



Article

The Interplay between Task Use, Enjoyment, Anxiety, and Willingness to Communicate in the Face-to-Face Classroom and Digital Setting among Vietnamese EFL Students

Thanh Tien Nguyen¹, Hung Phu Bui^{2*}

¹*Hoa Sen University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

²*Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ton Duc Thang University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

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CORRESPONDENCE

*E-mail: buiophung@tdtu.edu.vn

ABSTRACT

Willingness to communicate (WTC), a psychological drive for communication, is acknowledged as a burgeoning interest in language education. It can be affected by learner differences (e.g. motivation and emotion) and external factors (e.g. environment and interlocutor). Yet, little research has investigated the impacts of classroom task values and learners' emotions on learners' WTC across different learning modalities. This study examines the impact of perceived values of tasks on learners' WTC in the traditional class and digital setting. Two emotional constructs, namely enjoyment and anxiety, were included as mediating factors. Data were collected from questionnaires administered to 277 Vietnamese students ($n = 277$) of B1-level English proficiency at a language centre in Vietnam. We utilized a structural equation modelling approach to understand the associations among the variables. Data were entered into SPSS Statistics 26 and Amos 24 for analysis. We initially tested the hypotheses before examining the hypothesized model. Results indicate that task use positively affected enjoyment and negatively determined anxiety. Enjoyment and anxiety directly affected in-class WTC positively and negatively respectively. In-class WTC was in turn a positive antecedent of digital WTC. The study suggests employing meaningful tasks and establishing a low-anxiety learning environment to increase learners' WTC in the physical classroom and digital settings.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social interaction has been well-documented to facilitate language learning. According to Long (1981) and Vygotsky (1978), second or foreign language (L2) learners may acquire language, knowledge, and communication strategies from social interaction. This hypothesis has motivated a proliferating interest in the importance of interaction in L2 education. However, learners may not obtain any benefit from social interaction at all if they are not willing to engage in assigned communicative tasks. In other words, learners'

willingness to communicate (WTC) can drive them to enthusiastically participate in meaningful communication, facilitating learners' development (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

L2 WTC is broadly defined as one's readiness to converse in a second or foreign language (MacIntyre et al., 1998). It has been documented as a burgeoning interest in applied linguistics and language education. MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) framework outlines the key factors affecting WTC (see Figure 1). Accordingly, individual learner and classroom characteristics are included and

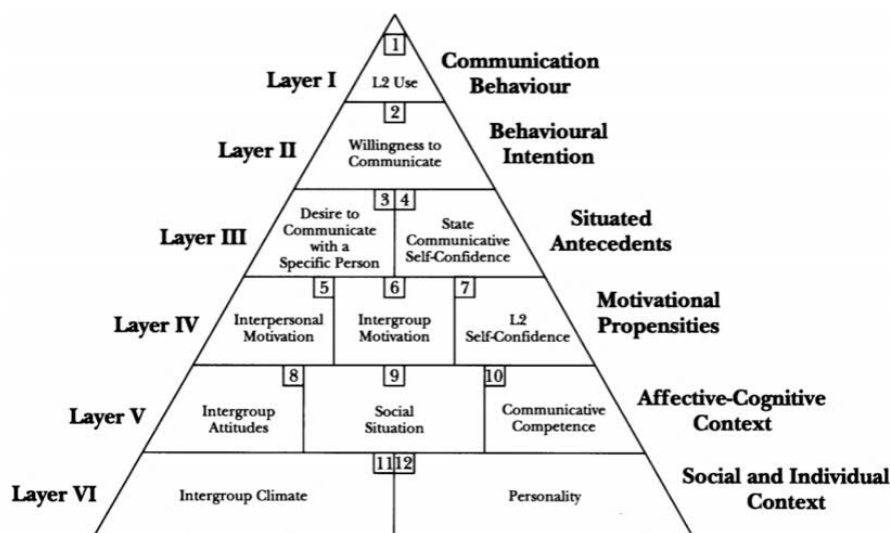


Figure 1. The heuristic model of factors affecting L2 WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998)

organized into six layers, suggesting that L2 WTC is affected by learner variables and social factors.

Motivated by the model, a few scholars have tested the associations between individual learner variables and WTC, hypothesizing that L2 WTC is trait-like and stable. Accordingly, one's WTC can be shaped by their gender (MacIntyre et al., 2001), perceived competence (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996), motivation (Yashima, 2002), language learning orientations (MacIntyre et al., 2001), international posture (Yashima, 2002), and anxiety (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). However, this perspective does not provide many pedagogical implications for L2 teaching as it is based mainly on learners' intrinsic factors.

