

**GENDER INFLUENCES ON LEARNERS’  
WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH  
USING COMPUTER MEDIATED  
COMMUNICATION TOOL**

**MUGUNTHANY A/P ARMUGAM**

**SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY**

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IN ENGLISH USING COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION TOOL**

**MUGUNTHANY A/P ARMUGAM**

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to find out the impact of gender and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) tools on students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. A quantitative research design was employed, combining survey and non-equivalent quasi-experimental methods. In the first phase, a questionnaire was used to collect data from 224 Form Four students. The second phase involved a non-equivalent quasi-experimental approach. The data were analyzed using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-test to examine significant gender-based differences in WTC. Participants were selected through non-random sampling. The Mann-Whitney U-test revealed a significant gender difference in WTC ( $U = 5171.5$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ), with females exhibiting higher WTC. The quasi-experimental findings indicated that students who used CMC tools showed significantly higher WTC compared to those in traditional classroom settings ( $U = 605$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). Notably, while CMC tools enhanced WTC, gender differences in WTC remained consistent across both CMC and non-CMC contexts. This suggests that although CMC tools can boost students' WTC, gender continues to play a significant role in influencing communication behaviors. Understanding these gender differences is crucial for educators to design targeted strategies that address the unique needs of male and female students, ultimately fostering their English communication skills. This study emphasizes the potential to improve WTC among Malaysian students by developing gender-responsive approaches, thereby promoting more equitable language acquisition for both genders.





## **PENGARUH JANTINA TERHADAP KESEDIAAN PELAJAR UNTUK BERKOMUNIKASI DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS MENGGUNAKAN ALAT KOMUNIKASI BERBANTU KOMPUTER**

### **ABSTRAK**

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji impak jantina dan alat Komunikasi Berbantu Komputer (CMC) terhadap Kesiediaan Pelajar untuk Berkomunikasi (WTC) dalam bahasa Inggeris. Reka bentuk kajian kuantitatif digunakan, menggabungkan kaedah tinjauan dan kajian quasi-eksperimen yang tidak seimbang. Pada fasa pertama, soal selidik digunakan untuk mengumpul data daripada 224 pelajar Tingkatan Empat. Fasa kedua melibatkan pendekatan kajian quasi-eksperimen yang tidak seimbang. Data dianalisis menggunakan ujian Mann-Whitney U yang tidak parametrik untuk mengkaji perbezaan WTC berdasarkan jantina. Responden dipilih menggunakan pendekatan pensampelan bukan rawak. Ujian Mann-Whitney U menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan dalam WTC antara pelajar lelaki dan perempuan ( $U = 5171.5$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ), dengan pelajar perempuan menunjukkan WTC yang lebih tinggi. Penemuan quasi-eksperimen menunjukkan bahawa pelajar yang menggunakan alat CMC, didapati mempunyai WTC yang lebih tinggi dengan signifikan berbanding mereka yang berada dalam pengajaran tradisional ( $U = 605$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). Walaupun alat CMC memberi kesan positif terhadap WTC, perbezaan jantina dalam WTC kekal konsisten dalam kedua-dua konteks CMC dan bukan CMC. Dapatan ini menunjukkan bahawa walaupun alat CMC dapat meningkatkan WTC pelajar, jantina tetap memainkan peranan penting dalam mempengaruhi tingkah laku komunikasi. Dapatan kajian perbezaan jantina ini penting bagi pendidik untuk merancang strategi yang menyasarkan keperluan khusus pelajar lelaki dan perempuan, seterusnya mempertingkatkan kemahiran komunikasi bahasa Inggeris mereka. Kajian ini membuktikan potensi untuk meningkatkan WTC dalam kalangan pelajar Malaysia dengan merangka pendekatan yang mengambil kira kecenderungan mengikut jantina, sekali gus mengukuhkan pemerolehan bahasa yang lebih seimbang untuk kedua-dua jantina.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ENL	English as a Native Language
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
L1 WTC	Willingness to Communicate in First Language
L2 WTC	Willingness to Communicate in Second Language
MEF	Malaysian Employers Federation
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
UnWTC	Unwillingness to Communicate





