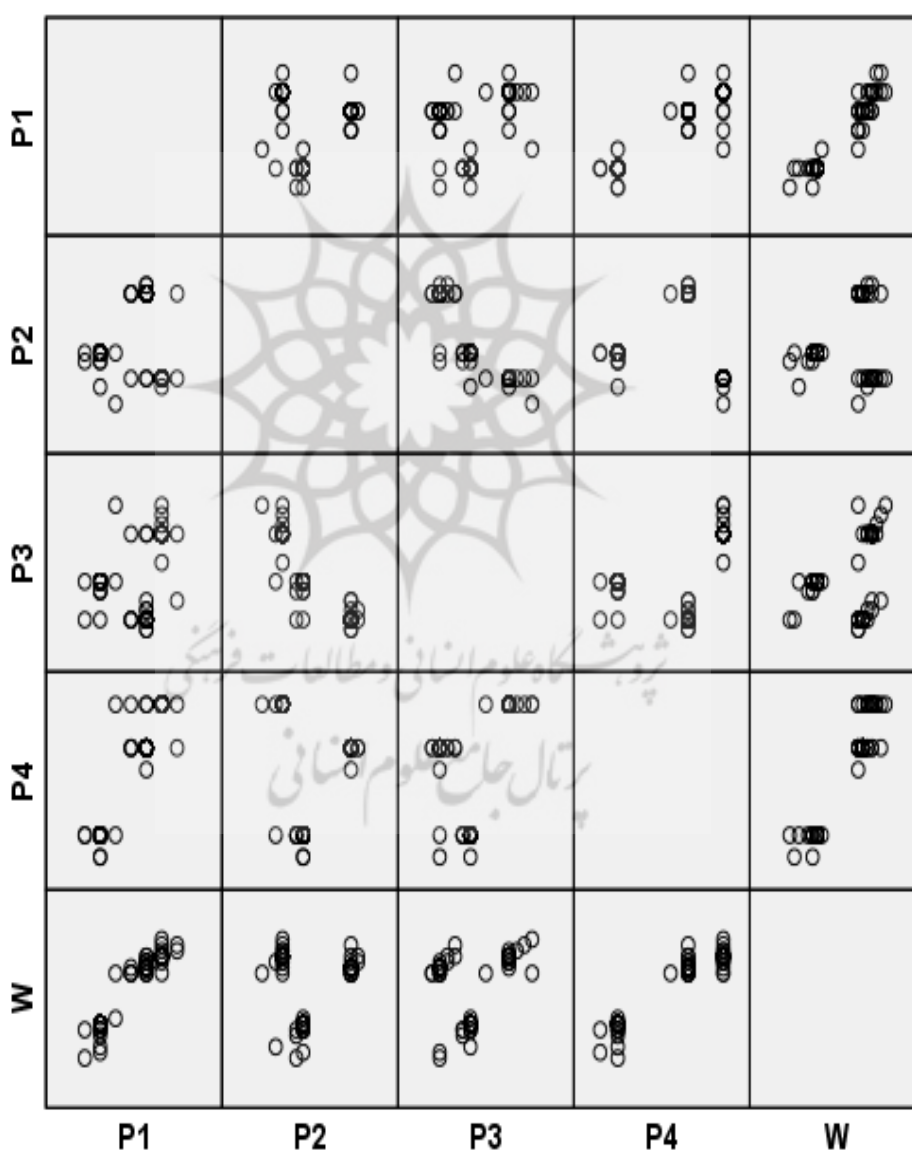

Figure 1. *Scatter plot for WTC and the PCIE components*

Table 2. demonstrates the interrelationships among PCIE and WTC and its different subscales.

Table 2. *Correlations Among PCIE and WTC Along with its Subscales*

		Speaking in class, in English	Reading in class (to yourself, not out loud)	Writing in class, in English	Comprehension in class	WTC
PCIE	Pearson Correlation	.584*	.990*	.799*	.562*	.592*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	112	112	112	112	112

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As Table 2 demonstrates, the correlation coefficient for the relation between PCIE and the first component of WTC, speaking in class in English, is 0.584 which is positive and approximately large (p= 0.000 < 0.05, r= 0.584). Hence, it can be concluded that at 95% confidence level there exists a positive and significant correlation between PCIE and the first component of WTC.

