

A Study on the Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Willingness to Communicate in Second Language among English Majors

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Abstract: *Based on a questionnaire survey of 549 English majors in China, this study examined the emotional intelligence and willingness to communicate in second language of English majors and the relationship between them through descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. The results show that the overall levels of emotional intelligence and willingness to communicate in second language of English majors are in the middle to upper level, and emotional intelligence has a significant predictive effect on willingness to communicate in second language. The study suggests that the emotional intelligence factor sheds some light on the teaching of oral English for English majors. The findings of this study provide theoretical basis and empirical support for teachers to better stimulate English majors' oral communicative willingness.*

Keywords: English majors, Emotional intelligence, Willingness to communicate in second language.

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the acceleration of globalization and the increasing frequency of international exchanges, the importance of English as an international common language has become more and more prominent, and the cultivation of learners' second language communicative competence has attracted more and more attention (Khajavy et al., 2016). Language Communicative Competence is one of the ultimate goals of second language acquisition (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Research has shown that one of the important factors contributing to the development of communicative competence is learners' willingness to communicate (MacIntyre & Conrod, 2001; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). As a key factor in the process of second language acquisition, willingness to communicate in second language (L2 WTC) has an important impact on learners' language use ability and intercultural communicative competence (Ellis, 2005). Therefore, the level of L2 WTC is an important indicator of the success of second language teaching and acquisition (MacIntyre et al., 1998). For English majors, having a good level of L2 WTC is not only a reflection of their language proficiency, but also a key factor for future intercultural communication and career development (Zhong & Fan, 2013).

Emotional intelligence, as an important factor influencing individuals' social interactions and cognitive processes, has attracted much attention in the field of second language acquisition (Goleman, 1995). There is a large body of literature on the effects of emotional intelligence on teaching and learning outcomes (Mikolajczak & Luminet, 2007; Dewaele & Furnham, 2008; Shao et al., 2013; Qin, 2014; Li, 2020; Xiao & Zhao, 2023; Hu et al., 2024). However, there are relatively few studies exploring the effects of emotional intelligence on L2 WTC, and most of the previous studies have been conducted on middle school or high school students, and there have been few studies specifically focusing on the correlation between the state of emotional intelligence and L2 WTC among English majors. Therefore, this study will deeply

analyse the situation of emotional intelligence and L2 WTC of English majors, focusing on the relationship between emotional intelligence and L2 WTC, and the research questions are:

- 1) What is the level of emotional intelligence of English majors?
- 2) What is the level of English majors' L2 WTC?
- 3) What is the correlation between English majors' emotional intelligence and L2 WTC?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Emotional Intelligence

The concept of emotional intelligence was first proposed by Salovey & Mayer (1990), which refers to an individual's ability to be aware of, perceive, express, evaluate, understand and regulate his or her own emotions and those of others. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence encompasses five dimensions, which include awareness of one's own emotions, management of one's own emotions, self-motivation, awareness of the emotions of others, and the ability to deal with interpersonal relationships appropriately. According to Bar-On (2006), emotional intelligence consists of a set of interrelated emotional and social skills, including the ability to recognize, understand and manage emotions, to manage interpersonal relationships, and to respond effectively to everyday psychological needs, challenges and stress. Therefore, it is hypothesized that emotional intelligence, as a more stable personality trait expressed by learners in their interactions with others, will inevitably have an impact on learners' L2 WTC.

2.2 Willingness to Communicate in Second Language

L2 WTC refers to an individual's willingness to communicate in a second language in a particular situation (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). MacIntyre et al. (1998) pointed out that teaching that fails to develop students' willingness to communicate

cannot be described as effective teaching because communicative willingness is a direct factor affecting participation in second language communicative behaviour. willingness is a direct factor affecting the participation in second language communicative behaviour.

