วารสารอิเล็กทรอนิกส์
ทางการศึกษา

OJED, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2017, pp. 93 - 108

OJED
An Online Journal
of Education
http://www.edu.chula.ac.th/ojed

ผลของการสอนแบบเน้นงานปฏิบัติผ่านเกมออนไลน์ที่มีต่อความเต็มใจในการสื่อสารเป็นภาษาอังกฤษของนิสิต นักศึกษา ระดับปริญญาตรีในกรุงเทพมหานคร

EFFECTS OF TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION THROUGH ONLINE GAMES ON THE WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN BANGKOK

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ เพื่อศึกษาระดับของความเต็มใจในการสื่อสารเป็นภาษาอังกฤษของนิสิต นักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี ในกรุงเทพมหานคร หลังจากที่ได้รับการสอนแบบเน้นงานปฏิบัติผ่านเกมออนไลน์จำนวนเจ็ดครั้ง กลุ่มตัวอย่างของงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ประกอบด้วยนิสิตชั้นปีที่ 1 จำนวน 15 คน จากมหาวิทยาลัยรัฐบาลแห่งหนึ่งในกรุงเทพฯ ในภาคการศึกษาตอนปลาย ปีการศึกษา 2557 เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัย ได้แก่ แบบสอบถามความเต็มใจในการสื่อสารเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ จำนวน 2 ชุด โดยใช้สถิติเชิงบรรยายในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ความเต็มใจในการสื่อสารเป็นภาษาอังกฤษโดยรวมที่รับรู้โดยกลุ่มตัวอย่างในเกมออนไลน์ (M = 2.89, $S.D.$ = 0.18) มีระดับสูงกว่าในชั้นเรียน (M = 2.78, $S.D.$ = 0.22) เมื่อเปรียบเทียบระหว่างบริบทออนไลน์เกมและบริบทชั้นเรียน กลุ่มตัวอย่างระบุว่ามีความประสงค์ต่ำกว่าที่จะสื่อสารกับบุคคลใดโดยเฉพาะเจาะจง โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งกับผู้ที่มีตัวละครที่น่าดึงดูดทางกายภาพ (M = 2.27, $S.D.$ = 0.88) และเจ้าของภาษา (M = 2.13, $S.D.$ = 0.83) กลุ่มตัวอย่างยังระบุอีกว่าในเกมออนไลน์ผู้อื่นไม่สามารถเข้าใจพวกเขาได้เนื่องจากภาษาอังกฤษที่อ่อนด้อยของพวกเขา (M = 2.73, $S.D.$ = 0.59) และพวกเขายังรู้สึกกังวลใจกับการใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในเกมออนไลน์ (M = 2.67, $S.D.$ = 0.49)

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ISSN1905-4491

Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore the level of willingness to communicate in English of undergraduate students in Bangkok after receiving seven sessions of task-based instruction through online games. The participants of the study included fifteen first-year undergraduate students who studied in a public university in Bangkok in the second semester of the academic year 2014. The research instruments in this study were two sets of "willingness to communicate" questionnaires. The data was analyzed by descriptive statistics for mean scores and standard deviation.

The findings showed that the overall willingness to communicate in English as perceived by this group of participants was higher in the online game activities (M = 2.89, S.D. = 0.18) than in the normal classroom activities (M = 2.78, S.D. = 0.22). In comparison between the online gaming setting and the classroom context, the participants indicated that they had lower desire to communicate with a specific person, particularly with those whose avatars were physically attractive (M = 2.27, S.D. = 0.88) and with native speakers (M = 2.13, S.D. = 0.83). They also thought that, in online games, others could not understand them because of their poor English skills (M = 2.73, S.D. = 0.59), and they felt more nervous about using English in the online games (M = 2.67, S.D. = 0.49).

คำสำคัญ: การสอนแบบเน้นงานปฏิบัติ / เกมออนไลน์ / ความเต็มใจในการสื่อสาร

KEYWORDS: TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION / ONLINE GAMES / WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

Introduction

Thai students learn English as a foreign language (EFL) and being able to communicate in English well is considerably important for Thai EFL learners. However, communicating in English as a foreign language would involve a language that is unfamiliar to them and code-switching process (Edmondson, 2004).

