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Willingness to Communicate and the Transfer to Real-World Language Use Among Long-Term Residents

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Abstract: This study investigates factors affecting willingness to communicate (WTC) in English as a second language among English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students, both inside and outside the classroom. Adopting a cross-sectional, retrospective qualitative design, data were collected using pre-interview questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 13 EAP students at an Australian university who are long-term residents planning to study, work, and settle there. Findings indicate that, although personality plays a role, psychological and contextual/environmental factors within and beyond the classroom are instrumental in shaping students' WTC. Drawing on Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST), the study conceptualizes these factors as dynamically interpenetrating forces operating across multiple timescales, rather than as a fixed hierarchy of traits. The study explores the transfer of WTC from the classroom to real-world contexts, providing evidence that fostering WTC requires more than linguistic instruction: it necessitates addressing students' affective needs, acknowledging the sociocultural challenges they face, and creating supportive, low-pressure environments that prepare them for academic, professional and social communication. The implication is that EAP pedagogy should transcend traditional linguistic instruction to prioritise learner agency through structured metacognitive cycles incorporating goal-setting, visualisation, and post-task reflection. Informed by CDST, programs should treat the classroom as a dynamic system in which psychological safety and contextual affordances are actively cultivated to support the transfer of WTC beyond the classroom, using it as a safe space to process real-world communicative challenges through non-threatening feedback, thereby bridging the gap between classroom confidence and the high-stakes social integration required in resettlement contexts.

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Keywords: Willingness to communicate (WTC), L2 use; English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English as a Second Language (ESL), complex dynamic systems theory (CDST), long-term residents

The construct L2 Willingness to Communicate (WTC) describes the final step before a person engages in real spoken communication with an interlocutor in the target language (L2) (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Over previous decades, many studies have explored the factors influencing WTC, with much of the focus placed on students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context (Alenezi, 2020; Başöz & Erten, 2019; Burgoon, 1976; Karnchanachari, 2019; Peng, 2012, 2025) or those participating in short-term study abroad programs (Cao, 2014; Davies et al., 2025). These environments, while valuable, often present language learning situations that differ considerably from the experiences of students in more immersive English as a Second Language (ESL) settings such as long-term residents (henceforth LTRs).

Recent scholarship has expanded the field in two significant directions. First, it has increasingly recognised that WTC among immigrant and refugee populations operates according to a fundamentally different logic than has been documented in EFL classrooms or short-term study abroad contexts. Henry and MacIntyre (2023) argue that for adult immigrants, WTC is inseparable from identity negotiation, community norms, and the perceived social costs of communicative participation. Unlike short-term sojourners whose communicative goals are temporally bounded, LTRs view long-term integration into the host society as a life objective; their WTC therefore directly shapes their access to social networks, employment, and education. Despite the critical importance of this population, empirical research specifically targeting LTRs enrolled in EAP programs remains sparse, and existing frameworks have not been adequately tested in this context (Cameron, 2020; Henry et al., 2024).

Second, and relatedly, researchers have increasingly questioned whether the foundational pyramid model of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998) provides an adequate theoretical account of the dynamic, context-sensitive communicative behaviour observed in immersive L2 settings. Wen and Clément (2003) challenged the model's cultural assumptions, while Peng and Woodrow (2010) demonstrated the empirical limitations of its variable structure. In response, scholars have turned to Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) as a more appropriate framework - one that conceptualises WTC not as a hierarchical, trait-driven progression toward L2 use, but as an emergent property of the continuous interaction between the learner and their communicative environment, operating across multiple timescales simultaneously (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Syed et al., 2022). While CDST has been applied to WTC in EFL and general ESL contexts, its application to LTR populations in EAP settings has yet to receive systematic empirical attention.

This gap between academic readiness and real-world communicative participation necessitates an examination of the specific factors that facilitate or hinder WTC in LTR learners moving between the structured EAP classroom and the unpredictable demands of everyday resettlement life. The present study addresses this gap by drawing on CDST to investigate the psychological and contextual/environmental factors that shape L2 WTC among culturally diverse LTR learners in an EAP program at an Australian university, exploring how these factors manifest across both classroom and out-of-class settings. In doing so, the study contributes empirical evidence from an underrepresented population and advances theoretically by demonstrating the analytical purchase of a CDST-informed perspective in an EAP context defined by complex resettlement dynamics.

To address this gap, the study is guided by the following research questions:

Q1. What are the main factors that influence LTR students' willingness to communicate in a second language (L2) during classroom interactions?

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Q2. How is LTR students' willingness to communicate in a second language inside the classroom related to their WTC outside the classroom in real-life contexts?

Willingness to Communicate

Recent research has increasingly framed willingness to communicate in a second language as a dynamic and context-sensitive construct, shaped by learners' affective states, interactional settings, and technological environments (MacIntyre, 2020; Peng, 2025). Rather than being viewed as a fixed trait, L2 WTC is widely understood as situational and fluctuating, responding to both classroom and outside classroom factors, including digital mediation (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). McCroskey and Baer (1985), building on Burgoon's (1976) definition of unwillingness to communicate as a "chronic tendency to avoid and / or devalue oral communication" (p. 2), developed the WTC-Trait Scale to measure WTC across twenty situations. They viewed WTC as primarily driven by personality traits rather than situation-specific circumstances, with the concept of communication apprehension as a key predictor. MacIntyre (1994) later extended the definition of WTC to include perceived competence suggesting that changes in either variable could influence WTC.

Kang (2005) identified psychological antecedents to situational WTC as being security, excitement, and responsibility. Cao and Philp (2006) seemed to reinforce a number of Kang's findings, stating that such factors as "group size, familiarity with interlocutor(s) and interlocutor participation" caused an increase or decrease in WTC (p. 488). Similarly, the choice of topic in the classroom was also seen as important in stimulating communication; familiarity and interest in a topic was seen to be important in increasing participants' WTC.

A significant development in our understanding of the construct of WTC with regards to using a second language (L2) was made by MacIntyre et al. (1998) who asked the question: "Why do some students seek, while others avoid, second language (L2) communication?" (p. 545). Their paper asked two fundamental questions centering on identifying the variables (linguistic, communicative, and social psychological) that may influence one's WTC and suggested how these variables could be related. MacIntyre et al. (1998) determined that both enduring (trait) and situational (state) variables were responsible for WTC, which they succinctly defined as a "readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (p. 547).