Researchers interested in the socially oriented approach have conceptualized WTC as a context-dependent construct, proposing its changeability in different social situations (Kang, 2005; Zhang et al., 2018). This school of thought has motivated a great number of studies in L2 teaching. The external factors documented to impact WTC in L2 classroom include interlocutors (Wei & Cao, 2021), topics and tasks (Peng, 2014; Wei & Cao, 2021), interactional patterns (Yu, 2015), teacher characteristics (Tavakoli & Zarrinabadi, 2018; Zare et al., 2022), and learning environment (Lee & Lee, 2020). As this research line primarily aims to investigate the link between classroom discourse and pedagogy to L2 WTC, it has provided implications for L2 teaching. Accordingly, teachers are recommended to establish low-anxiety learning environment to foster L2 WTC.

A few researchers (e.g. Ngoc & Iwashita, 2012; Yates & Trang, 2012) have analysed the characteristics of Asian cultures and found that Asian students tend to avoid speaking because they do not want to be corrected in public. For instance, Sato (1990) observed Asian university students and found that they had disproportionately low verbal engagement. While students from Asia comprised nearly two thirds of her class, the Asian students' speaking turns accounted for only approximately one third. They reported that negative feedback could make them be laughed at. According to Park (2000), Asian students are afraid of losing face in public, preventing them from commencing communication and willingness to speak out their opinions. Regarding the culture of Vietnam, Yates & Trang (2012), for example, found that Vietnamese international students in Australia described themselves as "passive" or "quiet" in the classroom setting, reflecting a broader learning culture of Vietnam. According to Ngoc and Iwashita (2012), Vietnamese students rarely volunteer to respond; instead, they rely mainly on teacher nomination to participate in discourse. In particular, teacher-centredness is a common pedagogical approach. That is, teachers are typically considered a primary input provider, while students are expected to listen, take notes, and absorb information rather than actively speak up. Therefore, students feel that if they do not have something particularly valuable to say, it is better to keep silent (Yates & Trang, 2012).

In L2 classrooms, task use (TU) has been conceptualized as an integral component of a

language classroom climate. It was first identified as one of the three dimensions of the classroom climate in Moos's (1979) seminal endeavour. Since then, this concept has received more attention from educational researchers. For instance, in Peng's (2014) study with 579 university undergraduate Chinese students, TU was found to be the strongest indicator of the classroom environment. Accordingly, the construct of task use was formulated with two main sub-concepts: task completion and perceived usefulness of tasks. The findings showed that these two key elements impacted learners' L2 WTC. When learners are familiar with a task and believe it to be useful, their WTC to accomplish the group task is likely to improve (Aubrey et al., 2022; Nakamura et al., 2021). Nevertheless, they may withdraw when they find that they cannot deal with the task (Rahimi & Zhang, 2018; Zabihi et al., 2020). Therefore, the teacher may examine the features of the task to enhance classroom interaction (Peng, 2014; Wei & Cao, 2021).

Regarding task complexity, it may be essential to reference Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory suggests classifying learners' competences into three categories: what learners can do if they are not supported, what learners cannot do even if they are supported, and what learners can do if they are supported. This suggests that teachers assign tasks that students can do if supported. In other words, learners can partly use their existing knowledge to complete an assigned task, carving the pathways for development.

Also, perceived pedagogical value of tasks is potentially associated with WTC inside the face-to-face class or in-class WTC. According to Li (2021) and Pekrun (2006), learners' performance is likely to improve when they identify that tasks are meaningful, relevant, and appropriately challenging. Accordingly, a task should be manageable, giving learners opportunities to apply what they learned and facilitating their uptake of new input. Lam (2023) also found that task difficulty significantly influenced Vietnamese students' WTC as students may face linguistic problems and struggle to generate ideas if they find a task overchallenging. In contrast, if they find nothing to learn from the task, learners may disengage or refuse to accomplish it (Bui et al., 2022). This suggests that topics and tasks can impact learners' in-class WTC

as they are likely to cognitively or experientially engage learners in classroom communication (Cao, 2011; Wei & Cao, 2021). Thus, authentic, relevant, and/or personalized tasks tend to prompt more spontaneous interaction. The literature suggests the following hypothesis:

H1: TU directly and positively influences in-class WTC.

The characteristics of tasks are likely to shape students' emotional responses. This suggests that emotions depend on how much control learners feel they have and how much value they attach to a task (Li, 2021; Pekrun, 2006). To further explain the link between tasks and emotion, Aubrey et al. (2022) proposed that tasks connected to learners' prior experiences tend to be less intimidating and more engaging.

Applied linguists have paid more attention to positive psychology since Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) endeavour, with foreign language enjoyment (FLE) as the central focus. Boudreau et al. (2018, p. 153) define that FLE, unlike short-term pleasure, is a "complex and stable emotion". Lee (2022) expanded this definition that FLE is formed from the pleasant experiences in learning an additional language. This variable can positively affect learners' well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2019), motivation (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012), and resilience against negative affect (Dewaele et al., 2018; MacIntyre et al., 2019). When learners believe a task to be manageable and meaningful, they tend to experience enjoyment (Li, 2021).

