Quantifying Factors Affecting Willingness to Communicate in English: Understanding Young Learners at Perhentian Island

Ahmad Shidki Mat Yusoff[1] ✉ iD
Muhamad Sidek Said[2] iD
Haslina Hanapi[3] iD
Azman Mohamed Nor[4] iD
Harwati Hashim[5] iD

(✉ Corresponding Author)

[1,2,3,4]*Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Sultan Mizan, Besut, Malaysia.*
[1]*Email: shidki@ipgmksm.edu.my*
[2]*Email: sidek@ipgmksm.edu.my*
[3]*Email: haslinahanapi@ipgmksm.edu.my*
[4]*Email: azmanmn@ipgmksm.edu.my*
[5]*Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia.*
[5]*Email: harwati@ukm.edu.my*

Abstract

Perhentian Island is a renowned islands by the locals and the tourists around the world. The island receives a high number of tourists every year. The high number of tourism activities has influenced the English communication skills among the locals who are using their own local dialect as a medium of communication. Nevertheless, based on the school yearly assessment, the proficiency among the pupils in the one and only school in Perhentian Island did not show any significant effect. It has brought up the question of how much the tourism activities could influence the English proficiency of the pupils. This research investigated the pupils' willingness to communicate in English as a Second Language by applying the variables extracted from Theory Reason Action (TRA) and the variables from willingness to communicate (WTC). The respondents involved in this research (N=107) were the pupils at the Perhentian Island. The findings showed that the willingness of communication in L2 has influenced the pupils' attitude and behavior in using English language during the school hours. The results reveal that perceived attitude is the main factor that influenced pupils' readiness in Perhentian Island to communicate in English as a second language. The implications of the results and future research directions are also discussed.

Keywords: L2, English Communication, Perhentian Island, Tourism, Readiness, Theory Reason Action (TRA), willingness to communicate (WTC).

Contents

Contribution of this paper to the literature
This study contributes to the existing literature by investigating pupils' willingness to communicate in English as a Second Language (ESL). The variables used in this study were extracted from Theory Reason Action (TRA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC).

1. Introduction

In the past two decades, willingness to communicate (WTC) have been studied extensively. In conjunction to producing a product competent to the world's dynamic levels, the Malaysian government has introduced education as one of the National Key Result Area (NKRA). The education NKRA is the benchmark for a better performance among students around the country to receive the best quality education possible. Despite the attempt by the Ministry of Education to strengthen the country's education, chances for the pupils to have access to a quality education are still at stake. This is due to an environmental gap in which those in remote areas are the least likely to experience this.

The English language in Malaysia is taught as early as in Malaysian pre-school education. Students are introduced to the English language as early as four to five years old. This was then to be continued until secondary levels. Nevertheless, the exposure of the language is different between each student. In some regions and cultures, children are exposed to active and passive communication. There are also children who refused to keep updated with English language classes which nonetheless may improve their performance.

There have been several studies in the literature reporting about English willingness. Early studies by Wang (2018) stated "many students don't like to take English classes, which leads to a lot of sleeping students in the class and even many students skipping classes, as a result the exam results are a complete mess". Huttenlocher, Levine, and Vevea (1998) mentioned that the children's language skills broaden during school time rather than when they were outside. It is unarguable that parents are the main source of language experience for many of the children and each of the adults have big impacts for the variation of experience. Might as well the social environment that revolves around the children be it in the house or school gives the same impacts and influence. These social contexts nonetheless support the language acquisition among children in many ways.

Social environments as such tourism activities gives a mere influence to the children's language acquisition. Loganathan (2004) relates the life of island settlers with the environment and nature such as the ocean and the existence of tourist from the locals and foreign countries. In the language context, this matter has caught the attention of researchers like (Gallaway & Richards, 1994) who suggested the literature relating to the language expansion alongside with the environment should be investigated. The local research by Hazita (2004) presented that the low exposure of English language among the pupils can be related to the attitude, geographical and ethnical factors. Stapa, Bakar, and Latiff (2017) studied the pupils' performance in written English and found that they were at intermediate to below target among the pupils in remote areas.

Malaysia has endorsed English language as a second language like it has been stated in the Article 153 of the Constitution of Malaysia. Nevertheless, after 11 years in school, the levels of English language acquisition are not satisfactory (Jalaluddin, Norsimah, & Kesumawati, 2008). Research studies have yielded consistent results suggesting that learners, particularly Asian learners, are unwilling to participate orally (Peng, 2014). This is due to the environment and experience where the communication happened. According to the massive local and foreign tourists to Taman Laut Island at Perhentian Island and Redang Island, the number of tourists from the year 2014 (63 998) to the year 2017 (107 442) have shown an obvious increase.