Moreover, Thai EFL students are generally well-known for their passive nature when they are in classrooms. Kamprasertwong (as cited in Reinders & Wattana, 2011, 2012, 2014; Wattana, 2013) stated that they have a tendency to avoid interaction in English classroom altogether. Pattapong (2010) explained that this might be because of the code of behavior as a result of Thai cultural values. This point appears to be consistent with Knutson, Hwang, and Vivatananukul (1995) who found that Thai students are apprehensive about communication, even in their first language.

This is true as many undergraduate students encounter a problem with communication in English. Pattapong (2010) emphasized that, even at university level where English classrooms are more communication-oriented, Thai EFL learners are reluctant to use English for communication within English classroom. However, for EFL instructors, it would be more ideal that the students would seek opportunities to communicate in English in

order to practice what they have learned from the classroom. Rama, Black, van Es, and Warschauer (2012) advised that, by engaging in the communication, the students would be able to enhance their language skills -- basically reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Berns, Palomo-Duarte, Dodero, and Valero-Franco (2013) added that language practice is crucial in learning language.

Unfortunately, the reluctance and the avoidance to communicate in English, as well as the communication apprehension, of Thai EFL learners suggest the decrease in the language use (MacDonald, Clément, & MacIntyre, 2003), which in turn limits the possibility to improve their communicative competence (Knell & Chi, 2012), which includes linguistic competence, discourse competence, pragmatic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence.

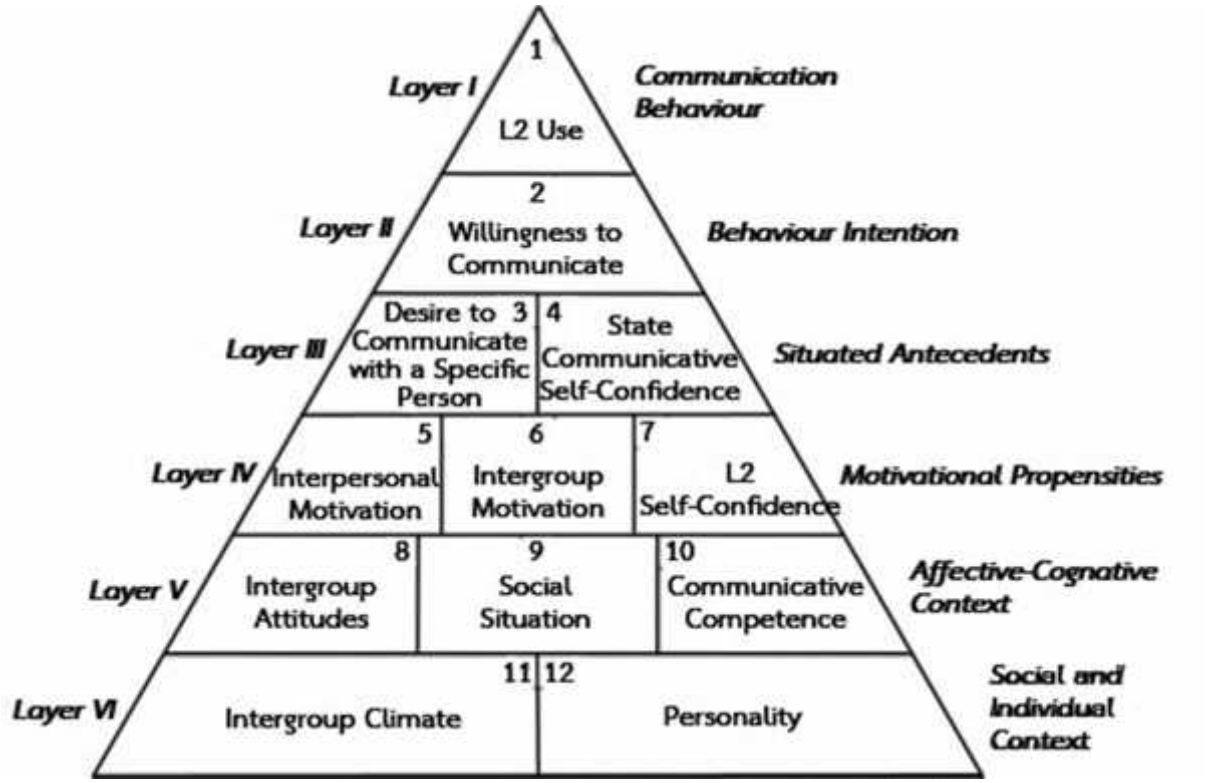
This study involved three main concepts which were discussed as follows:

