THE IMPACT OF SELF-COMPARISON ON WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH: A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF KOREAN AND UZBEK ENGLISH-MAJORS

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INGLIZ TILIDA MULOQOT QILISHGA TAYYORGARLIKKA O'ZINI SOLISHTIRISHNING TA'SIRI: KOREYS VA O'ZBEK INGLIZ TILI YO'NALISHI TALABALARI MISOLIDA MADANIYATLARARO TADQIQOT

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ВЛИЯНИЕ САМОСРАВНЕНИЯ НА ГОТОВНОСТЬ К ОБЩЕНИЮ НА АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ: МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ КОРЕЙСКИХ И УЗБЕКСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ, ОБУЧАЮЩИХСЯ ПО НАПРАВЛЕНИЮ «АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК»

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Abstract. The study explores the impact of self-comparison on the willingness to communicate (WTC) in English among Korean and Uzbek English-major university students. The study becomes essential because the learning of a language is increasingly dependent on communication skills, while scholars have not looked into how people compare themselves across different cultural groups. The research adds new information in terms of looking at two distinct education systems in two diverse cultural contexts. The researcher aimed to establish the relationship between self-comparison and WTC and identify whether there are differences in the two groups of participants. The research adopted a quantitative correlational design which included 200 participants who originated from two distinct locations known as Korea and Uzbekistan. Data was gathered by the researcher through developed survey questionnaires that were subsequently analyzed statistically. The results of the study showed that Uzbek students had higher performance compared to Korean students in both self-comparison and willingness to communicate. From the study, it is evident that self-comparison only maintains a minor relationship with willingness to communicate thus showing its impact occurs conditionally. The research results illustrate that language teaching needs cultural and psychological understanding of

successful classroom strategies that enable students from various backgrounds to develop their willingness to communicate.

Keywords: self-comparison; willingness to communicate; different cultural groups; quantitative correlational design; psychological understanding.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu tadqiqot universitetning ingliz tili yo'nalishida tahsil olayotgan koreys va o'zbek talabalari orasida o'zini solishtirishning ingliz tilida muloqot qilishga tayyorlik (WTC) darajasiga ta'sirini o'rganadi. Tadqiqot muhim ahamiyat kasb etadi, chunki hozirgi kunda til o'rganish jarayoni tobora ko'proq muloqot ko'nikmalariga bog'liq bo'lib bormoqda, biroq olimlar hali turli madaniy guruhlar vakillari o'zlarini qanday solishtirishlarini yetarlicha o'rganmagan. Ushbu tadqiqot ikki xil madaniy muhitga ega bo'lgan ikki turli ta'lim tizimini tahlil qilish orqali yangi ma'lumotlarni taqdim etadi. Tadqiqotning maqsadi o'zini solishtirish va muloqotga tayyorlik o'rtasidagi bog'liqlikni aniqlash hamda ishtirokchilarning ikki guruhi o'rtasida farqlar mavjudligini belgilashdan iborat bo'ldi. Tadqiqotda miqdoriy korrelyatsion dizayn qo'llanilgan bo'lib, Koreya va O'zbekiston mamlakatlaridan jami 200 nafar ishtirokchi qatnashgan. Ma'lumotlar tadqiqotchi tomonidan ishlab chiqilgan so'rovnomalar orqali to'plangan va statistik tahlil qilingan. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatdiki, o'zbek talabalarining o'zini solishtirish va muloqotga tayyorlik darajasi koreys talabalariga nisbatan yuqoriroq bo'lgan. Tadqiqotdan ayon bo'lishicha, o'zini solishtirish muloqotga tayyorlik bilan faqat qisman bog'liq bo'lib, bu omilning ta'siri shartli ravishda namoyon bo'ladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, til o'qitishda turli madaniy kelib chiqishga ega talabalarni muloqotga tayyor qilish uchun madaniy va psixologik yondashuvlarni hisobga oluvchi samarali dars strategiyalarini ishlab chiqish zarur.

Kalit so'zlar: o'zini solishtirish; muloqot qilishga tayyorgarlik; turli madaniy guruhlar; miqdoriy korrelyatsion dizayn; psixologik tushuncha.