To date, such an investigation does not seem to have been performed yet, to look into the social supports' responses among the pupil's in Perhentian Island social environment in conjunction with the pupils' willingness to communicate as a process in acquiring the language. The current study therefore addressed this gap.

2. Theory and Hypotheses Development

The following is a framework of research based on literature review see Figure 1.

A. Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

Willingness to communicate (WTC) has been counted as a benchmark to start a communication process. It is basically oriented to the communication acquisition and social support that will influence the pupils' readiness to learn the second language (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001). In the research context, this has shown to be the readiness of a person to take action or accepting one's behavior (Ajzen, 2001; Djumingin & Weda, 2019; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Kamaruddin, Rosli, Hamid, Hamzah, & Salleh, 2019; Yang, 2019). The harder the will power of oneself to do something, the higher the readiness for them to keep on trying and the higher the passion for them to act on something. According to an investigation by Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) they have proven that WTC is a useful variable to measure second language communication.

MacIntyre et al. (2001) revised WTC as the first step before research on oral behavior is taken more seriously. This is a psychology process or a silent variable (latent) that is being fully observed. A study has also been done by MacIntyre et al. (2001) to inspect how the orientation and social supports affects WTC inside and outside of the classroom. Yashima et al. (2004) proved that WTC shows a relationship between the usage of second language and inside and outside of the classroom.
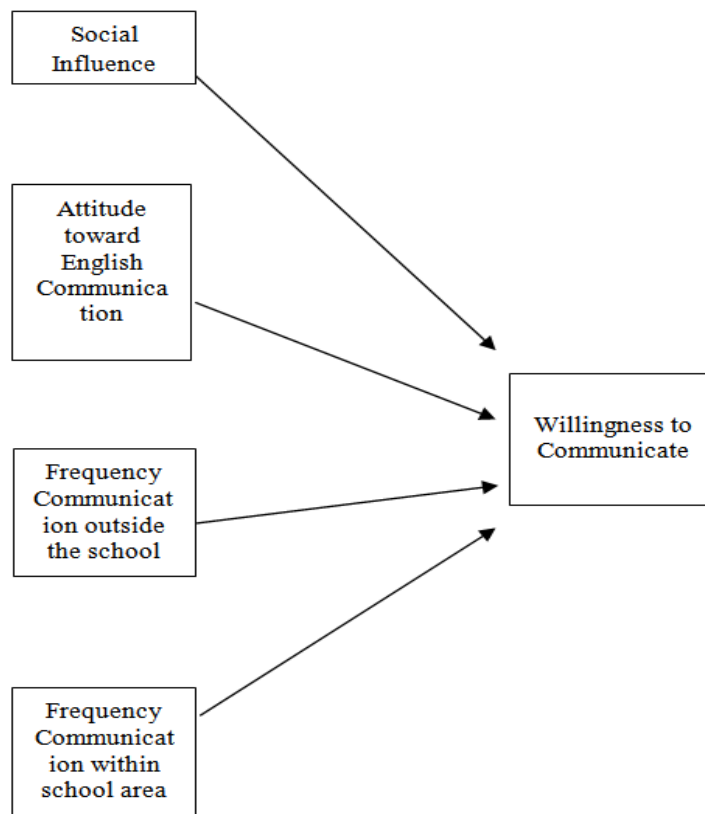
Figure-1. Research Framework.
Source: Willingness to communicate (WTC) (Maclntyre. et al., 2001).

B. Social Influence (SI)

The social influence is referring to how far can an individual approves social pressure or a prediction to get themselves involve in few behaviors and felt the urge to withstand pressures (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This study used social influences as such peers, families, colleagues and even mass media as an important role to persuade students to use the English language.

Social context is pictured as a system that revolves around children (Hoff, 2006). Social context includes school, children's care and peer groups. There are various social functions in an organization. A number of studies have found that (Ferris & Mitchell, 1987; Prestholdt, Lane, & Mathews, 1987) social influence has an important impact on many behavioral actions.

Therefore, social environment supports are needed for the pupils to learn second language and can be used to widen communications alongside by motivating them to do it by themselves. Crago, Allen, and Hough-Eyamie (1997) stated that it is potent for the pupils to take part in or to have conversations and a close interaction with other pupils as well. This is because pupils can acquire language in different social environments. In a certain culture, children converse at the very least with each other while in a certain regional culture, these children can be seen actively participating in a conversation even with the adults (Hoff, 2006).