Willingness to Communicate

The reluctance, avoidance, and communication apprehension are related to the concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) in second language as proposed by MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels (1998). This concept relates to the readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using the language unfamiliar to the speakers. However, WTC does not necessarily correspond with communicative competence or level of communicative ability (Brown, 2007; Dörnyei, 2003), meaning that students with low communicative ability might show higher level of WTC than students with higher ability. MacIntyre et al. (1998) also proposed that the main goal of language instruction should be to promote WTC. Brown (2007) and Kim (2004) added that WTC is one of many predictors of success in language learning.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) developed an influential model of L2 WTC based on McCroskey and Baer (1985) L1 WTC model. They illustrated the mental processes leading to actual language use in L2 with a six-layered pyramid diagram, containing twelve variables (see Figure 1). They further explained that the six layers represent two basic structures: the top three layers (I, II, and III) represent situational variables on WTC at a given specific time; and the lower three layers (IV, V, and VI) represent trait-like variables. The arrangement of the twelve variables in the model signifies the significance of situational variables over enduring variables.

Figure 1 *Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC in L2 (MacIntyre et al., 1998)*



MacIntyre et al. (1998) explained in details that Layer I in Figure 2 represents the L2 use (Box 1), which is not limited only to the productive skills, but also includes receptive skills, such as reading newspapers and listening to songs in L2. Layer II represents behavioral intention or *willingness to communicate* (Box 2), which can be both verbally and non-verbally. Layer III signifies two immediate antecedents influencing the WTC, which are *desire to communicate with a specific person* (Box 3) and *state communicative self-confidence* (Box 4). Desire to communicate with a specific person is influenced by two motives: affiliation and control. Affiliation is the need to form a relationship with the interlocutors, influenced by other motives, such as physical attractiveness of the interlocutors, similarity of the interlocutors, and familiarity with the interlocutors. Control is any task-related situations where interlocutors try to influence each other's behavior whether through requirement of assistance, cooperation, or services. State communicative self-confidence consisted of two key components: state perceived competence and state anxiety. State perceived competence refers to how ones view their capacity to communicate effectively at that specific moment. State anxiety is the temporary emotional reaction controlled by tension and apprehension. Note that two variables in Layer III are the most important immediate antecedents of WTC (MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996).

This study only focused on Layer II and III that were included in the WTC questionnaires to examine participants' perceptions on their WTC in English within two different learning contexts.

Another concept that the present study involved is online games, which was discussed below.

Online Games

It is generally known that online gaming is perceived rather negatively. At best, it is considered a non-productive activity (Techavimol & Walsh, 2011); at worst, it is labeled as a 'disruptive' activity (Thomas, 2012). In spite of the negative perspectives, during the past decades, educational values of online games have been of an interest of many advocates. It has been found that language learning can occur during online gaming, both intentionally and incidentally.

Sykes and Reinhardt (2013) proposed genres of games that have educational potentials, especially in language learning. This includes action games, adventure games, role-playing games, strategy games, and simulation and management games. Apart from these genres, there are also another two types of games that have been discussed: a) serious/education games, referring to the games in which education is the primary goal rather than entertainment (Michael & Chen, 2006); and b) vernacular/commercial off-the-shelf (COTs) games, which are games that are not designed for educational purposes (Reinhardt & Sykes, 2012; Sykes & Reinhardt, 2013). The genre selected for this study is a vernacular role-playing game, particularly massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), because many studies have revealed that MMORPGs can encourage the WTC among language learners by allowing more opportunities to communicate in the target language with other speakers of the language.

MMORPGs refer to highly graphical 2-D or 3-D games played online, allowing players to interact through their "avatars" with the non-player characters (NPCs) and other players (Steinkuehler, 2004, 2006, 2007; Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006). Steinkuehler (2004, 2006, 2007) further explained that "these virtual worlds are persistent social and material worlds loosely structured by open-ended fantasy narratives, where players are largely free to do as they please [such as] slay [monsters], siege castles, barter goods in town, or shake the fruit out of trees."

Lastly, the concept to be discussed below was task-based instruction.

Task-Based Instruction

Task-based instruction is an instructional approach which allows students to work at their own paces. It offers language learner control, freedom, and autonomy in their learning process while the teacher's role is defined as a helper (van Lier, 1996; Willis, 1996).