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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Introduction

English is a worldwide language that is incredibly vital in today's world and it is also regarded as the international communication language. English not only expands employment opportunities globally, but it also allows people to communicate with one another and better comprehend various cultures. As mentioned by Jenkins (2015), English is now spoken by the majority of individuals who do not speak English as their first language in practically every country. The speakers of English can be categorized into three broad categories: those who speak English as a native language





(ENL), as a second language (ESL), and as a foreign language (EFL). In accordance with Kachnu (1992a: 356) three-circle model of World Englishes, the English language first moved from Britain to other ENL countries, then to ESL countries, and more recently to EFL countries (as cited in Jenkins, 2015).

In the late eighteenth century, James Crook's Sea voyages marked the beginning of British influence in Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the South Pacific. The Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong were some of the main territories which offered the best instances of an English-based pidgin in the entire world. However, Jenkin (2015) reported that since Malaysia's independence in 1957, when Malay language (Bahasa Malaysia) was adopted as the country's official language and the primary language of instruction, the use of English has decreased in Malaysia. Following a policy reform, English-medium education resumed in 2003. However, the Malaysian government has switched back to teaching in the Malay language since 2013. Yet, English is a subject that must be studied in Malaysian schools since it is deemed essential for communication on a worldwide scale (Jenkins, 2015).

In the ranking of the languages of Malaysia, English is given secondary importance after the Malay language and it has been accepted as a second language in Malaysia (Jantmary Thirusanku & Melor Yunus, 2014). In fact, Malaysia, as a heterogeneous country, naturally develops a bilingual atmosphere and a second language (L2) is evidently vital in society in order to converse with people of different races. However, in Malaysian context, Malay language (national language) is widely used as a medium of communication among pluri-ethics. Apart from that, there are





certain fields where English is highly emphasized and utilized in Malaysia such as in higher education, business, medical, law and government policies. Doubtlessly, the world's trade market is concurred by an international business language which is English. Concurrently, vast knowledge on science and technology is mainly preserved in English and certainly, being able to excel in English language is one's great advantage (Sadiq, Cavus, & Ibrahim, 2021). Of necessity, Malaysians need to have a good command of English not only to communicate and also to compete in the international business market. Therefore, communication of English should be taken into serious consideration in Malaysia.

As a matter of fact, Azman (2016) and Samat, Muthu, & Yunus (2019), both claim that the majority of Malaysian students have difficulties in speaking English. Even though pupils start learning English at age six, Malaysia's circumstance demonstrates that their progress in the language has not been very positive. In line with Kashinathan & Aziz (2021), communication skills among ESL students are usually perceived as complex and difficult to master despite requiring a lot of effort to maintain. As a result, several scholars are constantly exploring Malaysians' willingness to communicate in English in order to take into consideration the significance of English communication.

Alternatively, as an effort to improve English communication in Malaysia, Abu Bakar, Latiff, & Hamat (2017) claim that online communication tools may provide low-skill students with a venue and a platform to improve their second-language communication abilities. ESL students gradually get over their hesitation





and nervousness when given the chance to use the language in a secure learning environment and develop confidence in speaking English. The researchers believe that the students will be able to pick up a new language spontaneously if given enough time to deliberate and practise their communication without interruption from their teacher or peers. Therefore, in order to better understand this issue, the current study seeks to ascertain whether Computer Mediated Communication tools aid in improving learners' willingness to communicate in the classroom by giving students more engagement and time to communicate in English.