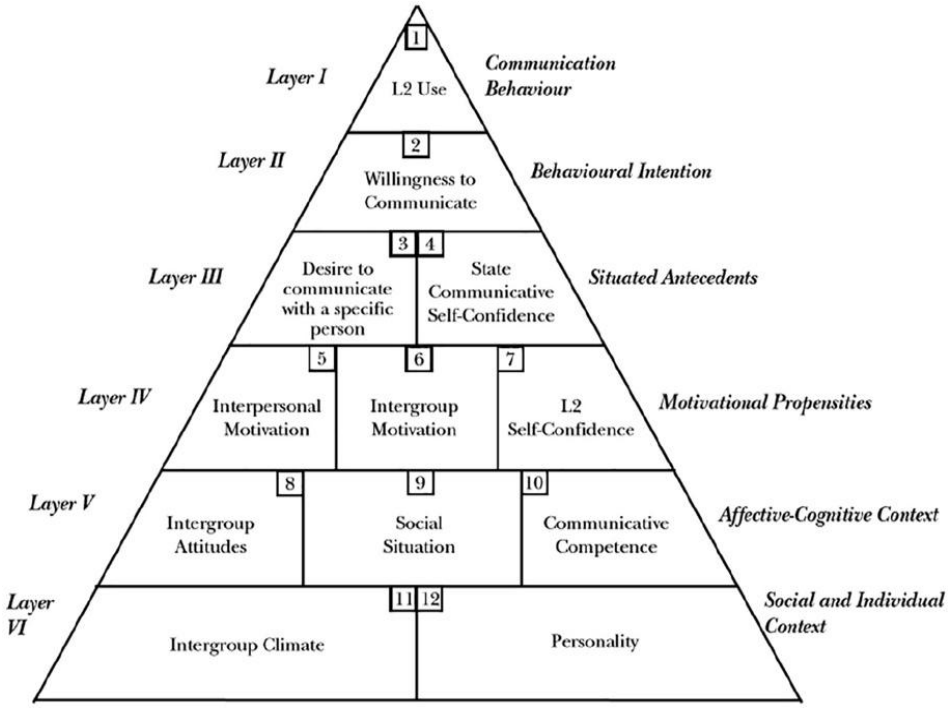
The Pyramid Model of WTC

The pyramid model which MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed (see Figure 1) has "largely laid the theoretical foundation for empirical studies on L2 WTC in the past two decades" (Kim et al., 2022, p. 1). It consists of six layers, the top one being L2 Use which MacIntyre et al. (1998) define as being the main goal of second language education. The variables that influence L2 Use can clearly be seen to be either distal or proximal to this end on the pyramid model. The base of the pyramid represents more long-term phenomena such as intergroup climate and personality. As one progresses up the pyramid, the variables become less stable and "more situation-specific" and "time-limited processes begin to become relevant" (MacIntyre, 2020, p. 115). Finally, we reach WTC, the immediate antecedent to the use of L2 and extremely significant in determining whether communication in a L2 occurs or not. MacIntyre and Wang (2021) noted that the pyramid model presented more than thirty variables that interact in complex ways and on different timescales to produce the behavioral intention of WTC. MacIntyre's (2020) revisit of the pyramid model highlighted important digressions between the model and current research, focusing primarily on temporal matters. Specifically, this refers to

the dynamic and non-linear nature of WTC, which is understood to fluctuate over time and across different communicative situations rather than remaining a fixed individual trait. This temporal perspective is essential for understanding how LTR students' readiness to communicate shifts as they move between academic and social environments. For instance, an LTR student may exhibit high WTC within the safe space of an EAP classroom, where the teacher's supportive feedback and familiar peer dynamics reduce situational anxiety. However, this same student's readiness can abruptly diminish in a high-stakes social setting such as at a government office or a local market, where unpredictable speech rates, unfamiliar accents, and the lack of instructional scaffolding may trigger a surge in cognitive load and self-doubt. This contrast illustrates that for LTRs, WTC is not a permanent acquisition but a continuous, dynamic negotiation between their developing L2 identity and the varying environmental demands of their resettlement journey.

Figure 1

The Pyramid Model of WTC



Note. MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547

The Dynamic Turn: Complex Dynamic Systems Theory and L2 WTC

Despite the theoretical contributions of the pyramid model, subsequent scholarship has increasingly challenged its capacity to capture the fluid, non-linear nature of real-time communicative behavior. Wen and Clément (2003) were among the first to critique the model's cultural assumptions, arguing that its emphasis on individual assertiveness and communicative initiative reflects predominantly Western values and fails to account for the face-saving norms and collectivist orientations of many Asian learners. Peng and Woodrow (2010) demonstrated that attempting to operationalize all thirty-plus variables in the pyramid simultaneously is empirically unviable, and found that immediate contextual variables, particularly classroom environment and learner beliefs, exert a more direct influence on WTC than the distal trait-level variables at the model's base. More fundamentally, Cao and Philp (2006) showed that high trait

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WTC did not automatically translate into actual L2 use, revealing a significant mismatch between the pyramid's predicted sequential pathway and learners' observable behavior.

These critiques collectively prompted what has been described as a dynamic turn in WTC research (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011). Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008), in their foundational application of Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) to second language acquisition, argued that language learning phenomena, including communicative behavior, are better understood as complex, adaptive systems characterized by non-linearity, sensitivity to initial conditions, and continuous interaction between the learner and their environment. From this perspective, the rigid, hierarchical architecture of the pyramid model fundamentally misrepresents the recursive, emergent nature of WTC. Responding to these critiques, MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) themselves acknowledged that the 1998 model lacked the capacity to capture moment-to-moment fluctuations in WTC during real-time communication, and introduced the idiodynamic method as a means of tracking such micro-level variation.

Syed et al. (2022) provide a comprehensive account of the implications of CDST for L2 WTC research, arguing that WTC undergoes constant flux as a result of interactions among its underlying variables. Crucially, CDST distinguishes between multiple timescales at which change operates simultaneously: longer timescales governed by trait-like variables such as personality and stable self-confidence, and shorter timescales shaped by state-like factors such as topic interest, interlocutor behavior, and momentary affect. This multi-timescale perspective offers a more theoretically coherent account of WTC variability than the pyramid's linear, bottom-up progression.

For the present study, CDST provides a particularly appropriate theoretical lens for two reasons. First, it enables the investigation of WTC as a contextually sensitive, emergent phenomenon without requiring a longitudinal design: cross-sectional data can illuminate the dynamic interplay between psychological and contextual variables at a given point in time, reflecting state-like fluctuations within a broader trait-like trajectory. Second, the CDST emphasis on the interaction between the learner-as-system and the surrounding environment is especially pertinent to LTR populations, for whom the L2 classroom and the wider resettlement context constitute two qualitatively distinct ecological niches - each exerting different affordances and constraints on communicative behavior. The following section situates this study within the broader empirical literature on WTC in EFL, ESL, and LTR contexts.

Previous Studies on WTC: Methodological Trends

Since the groundbreaking study by MacIntyre et al. (1998), extensive research has investigated the variables influencing L2 WTC, embracing quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches. Earlier studies adopted largely quantitative research (e.g., MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Yashima et al., 2004) focusing on stable traits. At the individual level, self-perceived communication competence, personality, and the ideal L2 self consistently predict WTC (Lan et al., 2021). Affective factors such as anxiety or enjoyment exert strong situational influence (Khajavy et al., 2018). At the contextual level, classroom climate, task type, and teacher support are critical (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). At the social level, peer and community support foster WTC beyond the classroom (MacIntyre et al., 2001).

However, subsequent research expanded upon these findings by emphasising the dynamic and context-dependent nature of WTC, employing qualitative methodologies (Alenezi, 2020; Cao, 2014; Davies et al., 2025; Pattapong, 2015). Peng (2012, 2025), for instance, identified the ecological aspects of WTC, including learner beliefs, motivation and the classroom environment. Similarly, Cao (2014) highlighted the interplay among individual,

environmental, and linguistic factors, demonstrating that learners' WTC varies across tasks and contexts. Pawlak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2015) found that Polish students' WTC fluctuated based on factors such as the topic, planning time, cooperation and familiarity with the interlocutors, and individual traits. Pattapong (2015) also underscored the influence of cultural, social and psychological contexts, showing that Thai students' WTC was intertwined with culturally specific values such as kreng-jai (approximately translated as saving face), teacher status, and fear of negative evaluation. Başöz and Erten (2019) employed semi-structured interviews to generate data and were able to probe more closely into specific factors related to L2 WTC. In all, they coded six broad themes from the data: classroom environment; affective factors; topic (studied in class); personal characteristics (e.g., introversion); linguistic factors; self-perceived communication competence; and past communication experience. Alenezi (2020) also employed semi-structured interviews with Saudi university students. The thematic analysis distilled the generated data into three main themes: those of learner-related factors (e.g., self-perceived communication competence, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence); affective factors (e.g., motivation, anxiety, evaluation apprehension); and classroom learning environment factors (e.g., topic interest, instructional methods and materials, class size). The study suggested that the factors most determinant of WTC were lack of confidence, self-perceived communication competence, and L2 communicative anxiety (p. 85).