With regard to the relationship between PCIE and the second component of WTC, reading in class (to yourself not out loud), Table 2 clearly shows a positive and significant correlation. As this table demonstrates, the correlation coefficient for this relationship is 0.990 which is positive and near 1 (p= 0.000 < 0.05, r= 0.990). Based on this finding, it is said that at 95% confidence level, the relationship between PCIE and the second subscale of WTC is positive and significant.

According to Table 2, the correlation coefficient for the interrelationship between PCIE and the third component of WTC, writing in class in English, equals 0.799 which is positive and near 1 (p= 0.000 < 0.05, r= 0.799). Based on this finding, it is stated that at 95% confidence level, there exists a positive and significant correlation between PCIE and writing in class in English.

Similar to other components, the relationship between the final component of WTC, comprehension in class, and PCIE is positive and significant. As the results in Table 2 indicate, the correlation coefficient for this relationship is 0.562 which is positive and approximately large (p= 0.000 < 0.05, r= 0.562). Hence, this positive and significant correlation is true at 95% confidence level.

Concerning the correlation between PCIE and WTC, Table 2 demonstrates a positive and almost large correlation coefficient (p= 0.000 < 0.05, r= 0.592). Therefore, at 95% confidence level, a positive and significant correlation between the two variables of PCIE and WTC can be obviously concluded.

Figure 2 illustrates a linear and direct positive correlation between PCIE and the different components of WTC.
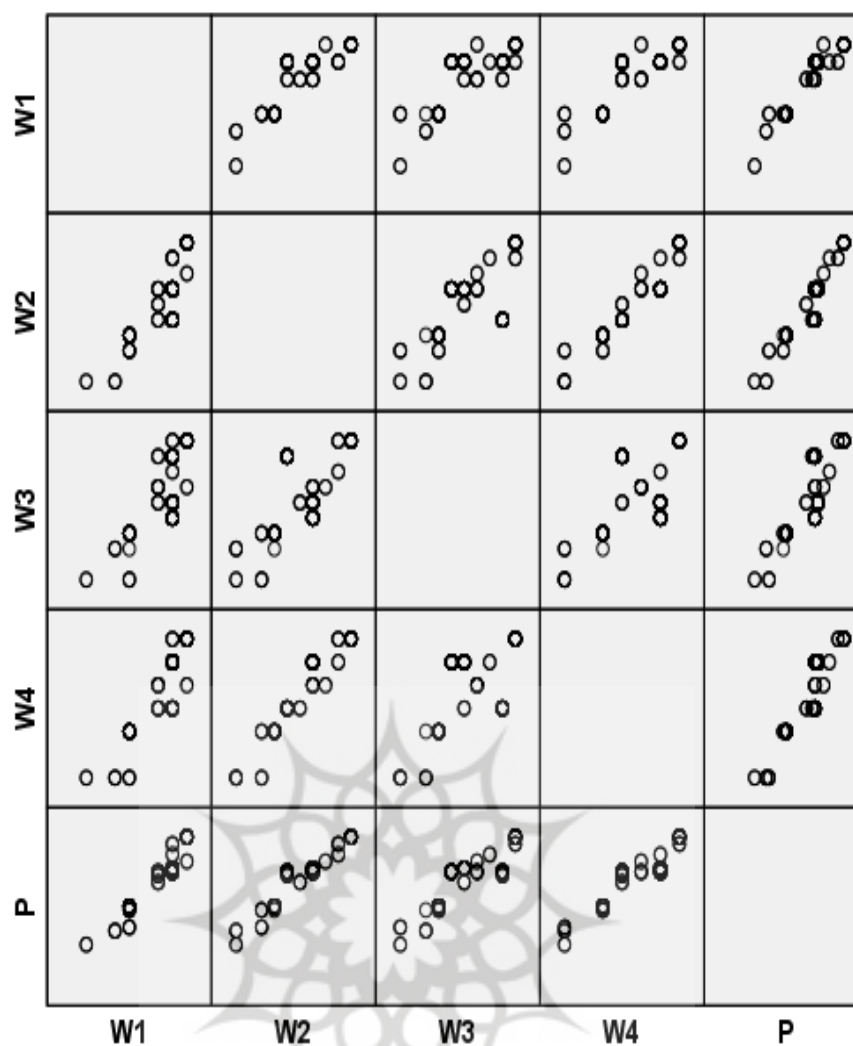
Figure 2. *Scatter plot for PCIE and the WTC components*

Discussion

The present study attempted to examine the correlation between Iraqi EFL learners' perceptions of class interactions and their willingness to communicate with others within the class. The results obtained from the two questionnaires administered among the participants indicated that there is a positive and significant correlation between PCIE and WTC in general and among PCIE and the subscales of WTC and WTC and the different components of PCIE. Based on this finding, it can be said that the results contain significant practical implications especially for EFL contexts.