## 1.2 Background of the Research



In accord with the New Straits Times newspaper dated on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2019, having a good command of English would improve a jobseeker's employability, especially for recent graduates. 64 percent of employers cite a poor command of the language as one of the causes for fresh graduate unemployment in Malaysia (Rozana Sani, 2019). Added in Malay mail, dated November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018 that Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) executive director, Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan and Datuk Abdul Halim Omar, head of the Malaysian Trade Unions Congress, agree that Malaysian graduates are not keen to be employed due to their incapacity to communicate effectively in English despite having learned it since primary school (Danial Dzulkifly, 2018). Also, The Star newspaper reported that as per a study, English proficiency is one of the top five skills that employers look for when hiring. The president of the Malaysian Employers Federation declared that it was a significant revelation from the





MEF Salary Survey for Executives and Non-Executives in 2021 (Lai, 2022). However, the standard and proficiency of English among Malaysian graduates is drastically declining especially in speaking English (D'Silva, 2019 & Zainul Arifin, 2021) even some undergraduates who attained high CGPA in their tertiary education are still not confident to communicate in English (Singh, 2019). Therefore, graduates who are seeking for employment, regardless of position or industry, must have strong English communication skills since graduates' employability has become a major issue in Malaysia, where a high unemployment rate is blamed on inadequate communication skills (Seetha Nesaratnam, Wan Hisham Wan Salleh, & Yi, 2020). Undoubtedly, English communication is vital in the workplace since it improves efficiency and productivity. Thus, the present study focuses on Malaysians students' willingness to communicate in English particularly in the classroom.



### 1.3 Problem Statement

Malaysia is an ethnocultural country whereby the society is altered by a multilingual environment. There are three main ethnics (Malay, Chinese and Indian) that live together, which means each ethnic has their own preferred language to communicate with (Noraini Zulkepli, Noor Alhusna Madzlan, Hema Vanita Kesevan, & Siti Nor Amalina Ahmad Tajuddin, 2020). Notwithstanding, Malay language enjoys the recognition as Malaysia's national language and it is used commonly as a medium of communication in official and unofficial functions. However, English as a second language in Malaysia is also widely used by Malaysians to a great degree in private





sectors, education, management and business industries (Siti Zaidah Zainuddin, Dumanig, & Phillip, 2019; Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). In fact, many Malaysians in metropolitan areas now speak English as their first language instead of Malay language, with many families using it as their primary language.

As stated by Aziz & Kashinathan (2021), after studying English for eleven years from preschool to secondary school, Malaysian students are still poor in English communication skills. In the same manner, when these students enter tertiary level, they merely choose not to communicate in English even if they are proficient in the language (Singh, 2019). As a result, many Malaysian graduates fail to pass in the job interviews and they gradually miss the opportunity to be hired by international companies (Siti Zaidah Zainuddin, Dumanig, & Phillip, 2019; Tee, Joanna, & Wirawahida Kamarulzaman, 2022). Ultimately, communicating in English is highly essential in conveying the ideas and information to the business world in order to compete in the global market among developed countries.

Unfortunately, Nadesan and Md. Shah (2018) have mentioned in their study that most of the Malaysian students are passive when it comes to using English language. Particularly, in speaking activities, the majority of secondary school students find it difficult to speak with confidence. Consequently, until today speaking ability has emerged as one of the main areas of worry as Malaysian students struggle to gain significant competency (Nadesan & Md. Shah, 2020). Given the previously indicated issue, this study focused on secondary school students' willingness to communicate in English primarily in the classroom.





Towards considering the importance of English communication, currently many researchers began to study Malaysians' willingness to communicate in English language. Lately, there are fairly large number of studies have been carried out in exploring both stable and situational factors, mainly on L2 motivation (Shima Balouchi & Arshad Abdul Samad, 2021; Subramaniam, Shaharudin, Abdul Hamid, & Abdul Wahab, 2021; Muhammad Faisal & Al Amirul Eimer, 2020; Noraini Zulkepli, Noor Alhusna Madzlan, Hema Vanita Kesevan, & Siti Nor Amalina Ahmad Tajuddin, 2020), L2 self-confidence (Nur Ilianis Adnan, Mohamad Jafre Zainol Abidin & M. Arif Rahman Hakim, 2020), L2 self-perceived communicative competence (Shima Balouchi & Arshad Abdul Samad, 2021; Muhammad Faisal & Al Amirul Eimer, 2020) and also on WTC in virtual learning (Shima Balouchi & Arshad Abdul Samad, 2021; Zulkepli, Tajuddin, AlBakri, Atan, & Abu Bakar, 2019).