In addition, task-based instruction refers to an instructional approach that focuses on the authentic language use and performing tasks in the target language (Kongkaew, 2009). Nunan (1989) stated that task-based instruction was characterized in five features: 1) an emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language; 2) the use of authentic comprehensible materials into the learning; 3) the opportunities for learners to focus on both the language use and their learning process; 4) an enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences to classroom learning; and 5) an attempt to relate classroom language learning with activities outside the classroom.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), task-based instruction is an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. It could help the learners to promote learning language for communication. Nunan (2001) indicated that task-based instruction represents a particular realization of communicative language teaching. The instruction emphasizes what learners need in the real world, outside the classroom.

Willis (1996) suggested a framework, composing of three phases: pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. She claimed that her framework provides exposure, use, and motivation as three basic components. In brief, 'pre-task' phase initiates the topic and task, and introduces related language features that may help students in their learning. The 'task cycle' phase offers learners with an opportunity to use the target language to complete the task, usually in pairs, or small groups. After finishing the task, students prepare and report their work to the whole class, exchange their work, and/or compare the results. Teachers act as facilitators, offering guidance when needed. Students' exposure to the target language can be done during this phase instead of at the pre-task phase, depending on the task type. Finally, language focus phase is where learners investigate and discuss specific language features.

This study, hence, aimed to investigate the effects of task-based instruction through online games on willingness to communicate in English of undergraduate students in Bangkok. The focus of the study was the quantitative data collected from two sets of WTC questionnaires.

Objective

The purpose of this study was to explore the levels of willingness to communicate in English of the undergraduate students at a public university in Bangkok after receiving seven sessions of task-based instruction through online games.

Methodology

Population and Participants

The population of this study was the undergraduate students in Bangkok. As literatures stated that the undergraduate students encounter the problem with communication in English.

Employing a purposive sampling method to recruit volunteers for this study, the participants included fifteen first-year undergraduate English majors of the Faculty of Education, including eleven females and four males; six of them had prior experience with other online games. This research was self-funded by the researcher; hence, only fifteen participants could be supported. Also, due to the voluntary nature of sampling, the different numbers between female and male participants were uncontrollable.

In addition, the task-based instruction was given separately from the existing English grammar course they were taking at the time in the second semester; English grammar was chosen to be the topics for open-ended discussions during language focus phase so that the participants would find the benefits of participating in the research.

Research Instrument

The WTC questionnaires of Reinders and Wattana (2014) and Wattana (2013) were adapted because of the similar nature of the study. The questionnaires were already created based on the WTC model by MacIntyre et al. (1998). Nevertheless, the researcher added another variable into the questionnaires, namely the desire to communicate with a specific person.

The purpose of the first set of WTC questionnaires was to investigate the WTC in English of the undergraduate students in the English classrooms to settle the baseline of their WTC in English; the second set was to measure WTC in English within the online gaming environment during task-based instruction through online games. The participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement to 25 statements on a 4-point scale to eliminate neutral responses (1=Highly unwilling/strongly disagree, 2=Somewhat unwilling/disagree, 3=Somewhat willing/agree, and 4=Highly willing/strongly agree). The

items of the WTC questionnaires were subjected to reliability analysis indicating a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .760 for the first set and of .789 for the second set.

Moreover, the researcher translated the two sets of WTC questionnaires into Thai and had a professional translator translated all texts back into English. The originals were compared to the English translation by two native speakers: an Australian and an American. This was to check the consistency of the meaning between the translated documents and the original texts. Both native speakers agreed that the translated texts and the original ones conveyed the same meanings; hence, there was no revision of the Thai translated version.

Data Collection

At the beginning of the research, the first set of WTC questionnaires was administered to the students to explore the baseline of their level of WTC in English in the classroom context. The second set of the WTC questionnaires was administered to the students at the completion of the task-based instruction through online games to evaluate their WTC in English after a task-based instruction through online games.

Data Analysis

Mean scores and standard deviations were used to analyze the data collected from the two sets of WTC questionnaires for the level of WTC of the participants in different contexts, using statistical analysis software.

Results

The findings of the study were summarized into the differences between the levels of WTC in English in classroom setting and online gaming environment as perceived by the participants. Given that the mean scores should be more than 2.5 to signify positive interpretation, according to Wattana (2013), the results were discussed as follows:

Difference between WTC in English in Classroom Setting

Table 1

Participants' Levels of WTC in English in the Classroom and in Online Game (N = 15)

