

## Elementary School Children's Willing to Communicate in Virtual Class: a Case Study

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**Abstract.** As one of the keys to a quality teaching process is the willingness of students to communicate, this is worth observing, especially when it is carried out by students who are young children when conducting virtual instructional practices during the Covid-19 outbreak. This study aims to investigate students' willingness to communicate during the teaching and learning process in a virtual classroom. The respondents of this study were 28 students of SDN 160 Sukalaksana Bandung, Indonesia. Students' patterns in their willingness to communicate were examined using close observation in 3 consecutive meetings. Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the instructional process is carried out virtually through the Zoom platform. One teacher acted as instructor and one passive supervisor was given access to record and observe instructional practice. This study revealed that students' willingness to communicate depends on the type of task given by the teacher. There are 6 patterns of students' willingness to communicate in response to teacher instructions. This shows the importance of understandable and appropriate instruction in order to increase students' willingness to communicate.

**Keywords:** Distance Learning, Instructional Practice, Willingness to Communicate.

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**INTRODUCTION** ~ When implementing collaborative learning, most teaching practitioners find that there are always active and passive students in group discussions, class discussions, or other typical activities (Harper, 2016). This is considered normal but teachers need to overcome it to get quality instruction. One of the keys to a quality learning process is the frequency of communication between teachers and students during learning activities. Researchers in the field of language learning have found intrapersonal difficulties faced by many students (Rastegar & Karami, 2015) and one of them is communication. Communication refers to the act of transmitting information and shared

understanding (Lunenburg, 2010) from one person to another about needs, affective, desires, knowledge, or perceptions (Velentzas & Broni, 2014). To be more specific, the central issue in communication is students' willingness to communicate (Liu & Jackson, 2008; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2009).

Willingness to communicate refers to the tendency of individuals to initiate communication when they do not have to (Lahuerta, 2004). In the classroom context, willingness to communicate is defined as the readiness of students to initiate communication when they have many choices (Barjasteh, Vaseghi & Neissi, 2011). Practically, the willingness to communicate

is not limited to verbal language, but also non-verbal. Students who raise their hands when the teacher answers questions are examples of willingness to communicate because it is a sign that they intend to communicate (Maryansyah, 2019). Havwini (2019) clearly provides an extension of whether or not a student is willing to communicate: (1) level of class anxiety, (2) level of perceived communicative competence, (3) level of fear of negative evaluation, (4) general communication anxiety level. Other factors such as students' perceptions of the value of oral communication also play a role when students decide or not to communicate in class.

Havwini (2019) stated that willingness to communicate has been widely discussed by various studies which are subject to many variables such as teacher factors, task factors, and interlocutor factors. However, when specifically subject to language context, very little research will be found. In fact, one of the goals in language is the ability of students to communicate in their own communities (Sukmawati & Nasution, 2019) to survive in their future careers. Therefore, the study of students' willingness to communicate in language classes is very important. Learning Indonesian for a specific purpose is aimed at empowering the development of students' skills to use Indonesian properly. More specifically, the aim is to enable students to develop their professional communication skills as an essential skill for success in academia and the workplace (Taha and El-Sakran, 2014). To achieve this goal, most language practitioners are aware of innovations in the classroom with respect to teaching methods and activities (Milosevic, 2014). However, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, teaching practices have

been shifted to virtual platforms. Its implementation has posed several challenges and could pose problems for all parties involved (Marinoni, Land & Jensen, 2020) especially in students' willingness to communicate. This study focuses on the willingness of the students of SDN 160 Sukalaksana Bandung in communicating in class.

A study on students' willingness to communicate was conducted by Havwini (2019) to junior high school students in East Aceh, Indonesia. This study looks for students' willingness to communicate when the 2013 National Education Curriculum is implemented in schools. Using close observation, this study examines the pattern of students' willingness to communicate. It was found that students showed a willingness to communicate when the types of assignments given by the teacher were different. This shows the importance of various types of tasks to increase students' willingness to communicate.

A study on students' willingness to communicate was also conducted by Alqahtani (2015) which aims to test Saudi students' willingness to communicate and explore the difficulties students face when learning English. Using a mixed methodology approach to obtain data for 658 participants, this study revealed that students have a desire to learn English with other students who share English as a mother tongue. Some of the difficulties in learning English are the level of motivation, cultural and social factors.

Ai Siok Kho-Yar, Shameem Rafik- Galea, and Elise Ai Hwee KHO (2018) conducted research on the WTC of Malaysian undergraduate students. By using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), this

study investigates students' willingness to communicate if it is correlated with self-efficacy, motivation, mindset, and performance. It was found that the students' personality directly affected their willingness to communicate in English. While other elements such as motivation and academic achievement indirectly affect their willingness to communicate.