WTC in Traditional EFL and ESL Contexts

This section will address literature pertaining to the research of WTC in traditional EFL and ESL contexts. Most empirical studies on WTC have been situated either within EFL classrooms or on ESL programs involving international students.

WTC in Traditional EFL Contexts

In an EFL context, English is typically confined to classroom use, making pedagogical design and teacher behavior crucial for communicative participation (Liu & Jackson, 2008). Karnchanachari (2019) compared two groups (Thai and international programs) of Thai students at a public university in Bangkok to discover those factors which most affect WTC in the classroom. The author stated that "Thai learners are often reluctant to communicate in English in the classroom" (p. 83) and assumed that the variables underlying students' WTC would be those not necessarily connected to overall proficiency in English. The results seemed to partially reinforce the initial assumptions (Pattapong, 2015), as it was discovered that peer pressure and fear of losing face were notable encumbrances to the use of English in the classroom. This did not entirely preclude such factors as experience of communication in English and self-perceived English competence but did lead the author to suggest that language teachers should use "culturally appropriate classroom management" that takes into account "culturally-oriented factors" during lessons (p. 102). In another Southeast Asian setting, Tuyen and Loan (2019) explored the factors affecting WTC in a private university in Vietnam, adopting a closed-ended questionnaire, classroom observations, and interviews. They reported a low level of WTC amongst about half of their first-year participants which they thought could be connected to culture and a reluctance to volunteer answers during lessons. However, the authors offered a number of other reasons why WTC levels were low, including such situational factors as unfamiliarity with speaking classes, difficulties in understanding native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), unfamiliarity with discussion topics, and teachers' strategies for correcting mistakes. Therefore, it would seem to be too simplistic to reach conclusions based solely on cultural factors when there are so many other personal and situational variables at

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play in the classroom. However, the authors do conclude by suggesting that NESTs should invest time in learning about Vietnamese culture as well as the learning styles of their students. They should also "be aware of the psychological hindrances that may prevent their students from WTC" and adapt their teaching practice accordingly (p. 261).

Because communicative opportunities in EFL contexts are limited, learners frequently express a gap between their desired and actual levels of communication. Sak (2020), investigating ideal L2 self as a motivational tool and its links to WTC, found a more nuanced situation. Based on questionnaire data received from EFL students in a pre-service EFL teacher education program at a university in Turkey, Sak reported that the participants reported high perception of ideal L2 self in WTC inside and outside the classroom and a slightly higher WTC outside the classroom. Sak suggested that this pattern may reflect some learners' preference to remain silent due to anxiety or fear of making mistakes, a tendency also observed by Başöz and Erten (2019). While participants may perceive themselves as possessing a high WTC outside the classroom, their actual L2 use may remain limited due to a lack of authentic communicative opportunities. This highlights the importance of understanding how WTC evolves when learners move beyond classroom exposure into more immersive environments, such as study abroad.

WTC in Traditional ESL Contexts

In contrast to the previous section, research in ESL settings often examines international students studying temporarily in English-speaking countries (Cao, 2014; Cinar & Ari, 2019; Davies et al., 2025). Research has covered such areas as enduring or situational variables as predictors of WTC, as well as the factors that can influence WTC either inside or outside the classroom. Study abroad settings create a fundamentally different ecology of L2 communication than EFL settings. Learners are immersed in authentic linguistic and cultural environments and are surrounded by spontaneous communicative opportunities that may both enhance and challenge their WTC (Cao, 2014; Davies et al., 2025). Cao (2014) examined the dynamic nature of WTC among six short-term EAP learners in New Zealand and Davies et al. (2025) conducted a similar study in Australia. These studies emphasised adaptation processes, language anxiety, and intercultural adjustment.

Furthermore, in a study involving 160 Japanese EFL students in Japan and 60 Japanese students in a study abroad program in the US, Yashima et al. (2004, p. 141) found that perceived communication competence was the strongest predictor of WTC in a study abroad program. Denies et al. (2015), through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), concluded that the variables of anxiety and integrativeness (a desire to integrate with the target language community) changed depending on the setting. They determined that anxiety increased outside the classroom, probably due to learners being exposed to naturalistic settings which presumably are more unpredictable than in the classroom environment. Thus, a lack of anxiety within the classroom does not necessarily result in a similar state outside. In other words, situations do seem to be a factor, not only personality traits.

More recently, Ma et al. (2025) investigated L2 WTC among Chinese international students transitioning from an EFL context in China to an ESL context in Malaysia, employing a mixed-methods design with 131 survey participants and 11 interviewees. Their findings identified four categories of influencing factors - individual, socio-cultural, educational, and environmental - with particular emphasis on the role of exam-oriented prior education, Confucian cultural values (including harmony maintenance and the doctrine of the mean), and the perceived risk of being seen as showing off by co-national peers. While this study makes a significant contribution to understanding WTC in EFL-to-ESL transitions, its participants were

short-term international students whose communicative goals were temporally bounded by their academic programs. This profile differs markedly from LTRs in the present study, whose integration into the host society is permanent and for whom English proficiency mediates access to employment, healthcare, and social participation. As the following section discusses, this distinction in settlement context produces qualitatively different WTC dynamics that existing ESL frameworks have not yet adequately captured.

WTC in Long-Term Residency Contexts

The following section diverges from the previous one in that it focuses on LTR students, specifically those of refugee and immigrant backgrounds, learning a language in an ESL environment, but where the situation differs from the traditional ESL context. In this regard, it merits its own separate consideration. For such LTR students, WTC is critical for successful integration, as communicative engagement facilitates access to social networks, employment, and education. In addition, in the case of refugees and immigrants, they often face unique challenges, including trauma, disrupted schooling, and socio-economic marginalisation (Miller, 2014; Norton, 2013; Scolaro & Tomasi, 2025). These factors can exacerbate language anxiety and reduce communicative confidence, underscoring the need for pedagogical approaches that prioritise psychological safety and inclusivity. Henry and MacIntyre (2023) conducted a qualitative longitudinal study involving adult immigrants enrolled in a Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) programs which involved an L3, in which English was widely spoken amongst the host population. In multilingual immigrant settings, they suggest that the perceived communicative costs and benefits of speaking, as well as identity negotiation and community norms, significantly influence WTC, highlighting its role as a socially situated construct rather than a purely individual trait.

Although WTC has been widely investigated across methodological, cultural and educational settings, LTR learners remain marginal in the literature. Unlike short-term international students, they see long-term integration into host societies as their goal, and their WTC directly influences social participation, employability, and community belonging. The current study focuses on LTR students from refugee and immigrant backgrounds enrolled in an EAP context, where encouraging WTC outside the classroom is as important, if not more so, than within the classroom, as it supports the transition to real-world L2 use in everyday life.