The findings indicate that different kinds of learners' perceptions about classroom interaction in English (i.e., perceptions of interaction with the teacher, perceptions of interaction with group members, perceptions of interaction in pairs, and perceptions of interaction between others) are positively related to WTC. This finding echo empirical results, indicating that the attitudes of learners toward the activities done in communicative situations and involving L2 interaction affect their L2 WTC (e.g., Dörnyéi & Kormos, 2000; Fushino, 2010; Yu, 2009).

To some extent, the results obtained in the present study corroborate those of Sun's (2008) research whereby the group work and teacher tended to be influential inthe communication intention of Taiwanese learners. The findings also partly support the results reported in Peng (2014) and Fushino (2010). In these studies, it was found that the learners' beliefs indirectly affectedL2 WTC. The findings are also partly in line with those found in Wang et al. (2019) in that both studies showed the importance of the learners' affective states and their perceptions of classroom interaction.

The findings of this study are consistent with those of Wang (2017). Wang investigated the relationship between learners' perceptions of classroom interaction and their communication motivation and communication apprehension. The results of his study showed that there were significant correlations between learners' perceptions of classroom interaction and three variables: English-language classroom communication apprehension, intrinsic motivation, and years of English learning. Additionally, a multiple regression analysis showed that intrinsic motivation was a significant predictor of learners' positive perceptions of classroom interaction, while extrinsic motivation and communication apprehension were not.

The findings obtained in this study also partly support the findings in Zhou's (2015) qualitative research which examined how the aspects of oral participation in the EFL classroom are perceived differently by the administrator, teachers, and learners at a Chinese university, and how these discrepant perceptions may affect learners in the process of classroom oral participation. In the interviews, all the academics, including the administrator and four teachers, and 87.5% ($n = 91$) of the 104 student interviewees had positive attitudes toward the significance of classroom oral participation.

Based on the findings, it is argued that endeavors to engage L2 learners in L2 interactions in the class rest on the L2 learners' attitudes toward L2 interactions and that teacher education should strongly highlight informing teachers about the value of L2 interaction and particular strategies to achieve it. In light of this, it makes sense to take into account a language learner's beliefs about interaction and group work as a precondition for L2 WTC and for having an interactive class which augments learners' chances to employ the L2.

Generally, the research findings indicate that the importance of developing a favorable view about class interactions should be appreciated. It is important to educate the learners such that any misconceptions about L2 interactionare discouraged and their supportive perceptions and beliefs in this regard are inspired. On the whole, it is sensible to anticipate that by cultivating the learners' beliefs, their L2 WTC can be strongly encouraged and their competence in English language improved to a great extent.

An individual's intended behaviors logically reflect the same behaviours of the individual (Wang & Tseng, 2020); as such, an L2 learner's perceptions and beliefs about interaction mirror his/her interactive behavior in the classroom. According to Fushino (2010), students who place less emphasis on traditional instruction would likely appreciate group work more and would feel more at ease being in a group, a sense that would decrease their communication anxiety in L2 group work. It is also argued that if the learners have high levels of communication anxiety in L2 group work, their apprehension about speaking in front of the others when the teacher calls on them would be high. Hence, group work would be more

outstanding than teacher-led traditional classrooms for such learners, since they are not forced to talk in front of all their classmates, which may be more face-threatening than taking part in group activities (Fushino, 2010).

Conclusion

In the present study, it was found that the perceptions of L2 interactions contribute to learners' WTC. In other words, the learners' extent of willingness to employ the L2 in the classroom had significant relationship with their views on learner–learner interactions and teacher–learner interactions in the L2.

The findings of the study have theoretical and practical implications. First, this research is significant as it provides empirically rendered data substantiating main SLA theories in interaction (Swain, 1985), emphasizing the value of interaction in enhancing WTC and the development of language inside the class. Second, there is not sufficient research on the role of L2 PCI in learner's WTC in the class (Fushino, 2010). The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of four types of PCIE in explaining WTC and, thus, further advance this research direction.