However, once a task requires the heavier cognitive load that learners cannot handle, anxiety is likely to emerge (Rahimi & Zhang, 2018; Zabihi et al., 2020). The first formal recognition of language classroom anxiety can be traced back to Horwitz et al.'s (1986) seminal work. Accordingly, foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) refers to "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). FLCA has received scholars' attention because it can disrupt cognitive processing when learners express themselves through a system that they have to struggle to deal with (Eysenck et al., 2007). Moreover, the fear about making errors in public or being evaluated can exacerbate the situation, making even confident learners reluctant to speak (Dewaele & Dewaele,

2017). Interestingly, this reluctance probably translates into lower WTC (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Zhou et al., 2023).

Therefore, giving learners some control over topics, partners, or formats, is likely to reduce anxiety and increases enjoyment (Nakamura et al., 2021). These emotional shifts then possibly influence how students actually engage in and perform a task. Positive appraisals often lead to deeper involvement and higher WTC, while learners perceive a task as threatening, pushing learners to withdraw from engagement (Côté & Gaffney, 2021). In addition, structure matters just as much. Tasks that require collaboration, problem-solving, or information exchange are likely to generate the communicative pressure necessary to drive interaction. Conversely, ambiguous instructions or activities lacking a clear interactional purpose frequently result in silence (Wei & Cao, 2021).

Research has examined the interplay between emotions and WTC. For instance, Khajavy et al.'s (2018) research found that FLE positively significantly affected Iranian secondary school students' WTC, while FLCA reduced it. These associations were confirmed by Dewaele and Pavelescu's (2021) qualitative study in the Romanian EFL context. The literature survey suggests the hypotheses as follows:

H2: TU directly and positively predicts FLE.

H3: TU directly and negatively predicts FLCA.

H4: FLE directly and positively predicts in-class WTC.

H5: FLCA directly and negatively predicts in-class WTC.

The increasing popularity of educational technology has motivated investigations into digital language learning (Pham et al., 2025; Reinders & Benson, 2017; Vo, 2025). As Lee and Chiu (2023) put it, learners may exhibit a greater level of WTC in the digital modality. First, learners commonly prefer conversing with like-minded peers from other cultures, probably to improve their cultural awareness and communication skills (McCallum, 2024). Second, in their qualitative study with 18 Vietnamese students, Le et al. (2018) reported that many students felt more confident when using texts or voice chat online compared to traditional classes because they had more time to think, and they were anonymized. Furthermore, artificial intelligence-

powered platforms generally create low-anxiety environments where learners can practice speaking (Tai, 2024), reducing the traditional classroom pressure and embarrassment (Bui et al., 2022). A possible explanation is that the effect of Eastern cultures and concerns about face is reduced in such a setting (Nguyen & Bui, 2026). Learners may opt to engage anonymously with a chatbot, reducing the tendency of judging or criticizing their mistakes (Tai & Chen, 2023). This results in a surge in WTC in the target language inside the physical classroom or in-class WTC and in the virtual setting (Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Zou et al., 2024).

Research also suggests that in-class WTC has potential effects on digital WTC as they both pertain to internal characteristics like affect (Liu et al., 2024) and environment features (Lee & Lee, 2020). Lee and Chiu (2023), from a survey administered to over 1,000 Korean students, found a strong association between in-class and digital WTC, both affected by anxiety and confidence. Given the possible impact of online communication on "performance and motivation" (Han et al., 2024) and transferability of in-class WTC to digital WTC, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H6: In-class WTC directly and positively influences digital WTC.

A survey of extensive literature shows that the relationship between TU and in-class WTC can be intervened by FLE and FLCA. That is, the relationship between TU and WTC can be direct and indirect. Yet, little research has simultaneously examined the associations between TU, FLE, FLCA, in-class WTC, and digital WTC in Asian contexts. To fill the gap, this study investigates whether learners' in-class WTC and digital WTC levels differ or align and the interplay between TU, FLE and FLCA, in-class WTC, and digital WTC in an L2 English context of Vietnam. Considering the particular learning culture of Vietnam, this study will extend the literature of English language teaching by providing implications for enhancing in-class and digital WTC in the immediate context and beyond.