Based on the background of foreign language learning in China, Wen & Clément (2003) pointed out that Chinese students are better at written tests and weaker at speaking, and one of the main reasons for the constraints on speaking is the lack of communicative willingness, so second language research should focus on how to stimulate students' communicative willingness in order to improve their communicative level. Chinese college students majoring in English generally have low communicative willingness and low self-assessment of their English communicative competence (Wu, 2008). Although English majors have strong communicative needs, they have low communicative willingness (Wu & Wen, 2009). This suggests that improving students' L2 WTC is crucial to enhancing their self-confidence and communicative competence.

2.3 Emotional Intelligence and L2 WTC

Dewaele & Furnham, (2008) studied second language learners from five different language backgrounds and found that the higher the learners' emotional intelligence, the better they perceive their emotions, and the more confident they are in communicating with others. Emotional intelligence has a direct predictive effect on L2 WTC, and the higher the level of emotional intelligence, the greater the second language communicative willingness (Birjand & Tabataba'ian, 2012). Öz & Pourfeiz (2015) explored the relationship between EFL learners' emotional intelligence and communicative willingness to communicate in English in a Turkish context, using Turkish learners of English as subjects. The results showed that as students' emotional intelligence increased, their L2 WTC tended to grow. A study by Fernández-García & Fonseca-Mora (2019) also found a high correlation between emotional comprehension and learners' L2 WTC. The higher the learners' level of emotional intelligence, the greater their ability to perceive their own and others' emotions, and the easier it is for them to find topics of mutual interest for interaction and communication.

3. Research Method

In this study, questionnaires were distributed and collected by means of Wenjuanxing. All questionnaires were in the form of a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "completely disagree" (1 point) to "completely agree" (7 points).

3.1 Participants

This study conducted a questionnaire research in Shaanxi Province for undergraduate English majors to get a comprehensive understanding of the emotional intelligence of English majors and their L2 WTC. A total of 631 questionnaires were collected, and according to the exclusion criteria of invalid questionnaires, i.e. questionnaires are regarded as invalid if there are too many identical choices in the questionnaires, 82 invalid questionnaires were excluded after screening and 549 valid questionnaires were obtained,

with a validity rate of 84.05%. The subjects' English learning time was mainly in the period of 10 to 12 years, accounting for 77.05%. Among them, 151 were male students, accounting for 27.50%, and 398 were female students, accounting for 72.50%. The sample structure ensured that the characteristics of students in English language learning at all levels were represented by a relatively even proportion of students from freshman year (20.22%), sophomore year (29.87%), junior year (19.31%), and senior year (30.60%).

In terms of self-evaluation of English communicative competence, 51.00% of the students thought they had lower communicative competence among their peers, 31.15% thought the same, and only 17.85% thought they had higher communicative competence. This evaluation trend indicates that most students lack confidence in their own English communication ability, which is closely related to the results of traditional English teaching in China that focuses on reading and writing and relatively neglects oral communication ability.

3.2 Instruments

1) Emotional Intelligence Scale

The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) is a seven-point Likert scale based on the theory of emotional intelligence, containing 153 items (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). The scale contains four dimensions, emotionality, self-control, sociability, and well-being, with high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$) and internal consistency reliabilities above .75 for each dimension (Petrides, 2009). A shortened version of the scale, containing 30 items, is used in this study. A series of cross-cultural studies have shown that the reliability and validity of the shortened version of the scale are more favourable (Mikolajczak et al., 2007; Dewaele & Furnham, 2008).

2) L2 WTC Scale

L2 WTC Scale is selected from Peng & Woodrow's (2010) Willingness to Communicate Scale and adapted from the English Willingness to Communicate in the Classroom Scale designed by Weaver (2005), which consists of 10 items covering two dimensions: meaning-focused communicative activity dimension (6 items in total) and form-focused communicative activity dimension (4 items in total).