Methodology

The study is positioned within the research paradigm of interpretivism, to "understand the subjective world of human experience" and through the analysis of responses during the interview which "retains the integrity of the phenomena being investigated" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 17). To align with this paradigm, a qualitative methodology was adopted, offering a robust and adaptable approach to data collection and analysis.

Course and Participants

The purpose of this study was to investigate the dynamic interplay of factors shaping WTC among the participants, with a particular focus on how these factors manifested across classroom and real-world communicative settings. The study initially recruited 18 volunteers (coded A-R), however, following the withdrawal of five students (C, L, M, O, and Q), the final cohort consisted of 13 ESL volunteers. These participants, all of whom were enrolled in an in-sessional English for Academic Purpose (EAP) program, identified as LTRs with refugee or

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immigrant backgrounds. Their lengths of residence (LOR) in Australia ranged from 0.5 to 15 years.

To capture the complex background of each learner, a pre-interview questionnaire was administered. This instrument assessed their self-perceived proficiency across the four language skills, their level of language anxiety/concern regarding peer evaluation, and their personal communicative traits. Table 1 details these individual profiles, highlighting the diverse linguistic and psychological landscape of the group. For instance, while some participants have resided in Australia for over a decade (e.g., Participants A and B), their self-perceived proficiency and communicative confidence vary, suggesting the length of residence alone does not determine L2 WTC.

Table 1
Detailed Individual Profiles of 13 Participants

ID	LOR (years)	Self-perceived proficiency (S/L/R/W)	Anxiety level (1-5)	Classroom comfort	Outside comfort	Personality traits & risk attitude
A	15	Avg / Avg / Avg / Avg	4	yes	Yes	Risk-taker
B	12	VG / VG / VG / VG	3	yes	Yes	Quiet
D	2	Avg / Avg / B. Avg / Avg	3	yes	Yes	Shy; Quiet; Risk-averse; Relaxed
E	2.5	B. Avg / B. Avg / Poor / Avg	3	no (lacks info)	no (fear of errors)	Outgoing
F	8	Avg / Avg / Avg / Avg	1	yes	yes	Talkative; Relaxed; Risk-taker
G	4	B. Avg / Avg / Ab. Avg / B. Avg	3	It depends	It depends	Shy; Risk-averse; Talkative; Tense
H	6	Poor / Poor / Ab. Avg / Ab. Avg	1	no (pronunciation)	no (friends only)	Shy; Risk-taker Talkative Relaxed Quiet; Tense
I	1.5	Avg / Avg / Avg / Avg	3	yes	yes	Tense
J	2.5	B. Avg / Poor / Avg / B. Avg	3	no	yes	Shy; Quiet
K	3	B. Avg / B. Avg / Poor / B. Avg	2	It depends	No	Shy
N	2	Avg / Avg / Avg / Poor	1	yes	yes	Talkative; Risk-averse
P	1	B. Avg / Poor / Ab. Avg / Avg	2	yes (practice)	yes (socialising)	Outgoing
R	0.5	Avg / B. Avg / Avg / B. Avg	-	-	-	

Note. S = speaking, L = listening, R = reading, W = writing; B. Avg = Below average; Avg = Average; Ab. Avg, = Above average; VG = Very good. Responses for Student R are limited to

the first page of the section, as the participant reported an oversight regarding the survey's multi-page layout.

While the course was not designed exclusively for this particular cohort, the study collected data during a session where, coincidentally, all students shared this common background. Their level of English was between pre-intermediate and intermediate level (IELTS 5.0 to 5.5). The inclusion of LTRs, such as refugees and immigrant learners, highlights the distinctive nature of this research, as their lived experiences and sociocultural contexts provide the opportunity for in-depth insights into the dynamics of individual differences in second language learning.

Data Collection and Analysis

The present study employed a cross-sectional, retrospective qualitative design. Data were collected at a single point in time (cross-sectional), capturing participants' WTC experiences as they stood at the end of the EAP program, and participants were asked to reflect on their communicative experiences across the course of the program and in real-world settings (retrospective). This design enables examination of the factors shaping WTC at a given moment in time across both classroom and out-of-class settings, while acknowledging that participants' accounts are necessarily mediated by recall. Data were collected from a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, which were based on the content of examples used in previous studies (i.e., Davies et al., 2025; Denies et al., 2015; Yashima et al., 2004), but which were modified to suit our particular purpose (e.g., the name of the program, in and outside of the classroom). The questionnaire was designed to gather insights into participants' general attitudes toward studying English, perceived proficiency in the four language skills, reasons for participating in the EAP program, and expectations for the program (see Appendix). These insights informed the subsequent semi-structured interviews, ensuring a targeted exploration of individual differences (e.g., personality characteristics, perceived proficiency levels). Importantly, the questionnaire data were not subjected to independent thematic analysis; rather, responses served a preparatory function, enabling the interviewer to contextualise questions to each participant's individual profile and to focus the interview on dimensions of WTC most relevant to that learner. The primary analytical source was the interview transcripts, which formed the basis for all thematic coding.

To address potential researcher positionality and mitigate power dynamics during data generation, the semi-structured interviews were conducted by the second researcher, who was affiliated with a different university and had no prior relationship with the participants. This approach was intentionally adopted as the first researcher served as one of the course lecturers. Participation was entirely voluntary, with 11 students opting to be interviewed toward the end of the course and two additional students participating in interviews taking place after the course. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The data were qualitatively analysed using thematic analysis to identify key themes related to fluctuations in anxiety, WTC, and what factors may have had an impact.

The inductive qualitative analysis (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was employed using NVivo version 20.5 to categorise and identify recurring themes. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data analysis, quality checks were incorporated throughout the research process. Specifically, co-coder reliability was established by two researchers collaborating in the coding process.

Initially, two researchers independently coded the data using NVivo, generating 16 preliminary themes. They subsequently met to compare, discuss, and refine their

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interpretations. In the second stage, after thorough discussions and revisiting the data with fresh perspectives, the themes were refined into three major categories:

1) affective factors that influence WTC
2) environmental factors that influence WTC
3) other possible factors from the data

These categories were further organised into sub-categories, as shown in Figure 2

Figure 2

Three Primary Themes and Their Subcategories

Name	Files	Refere...
Affective Factors that Influence WTC	0	0
Anxiety to Speak English	12	53
Negative Prior Learning Outcomes	8	14
Emotions and Attitudes toward Learning English	12	31
Interest in Speaking Activities	9	28
International Posture	0	0
Negative Attitude toward Different Cultures	1	1
Positive Attitude toward Different Cultures	5	9
Mood	2	2
Motivation to Speak English	0	0
For Employment	8	12
For Further Studies	9	13
For Quality of Life in Australia	8	8
Self-Determination	4	11
Perceived Improvement in Speaking English	12	50
Personality Type (shy, outgoing, talkative etc.)	13	36
Self-Confidence in Speaking English	12	46
Positive Prior Learning Outcomes	5	6
Environmental Factors that Influence WTC	0	0
Classroom Factors that Influence WTC	1	1
Familiarity with Class Content	11	23
Student Interactions in the Classroom	1	1
With other Students	13	50
With the Teacher	13	23
Teaching Approach	0	0
Classroom Management	7	14
Speaking Activities in Class (Discussions; Presentations etc.)	7	23
Outside Factors that Influence WTC	0	0
Difficulty of Understanding Spoken English outside of the Classroom	8	18
Individual Strategies to Increase Opportunities to Speak English	8	21
Necessity to Speak English in Day-to-Day Life (work; interpreting for family etc.)	10	16
Opportunities to Speak English outside the Classroom	13	34
Technology (Including use of SMS to contact with other students; use of internet for research etc.)	5	7
Other Possible Factors from the Data	1	1
Difficulty of Activities or Materials in the Classroom (Affecting WTC)	2	2
Level of Difficulty of Listening Materials	3	7

To revise and redevelop the themes from the initial phase into the structured themes seen in the second phase, a systematic process of categorisation and refinement was followed. For example, one researcher categorised anxiety to speak English from the initial stage. The other researcher used the same categorisation but suggested that the problem might be intrinsic to an individual (a personality trait) or might be the result of past (negative) experience. As an

individual factor, anxiety is a personal emotional response that varies from student to student. As a classroom factor, previous negative learning experiences can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and reluctance to speak. By refining the theme of Anxiety to Speak English to include aspects related to these negative prior outcomes, we acknowledged the significant influence past educational experiences might have on current anxiety levels. Finally, we integrated this refined theme into a broader framework as part of the Affective Factors that Influence Willingness to Communicate (WTC).