From the six hypotheses, we propose the following hypothesized model (Figure 2). As Hair et al. (2006) proposed, a model should be based on the hypotheses and specified. The primary idea is that the more detailed and engaging the classroom tasks are, the more enjoyable and less anxious the

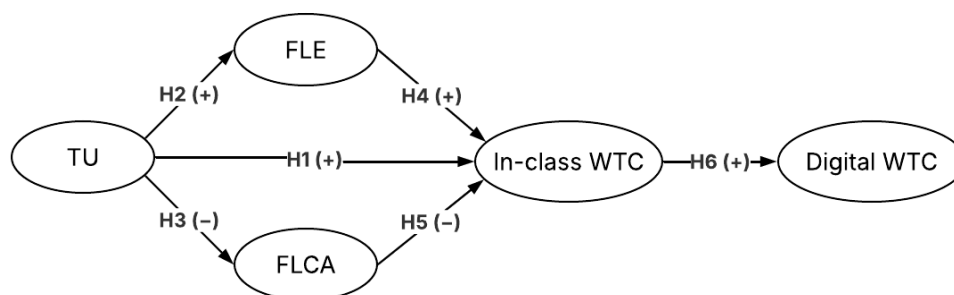


Figure. 2. Hypothesized model

students feel in the classroom. These emotions then shape learners' WTC level, transferring to learners' WTC level in digital settings. Also, a task-oriented environment can directly influence WTC. We predict that learners' in-class WTC affects their WTC in the digital context.

II. METHODS

Study Design

Considering the research purpose, we utilized a predictive research design. According to Creswell (2012), this design may include independent and mediating variables that affect the dependent variable. A structural equation modelling (SEM) approach, conducted with SPSS Statistics and Amos, was utilized to understand the associations among task use, L2 enjoyment, L2 anxiety and WTC in both face-to-face classroom and digital settings.

Participants

The current study was implemented at a language centre in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. We deployed the purposive sampling strategy, using screening questions about students' participation in digital communication to select the target participants. A sample of 317 students voluntarily responded to an invitation to participate in the study. Data provided by 40 participants were excluded during the data screening phase, leaving 277 valid cases for data analysis. They were high school students and judged to be at B1 level of English proficiency.

Materials and Instruments

To collect data for the study, we employed five questionnaires: (1) TU, (2) FLCA, (3) FLE, (4) in-class WTC, and (5) digital WTC. These questionnaires were bilingual (English and Vietnamese) to ease the participants' understanding and increase reliability. The consent form was

attached as the first page so that the researcher could direct learners to read and sign it before the questionnaire administration.

Regarding the measures of L2 WTC in the two settings, we adopted Lee and Hsieh's (2019) 5-point scales, namely in-class WTC (4 items) and digital WTC (4 items), as these scales refer to L2 English contexts. Items 1–4 are about in-class WTC, while items 5–8 measure digital WTC. For example, Item 7 "post comments to a foreign friend's wall on Facebook" particularly describes a digital interaction activity on social media.

We employed Peng's (2014) questionnaire about TU, modified from Fraser et al. (1996), because this modified version refers to the Asian context. The items, on a five-point Likert scale, evaluate whether students understand the goals of the class (Item 1), find the tasks useful (Item 2), and perceive the activities/assignments to be well-planned and clear (Items 3 and 4).

Dewaele and Dewaele's (2017) FLE Scale (10 items) was employed to investigate the students' enjoyment. This scale was modified from Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) 21-item scale. The 10-item version, with the removal of 11 low factor loadings or unclear items, enables it to offer a more focused measurement while significantly reducing survey fatigue. In the questionnaire, learners' enjoyment comes from either the classroom climate (e.g., "We laugh a lot in my English class.") or their internal feelings (e.g., "I enjoy my English class."). The items were formatted on a 5-point Likert scale.

To measure the students' anxiety, we utilized FLCA measure (7 items), adapted from Bensalem's (2022) FLCA Scale, originally based Horwitz et al.'s (1986) seminal endeavour. The modified measure was considered to match Asian classroom settings. These seven items (six positively coded items and one reversely coded item) were also set

in a five-point Likert format.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were gathered in 2025. To reach a wider pool of learners, the questionnaires were shared online (through the centre's learning platforms) and in a hard copy format during in-person classes. Before we administered the questionnaire, every student was informed about the research purpose, research procedure, and data confidentiality before they consented to their participation. We ensured instrumental equivalence by keeping instructions, item order, and visual layout identical across both formats. In addition, to maintain the integrity of data collection, we followed a standardized administration procedure. First, the participants received the same verbal briefing that outlined the study's purpose and assured anonymity. Second, the survey was administered uniformly, both in format and timing, specifically during the final 15 minutes of class. Finally, participants were provided privacy to respond without teacher involvement to reduce the risk of social desirability bias.

Data Analysis

We projected data to SPSS Statistics 26 and Amos 24 for analysis. We analysed data using

the 5-step process recommended by Hair et al. (2006). First, after the data cleaning phase, invalid responses from forty participants were removed, leaving data from 277 remaining participants for official analysis. Second, data distribution was examined to ensure data quality. Descriptive statistics confirmed that all constructs satisfied the assumptions of normality, with skewness indices ranging from approximately -0.60 to about 0.20 and kurtosis indices ranging from nearly -0.35 to about 3.70 (see Table 1).