3) Reliability Analysis

The reliability analysis for this study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Scale Reliability Test

Variable	Latent Variable	Number of Items	Latent Variable Cronbach's Alpha	Variable Cronbach's Alpha	Overall Cronbach's Alpha
Trait Emotional Intelligence	Emotionality	8	0.89	0.93	0.94
	Self-Control	6	0.86		
	Sociability	6	0.86		
	Well-Being	6	0.86		
L2 WTC	Meaning-focused Communication Activities	6	0.83	0.89	

Form-focused Communication Activities	4	0.73
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The scale used in this study includes a total of six latent variables. For the Trait Emotional Intelligence variable, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each latent variable are as follows: emotionality 0.89, self-control 0.86, sociability 0.86, and well-Being 0.86. These values indicate that each latent variable has good internal consistency, meeting the general standards for reliability assessment. Additionally, the overall Cronbach's Alpha for trait emotional intelligence is 0.93, suggesting that the scale has high reliability in capturing respondents' levels of trait emotional intelligence. For the L2 WTC variable, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for meaning-focused communication activities and form-focused communication activities are 0.83 and 0.73, respectively, demonstrating high reliability for these subdimensions. The overall Cronbach's Alpha for L2 WTC is 0.89, further validating the scale's reliability and stability in measuring L2 WTC.

In summary, all latent variables have Cronbach's Alpha coefficients above 0.70, aligning with commonly accepted standards for reliability assessment.

4) Validity Analysis

Validity tests were conducted on six factors: emotionality, self-control, sociability, well-Being, meaning-focused communication activities, form-focused communication activities-as well as the overall Scale. The single-factor validity test results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test Table

Variable	KMO and Bartlett Test			
	KMO	χ^2	df	Sig.
Emotionality	0.91	1972.39	28	0.00
Self-Control	0.88	1343.17	15	0.00
Sociability	0.89	1240.19	15	0.00
Well-Being	0.85	1457.09	15	0.00
Meaning-focused Communication Activities	0.91	1756.15	15	0.00
Form-focused Communication Activities	0.82	924.05	6	0.00

As shown in Table 2, the KMO values for all variables are greater than 0.7, and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity values are less than 0.05, indicating that they are suitable for factor analysis. The overall validity test results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Overall KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for the Questionnaire

KMO		0.94
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approximate Chi-Square	11981.52
	df	780.00
	Sig	0.00

As shown in Table 3, the KMO value of the survey questionnaire is greater than 0.8, and it passed the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity at a significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the survey questionnaire data passed the validity test, indicating that the questionnaire data used in this study can adequately represent the variables used in the subsequent

research.

3.3 Data Analysis

After recording the data, SPSS 26.0 is used to carry out descriptive statistics on the data; secondly, the reliability and structural validity of the two instruments are tested with the help of SPSS 26.0; lastly, descriptive statistics (including normal distribution test), Pearson correlation test and stepwise regression test are carried out on the obtained data with the help of SPSS 26.0.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

In order to understand the overall situation of English majors' emotional intelligence and second language communicative willingness, this study uses SPSS 26.0 to carry out descriptive statistics and normal distribution test for each variable, and the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

Factor	Size	Mean	Std.	Median	Skewness
Emotionality	549	3.590	0.890	-0.245	-0.445
Self-Control	549	3.577	0.926	-0.327	-0.418
Sociability	549	3.731	0.853	-0.224	-0.377
Well-Being	549	3.665	0.901	-0.065	-0.447
Trait Emotional Intelligence	549	3.637	0.661	0.115	-0.232
Meaning-Focused Communication Activities	549	3.781	0.935	0.401	-0.005
Form-Focused Communication Activities	549	3.757	0.971	0.491	-0.103
L2 WTC	549	3.772	0.815	1.206	0.274

Table 4 presents the results of the statistical indicators for each dimension and sub-dimension, including emotionality, self-control, sociability, well-being, and trait emotional intelligence, as well as meaning-focused communicative activity, form-focused communicative activity, and willingness to communicate in second language. Overall, the mean values of the dimensions ranged from 3.577 to 3.781, indicating that the respondents' self-evaluations on these psychological and social dimensions were low and failed to show significant positivity.

