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Promoting Thai EFL Learners' Willingness to Communicate in the Virtual Classroom Through Technology-Mediated Oral Tasks

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ABSTRACT

Willingness to communicate (WTC) in English in a classroom setting is considered a crucial factor for successfully learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This study investigated whether the intervention of technology-mediated oral tasks on the Flipgrid application designed as entrance and exit tickets could promote Thai EFL learners' WTC in English in the virtual classroom. It also examined their perceptions towards this pedagogical practice. This intervention was implemented in an online English for Communication course for eight weeks. A mixed methods approach was employed in this study with 34 participants through pre-post WTC questionnaires, a Flipgrid questionnaire, and focus-group interviews. The results showed that the increase in learners' overall WTC after the intervention was statistically significant ($p<.001$). Moreover, the students reported positive opinions towards the use of technology-mediated oral tasks in terms of academic engagement and in the improvement of speaking and listening skills. The study concludes with implications for best practices in the online English language classroom as well as suggestions for further research.

Keywords: willingness to communicate, technology-mediated, oral task, Thai EFL learners, virtual classroom

Introduction

Due to the influence of collectivist culture, most East Asian learners are perceived to be passive and reticent. In terms of learning behaviors, they tend to obey teachers and strive to maintain group harmony, in addition to fearing negative evaluation, making mistakes and losing face (e.g. Cao & Philp, 2006; Shao & Gao, 2016). The situation in Thailand is similar. It is common for Thai learners to be reluctant and unwilling to use English both inside and outside the classroom (e.g. Kamprasertwong, 2010; Pattapong, 2015). It is noted that despite over ten years of learning English, most Thai learners still have difficulties communicating in the language. (Beding & Inthapthim, 2019; Wanich, 2014).

Unlike the context of learning English as a second language (ESL) where opportunities to use English in daily life are plentiful, Thai people who learn English as a foreign language (EFL) have little opportunity to use English, especially for communication outside the classroom. Therefore, the English classroom is to be considered the most significant place for them to practice English. Having willingness to communicate (WTC) could foster successful language learning, as evinced by Skehan (1989), who stated that "learners have to talk in order to learn," (p.48). Consequently, it has been proposed that WTC is the ultimate goal of a second language (L2) education (MacIntyre et al., 1998). MacIntyre et al. (1998) further argue that "A program that fails to produce students who are willing to use the language is simply a failed program" (p.547).

Of great significance to educators at the present time are changes that have been made to the learning platform, where traditional classroom instruction often yields to an online setting because of the current pandemic situation. Teaching methods have to integrate appropriate technology to facilitate learning. In terms of an L2 communication class, there have been promising results from the pedagogical approaches of task-based language teaching (TBLT) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Previous studies show that the notion of combining tasks and the use of technology or technology-mediated TBLT, could facilitate L2 learners' improvement in language performance and support their L2 learning development (e.g., Gonzalez-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Ziegler, 2016).

Although previous research studies have investigated WTC in English for Thai EFL learners with the integration of technology in class (e.g., Chotipaktanasook & Reinders, 2016; Reinders & Wattana, 2015), very few

studies have examined Thai students' WTC in English in the form of spoken language. As a result, this paper investigates the impact of technology-mediated oral tasks on Thai EFL students' WTC in English in an online learning context by answering these following research questions:

1. Do the technology-mediated oral tasks promote Thai EFL learner's WTC in English in the virtual classroom?
2. What are Thai EFL learners' perceptions towards the use of technology-mediated oral tasks?

Literature Review

Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

MacIntyre et al. (1998) developed a model of willingness to communicate (WTC) in a second language (L2) based on a WTC model in the first language (L1) by McCroskey and Baer (1985). While L1 WTC was concerned with trait-like predisposition of an individual which tends to be stable over time and across communication situations, WTC in L2 is more complex and associated with many individual and situational variables that influence the tendency to initiate or engage in L2 communication (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Therefore, the conceptualization of L2 WTC involved both traits and varying levels of state that could change across situations. L2 WTC is defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p.547).