Third, we examined the internal coefficient consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of each scale. All achieved values were greater than the threshold of 0.7 (Byrne, 2016), except for FLCA. After the removal of FLCA4, the Cronbach's alpha of FLCA increased from 0.627 to 0.705 . Also, the initial data analysis showed that FLE1, FLE10, and FLCA7 did not meet the communality criterion ($h^2 = 0.109$, 0.177 and 0.196 , respectively). Moreover, WTC6 and FLE6 did not align conceptually with the other items measured in their constructs as these items loaded onto another distinct factor. Meanwhile, WTC3 and FLE8 did not load significantly onto any factors and FLE9 was seen to cross-load on two different factors. We then employed a

Table 1. Initial Data Analysis and Descriptive Statistics

Factors	Items	Skewness	Kurtosis	Factor loading	$\alpha (>0.7)$	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
In-class WTC	WTC1	-0.025	-0.235	0.795	0.832	0.730
	WTC2	-0.067	-0.179	0.784		0.812
	WTC4	0.137	-0.323	0.588		0.589
Digital WTC	WTC5	-0.226	0.094	0.743	0.832	0.757
	WTC7	-0.084	0.543	0.698		0.747
	WTC8	-0.113	0.375	0.735		0.625
TU	TU1	0.000	1.668	0.725	0.819	0.606
	TU2	-0.571	2.018	0.646		0.665
	TU3	-0.149	1.626	0.655		0.645
	TU4	-0.346	2.531	0.797		0.648
FLE	FLE2	-0.011	1.709	0.699	0.888	0.661
	FLE3	-0.462	3.337	0.838		0.706
	FLE4	-0.195	3.678	0.843		0.719
	FLE5	-0.209	3.522	0.780		0.699
	FLE7	0.168	1.333	0.745		0.661
FLCA	FLCA1	-0.338	-0.076	0.779	0.727	0.490
	FLCA3	-0.598	0.972	0.607		0.503
	FLCA5	-0.451	0.045	0.566		0.454
	FLCA6	-0.447	0.772	0.572		0.467

confirmatory factor analysis to examine the model fitness. Following this, FLCA2 was removed because it had low standardized loading and modification indices suggested it was a source of error covariance. These resulted in the removal of WTC3, WTC6, FLE1, FLE6, FLE8, FLE9, FLE10, FLCA2, FLCA4 and FLCA7, leaving 19 indicators in the model. The Corrected Item-Total Correlation values for all remaining items range from 0.454 to 0.812, above the cut-off point of 0.30 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The remaining items satisfied the statistical standard (see Table 1).

According to Kline (2023), this sample size was adequate as it equalled the number of indicators multiplied by 10-20. In addition, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(276) = 2630.886$ ($p < .001$), indicating that the correlation matrix was statistically satisfactory. Both the eigenvalue test and scree plot analysis converged on a five-factor solution, explaining 70.83% of the initial variance before rotation and 60.25% of the extracted common variance.

III. RESULTS

Vietnamese EFL students' levels of in-class WTC and digital WTC

A comparison between in-class WTC and digital WTC levels shows that the learners showed a greater degree of WTC in the technology-augmented modality than in the traditional class (see Table 2). Accordingly, their WTC in online settings accounted for a mean score of 4.16 (SD = 0.49), significantly greater than their in-class WTC level (M=3.86, SD = 0.55). This resulted in a significant

difference of 0.3 (95% CI [0.24, 0.36]) between these two constructs. The paired samples t-test supported this pattern and showed a statistically significant difference, $t(276) = -10.54$ ($p < .001$; Cohen's $d = 0.63$). This represents a medium-to-large effect size (Funder & Ozer, 2019). Overall, the learners demonstrated a greater WTC level in the digital setting than in the physical classroom.

The associations among task use, anxiety, enjoyment, in-class WTC and digital WTC

We examined convergent validity and discriminant validity before testing the model. The CR values of all variables were higher than the statistical standard of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2006). Regarding AVE, although the values for in-class WTC, digital WTC, TU and FLE exceeded the 0.50 benchmark, except FLCA (AVE=0.41) (see Table 3). However, we decided to keep this construct for further analysis. According to Henseler et al. (2015) and Malhotra and Dash (2011), AVE values of lower than 0.5 can retain in the model if CR is higher than 0.70.