In the TRA model, social influence is counted as a support from people around that is said to have an important impact to oneself. Lu, Yao, and Yu (2005) stated that the challenges and strategies for that social influence in a form of subjective norms and image can damage one's assessments on a prediction. If this language is socially impossible to be used and learned by an individual, it then will possibly make it hard to change their performance.

The subjective norm is referred to as the social pressure of an individual on a certain behavior and it is an important factor in Theory Reasoned Action (TRA). The social system that has no function to build power will be a reason why pupils are less interested to learn English language

Regarding the social influence of a predicament to involve oneself in a communication behavior and passion to follow the pressure, social influence nonetheless has a mere influence on pupils' behavior. The research by Maclntyre et al. (2001) checked on how the orientation and social supports influence WTC in the inside and outside of the classroom (Yashima et al., 2004). In regard with the latter, below are the hypotheses that follow:

H1: Social Influence has a positive effect on the willingness of communication among the pupils.

H2: The frequency of communication in school has a positive effect towards the willingness to communicate among pupils.

H3: The frequency of communication outside of school has a positive effect towards the willingness to communicate among pupils.

C. Attitude (A)

Attitude is defined as the tendency to react positively or negatively on one thing such as ideas, objects, humans or situations (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013). In the study's context, pupils' attitude towards language is classified as free variables towards the readiness to communicate among pupils in English as a second language.

In the context of learning English language as a second or foreign language, studies have found that the attitude influences one's desire to learn English (Alhamami, 2018; Brown, 2000) and comprehend English texts (Ghaith & Bouzeineddine, 2003). Therefore, it is predicted that a positive attitude towards English may help an individual to learn it.

Traindis (2009) has stated that attitude is the most vital aspects in attitude and human's knowledge that will cater reactions towards an event, objects, or humans. It is thus a trial to judge something and is influenced by experience, beliefs, or individual conceptions. Hobson (1996) mentioned that gender is one of the aspects of how one behaves. Attitude is said to be supporting or not supporting to oneself, places, or events (Sekaquaptewa, Espinoza, Thompson, Vargas, & von Hippel, 2003).

The study that focuses on language attitude in a learning second or foreign language context was by Gardner and Lambert (1959); Gardner and Lambert (1972) who are psychologists from Canada. They divided the language into two which are integrative orientation and instrumental orientation. Integrative orientation refers to "readiness or desire to be a language community volunteers while instrumental orientation is referred as "desire to gain social acceptance or economic advantages through the knowledge about foreign language. In other words, integrative orientation is very relevant to the interest in forming individual relationship with the targeted speaker of a language while instrumental orientation is related to the practical profits. Gardner and Lambert (1972) found that whether it is positive or negative, language attitude may affect motivation or even performance of a language.

This study used a theory by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). The WTC concept that was used in the pyramid model (Macintyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998) is consistent with Ajzen and Fishbein (1980); Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). It is a concept that it is more general about the desired attitude. The desired attitude theory is pictured in the renowned Theory Action Research (TRA) and Theory Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). In TRA, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) suggested that the attitude itself is set by the desire of an action with the two factors that is combined to set one's desire to get involved in an action; personal factors (attitude towards the action) and social factors (subjective norms).

The suggested hypothesis below is:

H4: Attitude has a positive effect towards the willingness of pupils to communicate in English.

3. Methodology

Using quantitative approaches, the paper explored the relative importance of factors affecting pupils' willingness to communicate in English as a second language (L2). The appointed research method was chosen for the study because it is suitable with the study objectives to collect and explain the changes of students' communication skills in a remote area. Several researchers have recently investigated various aspects related to L2 research. Al-Hoorie and Vitta (2019) highlighted the need to quantitative knowledge in the second language (L2) field.

Random samples technique was used to make sure students were in level 1 and 2. The estimated sample size that was needed for this study is set through G*power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007; Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) by looking through the total free variables that were used in the study. The calculation of the sample size steps were as follows: $f2 = 0.15$ (medium), $\alpha = 0.05$ and estimated numbers = 3 as well as the set-up powers 80% (Gefen, Straub, & Rigdon, 2011). By using this formula, the sample size needed to test the model was 77 respondents. Nevertheless, 107 samples were collected.