The first research is similar to this research, the difference lies in two thoughts: he observed it in the implementation of the 2013 national curriculum and this study was specifically for learning Indonesian subjects. Similarly, analyzing students' willingness to communicate, this study has significant difference from looking for correlational factors of several elements for students' willingness to communicate. Having looked at the mainstream studies on willingness to communicate, this study brings up the importance of investigating students learning Indonesian. More specifically, it is new that students' willingness to communicate is analyzed in a pandemic where learning practices have to be done virtually.

## METHOD

This study involved 28 5th grade students at SDN 160 Sukalaksana Bandung and a class teacher. The students are aged between 10-11 years. This is a naturalistic study in which researchers observe learning practices that are carried out virtually as a result of the prolonged outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the researcher did not provide any intervention on the flow of the learning process (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000).

Willingness to communicate was observed for 3 consecutive meetings and only the

teacher knew that the researcher was one of the participants in the virtual meeting as an effort to maintain the naturalness of the learning process. Instructional practices are recorded for observation. The total duration is 300 minutes. Then, the researcher chose one meeting to be transcribed verbally and analyzed. The selected meeting is considered representative because the overall learning strategy is similar where expository teaching strategies are chosen followed by class discussions. To analyze students' willingness to communicate, the researcher used a coding scheme adapted from Cao & Philp (2006) with some modifications to support the context. The scheme starts from analyzing the following patterns: (1) students who voluntarily answer the teacher's questions; (2) students who answer the teacher's questions; (3) students who express their own opinions in the middle of the discussion; (4) students who answer peer questions; (5) students who help their peers remember words that are rarely used; (6) students who click the 'raise hand' menu to start the response. The frequency of occurrence of each pattern is then calculated to conclude the degree of students' willingness to communicate.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' willingness to communicate through virtual platforms was analyzed by passive observers who were given access to attend virtual meetings. Using six patterns as suggested by Cao & Philp (2006), close observation for 3 consecutive meetings of online learning came to a finding of 6 patterns of students' communication willingness in responding to the instructions given by the teacher.

### **Pattern 1: Students voluntarily answer the teacher's questions or instructions**

After 3 meetings, it was found that the conversation between the students (coded 'S') and the teacher (coded 'G') was started by the teacher giving teaching questions. This pattern begins with the teacher giving questions to all students and giving students the freedom to choose to answer the question or not.

### Quote 1

1.G: Okay kids. Thanks for taking the time today to follow zoom. Well today we will talk about Animal and Human Movement Organs. Previously, has anyone ever heard of the term "movement organ"?

2.S1: Not yet, ma'am.

3.S2: That's the organ you use for walking, isn't it?

4.S3 : Not yet ma'am. I do not know yet.

The conversation occurred at meeting 1 which began with a question from the teacher regarding the student's experience regarding Animal and Human Movement Organs. A student gave a short answer that said that he did not know beforehand. However, another student came with a different experience. This corresponds to the same question he answered voluntarily.

### Quote 2

1.G: What do you know about the muscles and bones that make humans and animals the same in terms of locomotor organs?

2.S1: I am ma'am, active locomotor muscles, passive locomotor, ma'am.

3.S2: Yes, ma'am.

The conversation occurred in meeting 1 which began with instructions given by the

teacher to students to tell about what they know about muscles and bones in humans and animals. The students were also still entertained when the teacher started giving jokes about "but other things, don't play the game between animals and humans"

### Quote 3

1.G: Yeah. What about the structure and text of the written question. Did you find any difficulties?

2.S1: I don't understand sentence patterns yet, ma'am.

3.S2 : Ma'am. It's only a short time so it's not over yet.

4.G: Well. How many questions are there in this section?

5.S2: Less than 30 Ma'am.

6.S3: 25 Ma'am.

The conversation above occurred when discussing the structure and written expression sections in meeting 2. The teacher asked the students' experiences or impressions of completing the section. The question is determined in asking the difficulty of doing the task. Three students involved in the conversation answered two questions in a row given by the teacher. At the end of the conversation, one student verified another student's answer by saying there were 25 questions in the section to make it clearer than student 2's less than -30 answers.

### Quote 4

1.G: Can you see the slide now? It's a bit difficult to serve.

2.S1: Not yet, ma'am.

3.S2: Ma'am, try to come back again ma'am.

4.G: Oh yes. OKAY. Thank you.