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается влияние самосравнения на готовность к общению (WTC) на английском языке среди корейских и узбекских студентов, обучающихся по направлению «английский язык». Исследование приобретает особую значимость, так как изучение языка всё больше зависит от коммуникативных навыков, тогда как учёные мало изучали, как люди сравнивают себя в разных культурных группах. Работа вносит вклад в науку, так как рассматривает две различные образовательные системы в двух разных культурных контекстах. Целью исследования было выявить взаимосвязь между самосравнением и готовностью к общению, а также определить, существуют ли различия между двумя группами участников. В исследовании использовался количественный корреляционный дизайн, включавший 200 участников из двух стран – Кореи и Узбекистана. Данные были собраны при помощи разработанных исследователем анкет и подвергнуты статистическому анализу. Результаты показали, что узбекские студенты демонстрировали более высокие показатели как по самосравнению, так и по готовности к общению по сравнению с корейскими студентами. При этом было выявлено, что взаимосвязь между самосравнением и готовностью к общению носит слабый и условный характер. Полученные результаты указывают на то, что преподавание языка требует культурного и психологического понимания эффективных стратегий обучения, которые помогают студентам из разных социальных и

Introduction

Background and Rationale

English often ends up feeling less like a school subject and more like a passport. It shows up everywhere-during lectures, on resumes and when students try to communicate with people outside their own country. For those in what Kachru [Kachru 1990] described as "expanding circle" nations, this expectation can feel even heavier, because their future studies and career chances are so often tied to English ability [Dörnyei 2005; Yashima 2002]. Plenty of students spend years in classrooms yet hesitate when it comes time to actually use the language. Some students keep quiet in group discussions, while others avoid English conversations altogether. They fear of mistakes and how others will react-is what researchers usually describe as Willingness to Communicate [McCroskey & Baer 1985].

The act of comparing the self with others has long been recognized in psychology. Festinger [Festinger 1954] first described this process in his Social Comparison Theory of 1954 and 1957, explaining that people evaluate their own abilities and qualities by setting them against those of others. The outcomes of such comparisons are not uniform. Festinger [Festinger 1954] noted that at times, upward comparison, in which someone measures against a person viewed as more capable, may encourage growth and higher effort. At other times, downward comparison, directed toward those who appear less skilled, may provide only temporary reassurance. Within educational settings, especially in contexts where language proficiency is continuously tested, these comparisons can strongly shape a learner. They may increase confidence, but they can also weaken motivation and create anxiety. This tendency is mostly evident in the field of second language acquisition. Students usually track their development by observing how well their peers communicate, and this practice can influence their decision to take the chance of participating in a discussion or to keep calm [Festinger 1954].
Willingness to Communicate, or WTC, is about how ready a learner feels to actually start speaking in a second language [Pawlak et al., 2016]. Personal aspects like personality or confidence play a role, but so does the situation. For example, a student may feel comfortable with a familiar person but remain silent around strangers, or they may be a good talker in small groups but stutter in front of the class. MacIntyre et al. [MacIntyre et al., 1998] suggested a model where WTC sits at the intersection of many psychological and language-related factors, showing that it changes depending on the context. **.** In language learning, WTC is important because it influences how engaged learners are and how often they speak, which in turn affects how much they improve.
 Even though WTC has been studied several times, there is still not much

known about how it connects to internal processes like self-comparison, particularly when cultural differences are involved.

Looking at how people learn a second language in various cultures can tell a lot about how social norms and culture shape what learners do and how they feel. There are still very few studies that really look at how self-comparison and willingness to communicate connect across cultures. This study is focused on Korean and Uzbek students majoring in English examine how culture might matter. The two countries are considerably different in how they approach education and English learning. In Korea, students spend a lot of time in competitive, exam oriented classes. In Uzbekistan, students are dealing with an English education system that is changing quickly because of new policies. Looking at both groups helps show how culture can push students to compare themselves more or less to others, and how that affects whether they feel like speaking in class.