Overall, those aforementioned researches in Malaysia are generally highlighted on discovering the enduring influences and situational variables involved in willingness to communicate as well as its types and conceptualisation. Therefore, a noticeable gap is found in the research whereby there is a dearth in terms of gender concerning willingness to communicate in English in Malaysian settings (Lo, 2018; Tan, et al., 2020). Most of the studies conducted in Malaysia hugely focus on varsity students and very rarely concentrate on school students. Therefore, this study explored to willingness to communicate in English among secondary school students in a Malaysian context.





In spite of that, the existence of inconclusive findings or in other word, unclear understanding from previous research studies on willingness to communicate in English involving gender basis (Lo, 2018) is another gap that fosters this present study. It indicates that gender has been shown to have an impact on willingness to communicate in earlier studies. Findings from MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan (2002); and Donovan & MacIntyre (2009) claim that female adolescents have high willingness to communicate compared to male adolescents. However, this design reverses in adulthood (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2009). Many scholars find out that adult men are more willing to communicate than female adults (Tannen, 1990; Bursalı & Öz, 2017; Mohammad Amiryousefi, 2018; Sinnett Jr. & Alishah, 2021). Contrarily, Lo (2018) discovers that female ESL teachers engage more often in communicating with their instructors than male teachers. There have also been studies that demonstrate that there are no significant differences in willingness to communicate between males and females as they reach adulthood (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2009; Alemi, Tajeddin, & Mesbah, 2013). Consequently, there are contradictory findings from previous research, whereby willingness to communicate differs in male and female context (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2009). Those indications have derived the present researcher to study on willingness to communicate considering gender as a focus point. In addition, there is a scarcity of study carried out on willingness to communicate among secondary school students, whereby prior studies mostly focus on university students and working adults. According to Donovan & MacIntyre (2009), learners from 11 to 12 years are less willing to communicate compared to middle adolescents. Unlikely, Shamsi (2021) finds out that in the existing cyber age, early adolescents are more engaged in digital communication. This is another gap in the research which boosts this current research





by testing on secondary school students' willingness to communicate using Computer Mediated Communication tool.

Computer Mediated Communication is defined as communication involving humans (people) via two or more electronic devices such as computers (Yeh, Tseng, & Chen, 2019). Currently, various sophisticated technologies exist whereby people are more advanced in using smartphones, tablets and laptops. As is well known, there are two categories of Computer Mediated Communication. There are synchronous systems in which communication occurs instantly. Video chat and Google Meet are synchronous Computer Mediated Communication tool examples. Asynchronous communication means that two parties do not exchange information at the same time and that the sender does not instantly receive the recipient's response. Emails and text messages are two examples of asynchronous Computer Mediated Communication tools (Sayago, Sloan, & Blat, 2011; Dao, Nguyen, Duong, & Thanh, 2021). Many researchers from around the world have expressed an interest in studying the willingness to communicate using Computer Mediated Communication tools. However, very limited studies have been conducted on school students' willingness to communicate using Computer Mediated Communication tools in order to improve students' communication competence in English primarily in the classroom. Therefore, the present study concentrates on Malaysian secondary school students' willingness to communicate in English using Computer Mediated Communication tool. A detailed review on Computer Mediated Communication based on willingness to communicate will be explained in Chapter 2.





## 1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

RO1: To investigate the influence of gender on learner willingness to communicate in English.

RO2: To study the effectiveness of Computer Mediated Communication tool in enhancing learners' willingness to communicate in English.