The findings of the study have practical implications as well. According to the findings, it can be argued that the influence of the learners' attitudes toward classroom interaction with the group members and teacher should not be disregarded. The learners' classroom communication intention may be predicted by how they feel about and assess interactions. Therefore, making efforts to find strategies to reinforce learners' views on the significance of numerous interaction opportunities in the class can affect their intent to participate in communicative activities inside the class and their real use of the L2 in this context. Thus, it is vital to teach with an emphasis on fostering learners' favourable perceptions of class interactions with the group members and teacher as well as enhancing the degree to which they value the significance of interaction with other individuals in the L2. The other central pedagogical implication of the findings relates to developing the learner's WTC in the L2. The learner's L2 WTC must be strongly supported in such ways as conveying the value of interaction in learning to learners.

The association between PCIE and WTC is supported by the findings of the current investigation. The main limitation of this study relates to data collection instruments. Similar to most of the studies in this vein, this study is limited in that it relied on a self-reported instrument to explore the learners' opinions. In other words, it was entirely based on the learners' own views. Other methods of data collection, for example classroom observation, interviews, and teacher's evaluation of the learner's participation in the classroom practices, can act as more objective methods to describe the real perceptions within the class. Conducting interviews with diverse students in different educational contexts is one avenue for further research since learning experiences in various contexts may affect the learners' communication behaviors and perceptions of L2 classroom interactions. The diversity of learner backgrounds can generate more information on the learners' attitudes toward interaction and corroborate or contradict the findings.

Another limitation of this study is the small number of participants. Further research should do research on a larger sample. Moreover, in this study, the learners were from different

language proficiency levels learning English at university and language institute. Hence, by employing samples made up of a more homogeneous group of participants, future studies can add to this line of research. Besides, the study was done in a mono-cultural context, and therefore generalizability is limited to this society and replication of this study in other contexts is highly recommended. Moreover, this study selected convenience sampling approach without taking into account the ratio of population. This approach was taken owing to the concerns for expedited data collection, cost effectiveness, and easy accessibility of sample. The sample participating in the present study might be under-represented since a probability-based sampling procedure was not used. Therefore, the results of the study cannot be directly generalized to the target population. The findings of this study should be replicated by future studies utilizing a more systematic sampling procedure. Examining the attitudes of Iraqi EFL teachers toward classroom interaction and their tendency to integrate interactive activities into their teaching is another area for further research. Besides, exploring the perspectives of administrators and parents would also be enlightening.

Overall, classroom interaction promotes L2 use, presents a great learning space where learners test hypotheses pertaining to their recently acquired knowledge or skills, and develops the learning objective of automaticity (Long, 1996; Swain, 2000). According to Fushino (2010), without interaction, language development cannot be expected. Hence, L2 interaction is required to be enhanced in L2 learning and highlighted in numerous types and strengthening learners' views on the value of group work is essential. By elevating students' beliefs about interaction, teachers might boost WTC in L2.

It is hoped that L2 learner education can take advantage of the results of the current study, and L2 learners' WTC can be promoted and thereby their learning outcomes be maximized. By providing numerous forms of assistance on the part of the teachers, the learners will eagerly take risks and try out their L2, which will sequentially augment their chances for being successful in communication. Cumulatively successful experiences will result in improved confidence. After all, efficient cooperation is actualized only when learners experience quality interaction (Fushino, 2010).

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Appendix I

(Revised version of the) Questionnaire on Willingness to Communicate inside the classroom from Zarrinabadi and Abdi (2011, adapted from MacIntyre et al., 2001)

Dear student,

This questionnaire is composed of statements concerning your feelings about communication with other people, in English. The research is used for academic purposes only, and you are not needed to write your name. It should be pointed out that there is no right or wrong answers to the questions and your responses are just indicators of your opinions. So, please feel free to answer the items based on your real beliefs. Please indicate in the space provided the frequency of time you choose to speak in English in each classroom situation. The items range from 1 to 5 (1=almost never willing, and 5= almost always willing). Please read the items carefully and provide your responses in the format requested. If you are almost never willing to speak English, write 1. If you are willing sometimes, write 2 or 3. If you are willing most of the time, write 4 or 5.