A set of questionnaires consisting of two parts - Part A and Part B - . The readiness to communicate in English language was adapted from WTC (Weaver, 2005) English language usage frequency was adapted from Actual Use (Martínez-Torres et al., 2008; Teo, 2011) attitude (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and social influence from Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). The questionnaires used were marked and endorsed by an expert that has the qualifications and experience as a lecturer involved in assessments in English Language. These experts were to answer all items and were told to give feedback from the aspects of literal meaning, language, and time. After the review, there were items that were removed and added. A pre-test was done by the researchers to elevate the research qualities. Pre-tests can be used to escalate the data quality and the reliability and validity of an instrument. Grimm (2010) has stated that pre-testing should be considered a critical step when collecting data via a survey. The use of emoji for the instruments was exchanged for a 5 point Likert scale. The use of emoji based on Kaye, Malone, and Wall (2017) was said to reduce linkers confusion.

4. Analysis and Results

The researcher conducted a few data limitation tests such as straight lining, missing value and outliers. An essential consideration in quantitative research is checking that the necessary assumptions are satisfied to determine whether parametric tests are appropriate. Through the checking, there were a few questionnaires that could not be used for certain issues. Some of the issues were inconsistency and straight lining phenomena that happened among the respondents. This phenomenon happened when a respondent ticks off the same answer to the almost every part of the questionnaires (Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, & Hair Jr, 2014).

The results for skewness and kurtosis showed that the data was normal as the average suggested (univariate skewness < 2, kurtosis < 7) (Curran, West, & Finch, 1996). The data was then examined by using a multivariate assessment through the mahalanobis test to verify multivariate outliers. The study used 4 variables, with a chi square critical value (18.47). The analysis that used mahalanobis distance was less than 18.47 (10.917) thus, there were no multivariate outliers detected.

The collected data through the sets of questionnaires was processed by using the Science Social Statistics Package (22.0 version) and the technique of Partial Lease Square (PLS). To date, very few studies have examined the PLS-SEM to fulfill the study objectives.

A. Measurement Model Analysis

Reliability and validity have been of major concern in the quantitative research design. In L2 research, reliability has usually been emphasized, while validity considerations have been somewhat overlooked (Al-Hoorie & Vitta, 2019).

To assess the measurement model two types of validity were examined: the convergent validity and the discriminant validity.

Table-1. Measurement model of student readiness to use English in communication.

Contruct	Item	Convergent Validity		Internal Consistency Reliability	Discriminant Validity	
		Cross Loading >0.5	AVE >0.5	Composite Relibility >0.60-0.90	HTMT Confidence Interval does not include 1	VIF <5.00
Perceived Attitude	3	0.720-0.837	0.590	0.811	Yes	1.332
Perceived Social Influence	6	0.690-0.734	0.509	0.838	Yes	1.290
Frecuency of Communication (Within School)	1	1.000	1.000	1.000	Yes	1.085
Frecuency of Communication (Outside School)	1	1.000	1.000	1.000	Yes	1.125
WTC	4	0.606-0.785	0.531	0.818	Yes	

Table 1 presents an overview of the results in our sample. To assess the psychometric properties of the measurement, the researchers analyzed the validity and reliability of the scale according to the recommendation by Bagozzi and Yi (1988); Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Hulland (1999) namely evaluating (1) reliability, (2) the validity converges and (3) the validity of the discriminant. Thus, the analysis model used in this study involved checking the reliability, validity converge and the validity of the discriminant (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

B. Convergent Validity

The convergent validity of the measurement is usually ascertained by examining the loadings, average variance extracted (AVE) and also the composite reliability (Gholami, Sulaiman, Ramayah, & Molla, 2013). The loadings were all higher than 0.708, the composite reliabilities were all higher than 0.7 and the AVE of all constructs were also higher than 0.5 as Table 1 indicates (see Table 1 and Figure 2).

C. Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)

Discriminant validity is the extent to which the construct is truly distinct from other constructs, providing the evident that the construct is unique and capture some phenomena that others constructs do not (Hair, Anderson, Babin, & Black, 2010). There has been a recent criticism of that the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion do not reliably detect the lack of discriminant validity in common research situations (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). Through literature review, there is an alternative approach, based on the matrix multitrait-multimethod, to assess the discriminant validity of heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT). There is a new suggested method to use HTMT to assess discriminant validity. If the HTMT is greater than the value of 0.85 (Kline, 2011) or the value of 0.90 (Gold, Malhotra, & Segars, 2001) it shows the existence of discriminant validity problem. All the values passed the HTMT0.90 (Gold et al., 2001) and also the HTMT0.85 (Kline, 2011) shown in Table 2 indicating that discriminant validity has been ascertained.