Specifically, the mean values of emotionality, self-control, and sociability were 3.590, 3.577, and 3.731 respectively, indicating that respondents' self-evaluations of emotional management, self-control, and sociability were more conservative, and sociability was slightly higher than the other two dimensions, but still skewed negative overall. The mean value of happiness was 3.665, indicating that the respondents' self-assessment of happiness was on the low side and did not show strong feelings of happiness. The mean value of trait emotional intelligence is 3.637 and the standard deviation is only 0.661, reflecting that the respondents' self-assessment of trait emotional intelligence is more consistent with less inter-individual differences. The dimensions generally showed negative skewness, and the data distribution was skewed towards the middle and low ranges, with a relatively flat kurtosis, indicating that the distribution of ratings was more dispersed and not concentrated in the region of high scores.

On the sub-dimension of willingness to communicate in second language, the mean values of meaning-focused communicative activity and form-focused communicative activity are 3.781 and 3.757, respectively, which are close to, but still lower than, the median value, indicating that the respondents show a certain degree of conservatism in their actual communicative activities. The kurtosis of these two dimensions is positive (0.401 and 0.491 respectively), showing that the distribution is slightly concentrated in the lower middle region. The mean value of L2 WTC is 3.772, with a kurtosis of 1.206 and a skewness of 0.274, showing that the distribution is more concentrated in this dimension, but the respondents' self-assessment of their willingness to communicate in second language still does not reach a significantly positive level.

In summary, the data indicate that respondents' self-ratings on various dimensions such as emotionality, self-control, sociability, and well-being are generally low, especially on emotionality and self-control, with negative skewness and flat kurtosis showing that most of the respondents' ratings are skewed towards the low to middle range of the scores, reflecting a lack of confidence in these psychological attributes.

Although the distribution of the sub-dimensions related to willingness to communicate is slightly concentrated, the scores are low overall, indicating that there is room for improvement in respondents' willingness to communicate in second language and self-evaluation.

4.2 Overall Level of Emotional Intelligence and L2 WTC

Table 5: Analysis of Overall Emotional Intelligence among English Majors

Project	Emotionality	Self-Control	Sociability	Well-Being	Trait Emotional Intelligence
Score Range	8-56	6-42	6-42	6-42	30-300
Mean	28.723	21.464	22.388	21.993	94.568
SD	7.122	5.557	5.12	5.407	17.197
Median	30	22	23	22	95
Mode	31	23	24	24	94
Min	9	6	8	6	38
Max	48	36	36	36	153
Kurtosis	-0.245	-0.327	-0.224	-0.065	0.115
Skewness	-0.445	-0.418	-0.377	-0.447	-0.232

This study measured and analyzed the emotional intelligence level of English majors. The data in table 5 shows that the mean value of overall emotional intelligence in the sample is 94.568 (SD=17.197), which is lower than the critical value (121) for the medium level of the scale, indicating a relatively low level of overall emotional intelligence among the subjects. In terms of specific dimensions, the mean value of emotionality dimension is 28.723 (SD=7.122), approximately 51.29% of its full score (56); the mean value of self-control dimension is 21.464 (SD=5.557), about 51.10% of its full score (42); the mean value of sociability dimension is 22.388 (SD=5.12), about 53.30% of its full score; and the mean value of well-being dimension is 21.993 (SD=5.407), approximately 52.36% of its full score. The score proportions across dimensions are relatively close, fluctuating between 50% and 54%, demonstrating balanced characteristics. Regarding

distribution characteristics, the skewness values for overall emotional intelligence and all dimensions are negative (-0.232 to -0.447), indicating a slight left-skewed distribution; the kurtosis values are negative (-0.065 to -0.327) for all dimensions except overall emotional intelligence (0.115), suggesting that the data distribution is flatter than the normal distribution. Notably, there are significant gaps between the maximum and minimum values across dimensions, reflecting considerable individual differences in emotional intelligence levels.