RO3: To investigate the influence of gender on learners willingness to communicate in English using Computer Mediated Communication tool.

## 1.5 Research Questions

Below are research questions that are formulated to guide this research study:

RQ1: Is there any significant difference in learners' willingness to communicate in terms of gender?

RQ2: To what extent does Computer Mediated Communication tool enhance learners' willingness to communicate in English?

RQ3: Is there any significant difference in male and female learners' willingness to communicate in English using Computer Mediated Communication tool?

- a. male's willingness to communicate in English
- b. female's willingness to communicate in English

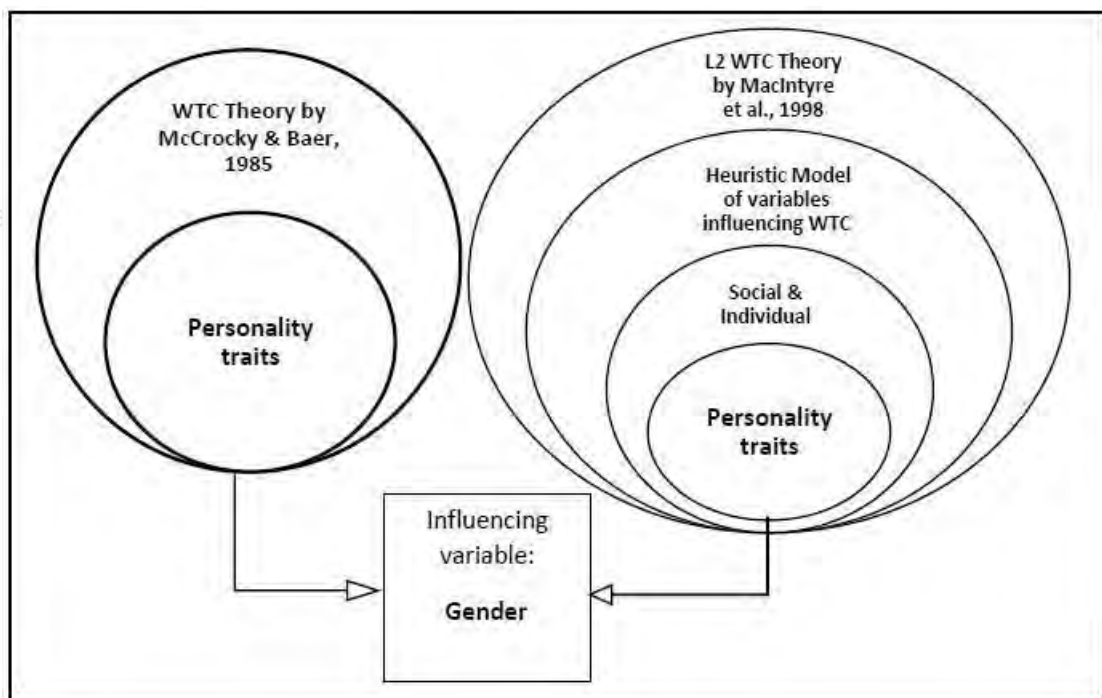


## 1.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded on WTC theory by McCrockey & Baer, 1985 and L2 WTC theory by MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels (1998). Figure 1.1 shows a theoretical framework of the present study.