In the third stage, to enhance the reliability of the findings, a third researcher conducted a comprehensive review, further refining themes into two major categories: 1) psychological factors that influence WTC, and 2) contextual/environmental factors from the data. This consolidation was driven by the researchers' review of the literature and discussion, which indicated that the other possible factors identified in the second stage were inherently linked to either the learner's internal psychological state or the external social environment. It is important to note that these two categories are not treated as discrete or mutually exclusive; rather, they function as heuristic analytical dimensions. Several sub-themes showed significant overlap - for example, anxiety operates as both a psychological trait and a contextually triggered response - and consistent with the CDST framework adopted in this study, the two dimensions are understood as dynamically interpenetrating rather than parallel, as illustrated in Table 2. This iterative process of systematic categorisation and integration ensured that the final themes more accurately represent the complex, situated reality of EAP students from refugee and immigrant backgrounds. Table 2 summarizes the psychological and contextual/environmental factors shaping students' WTC.

Table 2

Summary of Factors Influencing Students' WTC

Factors	**Sub-categories**	
Psychological	Anxiety	Feelings of nervousness or apprehension when speaking English, particularly in academic contexts.
	Self-confidence	Confidence levels varied, influencing whether students were willing to speak spontaneously.
	Motivation	Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation played a role in encouraging communication.
	Personality	Individual differences such as being more extroverted or reserved, shaped patterns of communication.
	Perceived competence	Students' recognition of progress in their speaking ability increased their willingness to engage in conversations.
Contextual and Environmental	In the classroom	Classroom interactions, peer dynamics, familiarity with topics and activities, teacher support influenced students' readiness to speak.
	Outside the classroom	Encounters with local speakers and opportunities in daily life provided both challenges and motivation to use English. Digital environments that mediate interaction.

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Ethics Approval and Participant Consent

Prior to the commencement of this research, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee at University of Southern Queensland, Australia (ETH2022-0189). Informed consent was obtained from participants involved in the study. Each participant was provided with detailed information about the nature of the research, its objectives, the procedures involved, potential risks, and benefits. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Results

The analysis of the data revealed a range of factors influencing the participants' WTC in English, both in the classroom and in broader social contexts. While responses to the pre-interview questionnaire helped the interviewer focus certain questions, the interview transcripts were the primary source for the thematic analysis. The analysis shows that psychological and contextual/environmental influences shaped participants' communicative behaviors in complex ways, and that two categories were closely related, with several sub-themes overlapping. Participants reported that previous educational experiences, emotional responses (such as anxiety or confidence), and opportunities to interact with local speakers all played a significant role in determining their readiness to speak.

A notable pattern emerging from the questionnaire was a linguistic skill imbalance across the cohort: several learners reported average or above-average reading alongside poor or below-average speaking and listening (e.g., Participants H and P; see Table 1). This asymmetry is consistent with an educational background weighted toward grammar-based literacy instruction rather than oral communication, and it is consequential for WTC - the skills most directly implicated in real-world interaction were precisely those in which participants felt least competent. Perceived content competence also mattered. Participant E reported that a lack of topic-specific knowledge produced communicative discomfort during classroom interactions, suggesting that readiness to speak is shaped by more than linguistic proficiency alone. The distinction between classroom and out-of-class WTC was likewise evident at this stage. While Participant P identified the EAP classroom as a supportive space for communicative practice, Participant H, expressed reluctance to use English outside of class, citing pronunciation and the unpredictability of spontaneous speech. These patterns were further explored through the interview data reported below.

Psychological Factors

Anxiety

Anxiety was one of the most frequently cited challenges, especially outside the classroom where conversations were less predictable. While structured tasks such as presentations initially provoked nervousness, many participants reported that their anxiety decreased over time in the supportive classroom environment. Student B, who had identified as quiet in the questionnaire, nonetheless felt comfortable speaking English in class: "In the beginning, I had some like, the shy feeling and nervous . . . now it's fine. The teachers are good. They are really helpful. They teach us [with] friendly, friendly manners."

Very few participants expressed difficulties with WTC in the classroom, seemingly because of the welcoming atmosphere created by their teachers. Outside the classroom,

however, anxiety remained a persistent barrier in unscripted or unfamiliar interactions. Student E felt anxiety because, having been in Australia for a long time, he believed he should be speaking better than he could. Although he had described himself as outgoing in the questionnaire, he expressed reticence both inside and outside the classroom: "I have like anxiety, scared little bit from it. I want to learn but I am just scared a bit."

Similarly, Student G recounted how initial classroom presentations left her "shaking from nervousness" and found it even harder to communicate with officials outside class. Describing a visit to Centrelink regarding her ID card, she recalled: "The first time I shy and I shaking. I forgot what I'm gonna say to tell her [at Centrelink]". Student G had described herself as being shy and risk-averse in the questionnaire, but also talkative, presumably in her L1. These examples illustrate how classroom environments could reduce anxiety, but everyday encounters in the community often reignited it.

Self-Confidence

Confidence was deeply shaped by prior learning experiences, many of which were described as discouraging. Several participants highlighted how their early English learning was limited to an exam-oriented school subject (reading and writing), leaving them unprepared for real communication. Student A recalled: "I didn't feel it's useful for our life. We have to do mandatory for this school, but we're just reading and writing, not speaking." Others, like Student B, had attended selective schools catering for students already expected to be proficient in English; because his English was well below the level of his peers, his confidence in speaking suffered accordingly.

Motivation

Motivation to communicate in English could be subdivided into employment, further education, and general quality of life. In terms of employment, a number of the participants were recent arrivals keen to raise their employability through improved English. One had been a banker in his own country but was considering pivoting to IT, while Student D, aspiring to be a psychologist, stated: "For psychologists, they should talk more to patients, so I need more experiences, more talking, more speaking". Student K stressed the link between English and employability: ". . . you can't get your dream job if you can't speak English well. Many of the jobs needs a high-level English."

For other students, further studies seemed the primary driver, the program being designed to bring them to a level sufficient for degree entry. Student A had lived and worked in Australia in a childcare facility but wanted to become a professional nurse; realizing that her everyday English was not academic, she framed enrollment as a calculated gamble: "This is taking a risk now." Student E likewise saw academic English as a means of opening doors to employment: "My first point is just to learn more English. Then I will have like so many opportunities to choose one, but now I don't have any opportunities." Student P linked motivation directly to university study: "I need to learn English because I need to go to uni after this . . . That's why I'm learning English here."