This conversation occurs when the teacher has difficulty in sharing his slides with students through a virtual platform. It was noted that the teacher was actually in the right way of sharing but not sure if the slide was accepted by the student screen. One student responded sharply saying that he couldn't see the slides on his laptop screen. However, other students responded to the question by giving suggestions or directions to the teacher instead of answering the teacher's question. In line with that, students also apply other patterns besides answering the teacher's questions.

### Pattern 2: Students ask questions

This pattern begins with students asking questions to the teacher regarding the material presented by the teacher. There is a conducive conversation between teachers and students in this pattern.

#### 5 quote

1.S1: Ma'am, how do you read it?

2.G: Oh yeah. Can you please explain?

3.S1: Yes, the reading is long. It's just time.

4.G: Okay, I understand. It is okay. Today we will discuss strategies for answering and overcoming long texts in the reading section. How many texts did you find?

5.S1: More than 7 ma'am.

The conversation took place in the learning to read section of meeting 3 where a student shared his difficulty in completing the passage for limited vocabulary and time. The teacher responds by saying that the discussion will soon continue explaining the strategy for solve the problem. The teacher decided not to answer the questions right away because the explanations would take some time after he explained some of the types of questions that often appear in the reading section.

#### Quote 6

1.S1: Ma'am, what about the second line, ma'am?

2.G: Good question. Can anyone answer?

(There is not any)

M: Yeah. The second line refers to the speaker answering the question. Why is that important? Because the answer to that question will be found in what the second line says.

This conversation occurred while discussing strategies for answering questions in the listening section of meeting 1. One of the strategies was to focus on the second line. The teacher didn't come to explain what the second line meant but an enthusiastic student asked a question about it. The teacher, on the other hand, did not immediately answer the question. The teacher likes other students to respond to questions but no one does. Finally, the teacher answered the question.

#### 7 quote

1.S1: Ma'am, what if the second line is a long conversation, Ma'am?

2.G: Oh yeah don't worry. This strategy only applies to short conversations.

Another conversation took place at meeting 1 where the discussion moved to a long conversation in the listening section. A student asks how to apply the strategy if in a long conversation. The teacher verified that the strategy to focus on the second line only appeared in short conversations not long conversations. This answer is a direct response to a student's question.

### 8 quote

1.S1 : Ma'am. Why is the answer C? Shouldn't it be D?

2.G: Good. OK, anyone have an opinion?

3.S2: Ma'am, the answer is C, if D, it makes sense, but the meaning is different.

4.G: Yes. That's right.

One student has a different opinion on the answer from the teacher's answer. He thought that the answer should be D with logical reasoning. However, the teacher did not immediately respond to his argument. He chose to give other students the opportunity to respond. Impulsively, other students responded well and theoretically the answer was correct. Therefore the teacher said right as a response of support without trying to attack the first student.

### Pattern 3: Students' willingness to use the "raise hand" feature

There is a menu on the platform that allows students to ask the teacher for permission to communicate. The menu named 'raise hand' is designed to allow all participants to initiate a conversation after the teacher clicks 'yes'. Overall, there are seven

moments when the teacher opens the opportunity for students to click on the menu in response to a question or instruction given by the teacher as seen in Quotation 9 or the teacher invites students to read the question to him as seen in Quotation 10.

### 9 quote

1.G: Yeah. Let's answer question no. 3. What is the synonym of the word 'anxiety'? and in what paragraph can you get the hint?

2.S2: students click the raise hand menu.

3.G: Yes S2, please.

The conversation occurred at meeting 3 when discussing the questions in the reading section. The teacher invites all students to answer what is the synonym of the word 'anxiety' but instead of directly answering the question, some students click on the 'raise hand' menu showing their interest in answering the question but needing the teacher's permission to answer.

### 10 quote

1.G: Yeah. Who wants to read the next question?

2.Ss: (3 students click the raise hand menu)

3.G: Yes, S1, please.

When students use the "Raise hand" menu, the teacher invites students to help him read the questions in the reading section. Actually, the same pattern also occurs in meetings one and two where students tend to wait for the teacher's permission before

starting to participate. This can be categorized as students' willingness to communicate.

#### **Pattern 4: Students present their own opinion in the middle of the discussion**

This pattern refers to the initiative of students to express their own opinions without any triggers at all. This shows the high level of willingness to communicate because the motive for expression is not from external factors. It was driven by themselves.

#### **Quote 11**

1.S1 : Ma'am. I think the answer should be

D. That's what the muscles move, right?

2.G: Yes. you want. Thank you for your answer.

3.S1 : Thank God ma'am. Finally I have the correct answer to this question.

4.G: Oh really?