Table 6: Analysis of L2 WTC

Project	Meaning-Focused Communication Activities	Form-Focused Communication Activities	L2 WTC
Score Range	6-42	4-28	10-70
Mean	22.689	15.027	37.716
SD	5.609	3.885	8.151
Median	23	15	38
Mode	24	14	41
Min	7	4	12
Max	42	28	70
Kurtosis	0.401	0.491	1.206
Skewness	-0.005	-0.103	0.274

The data reveals that the sample's overall mean score for second language WTC is 37.716 (SD=8.151), which falls in the upper-middle range of the scale (10-70 points). Regarding specific dimensions, the mean score for meaning-oriented communication activities is 22.689 (SD=5.609), accounting for approximately 54.02% of its full score (42 points); while the mean score for form-oriented communication activities is 15.027 (SD=3.885), representing about 53.67% of its full score (28 points). The similar scoring proportions between these two dimensions indicate that students demonstrate comparable levels of willingness in both types of communication activities. In terms of distribution characteristics, the overall WTC score shows a positive skewness (0.274), suggesting a slight right-skewed distribution, with a relatively high kurtosis value (1.206) indicating concentrated data distribution. However, both dimensions show negative skewness values close to 0 (-0.005 and -0.103) with relatively low kurtosis values (0.401 and 0.491), suggesting distributions closer to normal. Comparison of maximum and minimum values reveals substantial individual differences in students' second language WTC, with total scores ranging from 12 to 70 points. These differences are evident in both meaning-oriented (7-42 points) and form-oriented (4-28 points) communication activities.

4.3 Correlation Between Trait Emotional Intelligence (TEI) and L2 WTC

Table 7: Correlation analysis

	Emotionality	Self-Control	Sociability	Well-Being	L2 WTC	TEI
Emotionality	1					
Self-Control	.369**	1				
Sociability	.398**	.382**	1			
Well-Being	.396**	.415**	.420**	1		
L2 WTC	.334**	.341**	.365**	.432**	1	
TEI	.776**	.720**	.718**	.738**	.493**	1

**p<.01

A series of Pearson correlation analyses were conducted in

this study using SPSS 26.0 and the results are shown in Table 7.

Comparing the correlations between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and second language communicative intention, it was found that happiness, self-control, emotionality and sociability were positively correlated with the willingness to communicate in second language. The correlation between happiness and willingness to communicate in second language is the highest, 0.432, so the three aspects of happiness, namely self-esteem, happiness and optimism, have the most obvious influence on willingness to communicate in second language, while the correlation between emotional intelligence and willingness to communicate in second language is the lowest, 0.334, followed by self-control and sociability, 0.341 and 0.365, which show that emotional intelligence and willingness to communicate in second language are all positively correlated, 0.341 and 0.365, respectively, 0.365, which shows that students who perform better in the dimensions of self-confidence, emotional management and social awareness have higher second language willingness to communicate. Meanwhile, as shown in Table 2, the subjects' emotional intelligence is significantly and positively correlated with their willingness to communicate in second language, indicating that learners with better emotional perception and regulation are more willing to communicate in English, which is in line with the findings of Wei (2021). The difference in the level of correlation between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and second language communicative willingness suggests that teachers can target intervention and guidance to students' second language communicative activities from different dimensions in foreign language teaching.

4.4 Regression Analysis

In this study, in order to further investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and willingness to communicate in second language, multiple regression analyses were conducted on the data in order to examine the predictive role of the four dimensions of emotional intelligence, namely, well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability, on willingness to communicate in second language.

Table 8: Regression Analyses

	B	SE	β	t	p	Col-linearity Diagnostics	
						VI	Tolerance
Const	1.59* **	0.2 0	-	7.8 4	0.00* **	-	-
Emotionality	0.09	0.0 5	0.08	1.8 2	0.07	1.3 3	0.75
Self-Control	0.10*	0.0 5	0.10*	2.2 5	0.02*	1.3 4	0.75
Sociability	0.16* *	0.0 5	0.15* *	3.2 8	0.00* *	1.3 7	0.73
Well-Being	0.25* **	0.0 5	0.24* **	5.2 7	0.00* **	1.4 0	0.71
F					31.69***		
R ²					0.19		
Analysis of Differences					0.18		
R ²							

p<.01, *p<.001

As can be seen from Table 8, happiness and sociability play a major role in predicting the willingness to communicate in second language, and their significance p-values are less than 0.01. Secondly, self-control and emotionality have a lower degree of predicting the willingness to communicate in second language, and their p-values are less than 0.01, which is statistically significant.