Personality

Personality characteristics such as shyness, quietness, extroversion, sociability and risk orientation, emerged as salient influences on WTC. For many participants these traits were situational, varying by context, interlocutor, and topic, and developmental, shifting over time with exposure and practice. Personality also interacted with prior educational experiences and

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community norms, shaping how readily students initiated and sustained English conversations. Several described being quiet or shy, in unfamiliar or less-structured interactions, yet more communicative in supportive settings. Student B described a language-contingent quietness that gradually diminished through sustained classroom use of English:

> Because in here I'm really quiet because the environment is English. When I'm in my country I'm not quiet . . . But no, for four hours we [are] normally talking English in [the] classroom, so it's helped me to get rid of [that] thing, so now I think I'm not quiet.

Student J linked shyness to fear of error and audience evaluation, which limited participation even when ideas were available to share:

> Yes, that's why because I'm shy, I don't . . . participate. I feel nervous to make a mistake. But if we don't make mistakes, we don't learn. I know that. But I still shy to say if I was to be a mistake.

Student K, who also wrote shy in the questionnaire, noted a clear difference between speaking with familiar versus unfamiliar interlocutors: "If I know . . . people . . . before, so I'm very confident. And if . . . people I haven't seen . . . I feel shy. I don't know how to start a conversation . . . I usually wait for them to speak." Other participants identified as outgoing and described deliberately using daily encounters to practice English. Student P, identifying as extroverted, used public transport as a site of practice:

> Yea, I'm extrovert person, I like to discuss with everybody. Learn from everybody. So even going out in public transport, transport, like to talk to drivers, bus drivers. So because it's kind of . . . is that what helped me to increase my speaking . . . My dream . . . is to be the best speaker . . . I love to talk to people.

Interestingly, Student P had described his speaking proficiency as below average and his listening proficiency as poor in the questionnaire, and yet his extraversion was able to overcome his limitations. Willingness to take communicative risks was likewise associated with greater engagement, captured in Student R's concise stance: "I think [I'm] a risk taker, if I don't try it, I can't find out."

Personality-related tendencies were not fixed. Many students reported becoming less shy and more talkative as they adapted to classroom routines and local culture. Student D described an initial shyness that receded with cultural adaptation: "Before, in Turkey I [was] . . . anxious and shy . . . coming]to Australia . . . totally different . . . language . . . culture . . . [But] shy and anxious . . . is removing day by day here . . . Now I feel more relaxed."

Perceived Competence

The questionnaire administered prior to the interviews asked students to self-evaluate their proficiency in the four skills. During the interviews, they were asked to comment on any improvements they perceived over the term. The most commonly reported improvement was in speaking, and classroom experience had clearly played a role. Student B described a shift in mindset: "Now I know mistakes is normal. Everyone does that . . . So, it doesn't matter if something is grammarly wrong, or grammarly right, I speak now. Before that I worry about grammar if it's wrong or right. Now, I don't care."

This perceived improvement in speaking seemed to spill over beyond the classroom. Student D felt that vocabulary learned in the EAP classroom "helped me to communicate more, to speak more and to chat with people more". Student B attributed his growing confidence largely to the teachers' "friendly manners", which enabled him to initiate conversations and to talk more freely: "Before someone asked me something, I replied in within like two or three

words . . . Now I reply with many words and many sentences." He felt that this had also helped him to build good friendships in his adopted country. Student F reported that the required class presentations had helped build confidence: "I think I'm not overconfident but just relaxed". Student I related growing self-confidence directly to proficiency gains: "I developed my speaking skills last like seven or eight months. Yeah, that's why I'm confident."

Contextual/Environmental Factors

The coding also revealed contextual/environment environmental factors as important in eliciting WTC. These could be further subdivided into factors affecting students within the classroom and those prominent outside it. Within the classroom, WTC drew on peer and teacher interaction, familiarity with content, and teaching approach. Outside the classroom, the opportunity and necessity to speak English in daily life were both cited as contributors. A further subdivision, technology, seemed to straddle the two as communication between students could have occurred in either situation.

In the Classroom

The classroom was consistently described as a supportive space that encouraged WTC. Student A found correcting useful both for improving her English and for supporting classmates, while Student B valued class discussions as a means of sharing ideas. A number of students highlighted interactions with peers and teachers as enjoyable and instructive. Student A commented: "And I get opportunity to speak with my classmates and with my teacher as well . . . I feel confident to . . . I can bring my problems and to get the solution from my team members." Student D compared the classroom to a family, which helped break down barriers both among students and between students and teachers. No participant expressed reluctance to rely on classmates or teachers for help.

Classroom management, particularly the emphasis on student-centered communicative activities, also played a role. For some students this differed markedly from their prior educational experience. Student A, who had studied English from a young age with a strong grammar focus in a teacher-centered classroom, observed: "But I think it is different here . . . when I come to the class. I feel I can get skilled myself to how to speak and writing."

Familiarity with class content also affected participation and levels of nervousness. Students felt more comfortable with familiar topics and valued preparation time for new ones. Student E commented: "If I don't know much about it [the topic], it's a bit complicated. Like, I try my best to understand but sometimes it's really hard." Student I also concurred: ". . . it depends on the subject. Like if I know I'm like gonna talk about . . . I'm not afraid to like talk in front of people." Several answers indicated that students relied on one another when unfamiliar with content, and enjoyed listening to peers with greater knowledge of the topic.

Outside the Classroom

A recurring difficulty outside the classroom was understanding spoken English away from the safety net that the classroom provided. One frequently raised problem was unfamiliarity with the Australian accent. Student B recalled: "When I come here, it's really hard . . . I was like really confused. Now I know their slangs and other things." The speed of natural speech was also a source of stress:

> . . . because most difficult thing is some people are talking English very fast. Sometimes I can't understand what he or she is saying. It's the most difficult part of the speaking and listening for me. If someone

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> speaking clearly, I can understand well, but someone's talking is really fast, it's really difficult for me.

Student J, who had rated her listening as poor in the questionnaire, described requesting accommodation from interlocutors: "They speak fast . . . Sometimes I say okay, can you just slow down? Sometimes I just make a mistake because I try to guess what I say." Student K, by contrast, was reluctant to use this strategy: ". . . because people may get angry . . . and they may think that I'm not giving their attention".

For some students, the necessity of using English in daily life shaped WTC in situation-dependent ways. Student E felt confident at a reception counter, presumably because much of the English was formulaic, but nervous in less structured situations: ". . . if it's like, let's say, a receptionist, I'm confident talking to them, but like, if another normal person, just I find him on the street and start talking to each other, I'm a little bit nervous." Student F emphasized the stress of daily living in English when accent, grammar and much else differ. Student J periodically acted as interpreter for her mother at hospital, where the challenge lay in specialist medical vocabulary and in staff unaccustomed to adjusting their language for learners: "But some, they can't explain like teachers [can]". Such accounts demonstrate how they lived realities of LTRs shaped both their communicative challenges and their resilience.

For others, the out-of-class environment offered valued opportunities to improve spoken English, and students identified situations in which their WTC was heightened. Student D, who had described himself as shy and risk-averse in the questionnaire, worked part-time delivering takeaway food and used waiting time at restaurants to initiate conversation: ". . . in the restaurant when the food is not ready, I watch out to find a person who native English speakers, so I close to him asking some questions, sharing ideas, what do you do . . . like that." Student F used walks in the park similarly, opening conversations, about flowers, the season, or people's pets. Student R described how contemporary apps facilitated communication outside class, making it easier to stay connected, share homework and form supportive groups, compared with older models like email or phone calls: "Now we can use . . . WhatsApp, Instagram . . . Once they start chatting, we can help each other . . . if I've sent the post, today's lectures, something important homework. So, we can share information."