If Kazakhstan is used as an approximate proxy for Uzbekistan, Hofstede's cultural dimensions [Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind 2005] highlight some big differences with South Korea. South Korea scores high on long-term orientation (86) and uncertainty avoidance (85), which may encourage people to plan ahead and avoid risks. That kind of environment can make students compare themselves a lot with their peers. In many cases, that creates stress or makes them less willing to speak Korea also shows a moderate level of collectivism (42), which may foster group cohesion but also heighten concern about others' opinions, making it harder for students to speak up. In Uzbekistan, using Kazakhstan's cultural scores as a rough approximation, collectivism is quite high (80) and power distance is also high (88), while uncertainty avoidance is more moderate. These traits seem to encourage a learning environment where students collaborate more and feel less pressure to constantly compare themselves with others. In most cases, this reduces anxiety and support greater willingness to communicate in class. The emphasis on group harmony and mutual support appears to create a less stressful setting, which may help learners feel more confident when speaking.

Research Gap

Although a lot of research has looked at willingness to communicate (WTC) in relation to motivation, anxiety, and self-perceived communicative competence, the role of self-comparison remains largely unexplored. In particular, the psychological effects of upward comparison on learners' confidence and communicative behavior in second language contexts have not received much attention. Cross-cultural differences in WTC have been studied in places like Japan and Canada, but there is very little research examining this phenomenon among Korean and Central Asian students, where cultural norms and educational practices can be quite different [Kopp 2023]. Recent studies have started to highlight that WTC is not a fixed trait but is dynamic and situational. Factors such as communicative behavior and learner engagement play a role, and these are often shaped by self-perceived communication competence and levels of anxiety [Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak 2017]. However, how self-

comparison interacts with these variables remains unclear, mainly across diverse cultural contexts [Lockley 2013]. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how self-comparison impacts WTC among Korean and Uzbek students, providing insight into how psychological processes as well as cultural settings interact in second language learning.

Objectives and Research Questions

The main goal of this study is to explore how self-comparison relates to willingness to communicate (WTC) in English among university students majoring in the language. Another focus is to examine cross-cultural differences in these patterns between Korean and Uzbek students. More specifically, the study addresses two questions:

1. Is there a correlation between self-comparison with course mates and WTC in English?

2. Are there differences in self-comparison and WTC between Kore an and Uzbek students?

By looking at these questions, the research aims to deepen understanding of the psychological and cultural factors that influence WTC in second language learning. It also seeks to offer practical insights for language teachers working in culturally diverse classrooms.

Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework provides a foundation for understanding and interpreting the phenomena under investigation. In the context of this study, two theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant: Social Comparison Theory and Willingness to Communicate Theory.

Social Comparison Theory

Festinger's work on Social Comparison Theory [Festinger 1957] suggested nine ideas to explain when people tend to compare themselves with others, how they pick who to compare themselves to, and what might happen as a result. The basic idea is that people want to understand themselves accurately. Sometimes this happens through non-social ways, where individuals look at standards to see how they measure up. Like, for instance, someone might consider the achievements of experienced professionals in their field to get a sense of their own abilities.

According to researchers, people often compare themselves with others who seem relevant to their own goals or interests [Goethals & Darley 1977; Miller 1982]. They sometimes notice smaller details too, like whether the person they are comparing themselves to is a professional or just an amateur [Wood 1989]. Festinger [1954] pointed out that the urge to compare usually drops off when the differences are really big. When abilities, beliefs, or performance are very far apart, people tend to exaggerate those differences, maybe to protect their self-esteem [Taylor & Lobel 1989; Wood et al., 1985]. By thinking of others as very different, the comparison feels less intense and less threatening to their own sense of self.

Mumford [Mumford 1983] examined how social comparison theory

applies to peer evaluations in workplace settings. The study discussed factors that make peer evaluations **effective and highlighted their potential as a valid means of assessing** job performance. Mumford [Mumford 1983] suggests that thinking about how people compare themselves to others helps explain how peer evaluations work. The research also explores the situations where peer evaluations tend to be most accurate and argues that social comparison can actually improve how reliable and effective these assessments are. By combining theory with practical observations, Mumford shows how understanding social comparison can help make peer evaluations better in real-world settings.