The model fit indices also confirmed that the data exhibited a good overall fit. The results of the path analysis supported all proposed hypotheses (see Table 4). First, TU was a significant determinant of in-class WTC ($\beta = 0.354$, $p < .001$), supporting H1. It was also a significant predictor of the learners' emotions. In particular, TU was a positive predictor of FLE ($\beta = 0.622$, $p < .001$) and a negative antecedent of FLCA ($\beta = -0.159$, $p = 0.041$). Therefore, H2 and H3 were supported. In addition, FLE and FLCA were the antecedents of in-class WTC ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$ and $\beta = -0.369$,

Table 2. Paired Samples t-test

In-class WTC		Digital WTC		Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval (CI)		df	t	Cohen's d
M	SD	M	SD		Lower	Upper			
3.86	0.55	4.16	0.5	0.3	0.36	0.24	276	-10.54	0.63

Table 3. Convergent and Discriminant Validity

	CR (>0.7)	AVE (>0.5)	HTMT (<0.85)				
			1	2	3	4	5
TU	0.80	0.51	-				
FLE	0.89	0.62	0.617	-			
FLCA	0.73	0.41	0.174	0.138	-		
In-class WTC	0.77	0.53	0.502	0.563	0.389	-	
Digital WTC	0.77	0.53	0.540	0.543	0.383	0.712	-

Note. CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; HTMT = Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio.

Table 4. Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Structural Path	β	p	Result
H1	TU $\rightarrow$ In-class WTC	0.354	< 0.001	Supported
H2	TU $\rightarrow$ FLE	0.622	< 0.001	Supported
H3	TU $\rightarrow$ FLCA	-0.159	0.041	Supported
H4	FLE $\rightarrow$ In-class WTC	0.360	< 0.001	Supported
H5	FLCA $\rightarrow$ In-class WTC	-0.369	< 0.001	Supported
H6	In-class WTC $\rightarrow$ Digital WTC	0.896	< 0.001	Supported
Mediation paths		β	p	Result
FLE $\rightarrow$ In-Class WTC $\rightarrow$ Digital WTC		0.394	0.037	Significant
FLCA $\rightarrow$ In-Class WTC $\rightarrow$ Digital WTC		-0.42	0.001	Significant
TU $\rightarrow$ FLE/FLCA/In-Class WTC $\rightarrow$ Digital WTC		0.655	0.001	Significant

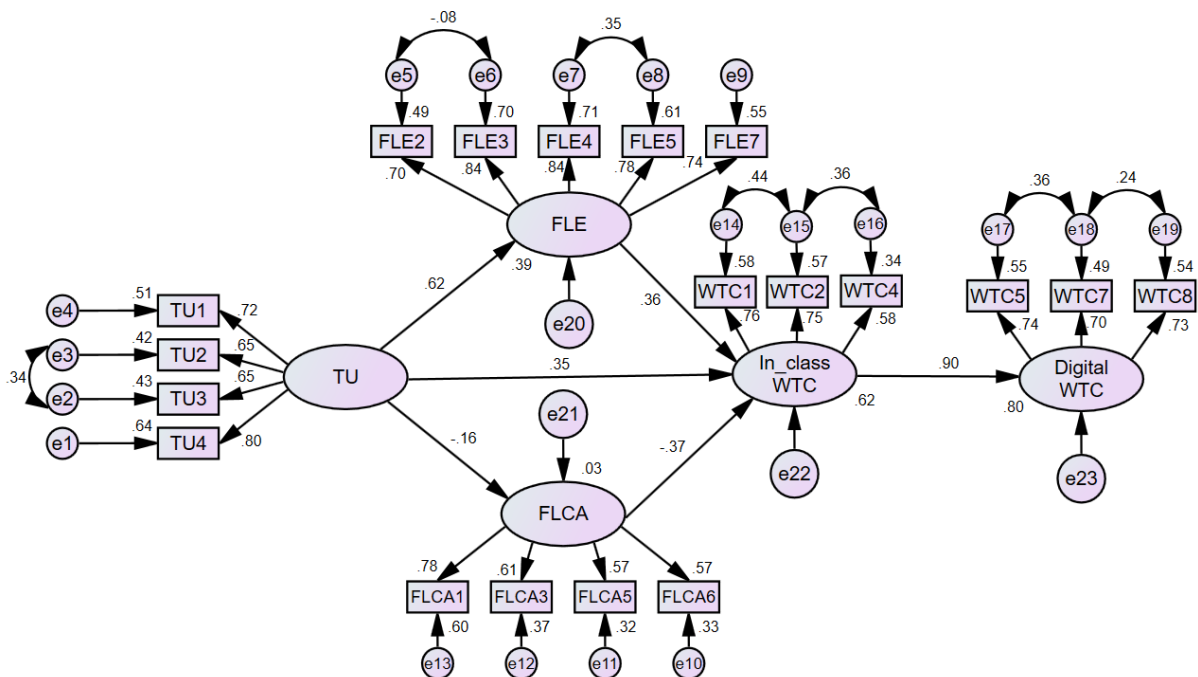


Fig. 2. The Structural Model

$p < 0.001$, respectively). The statistics supported H4 and H5. Finally, the path from in-class to digital WTC was significant ($\beta = 0.896, p < 0.001$), supporting H6. Overall, the findings indicated a good model fitness, with $\chi^2/df = 2.516$ ($p < 0.001$), RMR = 0.015, GFI = 0.884, AGFI = 0.841, IFI = 0.921, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.902, and RMSEA = 0.074.