**Figure 1.1**

*Theoretical Framework*

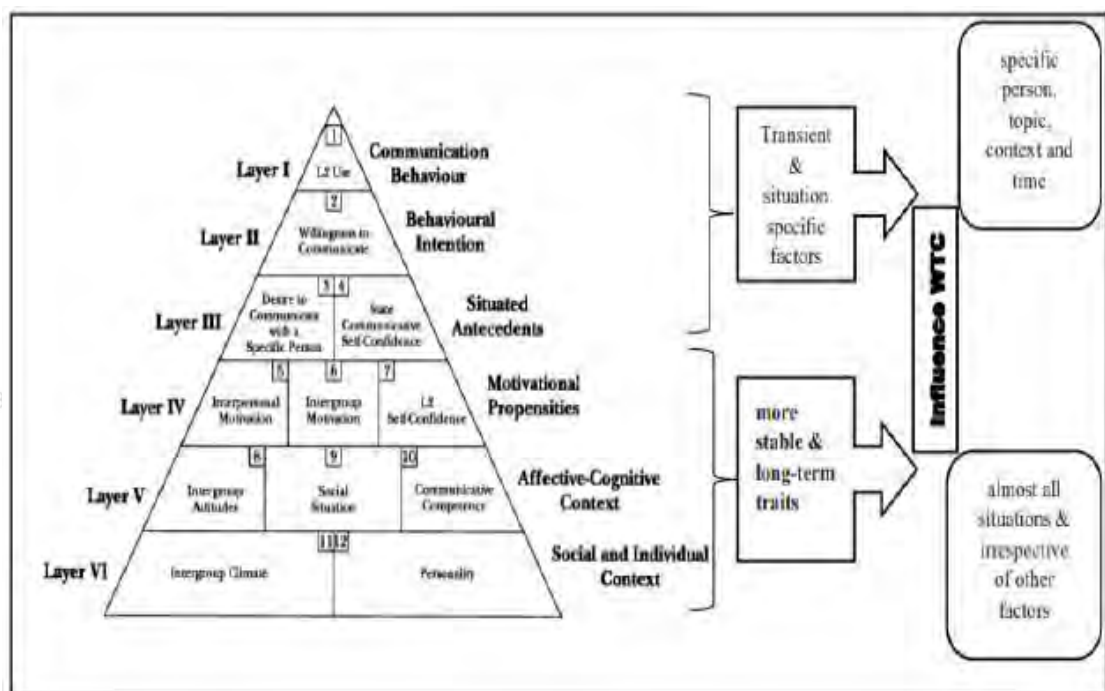


Both theories claim that an individual's personality traits do influence one's willingness to communicate and this trait is considered as a stable factor which exists almost all the time and not situational based. This current research decides to study the willingness to communicate in a second language in terms of gender which is also

categorized under a stable factor as per heuristic model of variables influencing willingness to communicate. Figure 1.2 exhibits both stable factors and possible influences of L2 WTC.

**Figure 1.2**

*Both Stable Factors and Possible Influences of L2 WTC*



This heuristic model comprises both stable factors and possible influences of willingness to communicate in a second language. At the top layer of the pyramid is the spot of second language communication. The situational factors when moving from layer I to layer III become less transient and situational specific whereby willingness to communicate is influenced by specific person, topic, context and time. Moving downward from layer IV to layer VI, the enduring influences become more stable and long term that can be pertained to almost all situations and irrespective of

other factors. Gender factor falls under personality traits at the layer VI (social and individual context) of the pyramid. A detailed description of this theory in accordance with the variables of this study will be discussed in Chapter 2.