Statements	Classroom		Online Game	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Willingness to Communicate in English				
1. I talk to my classmates about the assignments/tasks.	3.07	0.46	3.33	0.49
2. I communicate my ideas, feelings, and opinions in English.	2.93	0.59	3.33	0.49
3. I ask for clarification in English when I am confused about the task I must complete.	2.87	0.64	2.80	0.41
4. I read the English instructions/explanations before starting the assigned task.	3.13	0.35	3.13	0.35
5. I listen to/read what my classmates say in English.	3.20	0.56	3.47	0.52
Desire to Communicate with a Specific Person				
6. I desire to talk in English to those who are physically attractive.	2.47	0.74	2.27	0.88
7. I desire to talk in English to the person I am familiar with.	3.53	0.52	3.27	0.46
8. I desire to talk in English to native speakers only.	2.47	0.74	2.13	0.83
9. I desire to talk in English to those who can help me.	3.07	0.59	2.93	0.46
10. I desire to talk in English to those who have the same level of English competency as me.	2.93	0.59	2.60	0.74
11. I desire to talk in English to others to form a relationship with them.	2.87	0.64	3.07	0.46

Table 1 *(continued)*

Statements	Classroom		Online Game	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Desire to Communicate with a Specific Person				
12. I desire to talk in English to others to request help/assistance.	2.80	0.56	3.00	0.66
13. I desire to talk in English to others to ask questions.	2.93	0.46	3.13	0.52
14. I desire to talk in English to others to give advice/ suggestions.	2.67	0.49	3.07	0.46
15. I desire to talk in English to others to command them to follow my instructions.	2.60	0.51	3.00	0.38

State Communicative Self-Confidence				
16. I find it difficult to communicate in English.*	2.40	0.63	2.47	0.64
17. I can say what I want to say in English.	2.73	0.46	3.00	0.38
18. I think others cannot understand me because of my poor English.*	2.47	0.52	2.73	0.59
19. I know the words required for each communication.	2.73	0.46	2.53	0.52
20. I think participating in English activities help me develop my English skills (i.e. with little hesitation and pauses).	3.20	0.41	3.07	0.59
21. I am not worried about making mistakes in English.	2.40	0.63	2.80	0.68
22. I am worried that I will not understand what others say in English.*	2.27	0.59	2.40	0.63
23. I feel nervous about using English when participating in activities.*	2.13	0.35	2.67	0.49
24. I feel comfortable sharing my ideas/feelings/opinions in English with others.	2.87	0.74	3.27	0.46
25. I generally find communicating in English relaxing.	2.67	0.62	2.80	0.56
Total	**2.78**	**0.22**	**2.89**	**0.18**

*Note: *Responses for these items were reversed.*

In response to research objective, Table 1 shows that the overall willingness to communicate in English as perceived by this group of participants was higher in the online game (*M* = 2.89, *S.D.* = 0.18) than in the classrooms (*M* = 2.78, *S.D.* = 0.22). The participants reported that they were more willing to communicate in English in three communication tasks in online gaming environment than in the classrooms, namely listening to/reading what their classmates say in English (Item 5) (*M* =3.47, *S.D.* 0.52), talking to their classmates about the assignments/tasks (Item 1) (*M* = 3.33, *S.D.* = 0.49), and communicating their ideas, feelings, and opinions in English (Item 2) (*M* = 3.33, *S.D.* = 0.49). Interestingly, their willingness to read English instructions/explanations before starting the assigned tasks (Item 4) was the same in classroom and online game (*M* =3.13, *S.D.* = 0.35). Surprisingly, they reported that they were more willing to ask for clarification in English when they were confused about something (Item 3) in classrooms than in online game (*M* = 2.87, *S.D.* = 0.64).

Concerning desire to communicate with a specific person, all interlocutor-related desire items (Item 6 – 10) were lower in online gaming environment than in classroom context. The participants indicated that they did not desire to communicate with those who were physically attractive (*M* = 2.47, *S.D.* = 0.74) and with native speakers (*M* = 2.47, *S.D.* =

0.74) in the classrooms. They even desire less to communicate with native speakers (*M* = 2.13, *S.D.* = 0.83) and those whose avatars were physically attractive (*M* = 2.27, *S.D.* = 0.88). On the other hand, they desired to communicate with those who they were familiar with (*M* = 3.53, *S.D.* = 0.52), those who can offer them assistance (*M* = 3.07, *S.D.* = 0.59), and those who had the same level of competency (*M* = 2.93, *S.D.* = 0.59) in the classrooms more than in the online game.

In relations to purpose-related desire to communicate with a specific person, all five items (Item 11 – 15) were higher in an online game than in the classrooms. They desired to communicate in English to ask questions (*M* = 3.13, *S.D.* = 0.52), to form a relationship and to give advice or suggestions (*M* = 3.07, *S.D.* = 0.46), as well as to ask for help (*M* = 3.00, *S.D.* = 0.66) and to give command to others (*M* = 3.00, *S.D.* = 0.38) in the online game more than in the classrooms.