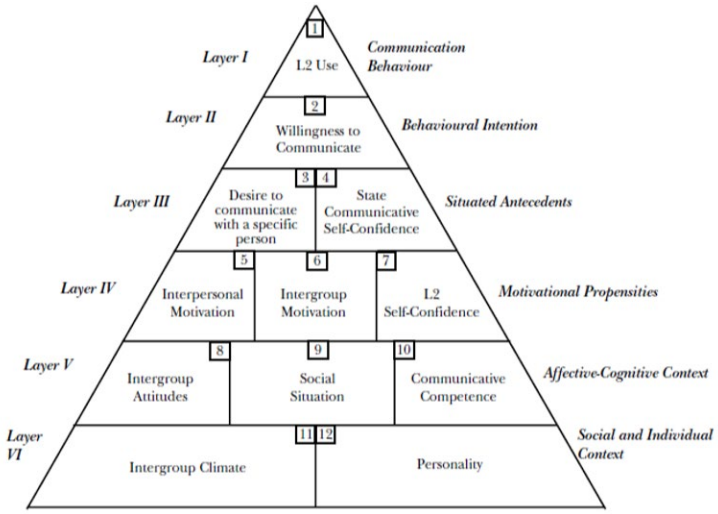
From this perspective, MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed a heuristic model of L2 WTC incorporating a range of linguistic, communicative, and social-psychological variables that influence one's WTC in L2 (Figure 1). The factors contributing to L2 use on the top of the pyramid are divided into six layers representing two main types of influences: enduring (Layers IV-VI) and situational (Layers I-III). While the enduring variables are concerned with fixed personal attributes of an individual that seem to apply to any circumstance regardless of specific time and contexts, the situational variables are perceived as temporary and dependent on certain contexts that one encounters at any given moment.

This WTC model is considered comprehensive and influential in WTC research since it includes both theoretical and practical implications. Numerous subsequent studies have confirmed its enduring factors, for example, age and gender (MacIntyre et al., 2003), attitude (MacIntyre et al., 2001), L2 anxiety (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003), self-confidence (Yashima, 2002), self-perceived communication competence (Yashima et al., 2004), and motivation (Hashimoto, 2002). Some researchers have examined the situated nature of L2 WTC and have proved the influence of variables related to social

context, such as social support (MacIntyre et al., 2001), frequency and quality of L2 contact (Clément et al., 2003), and learning context (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003).

Figure 1

Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC



In educational settings, Cao (2014) defines L2 WTC as "observable behavior in class, which refers to occasions in which students chose whether to communicate when they had the opportunity to do so" (p.795). Some contextual variables that affect WTC in the L2 classroom include interlocutor familiarity, participation, task type and topic (Cao & Philp, 2006). In addition, Peng and Woodrow (2010) found that classroom environment was a strong predictor of WTC and motivation in the EFL context in China. In Japan, Yashima et al. (2016) found that the interplay of trait WTC (e.g. personality, English proficiency) and emerging contextual variables (e.g. peers' reactions, talk-silence patterns in group talks) created situated emotional responses which led to state WTC and self-initiated turns at a given moment. More recently, Toyoda et al. (2021) focused on enhancing Japanese novice EFL learners' L2 WTC through the task-based learning (TBL) approach. Three important WTC predictors were found to stem from an enduring factor (L1 WTC), and from two situational factors (perceived situational task competence and situational task engagement). The findings show a significant increase in the learners' L2 WTC and indicate their enjoyment during the communication tasks due to gains in self-confidence and from L2 task competence over time.

In Thailand, many research studies have investigated the factors that influence WTC of Thai EFL learners (e.g. Karnchanachari, 2019; Pattapong, 2015). Pattapong (2015) categorized variables that affect Thai EFL learners' WTC into four contexts: cultural, social and psychological, classroom, and social and individual. In 2018, Darling and Chanyoo found a positive correlation between the L2 motivational self-system and WTC among Thai EFL undergraduates. A study by Karnchanachari (2019) demonstrates that although her Thai EFL participants from both Thai and international programs preferred to use Thai during the brainstorm activity with their Thai peers, their WTC in English in class was significantly higher. The findings also show some factors that influence the participants' WTC such as personality, experience communicating in English, topic interest and familiarity, anxiety, and the interlocutors.