Upward and Downward Social Comparisons

Later studies on social comparison theory expanded on Festinger's [1954] original ideas by examining the direction of comparisons—upward and downward — and their respective psychological effects. Upward comparisons happen when someone looks at others they think are better in a certain area. This can sometimes motivate them, giving ideas or inspiration for improving themselves [Festinger 1954]. To illustrate, an employee might notice how a high-performing colleague handles tasks and try to pick up some strategies. But upward comparisons can also make people feel good if they spot things they share with that person. This is called assimilation [Collins 1996; Taylor & Lobel 1989], and it can lift their mood. For instance, realizing both they and a successful peer have a strong work ethic might make them feel more optimistic and confident.

When someone looks at those they believe are not as skilled in a certain area, they are engaging in downward social comparisons. This is frequently done to feel a little better about oneself rather than to criticize others [Wood et al., 1985; Wills 1981]. A student who performed well on an exam, for instance, might become more assured of their own success after observing a classmate who received lesser grades. These comparisons typically highlight the gaps that exist between the other person and oneself. People may feel more safe or content with their current situation as a result of that disparity. For example, a professional may feel comforted about their own career path while considering coworkers who are having difficulties. Downward comparisons frequently appear to serve as a subdued means of preserving self-worth without necessarily being competitive.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and Its Contextual Evolution

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) was initially developed as a concept within the domain of first language (L1) acquisition, aiming to predict the likelihood of a speaker voluntarily engaging in communication [McCroskey & Baer 1985, cited in MacIntyre et al., 1998]. Traditionally, WTC was understood as a static personality trait, impervious to external influences or situational factors. However, subsequent research by McCroskey [McCroskey 1991] and colleagues argued that WTC is, in fact, a dynamic variable shaped by situational elements, such as familiarity with the conversational partner(s), the size of the audience, the formality of the context, and the topic under discussion.

A significant distinction exists between WTC in a first language (L1) and in a second language (L2). According to MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels [MacIntyre et al., 1998], WTC in L1 does not directly transfer to L2 contexts. They asserted that "it is highly unlikely that WTC in the second language is a simple manifestation of WTC in the L1" [MacIntyre et al., 1998: 546]. In L2, WTC is better defined as a readiness to initiate communication with specific individuals at a particular moment using the target language [MacIntyre et al., 1998]. This intention to communicate, such as raising a hand in class, reflects a cognitive and emotional state where the speaker believes they are prepared to interact, even if they do not immediately produce language.

Given these considerations, MacIntyre et al. [MacIntyre et al., 1998] posited that fostering a willingness to communicate should be a primary objective in second-language education. They emphasized that engendering this readiness ensures that learners not only acquire linguistic competence but also gain the confidence to use the language in real-life situations.

By integrating these theories and cultural insights, this study seeks to illuminate how self-comparison and cultural norms intersect to shape L2 learners' WTC. This approach does not only enhance theoretical understanding but also provides practical implications for designing culturally sensitive language learning interventions.

Literature review

The following section evaluates essential research regarding self-comparison and willingness to communicate (WTC) within second language acquisition (SLA). The analysis shows how self-comparison affects learners' self-assurance and motivation and communication patterns yet considers cultural and personal variations. This review establishes a fundamental understanding of how self-comparison interacts with WTC through the integration of previous research findings.

Research conducted recently demonstrates the fluid relationship between students comparing themselves to others and their willingness to communicate which leads learners to evaluate their abilities relative to others and subsequently impacts their confidence levels and communication engagement behaviors [Dörnyei 2005; MacIntyre et al., 2019]. Research conducted by Wang et al. [Wang et al., 2021] demonstrates that positive self-comparison improves WTC but negative self-comparison results in reduced motivation which leads to communication avoidance. The way culture influences self-comparison patterns and WTC development remains under discussion among researchers. Research demonstrates that collectivist cultures place greater value on group harmony which leads to different WTC outcomes than individualistic cultures that focus on personal achievement [Yashima 2002]. A culturally adapted understanding of these constructs appears to be necessary according to these findings. The connection between language proficiency and WTC exists but it remains complicated. WTC levels tend to increase with higher proficiency but anxiety functions as a key mediator between them. Research indicates that students who

experience anxiety about communication tend to stay away from communicative activities even though they possess adequate language abilities [MacIntyre & Charos 1996]. This research does not incorporate proficiency as one of its variables.