To examine the roles of the mediating variables, a bootstrapping procedure with 2,000 samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (BC-CI) was deployed (see Table 4). FLE had a significant positive indirect effect on digital WTC ($\beta = 0.394$). Conversely, FLCA exerted a significant negative indirect effect on digital WTC ($\beta = -0.42$). Finally, TU also demonstrated a strong indirect effect on digital WTC ($\beta = 0.655$).

The structural model demonstrated the associations among the variables (see Figure 2). TU directly affected in-class WTC; that is, the more highly the learners evaluated tasks, the more willing they were to communicate in class. Also, FLE and FLCA mediated the impacts of TU and in-class WTC, suggesting that TU significantly influenced the students' enjoyment positively and anxiety negatively. In-class WTC, in turn, affected digital WTC. The model demonstrated that TU directly and indirectly affected the students' WTC in the physical classroom, which in turn had effects on their digital WTC.

IV. DISCUSSION

This study compared the levels of WTC in the physical classroom and online setting and

examined whether task use, enjoyment, and anxiety affected the in-class and digital WTC of learners at a language centre in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Drawing data collected from a sample of 277 B1-level Vietnamese learners, the six hypotheses were supported, showing that enjoyment and anxiety mediated the influence of task use on in-class WTC.

The results revealed that the learners showed a significantly higher WTC level in digital contexts than in the physical classroom. This result aligns with the research by Lee and Hsieh (2019) and Lee and Lee (2020). One possible explanation is that the learners were readier to communicate in a low-control digital context because they were less likely to feel the impact of social anxiety and negative evaluation (Lee & Chiu, 2023). As Kang (2005) and Yates and Trang (2012) noted, learners may refuse to talk as they identify the threat of losing face in public. In the Vietnamese EFL context, this hesitation may be rooted in the face-saving norm as learners do not want to be judged and corrected. Also, they prefer talking from their needs to being assigned to talk in public by the teacher (Yates & Trang, 2012). The findings suggest that Vietnamese teachers might take advantage of the digital spaces to encourage their students to speak. They may integrate online tools into both in-class speaking activities and asynchronous assignments. For example, artificial intelligence chatbots may be used as virtual conversation partners to create the sense of real-time interaction as these tools can be “ideal interlocutors” (Tai, 2024; Tai & Chen, 2023). Besides, anonymous platforms such as Padlet or Mentimeter can lower the emotional barrier to participation, making it easier for students to share responses (Vo, 2025).

Findings also showed that tasks exerted a direct impact on in-class WTC. This finding confirmed Peng and Woodrow’s (2010) research that TU is a direct antecedent of in-class WTC. The present study extends this understanding by revealing an indirect pathway, fundamentally mediated by learners’ emotions, namely enjoyment and anxiety. According to Li (2021) and Pekrun (2006), when learners feel they have a certain control over a task and perceive a task to be interesting, relevant, or meaningful, they are more likely to enjoy this task. This state of emotion can be achieved if the tasks are designed with familiar content (Aubrey et al., 2022; Lambert & Zhang, 2019) and provide choices (Nakamura et al., 2021).

The impact of FLE on WTC was aligned with past research (e.g. Cao, 2022; Zhao et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Lee et al. (2021) explained that FLE could be more significant than FLCA in L2 education, suggesting that FLE could be a crucial factor driving learners’ communication (Zhao et al., 2024). Enjoyment generated from classroom tasks is especially crucial in the language class because it can broaden learners’ thought–action repertoire and contribute to the development of their individual and social resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Therefore, language teachers may focus on creating an enjoyable classroom climate, as this can encourage learners to feel more willing to communicate. This may be particularly influential in the context of Vietnam, where a significant responsibility is placed on educators to create an environment enhancing classroom interaction (Lam, 2023; Nguyen & Vu, 2024). Pedagogies such as task use, group discussion, and role play can generate more interests in learners and encourage them to use the target language (Biynazarova et al., 2024; Muliati et al., 2023).

In contrast, the relationship between TU and FLCA was found negative, suggesting that the learners’ perceived usefulness and relevance of tasks could significantly lower anxiety. As Côté and Gaffney (2021) put it, a lower anxiety level can be linked with a higher level of task engagement. However, anxiety can arise if the tasks are beyond the learners’ competence, requiring significant reasoning effort (Rahimi & Zhang, 2018; Zabihi et al., 2020).