Furthermore, some WTC studies in Thailand have aimed to increase WTC among Thai EFL learners. Reinders and Wattana (2015) examined learners' experiences with a 15-week game-based learning program using the massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs). Some benefits from gameplay found in this study include the lowering of affective barriers and increasing WTC. To investigate the long-term effects of the social media platform on Thai EFL learners' WTC, Chotipaktanasook and Reinders' (2016) study reveals that using social media had a positive impact on learners' WTC in an English class over two semesters. The use of social media encouraged learners in this study to use English to communicate their ideas, feelings, and opinions.

In summary, the existing WTC studies in the Thai context contribute to WTC research regarding the investigation of WTC variables in EFL classrooms and the implementation of some practical strategies to increase learners' WTC. However, data collected from WTC studies on pedagogical practices in digital settings were confined to only written forms, namely chats in games (Reinders & Wattana, 2015) and comments on social media (Chotipaktanasook & Reinders, 2016). Little attention has been paid to WTC in spoken form for Thai EFL learners. This paper attempts to fill in this gap and gives an account of an intervention designed to promote WTC in an online context.

Technology-mediated Task-based Language Teaching (TMTBLT)

In the past decade, researchers have developed learning tasks integrated with technology under the fields of both task-based language teaching (TBLT) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) to inform optimal teaching practices and serve today's learners living in the digital age (e.g. Smith & Gonzalez-Lloret, 2020; Ziegler, 2016). In this regard, Gonzalez-

Lloret and Ortega (2014) proposed a framework for technology-mediated tasks consisting of three requirements: 1) informed definition, 2) implications of technology, and 3) integration in the L2 curriculum.

First, there are five key features of tasks in technology-mediated context, including 1) focusing on meaning, 2) having a goal orientation, 3) being learner-centered, 4) being authentic, and 5) offering reflective learning. The second requirement indicates some promising results from integrating tasks and technology. These include providing authentic tasks in online education, connecting learners both remotely and collaboratively, and developing the learning culture in more interactive ways. The last requirement is to integrate technology-mediated tasks to the L2 curriculum. It is suggested that the L2 curriculum should be conceptualized at a macro and micro levels. While the macro level is concerned with course or program outcomes, the micro level should ensure that the task-based learning experience includes pedagogical tasks, teaching strategies and assessments.

The technology-mediated oral tasks in this study are one-way, experience-sharing communication tasks. These tasks require learners to record a video of themselves talking about their experiences or opinions regarding related topics using vocabulary and language features from their prior knowledge and the lessons. Learners then upload their videos on Flipgrid which is an application that has been widely used in educational contexts. This online video-mediated tool is a discussion platform where the instructors can create their own class or a 'grid' on the website or in the application. The instructor can then invite students to upload short video responses to topics regarding to the subject. Not only can students see the videos of their classmates, but they can also reply to each other's videos by recording and uploading their own video commentary.

Recently, researchers have noted some benefits of Flipgrid as a digital educational tool, including encouraging learners to use the target language, developing their speaking, communication and presentation skills, as well as motivating them to persist in their L2 learning (e.g. Cherrez, 2019; Difilippantonio-Pen, 2020; Mango, 2021). While a study by Difilippantonio-Pen (2020) has shown an increase in oral English language fluency with the use of scaffolding activities in Flipgrid among the 7th grade students, Tuyet and Khang's (2020) research has presented a decrease in learners' English-speaking anxiety after using Flipgrid in an EFL class in a Vietnamese high school. Both studies also found that the use of Flipgrid motivated students to speak English, as they gained more confidence and felt more comfortable while speaking.