According to the above table, the regression coefficients of emotionality, self-control, sociality and happiness among the independent variables are 0.11, 0.15 and 0.24 respectively, and all the variables reach the 95% significance level, which indicates that all the variables have a significant effect on the willingness to communicate in second language. The formula of the model is: second language communicative willingness = 0.11*Emotionality + 0.11*Self-Control + 0.15*Sociability + 0.24*Happiness + 1.54. Multiple covariance test for the model found that the VIFs in the model are all less than 5, which indicates that there is no covariance in the model. Therefore, it can be concluded that emotionality, self-control, sociability and well-being will have a significant positive effect on willingness to communicate in second language.

5. Discussion

5.1 Overall Level and Correlation Between Emotional Intelligence and L2 WTC

The data of this study show that the participants' attitudes on emotional expression are generally in the negative direction. Respondents' self-assessment of emotional expression, understanding others' feelings and paying attention to their own emotions is not high, reflecting a certain lack of emotional management, and the self-assessment of self-control is more consistent and overall at a moderately low level, and there is still room for improvement for most of the respondents. Respondents are generally willing to use English to communicate in different contexts, especially with assistance (e.g., tips on notes) or in group activities. However, some respondents were hesitant to use English in front of the whole class or without prompting. Teachers can accordingly enhance the development of students' oral expression and self-confidence, and encourage them to use English in a wider range of communication contexts.

5.2 Predictive Effect of Emotional Intelligence on L2 WTC

This study found that the four dimensions of emotional intelligence as a whole significantly predicted students' willingness to communicate in oral English within the classroom. This emphasises the importance of emotional intelligence in language learning and suggests that educators should pay attention to the integration of emotional education in their teaching. The higher the level of emotional intelligence, the higher the willingness to communicate in second language, which further validates Birjandi & Tabataba'ian's (2012) finding that good emotional intelligence enhances willingness to communicate in second language. The higher the level of learners' emotional intelligence, the better they perceive their own and others' emotions, and the easier it is for them to find topics of mutual interest for interaction and communication.

The data in this study suggest that learners with high emotional management skills are more positive and optimistic in their view of whether their language learning ability can be improved through their own efforts, and that this positive and optimistic view of language learning will further stimulate and mobilise their sense of well-being in the learning process, and motivate them to be more actively involved in oral training. The results of this study further validate the findings of Alavinia & Alikhani (2014) and suggest the integration of emotional intelligence into second language learning programmes.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and second language communicative willingness. The findings of the study show that emotion management and interpersonal relationship skills can promote willingness to communicate in second language, especially a good level of emotional intelligence helps learners to view language learning more positively and mobilize positive emotions in the learning process, which prompts them to be more actively engaged in second language communication. Based on the results of the study, foreign language teachers should improve students' willingness to use English for communication by strengthening their sense of well-being in professional learning. Foreign language teachers should also create a favourable foreign language learning atmosphere for students to experience positive emotions in classroom teaching activities, so as to encourage students to actively use English to interact and improve their foreign language communicative competence. There are some shortcomings in this study. The subjects are mainly English majors, and there is a lack of examination of a larger sample size or other student groups.

The research contribution of this study is mainly reflected in both theory and practice. In terms of theory, this study will enrich and improve the theory of the relationship between emotional intelligence and second language communicative willingness, providing new research perspectives for English educators and psychologists. On the practical side, this study will provide empirical evidence for the educational reform of English majors, help educators better understand and stimulate students' second language communicative willingness, and improve their second language acquisition.

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