## 1.7 Conceptual Framework

**Figure 1.3**

*Conceptual Framework*

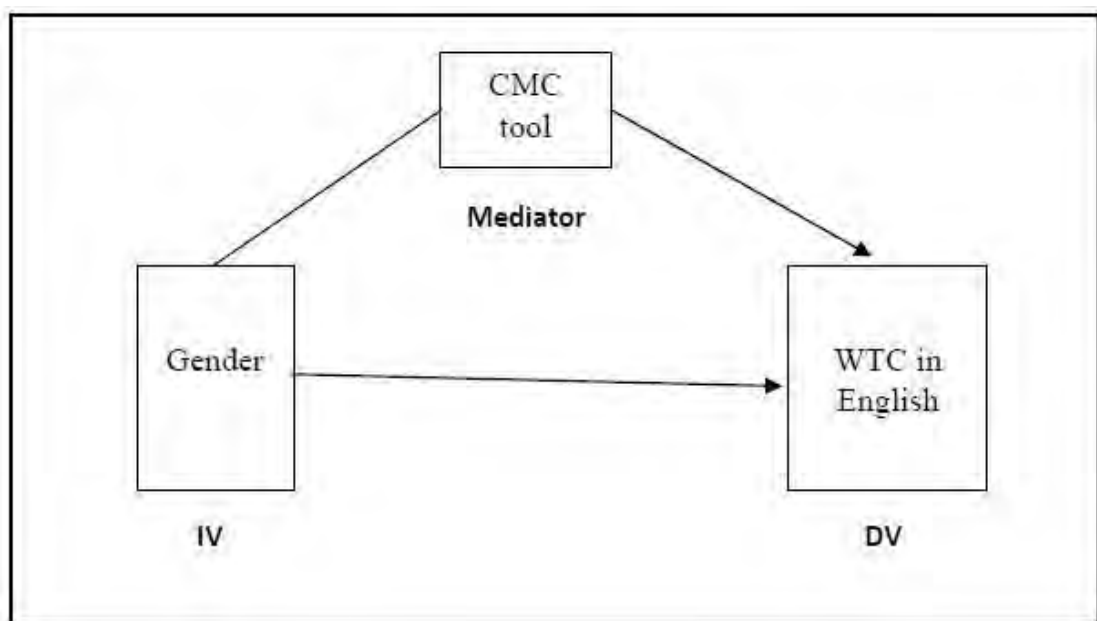


Figure 1.3 represents the conceptual framework of this study. The independent variable in the current research is derived from the WTC theory by McCrokey & Baer, 1985 and L2 WTC theory by MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels (1998). Conforming to MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan (2002), gender does influence



one's willingness to communicate in a second language. The present study was conducted in a Malaysian context among secondary school students on willingness to communicate in a second language (L2 WTC). Gender is the independent variable of the study and willingness to communicate in English as a dependent variable. In addition, the Computer Mediated Communication tool was utilized as a mediator in the study in order to identify the effectiveness of online tools in enhancing one's willingness to communicate in English.

## 1.8 Operational Definition



Listed below are the definitions that are used in this study



### Willingness to communicate

It is defined as one's readiness to speak or stay silent when choice is given (MacIntyre, 2007). In this study, the willingness to communicate is measured based on respondents' intention to speak in any situation or to text using any online tools.

### Personality traits

This term is reflected as humans' behaviour, thought, emotion and characteristic differ with one another and these traits are commonly consistent and stable (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998). This current study assumes that each respondent





falls under a different dimension of a specific trait and may vary by low, medium or high on certain traits.

### Communication competence

Generally, communication competence is defined as one's capability in attaining communication strategy in an appropriate and effective manner in a given context (Kiessling & Fabry, 2021). In this research, communication competence refers to one's social knowledge in using English language effectively and confidently at a proper place and time.

### Computer Mediated Communication

Computer Mediated Communication is defined as communication involving people via two or more electronic devices such as computers (Yeh, Tseng, & Chen, 2019). This study mainly focuses on asynchronous communication whereby communication does not happen in the same time and responses are received in different periods of time such as text and voice messages in WhatsApp or telegram.

## 1.9 Study Limitations

There are some possible limitations in the present study. Even though there are four types of school (government school, vernacular school, private school and





international school) in Malaysia, this study only focuses on government schools. This study only concentrated on one of the secondary government schools in Kinta District, Perak. This particular secondary school has been chosen in order to have mixed ethics of participants (Malay, Chinese and Indian) who are living a homogeneous lifestyle and mainly speak English as their second language. Further, only students from Form 4 will be selected as the sample of the study. The reason for selecting such a sample is because they have been learning English for 11 years from preschool to secondary school. However, Form 5 students, who have been learning English for 12 years, are not chosen for the study because they are concentrating on studying for the public examination (SPM). Therefore, the results of the study will not be appropriate to generalize to all levels of secondary school students in Malaysia. Several aspects such as types of schools, geographical elements, language of communication as well one's lifestyle need to be taken into consideration by future researchers before generalizing the findings of the current study.