Similarly, Petersen et al. (2020) who conducted a pilot study to evaluate the effectiveness of Flipgrid in a Japanese university EFL classroom, pointed out that Flipgrid can promote successful outcomes in L2 learning

because it provides the opportunity for students to evaluate their videos before uploading, and then re-record if needed for a better performance. In addition, Mango (2021) claims that Flipgrid is an effective tool in the language classroom as it is safe, user-friendly, and enjoyable. It is an engaging platform that offers students their own space and provides them with time to practice in a low-anxiety environment.

In a quasi-experimental research study, Cherrez (2019) examined the impacts of technology-mediated pedagogical tasks on WTC and communicative performance of L2 learners. The findings indicate that the participants from technology-mediated tasks or the Flipgrid group (FG) outperformed those from the comparison group (CG) in terms of WTC, communicative performance, and the use of Spanish in natural ways. Furthermore, the students from FG group reported increases in confidence when speaking. This was due to the low stress atmosphere and non-judgmental learning environment the Flipgrid platform provides.

While the existing literature demonstrates the effectiveness of technology-mediated tasks, the extent to which the use of technology-mediated tasks in the virtual classroom has an effect on Thai EFL students' WTC in English remains unknown. The investigation of this issue with available technological resources is crucial to provide insights for language teachers to serve 21st century learners better in terms of integrating tasks and technology in their online lessons. This study, therefore, aims to make a noteworthy contribution to the field of WTC in English by enhancing the English speaking ability and WTC in English of Thai EFL learners with technology-mediated oral tasks on a digital platform.

Methodology

Participants and Setting

This study was conducted with 34 participants (31 females and 3 males) at a public university in the Northeast of Thailand. They were second-year students majoring in English. They had studied English for up to 12 years. Of the 34 participants, 26 used English in their daily life to watch English movies or video clips, listen to English songs or podcasts and read English books, websites, and content on social media. Regarding English communication skills, most of them (19) rated "Fair" while 12 rated "Poor", and only three rated "Good".

Teaching Intervention

The intervention was implemented in an English for Communication course comprised of two 90-minute classes per week. Due to health and safety protocols related to the pandemic, an online learning platform was utilized, which included both asynchronous and synchronous instruction. The technology-mediated oral tasks were implemented in the course in the form of entrance and exit tickets. The task of completing an entrance ticket is done to prepare the learners for the synchronous discussion to be had in a later class. Its aim is to bridge the students' background knowledge with the lesson of the week. On the other hand, the exit ticket provides an opportunity for students to reflect on what they learned, as well as to check their understanding around the application of topic-related words and phrases learned in class.

For the first 90-minute class each week, the students took part in self-study via asynchronous learning on Google Classroom. Before the student were introduced to the lesson, which prepared them for a discussion to be had in the second class of the week, they were required to submit an entrance ticket on Flipgrid by recording a one-minute video of themselves sharing their prior knowledge on the topic. The focus was on conveying their ideas rather than worrying about correct language form at this stage. They were instructed to use their own linguistic resources.

In the second 90-minute class of the week, the students first did a warm-up activity and activities in the textbook. Then, they were divided into pairs and small groups of 3-4 participants in the breakout rooms to discuss the related issues. After that, all participants were called back to the main room to share the highlights of their talks and comment on each other's group's opinions. Afterwards, the important chunks of language and language forms were made explicit. At the end, the students were required to do an exit ticket task. They had to individually record a one-minute video of themselves sharing their opinions on the issues they had discussed in class. A speaking model of each task performed by the Thai and non-Thai speakers of English was provided for the learners as an authentic source of real-world language use that integrated form, function, and meaning. The class flow is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Class Flow (90-minute class, twice a week)

Duration	Activity	Remark
The first 90-minute class (asynchronous learning)		
90 mins	Entrance ticket Self-study	Flipgrid task Instructional VDOs
The second 90-minute class (synchronous learning)		
10 mins	Warm up activity	On Zoom
20 mins	Activities in textbook	On Zoom
10 mins	Pair communication activity	Break out room
10 mins	Small-group discussion	Break out room
10 mins	Break	
20 mins	Whole-class discussion	On Zoom
10 mins	Lesson conclusion	On Zoom
After class	Exit ticket	Flipgrid task

Data Collection

The data was collected for four lessons over eight weeks. In the course orientation, students were informed of the purpose of the research study and were later asked if they were willing to volunteer to participate in the study. Any questions or concerns related to the research procedures were clarified before the students signed the consent forms. The data collection methods were as follows.