Moreover, four items on state perceived competence (Item 16, 18, 19, and 20) were signified to be more troublesome in online gaming environment than in the classroom setting. In details, the participants revealed that they though that participating in classroom activities helped them develop their English skills (*M* = 3.20, *S.D.* = 0.41) more than in online game. They also thought that in online game others could not understand them because of their poor English (*M* = 2.73, *S.D.* = 0.59). Similarly, they felt that they knew words required for each communication in classrooms (*M* = 2.73, *S.D.* = 0.46) more than in online game. However, they did not find it more difficult to communicate in online game (*M* = 2.47, *S.D.* = 0.64) and they felt that they could say what they wanted to say in English within online gaming environment (*M* = 3.00, *S.D.* = 0.38) more than in classroom context.

Lastly, concerning state anxiety, the participants reported that they felt more comfortable sharing their ideas, feelings, or opinions (*M* = 3.27, *S.D.* = 0.46) in online game than in classrooms. In addition, they were not worried about making mistakes (*M* = 2.80, *S.D.* = 0.68) in online game as much as in classrooms and they found communicating in English was more relaxing (*M* = 2.80, *S.D.* = 0.56) in online game than in classrooms. Although they were not worried that they would not understand what others said in online game (*M* = 2.40, *S.D.* = 0.63), they reported that they felt more nervous about using English (*M* = 2.67, *S.D.* = 0.49) in online gaming setting than in classroom context.

Discussion and Recommendation for Future Research

Based on the results from both sets of WTC questionnaires, the findings suggested that a task-based instruction through online games could improve students' willingness to communicate in English, despite the slightness of improvement.

The results from the first set of WTC questionnaires revealed that this group of participants claimed to be slightly willing to communicate in English in the classroom context. It could imply that this group of undergraduate students had some intention to participate in English communication if they were required to do so. However, they were unlikely to seek opportunities to practice the language on their own. The assumption was consistent with Kamprasertwong's (as cited in Reinders & Wattana, 2011, 2012, 2014; Wattana, 2013) claim that Thai EFL students are generally well-known to be passive in the classrooms. Also, this could relate to the findings by Jongsermtrakoon (2009) in Thailand, Kim (2004) in Korea, and Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) in Japan that EFL learners do not use English in their daily life; hence, the limited exposure to the language in their respective countries can affect their WTC in English.

It should also be noted that the participants were positive in all aspects contributing to WTC in English. In details, they perceived themselves as being willing to participate in communication tasks in the classroom context, having a positive desire to communicate with a specific person, having a positive state perceived competence, and having a low state anxiety when communicating in the classrooms, using English.

On the contrary, the results from the second set of WTC questionnaires showed that the participants' level of WTC in English was slightly higher in online gaming context than in the classroom. This finding was congruent with Reinders and Wattana (2014) and Wattana (2013) that students' willingness to communicate in English appeared to be higher in online games than in the classrooms. However, this group of participants was less willing to ask for clarification when they were confused about something. This might be the result of their nervousness about using English within the online game, which contradicted with Reinders and Wattana (2014) and Wattana (2013). When asked, they stated that they were self-conscious about what they typed in the chat window. They thought that if they made mistakes or typos, everything would stay in the chat window and everyone could see it. Although they indicated that they were not worried about making mistakes, they were still conscious about it.

Additionally, since this study investigated an additional variable influencing WTC in English, it was also discovered that this group of participants had a lower interlocutor-related desire to communicate with a specific person in online games than in the classrooms. This could be assumed that the attractiveness and the familiarity of interlocutors did not affect much when their identities were hidden behind their avatars; while, in the classrooms, the identities of interlocutors were more observable.

The findings generated some recommendations for the further study as follows.

Firstly, it is recommended that a larger group of participants with a variety of genders, game literacy, and English competency levels should be investigated for a better understanding of the effectiveness of the task-based instruction through online games. It would also be interesting to employ the same methodology with other groups of students who are inexperienced with online gaming and have low willingness to communicate in English, together with a control group to compare the progress with.

Finally, the use of modifiable games is highly recommended. As online games can offer students a low-anxiety context to communicate in the target language, the game contents that are comprehensible and related to their life can also enhance their learning. Besides, the game contents designed by the teachers can develop other language skills of the students as well.

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