Research findings show that the connection between self-comparison and WTC exists as an intricate network of various factors. Research conducted by Yashima [Yashima 2002] showed that students who formed helpful self-comparisons tended to use language outside classrooms which created a positive cycle between self-awareness and readiness to communicate. MacIntyre et al. [MacIntyre et al., 2019] demonstrated that unfavorable self-assessment leads to avoidance behaviors which show how harmful maladaptive self-comparison strategies can be. The interaction between self-efficacy plays an essential part which should not be disregarded. According to Bandura [Bandura 1997] self-efficacy beliefs create powerful effects on motivation levels and performance results. Research demonstrates that students with strong self-efficacy tendencies choose to participate in WTC even when their performance stands below their classmates [Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011].

The research conducted by Filipović in 2013 demonstrates that individual differences in SLA play a central role by showing the connection between willingness to communicate and perceived communication competence and oral language proficiency. According to Filipović's [Filipović 2013] study WTC functions as a stable language achievement predictor which means students who see themselves as competent communicators tend to participate more actively in language use during class. This basic research creates a foundation for future studies which examine how to encourage WTC among students [Filipović 2013].

Further expanding the discourse, Shahbaz et al. [Shahbaz et al., 2016] continue their discussion by analyzing how Pakistani university students view their communication abilities and their reluctance to communicate affect their willingness to speak in both L1 and L2. The study shows that students who believe they have good communication skills and experience less anxiety tend to be more willing to participate in both their native language and their foreign language settings. The research demonstrates that a positive self-image in one language boosts WTC for that language but high anxiety about one language may develop a positive self-image in another. The complex connection between WTC and its contextual factors requires further investigation to understand how interpersonal relationships together with environmental elements affect language learner communication practices.

Methodology

The research utilizes quantitative correlational methodology with a comparative framework to study how self-comparison affects English willingness to communicate (WTC) among students from South Korean and Uzbek universities. The correlational method [Singh 1998] tracks statistical links between self-comparison activities and WTC but the comparative analysis [Creswell & Creswell 2018] investigates cultural distinctions between two groups. The study evaluates different patterns

which help understand how social expectations and cultural principles affect second language acquisition communication patterns.

The research included 200 undergraduate pupils consisting of 100 South Korean students and 100 Uzbek students who studied English. The study chose English majors because they regularly use second-language communication which made them appropriate subjects for studying self-comparison and WTC in English. WTC shows different levels among learners because of their language competence and personal drive and cultural background thus English majors offer a fitting sample to study these connections. English majors serve as an appropriate research sample to examine these relationships. The selection of South Korea and Uzbekistan as study participants was based on their different cultural dimensions according to Hofstede [Hofstede 2001].

The academic and linguistic environments in South Korea may develop hierarchical self-comparison because the country demonstrates both high collectivism and power distance. Following their independence from Soviet rule Uzbekistan exhibits collectivist traits yet underwent major educational and linguistic transformations which may have led to distinct self-comparison and communication approaches. The examination between these two groups enables researchers to understand how cultural values affect self-comparison and WTC in English thereby enhancing knowledge about second-language communication patterns in different sociocultural settings.

The research participants were chosen through different procedures to maintain a representative diversity in the sample. In South Korea, data collection occurred through the assistance of professors who work at Korean universities. The recruitment process became faster because of this method. The data collection process received support from university professors in Uzbekistan who helped with the participant recruitment.

Google Forms served as the platform for online surveys which participants accessed through social media distribution of survey links. The study participants learned about the research goals and received information about data protection and confidentiality before completing their participation within the four-week period to reduce external impact.

The research utilized two established survey tools to assess participants' self-comparison tendencies along with their willingness to communicate (WTC) behavior. The instrument measuring self-comparison drew from the theoretical framework which includes Social Comparison Theory by Festinger [Festinger 1954] and Bandura's [Bandura 1997] Self-Efficacy theory together with Dörnyei's [Dörnyei 2005] and MacIntyre et al.'s [MacIntyre et al., 1998] research on language learning motivation and anxiety.