Pre- and Post-WTC Questionnaires

Before the intervention, the participants were asked to complete the pre-WTC questionnaire which included two parts: 1) Background information and 2) Willingness to communicate. The first part collected information about the participants' demographics as well as their English educational experience, whereas the second part was utilized to measure their WTC in the English classroom. In Part 2, statements regarding WTC were adapted from Cao and Philp (2006) and Chotipaktanasook and Reinders (2016). Participants were asked to rate the first ten items based on a 5-point Likert scale to measure WTC (1 = Strongly unwilling to 5 = Strongly willing). Another ten items followed, which were used to measure their communicative self-confidence (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). At the end of the intervention, the participants were required to complete only Part 2 of this same WTC questionnaire as a posttest.

Flipgrid Questionnaire

In the last week of the intervention, a questionnaire on perceptions towards the use of the technology-mediated oral tasks on Flipgrid in class, which as adapted from Mango (2021), was shared with the participants. There were 25 statements under the five main themes, namely 1) Affective perceptions, 2) Tasks, 3) Listening and speaking skills, 4) Academic engagement, and 5) Social engagement. Each theme contained a set of five statements, all based on a 5-point likert scale regarding their level of agreement (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

Focus-group Interviews

At the end of the intervention, the participants were asked to participate in focus-group interviews (groups of 4-5) via an online meeting. The interviews were video recorded and lasted about 7-10 minutes per group. The interviewees were asked to share their opinions on the use of technology-mediated oral tasks in the lessons and their WTC in the virtual classroom. To prevent any difficulties on account of the language barrier, the interviews were conducted in Thai.

Data Analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) Program Version 25 was deployed to analyze the quantitative data from the questionnaires. A paired samples t-test was applied to the WTC questionnaire to compare the pre and post WTC scores, while mean statistics were used for the Flipgrid questionnaire to show the level of the participants' agreement. The negative statements were reversed before summing. The focus-group interviews were transcribed and analyzed by using content analysis.

Results and Discussion

Impacts of Technology-mediated Oral Tasks on WTC in English

To answer Research Question 1: "Do the technology-mediated oral tasks promote Thai EFL learner's WTC in English in the virtual classroom?", the participants' WTC in English including their communicative behaviors (CBs) and communicative self-confidence (CSC) was measured before and after the intervention. As shown in Table 2, the overall mean score of the communicative behaviors was 3.33 (SD=.507) in the pre-survey while it was 3.77 (SD=.635) in the post-survey. Although the interpretation of the overall

mean scores for both pre- and post-WTC survey was the same degree or "somewhat willing", the result from pair samples t-test shows an overall statistically significant improvement ($p<.001$). In addition, Behaviors 1 to 7 showed a statistically significant increase ($p\leq0.05$). Noticeably, their WTC levels for these six behaviors, except Behavior 7, had changed from "neutral" to "somewhat willing".

The three communicative behaviors that were not significantly different were Behaviors 8 to 10. Reasons for the insignificant change could be that the students' WTC in English regarding these three specific communicative behaviors were already high at the beginning of the course. Indeed, Behaviors 9 and 10 were the top two highest means which implies that they were normally willing to talk with their friends in English (M=3.88) and to guess the unknown words in English (M=3.79).