Despite the fact that synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools exist, this study primarily focuses on synchronous CMC tools, in which communication happens instantly. Another key aspect is that Google Meet is the only platform utilised to evaluate how willing the learners communicate in English. In light of this, future investigations could take a closer look at various computer-mediated communication techniques.

Apart from that, this study mainly relies on a quantitative approach whereby an adopted questionnaires and a non-equivalent quasi experimental study are applied





in order to obtain the results. This quantitative study narrowly focuses on the speaking and writing mode of willingness to communicate in a second language. Despite these two modes, there are other modes of communication as well. According to MacIntyre et.al (1998), willingness to communicate in a second language comprises entire listening, speaking, reading and writing. Thus, future researchers could think of considering those modes in order to get valid findings. Apart from that, future research in employing a qualitative approach would be worth conducting in an effort to acquire rich information on willingness to communicate.

### 1.10 Importance of Research



This study on willingness to communicate could help to update and enrich sources in the WTC field, as very limited research has been carried out on Malaysian secondary students' context, especially concerning gender basis. Elsewhere, other countries notably French (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan, 2002; Donovan & MacIntyre, 2009), Iran (Alemi, Tajeddin, & Mesbah, 2013; Mohammad Amiryousefi, 2018) and Turkey (Bursalı & Öz, 2017; Akdemir, 2019; Sinnett Jr & Alishah, 2021) have already had existing literature on this particular subject in order for their future researchers to study and refer with. In the researcher's opinion, this recent study could bring in new information on willingness to communicate based on the Malaysian setting. Therefore, the current study looked into how gender influences L2 WTC among Malaysian secondary school students.





Secondly, studying secondary school students' willingness to communicate in English as a second language, is certainly necessary in the Malaysian environment. Unwillingness to communicate in English could be reduced if the problem concerning this matter is identified at the early stage of each student in order to find out the possible solutions in enhancing willingness to communicate since from school education. Furthermore, once these students enter tertiary level education, they could overcome the fear or anxiety to interact in any situation easily and will be more willing to communicate in English with great confidence.

Thirdly, it is important to study on gender basis so as it will be helpful to the secondary school teachers in order to approach both male and female students by using appropriate techniques (e.g., Computer Mediated Communication) in improving the students' communication competence. A better solution to overcome Malaysian students' unwillingness to communicate in English needs to be explored promptly and continuously. By this, communication competence of Malaysian graduates once they enter tertiary education could be improved gradually in the future.

Overall, studying the willingness to communicate in English in terms of gender of secondary school students will indirectly boost Malaysian English language education especially in firming students' communication skill. Certainly, the results of the study could benefit English teachers in secondary schools, teacher trainers, policy makers and material designers whereby they will tend to approach the students by considering their individual context as well. Teachers may apply different approaches and appropriate communication tools in order to encourage learners to communicate





in English in the classroom. Concurrently, male and female students' willingness to communicate could be enhanced independently in a separate way as both could excel equally and subsequently. Besides, teacher trainers may make use of the findings to create and practise efficacious teacher education programs particularly in communication competence. Last but not least, policy makers and material developers will be more aware of the importance of communicative needs in second language education.

### 1.11 Summary

This chapter is an outline of the entire thesis. It begins with an introduction that discusses the issues pertaining to English communication in Malaysia and the willingness to communicate in English among Malaysian learners. Then, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks are described in general. As a whole, this present study carries several objectives and they are mainly formed to test the influence of gender and also the effectiveness of Computer Mediated Communication tool towards willingness to communicate in English among secondary school students. Parallely, the research questions for the study are created based on the above objectives that are related to the problem of the study. The following chapter will discuss L1WTC and L2WTC-related theories and concepts, as well as recent WTC and CMC related findings.