Aligned with Horwitz et al.’s (1986) foundational work and Khajavy et al.’s (2018) study, the current study found that FLCA was a psychological barrier to WTC. However, MacIntyre (2017) does not recommend eliminating FLCA entirely as a low-anxiety classroom may put pressure on students to be more productive. Thus, it may be essential that teachers try to lower students’ anxiety by creating a low-stress classroom atmosphere to boost learners’ WTC (Hoang & Bui, 2023). Also, it may be essential that teachers explicitly communicate the practical value of these tasks to promote learners’ engagement in communication as learners are more likely to engage when they are informed of the learning objectives (Saeed et al., 2025).

Moreover, the findings show that in-class

WTC was a positive predictor of digital WTC. This confirms the concept that WTC is somewhat trait-like (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Digital WTC seems to rest on what has already been developed inside the classroom (Lee & Hsieh, 2019). While digital tools certainly offer advantages, they do not fundamentally change a learner's underlying disposition on their own (Le et al., 2018; Vo, 2025), suggesting the importance of face-to-face interaction. Face-to-face interaction serves as a direct antecedent of digital communication in educational contexts. Digital tools should not be used to substitute traditional teaching but to assist teaching and learning (Lai, 2017).

In general, the structural model showed that the hypotheses were reasonably supported, revealing how tasks could be structured to enhance WTC (Cao, 2011; Wei & Cao, 2021). In addition, the influence may also be indirect, intervened by learners' affect, shaping their enjoyment and anxiety. Those emotions could in turn determine whether they decide to engage in communicative tasks (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021; Khajavy et al., 2018). Moreover, although WTC levels may vary across different settings, in-class WTC and digital WTC can be interrelated (Lee & Hsieh, 2019). In the study, in-class WTC significantly predicted digital WTC, highlighting the importance of the traditional classroom even in the context of technological evolution.

The results suggest several pedagogical implications for EFL educators. First, technology can support WTC because it offers a low-stress speaking environment (Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Zou et al., 2024), but it should not be viewed as a complete replacement for face-to-face and authentic L2 interaction (Lai, 2017). Teachers might try to incorporate technology into their traditional lessons to enhance students' WTC in both conventional classroom and digital settings (Vo, 2025). Second, task use is considerably important in the classroom. They exert their influence not only on WTC but also learners' emotions (Li, 2021; Pekrun, 2006; Rahimi & Zhang, 2018; Zabihi et al., 2020). Therefore, it may be necessary to create and adopt activities leading to a positive classroom atmosphere to influence learners' affect (Hoang & Bui, 2023). Finally, emotions can bridge classroom tasks and learners' WTC. Classroom tasks can foster enjoyment while alleviating anxiety, thereby

creating conditions that promote communication. Therefore, it may be essential to situate classroom tasks within ZPD and ensure that they meet learners' needs and competencies (Aubrey et al., 2022; Lambert & Zhang, 2019).

V. CONCLUSION

This article reports on research into the effects of the TU, FLE, and FLCA on students' in-class WTC and digital WTC in a Vietnamese context. Drawing on data collected from 277 valid cases, the study indicates significant direct and indirect effects of TU on Vietnamese learners' WTC. Enjoyment and anxiety, as mediators, in turn significantly predicted in-class WTC. Additionally, L2 WTC was not confined to the classroom but could extend into the digital environment, where students exhibited a higher WTC level.

This study contributes to the current knowledge of L2 WTC by testing the structural model that connects TU, emotions and WTC. First, it enriches the understanding of the "Task-Emotion-WTC" framework. In essence, TU directly affects learners' WTC directly and indirectly. Moreover, the findings that WTC is impacted by both TU and emotions shed light on the ongoing debate on whether WTC is situational or trait-like. It is trait-like as it affected by learners' emotions, and it is situational as it is influenced by TU. These findings offer insights for language educators in Vietnam and similar contexts to design task-based lessons that foster positive emotions and reduce negative feelings, thereby enhancing learners' WTC.

However, this study has possible limitations. First, it relied mainly on self-reported data, probably causing bias responses. This calls for more comprehensive research, perhaps incorporating qualitative data, to validate the findings in other educational contexts. Second, the study sample came entirely from a private English centre in Vietnam, who were all above B1 level. This may have affected the statistical results, particularly those of FLE and FLCA items were dropped during the validation stage. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to the broader Vietnamese EFL population. Future research may recruit a larger sample, re-examine the subcomponents of FLE and FLCA and develop culturally adapted measures of these constructs that better capture how Vietnamese learners emotionally experience language learning.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The described work has been carried out in accordance with The Code of Ethics of the World Medical Association (Declaration of Helsinki) for experiments involving humans. The participants were informed of the study's purpose and consented to participate.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Thanh Tien Nguyen: developed the conceptual framework, designed the methodology, collected and analysed data, and wrote the first draft.

Hung Phu Bui: provided academic supervision, contributed to the methodological design, validated the hypothesized model, and critically reviewed and edited the manuscript.

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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