Discussion and Implications

Three key findings emerge from this study. First, psychological factors, particularly anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation, operated differently for LTRs than has been reported in EFL or short-term ESL contexts, because for these learners, communicative failure carries real-world social and economic consequences that extend beyond the classroom. Second, the EAP classroom functioned as a critical low-stakes micro-context in which supportive peer and teacher dynamics reduced situational anxiety and fostered communicative engagement. Third, participants' reported L2 use outside the classroom appeared to be mediated not by automatic transfer, but by conscious communicative strategies and learner agency - a pattern that has not been foregrounded in prior WTC research with non-immigrant populations.

Viewed through a CDST lens, these findings are consistent with the principle that WTC operates simultaneously across multiple timescales (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Syed et al., 2022). The role of anxiety as a barrier to WTC is well established (Alenezi, 2020; Başöz & Erten, 2019; MacIntyre et al., 1998). The present findings reveal a dimension that has received comparatively little attention: for LTRs, anxiety is compounded by what might be termed a proficiency-residence gap - a perceived discrepancy between the length of time spent in the host country and actual L2 competence. This finding extends Alenezi's (2020) observation that self-perceived communicative competence is among the strongest

determinants of WTC, by revealing that for LTRs this perception is shaped by social integration pressures unique to a resettlement context. Similarly, while Pattapong (2015) identified culturally specific values such as kreng-jai (saving face) as sources of communicative reluctance among Thai EFL learners, the present data suggest that for immigrant and refugee populations the cultural pressure operates differently - stemming not from face-saving norms within a shared cultural group, but from the asymmetry between the learner and the wider host community. This distinction is illuminated by comparison with Ma et al.'s (2025) findings: in their study of Chinese international students in Malaysia, the dominant source of anxiety was the fear of being perceived as showing off by co-national peers - a within-group face-saving. The present data reveal no such peer-group anxiety dynamic; instead, for LTR participants, the communicative threat originated from without, in the form of the host community's implicit expectations of residency-appropriate proficiency. This suggests that the source and social structure of L2 anxiety shift fundamentally as learners move from temporary sojourn to permanent settlement.

In contrast, participants who identified as more extroverted demonstrated that personality traits could partially offset lower perceived proficiency. This aligns with Sak's (2020) finding that ideal L2 self-image predicts WTC both inside and outside the classroom; however, the present data add that for LTRs, this motivational resource is further reinforced by a concrete survival imperative - the need to access employment, education, and healthcare services in the host language. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drivers were therefore more tightly intertwined for this cohort than is typically reported in EFL studies (e.g., Karnchanachari, 2019; Tuyen & Loan, 2019), suggesting that existing WTC motivation frameworks may need to account for the material stakes of language use in resettlement contexts. This stands in sharp contrast to Ma et al.'s (2025) finding that some Chinese international students exhibited reduced motivation due to concerns about technology replacing English-language careers - a consideration that was entirely absent among LTR participants in the present study, for whom English proficiency was not an optional academic credential but a non-negotiable prerequisite for navigating daily life in the host country.

A further psychological dimension shaping classroom WTC - one that connects directly to the second research question - was participants' perceived communicative competence and the self-confidence bound up with it. Several students reported that their prior English education had been confined to grammar instruction and written literacy, leaving them with limited oral foundations and correspondingly low confidence in spoken interaction. This is consistent with Leeming et al.'s (2024) distinction between linguistic self-efficacy and speaking self-efficacy, the latter being more proximally tied to WTC. Crucially, however, the EAP classroom appeared to function as a corrective environment: participants described a shift in orientation - from preoccupation with grammatical accuracy to a tolerance of error in the service of communication. Student B's observation that he now speaks regardless of grammatical correctness reflects what Krashen (1982) would identify as a lowered affective filter, and it is this shift in perceived competence that appeared to generate the conditions for more confident communicative engagement beyond the classroom walls.

The classroom consistently emerged as a space that buffered situational anxiety, a pattern consistent with Cao and Philp's (2006) identification of familiarity with interlocutors and group dynamics as key facilitators of WTC. The present study reinforces this finding and extends it in two ways. First, the culturally and linguistically diverse composition of the cohort created a leveling dynamic: because all participants were learners, the threat of negative peer evaluation - identified by Başöz and Erten (2019) as a central inhibitor of in-class WTC - was substantially reduced. Second, the shift toward student-centered, communicative pedagogy represented a departure from the grammar-focused, teacher-led instruction that many participants had experienced in their home countries. As Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak

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(2017) argue, instructional approach is a significant macro-level variable shaping WTC; the present findings corroborate this at the micro level, demonstrating that students' willingness to speak increased not as a result of improved proficiency alone, but as a direct response to a pedagogical environment that reframed error-making as a normal part of communicative learning.

Outside the classroom, participants encountered a set of challenges that are less prominent in EFL or short-term study abroad contexts. The speed and unfamiliarity of Australian English, as well as the unpredictability of spontaneous interaction, are consistent with Denies et al.'s (2015) finding that anxiety levels tend to increase outside the classroom due to the loss of the structured and predictable environment that formal instruction provides. What the present data reveal, however, is that many participants did not respond to this challenge passively. Several engaged in conscious strategies to manage the transition - selecting predictable interaction settings before attempting less structured encounters. This echoes Kang's (2005) emphasis on security and responsibility as antecedents to situational WTC, and suggests that for LTRs, the perceived cost-benefit calculation of initiating L2 interaction is shaped by strategic rather than purely affective considerations.

With respect to the second research question, the data suggest that the transfer of WTC from classroom to real-world settings was neither automatic nor uniform, but was mediated by two mechanisms that have received limited attention in prior WTC research on LTR populations. First, perceived improvement in speaking competence, cultivated within the supportive classroom ecology, appeared to function as a communicative launching pad: students who reported growing confidence in class (e.g., Students B, D, F, I) also described actively seeking out English interactions in their daily lives. From a CDST perspective, this is consistent with the notion of shifting attractor states: classroom-based confidence reconfigures the learner's communicative system such that out-of-class interaction becomes progressively less aversive. Second, digital communication tools functioned as an informal bridge between classroom and community. As Student R described, group messaging platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram) enabled learners to sustain English interaction beyond contact hours, reinforcing the social bonds formed in class while extending communicative practice into lower-stakes digital spaces. This empirical observation directly supports the pedagogical recommendation, advanced in the implications below, that EAP programs leverage digital tools as a structured transitional space between classroom and real-world L2 use.

It is important to note that, given the retrospective and cross-sectional design of this study, these observations reflect participants' self-reported perceptions of their communicative behavior rather than direct evidence of a developmental trajectory from classroom WTC to real-world L2 use. From a CDST perspective, this is precisely the kind of snapshot that cross-sectional qualitative inquiry can yield: evidence of the system's current attractor states, shaped by the accumulated interaction of psychological and contextual variables across multiple timescales, without implying a simple linear progression (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). The data are nonetheless consistent with the theoretical position advanced by MacIntyre et al. (1998) that WTC functions as a proximal antecedent to actual language use, and they illuminate the contextual conditions under which LTRs perceive themselves as more or less willing to act on that readiness.