Table-2. Result of Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio).

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5
1.Perceived Attitude					
2.Frecuency of Communication (Outside School)	0.649				
3.Perceived Social Influence	0.085	0.183			
4.Frecuency of Communication (Within School)	0.240	0.278	0.086		
5.Willingness to Communicate	0.685	0.142	0.419	0.105	

As suggested by Gadermann, Guhn, and Zumbo (2012) we did not use Cronbach's alpha for the reliability contrast as it was not appropriate for the PLS-SEM. The average variance extracted (AVE) equal or more 0.50 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988) of the constructs and the factor loadings more 0.4 (Hulland, 1999) was considered as the measure for convergent validity. The square root values of AVE and the correlations between the constructs were compared to check the discriminant validity.
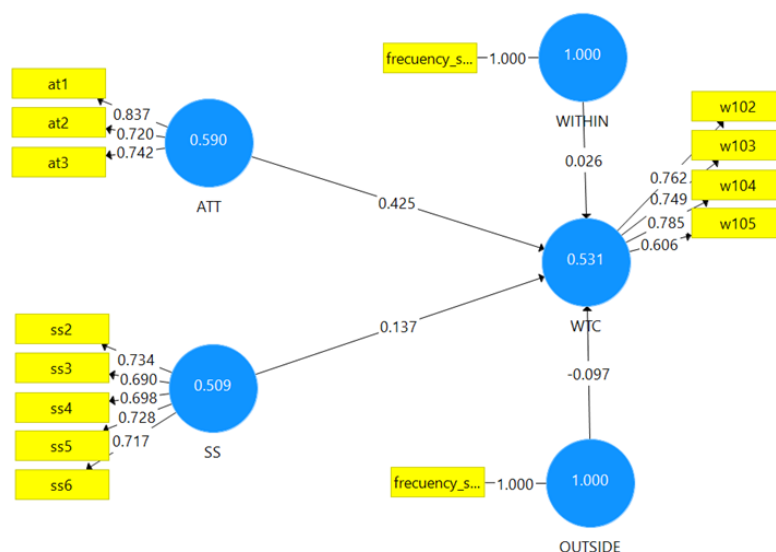

Figure-2. Measurement model.

4.1. Structural Model Analysis

Next, we looked at the predictive effects on the WTC. Perceived attitude (β= 0.425, t= 3.364, p< 0.01, f2= 0.181) was significant while Perceived social influence (β= 0.137, t= 0.948, p< 0.05, f2= 0.019), frequency of communication within school (β= 0.026, t=0.341, p< 0.05, f2= 0.001) and frequency of communication outside of school (β= -0.097, t=1.065, p< 0.05, f2= 0.011) were insignificant predictor of usage communication explaining 24.8% of the variance in usage. The findings supported H1 while H2, H3 and H4 were not supported see Figure 3.
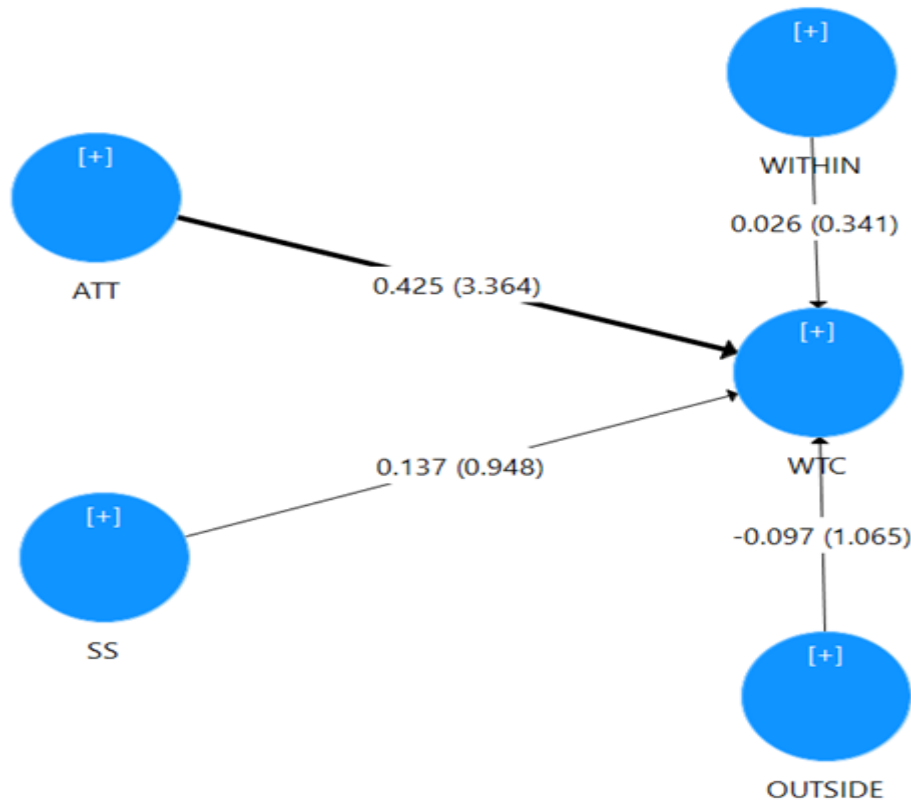