The conversation occurred at the second meeting when the topic of discussion was about the muscles of human and animal movement in theme 1 of the Indonesian language subject. A student submits a statement to the teacher in the hope that the teacher confirms the statement. Students feel less confident in answering. It was marked by his pleasure when he found out that the teacher agreed with his statement.

#### **12 quote**

1.S1: Mom, if I say the main idea is not in the first paragraph of the sentence, it's at the end, ma'am. What kind of tea is that, I forgot.

2.S2: Inductive paragraph

3.S3: Oh yes. Inductive paragraph

The conversation takes place in the reading section of a text on theme 1.

3.5.Pattern 5: Students answer peer questions

13 quote

1.S1 : Ma'am, I don't understand the difference between concluding and implying in the reading section.

2.S2: Isn't that the same?

3.S3: Yes, the asana is the same.

4.G: Yes. Basically infer and imply are the same. You need to search more and try to think critically to get the answer. You won't find the answer in the text unless you figure it out yourself.

The conversation occurred at meeting 3 when discussing the reading section. A student directly answers questions about the difference between inferring and implying as often appears in reading questions. Before the teacher answers the question, another student answers by saying that the two are lexically the same. And it was also approved by other students. This shows that students have a willingness to respond to their peers. 3.6.Pattern 6: Students help other students remember difficult words

#### **Pattern 6 is the lowest pattern of all patterns that occurred during three meetings.**

There were only 2 occasions when students helped other students to remember difficult words they could not pronounce

and both occurred in the reading section as Excerpt 14 shows.

14 quote

1.S1: Mom, if I say the main idea is not in the first paragraph of the sentence, it's at the end, ma'am. What's the name of that tea, forgot

2.S2: Inductive paragraph

S1: Oh yes. Inductive paragraph

A student came to argue that the main idea should be in the first paragraph which is called the inductive paragraph. But he couldn't remember the sentence so he questioned it. Fortunately, other students come up with help remembering such paragraphs called inductive paragraphs.

From all the conversations that occurred during the three program meetings on theme 1, it was found that the students' willingness to communicate increased when they were given questions or instructions by the teacher. In the 3 meetings analyzed there were 16 active students and 9 students who could answer the questions given by the teacher correctly.

In terms of asking questions, there were 4 students who volunteered to ask questions related to the obstacles they faced.

Furthermore, students' willingness to communicate can also be seen from their willingness to use the raise hand feature. There are 2 students who use this feature.

At the time of discussion, students were also active in expressing their opinions, there were 2 students who dared to express their opinions in the discussion.

This shows that the factors that influence students' willingness to communicate mostly come from external factors; teacher. This finding is in line with Havwini (2019) which states that the type of task given by the teacher greatly affects students' willingness to communicate. This is considered reasonable because learning practices occur virtually where there is distance and media that hinder interaction between participants (Onyemah & Deborah, 2019). Therefore, teachers play an important role in increasing students' willingness to communicate as one of the criteria for success in the learning process (Sukmawati & Nasution, 2020).

Fortunately, virtual learning enables and effectively mediates question and answer interactions among users (Gomez-Rey, Barbera, & Navarro, 2016) despite the distance. It is proven that students' willingness to communicate, especially in answering questions, can be said to be high because they have (Sesriyani, 2020) the opportunity to do so. This is in line with Kho-Yar, Galea, & Hwee KHO (2018) that asking questions is considered easy to do, which many students master. It is also because the teacher mentioned at the beginning that questions are welcome during the learning process.

Furthermore, the least pattern is the students' willingness to help their friends remember difficult words. This typical will is considered difficult to achieve because students must have knowledge or experience in helping other students to do so (Havwini, 2019). This is the reason why there are only two students who can help other students remember difficult words as a willingness to help based on their capacity.



## CONCLUSION

An investigation of students' willingness to communicate while studying Theme 1 grade 5 through a virtual platform has found some findings. First, students' willingness to communicate is highest when the teacher gives questions or instructions for working. This shows that students' willingness to communicate is triggered by external factors.

Furthermore, in virtual meetings that mediate question and answer interactions, students show their willingness to answer questions. Students' willingness to use the "raise hand" feature was also seen on several occasions in the teaching and learning process. Students are also willing to answer questions posed by their friends. In short, conducting virtual learning practices allows students to be willing to answer teacher questions as well as in answering peer questions.

These findings indicate that teachers need to be proactive in providing questions and instructions to increase students' willingness to communicate as one of the criteria for success in learning practices. Suggestions for researchers who have the same interest in students' willingness to communicate are the challenges faced by students in carrying out their communication when studying virtually.

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