 1 = Almost never willing

 2 = Sometimes willing

 3 = Willing half of the time

 4 = Usually willing

 5 = Almost always willing

 Thank you for your cooperation

Before answering the questionnaire items, please complete the following information

Gender: Male   Female
Age:
English Language Proficiency Level:
Basic   Elementary Pre-inter Intermediate High Inter Advanced
City/Province:
No. of years you have been studying English:
E-mail:

	No.	Item	Almost always willing	Usually willing	Willing half of the time	Sometimes willing	Almost never willing
Speaking in class, in English (8 items)	1	1. Speaking in a group about your summer vacation.	5	4	3	2	1
	2	2. Speaking to your teacher about your homework assignment.	5	4	3	2	1
	3	3. A stranger enters the room you are in, how willing would you be	5	4	3	2	1

		to have a conversation if he talked to you first?					
	4	4. You are confused about a task you must complete, how willing are you to ask for instructions/clarification?	5	4	3	2	1
	5	5. Talking to a friend while waiting in line.	5	4	3	2	1
	6	6. How willing would you be to be an actor in a play?	5	4	3	2	1
	7	7. Describe the rules of your favorite game.	5	4	3	2	1
	8	8. Play a game in English.	5	4	3	2	1
Reading in class (to yourself, not out loud) (6 items)	9	1. Read a novel.	5	4	3	2	1
	10	2. Read an article in a paper.	5	4	3	2	1
	11	3. Read letters from a pen pal written in native English.	5	4	3	2	1
	12	4. Read personal letters or notes written to you in which the writer has deliberately used simple words and constructions.	5	4	3	2	1
	13	5. Read an advertisement in the paper to find a good bicycle you can buy.	5	4	3	2	1
	14	6. Read reviews for popular movies.	5	4	3	2	1
Writing in class, in English (8 items)	15	1. Write an advertisement to sell an old bike.	5	4	3	2	1
	16	2. Write down the instructions for your favorite hobby.	5	4	3	2	1
	17	3. Write a report on your favorite animal and its habits.	5	4	3	2	1
	18	4. Write a story.	5	4	3	2	1
	19	5. Write a letter to a friend.	5	4	3	2	1
	20	6. Write a newspaper article.	5	4	3	2	1
	21	7. Write the answers to a "fun" quiz from a magazine.	5	4	3	2	1
	22	8. Write down a list of things you must do tomorrow.	5	4	3	2	1
Comprehension in class (5 items)	23	1. Listen to instructions and complete a task.	5	4	3	2	1
	24	2. Bake a cake if instructions were not in Arabic.	5	4	3	2	1

25	3. Fill out an application form.	5	4	3	2	1
26	4. Take directions from an English speaker.	5	4	3	2	1
27	5. Understand an English movie.	5	4	3	2	1

Appendix II

Questionnaire on Perception of Classroom Interaction with English (PCIE)

Dear student,

You are respectfully invited to participate in this research. The research is used for academic purposes only, and you are not needed to write your name. It should be pointed out that there is no right or wrong answers to the questions and your responses are just indicators of your opinions. So, please feel free to answer the items based on your real beliefs.

Please read the items carefully and provide your responses in the format requested. If you strongly believe in the statement select option ٥, and if it is not at all true about you select option 1. If these two options are not true for you, choose an option between 1 and ٥ which better expresses your opinion (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree).

Thank you for your cooperation

Before answering the questionnaire items please complete the following information

Gender:	Male	Female
Age:		
English Language Proficiency Level:		
Basic	Elementary	Pre-inter	Intermediate	High Inter	Advanced
City/Province:		
No. of years you have been studying English:		
E-mail:		

	No.	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Perceptions of Interaction with the Teacher (PCIEtea) (2 items)	1	The opportunity to interact with my English teacher is important for my English language learning.	5	4	3	2	1
	2	The opportunity to interact with my English teacher is an effective way to enhance my English communication skills.	5	4	3	2	1
	3	I like group discussions in English.	5	4	3	2	1

			5	4	3	2	1
Perceptions of Interaction with Group Members (PCIEgp) (3 items)	4	Group discussions are important for my English language learning.	5	4	3	2	1
	5	Group discussions are an effective way to enhance my English communication skills.	5	4	3	2	1
Perceptions of interaction in pairs (PCIEpr) (3 items)	6	I like dyadic interaction in English.	5	4	3	2	1
	7	Dyadic interaction/communication in English is important for my English language learning.	5	4	3	2	1
	8	Dyadic interaction/communication in English is an effective way to enhance my English communication skills.	5	4	3	2	1
Perceptions of classroom interaction between others (PCIEob) (2 items)	9	Listening to others using English in classroom interactions is important for my English language learning.	5	4	3	2	1
	10	Listening to others using English in classroom interactions is an effective way to enhance my English communication skills.	5	4	3	2	1