WTC questionnaire was based on the Darasawang and Reinders [Darasawang & Reinders 2019] framework which draws upon the WTC studies by [Cao & Philp 2006; Freiermuth & Jarrell 2006; Léger & Storch 2009; MacIntyre et al., 1998, 2019]. The survey instruments utilized a 5-point Likert scale for responses and underwent minor adjustments to fit this particular research with a few additional distractor elements.

The research employed SPSS software to perform data analysis for achieving accurate and reliable results. The data analysis utilized

descriptive statistics to present average values together with standard deviations for both self-comparison scores and WTC scores. Pearson's correlation coefficient served as an inferential statistical tool to measure the connection between self-comparison and WTC among different cultural groups. The study used independent samples t-tests to analyze variations between Korean students and Uzbek students.

Results

This section presents the results which include descriptive statistics summarizing the mean scores and standard deviations for self-comparison and WTC, as well as correlation analyses and independent samples t-tests to examine the relationships and differences between the two cultural groups.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for self-comparison and willingness to communicate (WTC) scores among Korean (Group 1) and Uzbek (Group 2) participants. For self-comparison, Korean participants exhibit a lower mean score of 2.084 (SD = 0.264), with minimal variability, compared to Uzbek participants who report a significantly higher mean score of 3.439 (SD = 0.525), indicating greater variability. In terms of WTC, Korean participants show a mean score of 3.384 (SD = 0.238), reflecting a moderate willingness to communicate, while Uzbek participants report a slightly higher mean score of 3.637 (SD = 0.402), suggesting a broader range of communication willingness.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Groups (1 Koreans, 2-Uzbeks	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-Comparison Scores (Mean)	1	100	2.084000000000000	.263894683615271
	2	100	3.438666666666664	.524607062615348
Willingness to Communicate Scores (Mean)	1	100	3.384285714285715	.237879170840646
	2	100	3.636666666666665	.401767493752502

Table 2 presents the correlation analysis between self-comparison and willingness to communicate (WTC) scores for Korean and Uzbek participants. The Pearson correlation coefficient for the relationship between self-comparison and WTC for Korean participants is -0.030 (p = 0.771), indicating a negligible and statistically insignificant relationship. Similarly, for Uzbek participants, the correlation coefficient is 0.165 (p = 0.101), suggesting a weak positive relationship that is also not statistically significant. These findings indicate that, in both cultural contexts, self-comparison does not have a strong or direct influence on WTC. However,

a significant weak positive correlation (0.208, p = 0.037) was observed when analyzing self-comparison scores with specific subdomains, highlighting that certain aspects of self-comparison might modestly influence WTC under circumstances.
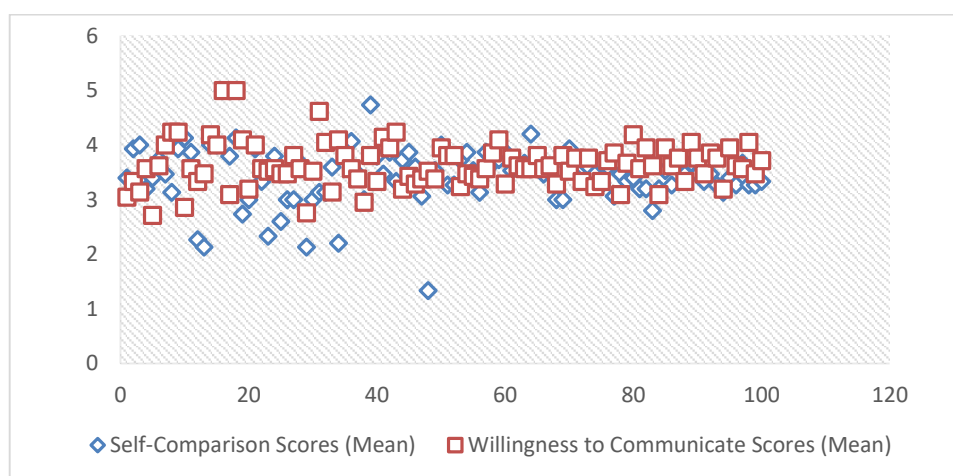
Table 2