These findings suggest a potentially distinctive sociolinguistic position for LTRs in EAP programs - a population that remains underrepresented in WTC research, which has been dominated by EFL settings and short-term study abroad participants. Unlike international students whose communicative engagement is temporally bounded, LTRs in this study viewed English not as a transient academic medium but as a permanent social tool. As Henry et al. (2024) demonstrate in their study of adult immigrants, WTC for immigrant populations is

inseparable from identity negotiation and the perceived communicative costs of integration. The current findings support and extend this claim: even within a single EAP cohort, the intersection of refugee and immigrant backgrounds, varied lengths of residence, and diverse prior educational experiences produces a highly heterogeneous communicative profile. Importantly, the two analytical categories employed in this study - psychological and contextual/environmental - are not understood as discrete or parallel dimensions; consistent with CDST principles, they are dynamically interpenetrating, with psychological states (e.g., anxiety, confidence) continuously shaping and being shaped by environmental affordances and constraints across multiple timescales.

These findings carry direct implications for EAP pedagogy serving refugee and immigrant populations. The evidence suggests that fostering WTC in LTR learners requires more than communicative language instruction. Specifically, programs should attend to the affective dimension of resettlement by creating structured opportunities for learners to process real-world communicative challenges within the relative safety of the classroom. Incorporating out-of-class communication tasks followed by structured reflection would allow students to develop the metacognitive awareness and strategic repertoire that several participants appeared to deploy spontaneously. Such a cycle of experience and reflection aligns with Munezane's (2015) demonstration that goal-setting and visualization enhance WTC, and with Krashen's (1982) concept of the affective filter, which the present data suggest operates powerfully in naturalistic LTR communication contexts. Furthermore, given that technology already functions as an informal communicative bridge for many learners, EAP programs might leverage digital tools as a structured third space in which learners can rehearse L2 communication before engaging in higher-stakes face-to-face interactions. The participants' own use of messaging platforms was spontaneous and social rather than instructional; harnessing such tools deliberately, as has been done to extend independent speaking practice beyond contact hours in an Australian EAP setting (Chang & Windeatt, 2023), would give LTR learners a rehearsal space for the community-facing interactions they must eventually manage unaided.

Conclusion

This study examined the complex and dynamic nature of WTC, conceptualized through a CDST lens, among LTRs - specifically refugee and immigrant learners - enrolled in an EAP program. The findings indicate that WTC is not a fixed trait but an inherently dynamic, socially situated construct. Crucially, the data captures how psychological and environmental factors interlock and fluctuate across multiple timescales simultaneously. For these learners, English functions not only as a tool for education and employment, but as a means of reconstructing identity during resettlement.

Issues affecting WTC in class were also present in communication outside class, amplified by unpredictable interlocutor behavior and lack of familiarity with accents and speech rates. Supportive and culturally responsive classroom environments played a central role in reducing anxiety and fostering confidence, and participants reported that increased in-class communicative engagement to interactions outside class - a pattern consistent with CDST's notion of shifting attractor states across communicative contexts. However, transferring WTC to unpredictable real-world contexts requires additional explicit pedagogical support; integrating simulated real-world tasks, digital communication opportunities, and structured cycles of goal-setting and reflection can strengthen learners' communicative autonomy beyond the classroom.

While surface-level parallels exist between the patterns observed in this study and those reported in the short-term study abroad literature such as the role of anxiety, interlocutor

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familiarity, and classroom support, the underlying dynamics follow a fundamentally different logic. For LTRs, communicative engagement is not bounded by an academic semester but constitutes an ongoing negotiation of identity, belonging, and access. The timescales across which they negotiate their L2 identity - daily interactions, semester-long courses, and years-long resettlement trajectories - are qualitatively different from the compressed timescales of short-term sojourners. These dynamics, documented in a population that remains marginal in the WTC literature, suggest that a CDST-informed perspective has particular analytical purchase in EAP contexts defined by resettlement. The development of WTC thus represents a potentially transformative dimension of language learning for resettling populations, supporting social integration and psychological well-being.

Limitations and Further Research

The quality of the data on WTC in real-world encounters depends on participants' retrospective accounts. Reflective journals, regular report-back activities, or stimulated recall anchored to specific communicative episodes could supplement questionnaire and interview data with more immediate records (Chang & Windeatt, 2026). More fundamentally, the cross-sectional design yields a snapshot rather than a trajectory. CDST-informed methodologies would enable real-time tracking of WTC fluctuations, revealing how attractor states shift as LTR learners move between EAP classrooms and academic, professional, and community settings.

The sample is also small, limiting inferences about the transfer of classroom strategies to real-world encounters and about the role of learners' cultural and educational backgrounds. Comparable data on study-abroad students' actual out-of-class language use are likewise lacking, and gathering such data would permit a more direct test of the distinction drawn above. Finally, enrollment in an EAP program presupposes at least low-intermediate proficiency, secondary education, and strong academic motivation. Future research might therefore recruit a more representative sample of the LTR community, including those not yet on defined academic pathways.

Author Contributions

Heejin Chang: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, validation, writing - original drafts, review and editing, and project administration.

Michael Davies: conceptualization, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, validation, resources, and writing - original drafts, review and editing.

Scott Windeatt: conceptualization, methodology, validation, and writing - original drafts, review and editing.

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Ethics statement

This study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of University of Southern Queensland in Australia (ETH2022-0189). Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Notes on Contributors

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Appendix

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

Background Information

1. How long have you been studying English? _____ years.

2. How important is it for you to learn English?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all	slightly	somewhat	very	extremely

3. On a scale of 1 – 5. How much do you enjoy studying English?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all	slightly	somewhat	very	extremely

4. Why are you studying English at the University of Southern Queensland?

_____

5. What do you hope to achieve from your English courses at the University of Southern Queensland?

_____

6. How would you judge your English skills ability?

Speaking	Poor	Below average	Average	Above Average	Very good
Listening	Poor	Below average	Average	Above Average	Very good
Reading	Poor	Below average	Average	Above Average	Very good
Writing	Poor	Below average	Average	Above Average	Very good

7. Do you worry about what other people think about your English ability?

1	2	3	4	5
not at all	slightly	somewhat	very	extremely

8. Are you comfortable speaking English **in** the classroom?

Yes No It depends

Extra information: _____

9. Are you comfortable speaking English **outside** the classroom?

Yes No It depends

Extra information: _____

10. Which of the following adjectives do you think you apply to you?

Shy	outgoing	talkative	quiet
risk-taker	risk-averse	relaxed	tense

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Post-Course Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

The following semi-structured interview questions can be asked in any order, and supplementary questions can be asked to develop answers.

1. Opening questions based on Questions 1 – 4 in the initial questionnaire.
2. How are you enjoying your English classes at UniSQ?
3. How much do you like learning together with your classmates in your classes?
4. How do you feel when you speak English in the classroom?
5. Does it depend on who you are talking to?
6. When do you think it is easy for you to speak English in the classroom?
7. When do you think it is difficult for you to speak English in the classroom?
8. What kind of speaking activities in your class do you most enjoy?
9. What kind of speaking activities in your class do you least enjoy?
10. Have you noticed a change in how much you want to speak English in the classroom during the UniSQ course? Why?
11. How do you feel about speaking English to English-speakers outside of the classroom?
12. Does it depend on the person, the situation, or the location?
13. Has your communication with English-speakers outside the classroom increased or decreased during the UniSQ course? Has it stayed the same?
14. Do you think your personality affects how much you speak English inside or outside the classroom?