Figure-3. Bootstrapping Results.

The hypotheses and summaries of the results of variables can be seen in Table 3.

Table-1. Hypotheses and summary of results.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Beta	t-value	Decision	VIF	R2	Q2	f2
H1	ATT >WTC	0.425	3.364	Supported	1.332	0.248	0.239	0.181
H2	SS > WTC	0.137	0.948	Not Supported	1.290			0.019
H3	COM_WITHIN> WTC	0.026	0.341	Not Supported	1.085			0.001
H4	COM_OUTSIDE> WTC	-0.097	1.065	Not Supported	1.125			0.011

4.2. Hypotheses Testing Results

To assess the structural model, Hair, Thomas, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2017) suggested looking at the R2, beta (β) and the corresponding t-values via a bootstrapping procedure with a resample of 5,000. They also suggested that in addition to these basic measures researchers should also report the predictive relevance (Q2) as well as the effect sizes (f2). Effect size reporting has therefore been stressed by L2 methodologists in recent years (e.g. Larson-Hall and Plonsky (2015). Hahn and Ang (2017) have summarized some of the recommended rigor in reporting results in quantitative studies which includes the use of replication studies, the use of effect size estimates and confidence intervals, or alternatively use Bayes factors (see Dienes (2014)). As suggested, the effect sizes and confidence intervals were included in Table 3.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was designed to determine the effect of variables of Theory Reason Action to student willingness to communicate. The findings were two-fold.

Firstly, we developed TRA and borrowed the variables of perceived WTC with adding usage communication within and outside school to the model. Our findings showed that perceived attitude predicted WTC. The finding was consistent with findings of past studies by Ghazvini and Khajehpour (2011); Ming, Ling, and Jaafar (2011). Personal factors were the most influenced factors for an individual to learn a language. If the students have a positive attitude such as having an awareness about how important the language learned is, they will try to master the language in any way possible (Nasir & Hamzah, 2014).

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study was that perceived attitude is important in driving WTC. The current findings add substantially to our understanding of school to expend self-potential in students by exposing them with language attitude. This attitude somehow is critical because it has an effect towards the student's attitude through teacher's factor. Researchers like (Bradley, Waliczek, & Zajicek, 1999; Summers, 2000; Tatar, 1998)) have shown that teachers' attitude, knowledge and action towards the environment can influence students' attitude. Attitudes towards a language are dependent on several factors, among which are the learner's mother tongue (Baker, 1992; Lasagabaster, 2003) and attendance to language classes (Huguet & Llurda, 2001). Therefore, attitude has a massive impact on how far and fast the students can master and learn it.

Surprisingly, perceived social influence was not found to be a significant predictor of WTC. This finding can

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possibly be attributed to the profile of the respondents that consists of young pupils, the pupils who grew up with unique environment, hence presumably they are very quick to adapt and learn language compared to the older generation of user's.

This research has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation. Further work needs to be done to establish whether the social environmental influence affects the remote area students on Perhentian Island. More studies are needed to have better understanding when implementation ends by looking at the social influence coming from the volunteers, tourism, and the community support on the use of English language among the students.

Our second contribution was the application of a confirmatory analysis using PLS (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015a; Dijkstra. & Henseler, 2015b) and to illustrate clearly how to do the analysis and report the findings. Other researchers who plan to use PLS to do analysis can follow the process shown in this paper. School is an environment where students listen and learn the language through experience. Besides their home environment it is the most affected social environment as they will spend much of their childhood in school on a daily basis. The social influence context on the island was less supportive to the English language awareness. This was due to the use of English inside and outside of the classroom being different. Parents are the main source of students' experiences and this may be the least effective to be compared to them having contact with the tourist rather than at home. Regardless, the attitude towards learning English language was better seen in school rather than when they were outside the school environment.

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