Correlations

		Self-Comparison (Korean Participants)	Willingness to Communicate (Korean Participants)	Self-Comparison (Uzbek Participants)	Willingness to Communicate (Uzbek Participants)
Self-Comparison (Korean Participants)	Pearson Correlation	1	-.030	.187	.165
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.771	.063	.101
	N	100	100	100	100
Willingness to Communicate (Korean Participants)	Pearson Correlation	-.030	1	.045	.032
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.771		.655	.750
	N	100	100	100	100
Self-Comparison (Uzbek Participants)	Pearson Correlation	.187	.045	1	.208[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.063	.655		.037
	N	100	100	100	100
Willingness to Communicate (Uzbek Participants)	Pearson Correlation	.165	.032	.208[*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.101	.750	.037	
	N	100	100	100	100

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The scatter plot (Chart 1) illustrates the distribution of Self-Comparison Scores (Mean) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Scores (Mean) for Korean participants. Self-Comparison Scores (blue points) range between 1.0 and 3.0, with most participants clustered around the mean value of 2.08, indicating low variability and consistent perceptions of self-comparison. Similarly, WTC Scores range between 2.8 and 4.0, with a mean of 3.38, showing a tightly clustered distribution that reflects low variability in WTC among Korean participants. Overall, the two variables appear independent, with no observable linear pattern between Self-Comparison and WTC scores. The consistent spread of red and blue points suggests that self-comparison does not directly influence WTC for Korean participants.

Chart 1: *Korean Group*
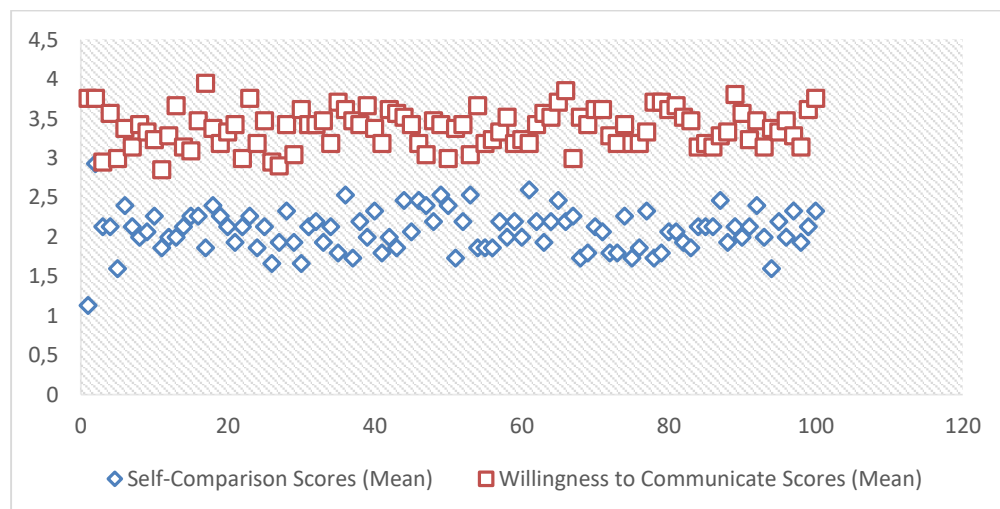
The scatter plot (Chart 2) illustrates the distribution of Self-Comparison Scores (Mean) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Scores (Mean) for Uzbek participants. **S**elf-Comparison Scores range between 1.3 and 5.0, with most participants clustered around the mean value of 3.44, indicating moderate variability. WTC Scores range between 2.7 and 5.0, with a mean of 3.64. The orange squares are more widely spread compared to the blue diamonds, suggesting greater variability in WTC scores among Uzbek participants. In general, there appears to be no strong linear pattern between Self-Comparison and WTC scores, indicating a weak relationship between the two variables. The wider spread of scores in both measures for the Uzbek group suggests more diverse perceptions of self-comparison and WTC compared to the Korean group, potentially reflecting varying cultural or educational influences.

Chart 2: *Uzbek Group*

The results from the independent samples t-test (Table 3) show that Korean and Uzbek participants demonstrate important differences in self-

comparison and willingness to communicate (WTC) scores. Self-comparison analysis shows that Uzbek participants achieved substantially higher ratings than Korean participants with a mean difference of 1.355 (p < .001). The data reveals that Uzbek participants believe their English-speaking abilities exceed those of their peers. WTC scores show that Uzbek participants demonstrate marginally higher levels of willingness to engage in English communication compared to their Korean counterparts as indicated by the mean difference of 0.252 (p < .001). Self-comparison and WTC score variations likely result from cultural and educational and linguistic elements which are specific to each group because Uzbek participants demonstrate greater response variability together with higher confidence than Korean participants who show lower but more stable scores.

Table 3: Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
						Significance			Std.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		
		F	Sig.	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Self-Comparison Scores (Mean)	Equal variances assumed	17.968	<.001	-23.068	198	<.001	<.001	-1.354666666665	.058724183620235	-1.470471783137406	-1.238861550195923
	Equal variances not assumed			-23.068	146.087	<.001	<.001	-1.354666666665	.058724183620235	-1.470725371920127	-1.238607961413202
Willingness to Communicate	Equal variances assumed	13.740	<.001	-5.405	198	<.001	<.001	-.252380952380949	.046690857665714	-.344456139752881	-.160305765009017

Scores (Mean)	Equal variances not assumed			-5.405	160.814	<.001	<.001	-.252380952380949	.046690857665714	-.344587241465734	-.160174663296164

Discussion & Conclusion

The findings have implications with regards to the influence of self-comparison on WTC in Korean and Uzbek English-major students. The results demonstrate that there are statistically significant differences between self-comparison and WTC scores, with the Uzbek students having greater means in each dimension than their Korean counterparts.

Higher self-comparison scores among Uzbek students indicate that they are more predisposed to compare their English-speaking skills to those of others. This pattern may be influenced by cultural priorities for collectivism and group harmony in Uzbekistan, where students might feel motivated to self-assess in order to promote group cohesion and mutual support [Hofstede 2001]. On the other hand, the low level of self-comparison among Korean students may be indicative of a competitive classroom situation in South Korea where students if othered may be anxious and afraid to be compared to others, thus resulting in low self-comparison [Yashima 2002].

Furthermore, the risk-averse attitude towards risk that is common in South Koreans, may also contribute to the relatively low WTC level. Research has found that the South Koreans are likely to have lower preference for risks when making those specific individual judgments, due to cultural determinants like high uncertainty avoidance, and strong community harmony and group belonging [John, So-Hyun, & Joo-Yung 2010]. This conservatism may be a causal factor of greater CA and less WTC among Korean students. But, it is notable that South Koreans are more risk seeking in the conditions of group decision-making, which means that cooperative learning environments probably diminish some of the individual communication anxieties [Hoang et al., 2023].

Correlation analysis indicated that self-comparison and WTC have weak and non-significant relationship for both the Korean and Uzbek participants. This result implies that self-comparison as the only measure is not a powerful predictor of WTC in these cultural settings. Nevertheless, the moderate to strong correlation of self-comparison with subfactors of WTC in Uzbeks suggests that aspects of self-comparison in the given context could influence WTC in certain situations. For example, learners who make upward comparison may be stimulated to develop their language skills, leading to more WTC [Collins 1996].

In Uzbekistan, the value of cooperation varies, and a culture of contradiction may provide a supportive learning environment with reduced performance inhibition of speaking in English, and so students can express themselves very freely [Wang et al., 2021]. On the other hand, the competitive and high-pressure academic environment in Korea could

contribute to greater communication apprehension and lower WTC of students [MacIntyre et al., 1998].

The findings provide useful information to language educators together with policymakers. To support Korean students' WTC educators should establish learning environments that minimize competition while offering support to decrease their anxiety about negative evaluations. Collaborative learning strategies alongside positive feedback mechanisms enhance student confidence which leads to increased English communication participation [Dörnyei 2005]. Classroom environments which encourage collaboration and support combined with self-comparison teaching methods will help Uzbek students develop stronger WTC.

The effects of various psychological and contextual elements including self-efficacy and motivation and classroom dynamics on WTC need further investigation across different cultural environments. The study of WTC would benefit from qualitative research through student and teacher interviews which would uncover deeper explanations about WTC behaviors. Longitudinal research would help researchers understand the development of self-comparison and WTC as well as their reactions to different educational approaches over time.

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