Table 2

Paired Samples t-test for Pre-CB and Post-CB Scores (n = 34)

Communicative Behaviors (CB)	Pre		Post		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. Volunteer an answer in English	2.94	.736	3.56	1.050	-4.055	<.001
2. Give explanation in English.	2.94	.776	3.56	.746	-3.908	<.001
3. Present your own opinions in English in class.	2.94	.649	3.50	.896	-3.791	<.001
4. Try out difficult form in English language	3.00	.853	3.62	.779	-3.775	<.001
5. Give a presentation in English in front of the class.	3.26	.931	3.85	.857	-3.708	<.001
6. Help others answer a question in English.	3.41	.743	3.91	.753	-3.531	.001
7. Ask a question in English in class.	3.68	.684	4.00	.921	-2.149	.039
8. Participate in group discussion in class.	3.47	.896	3.82	.904	-1.875	.070
9. Talk to my friends in English.	3.88	.769	4.06	.814	-1.099	.280
10. Guess the meaning of the unknown word.	3.79	.770	3.85	.784	-.339	.737
Overall	**3.33**	**.507**	**3.77**	**.635**	**-4.830**	**<.001**

Interpretation: 1.00-1.49 = Very unwilling, 1.50-2.49 =Somewhat unwilling, 2.50-3.49 = Neutral, 3.50-4.49 = Somewhat willing, 4.50-5.00 = Very willing (Chotipaktanasook, 2014)

From Table 2, the communicative behavior that received the most notable score was Behavior 1 "Volunteer an answer in English". From the focus-group interviews, the participants explained that the topics or questions were easy because they were related to their experiences or interests. Also, some said that they had studied the lessons and worked on the technology-mediated oral tasks in advance, so they were willing and able to participate in the discussion. This result is consistent with data obtained by Hanifah and Nainggolan (2021) and Sesriyani's (2020) study which both report that the highest rate of their participants' WTC pattern in the virtual classes was to volunteer to answer the teacher's questions or reply to instructions. Moreover, Hanifah and Nainggolan (2021) found that asking open-ended

questions that were closely related to the students' daily lives could grab their attention and increase their confidence to share their opinions.

With regards to communicative self-confidence (CSC), the overall mean score of the CSC was 2.99 (SD=.480) in the pre-survey whereas it was 3.26 (SD=.464) in the post-survey (Table 3). Though the interpretation of the overall means of CSC both before and after the intervention was equal or "neutral", the result from pair samples t-test in the overall score indicates a statistically significant gain in learners' CSC ($p<.001$).

Among the ten statements, Statements 1 to 4 showed statistically significant improvement ($p\leq0.05$). Overall, only Statement 2 regarding the pleasant classroom environment demonstrates change of the participants' agreement level from "neutral" to "agree". It could be interpreted as a sign that the virtual classroom environment had become more relaxing during the intervention. This could be a crucial factor in increasing the students' confidence in using English in the virtual classroom.

Table 3

Paired Samples t-test for Pre-CSC and Post-CSC Scores (n = 34)

Communicative Self-confidence (CSC)	Pre		Post		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. I am worried that I will not understand what my friends say in English.	2.15	.989	2.97	.521	-4.420	<.001
2. I find communicating in English in classroom situation relaxing.	3.12	.913	3.56	.824	-2.520	.017
3. I know the words required for communicating in English.	3.12	.729	3.41	.821	-2.385	.023
4. I can say what I want to say in English.	2.97	.717	3.32	.878	-2.244	.032
5. I am not afraid of making mistakes.	3.21	1.122	3.59	1.076	-1.888	.068
6. I feel nervous about using English while participating in class activities.	2.53	.929	2.65	1.012	-.702	.488
7. I find it difficult to communicate in English.	2.85	.958	2.97	.904	-.681	.501
8. I think my friends cannot understand me because of my poor English.	2.88	.913	2.97	.969	-.442	.661
9. I feel comfortable sharing my ideas, feelings, and opinions with my friends in English.	3.06	.649	3.12	.946	-.304	.763
10. I think participating in class activities help me develop my fluency.	3.97	1.000	4.00	.853	-.172	.865
Overall	**2.99**	**.480**	**3.26**	**.464**	**-4.407**	**<.001**

Interpretation: Favorable statements: 1.00-1.49 = Strongly disagree, 1.50-2.49 =Disagree, 2.50-3.49 = Neutral, 3.50-4.49 = Agree, 4.50-5.00 = Strongly agree
Unfavorable statements: 1.00-1.49 = Strongly agree, 1.50-2.49 =Agree, 2.50-3.49 = Neutral, 3.50-4.49 = Disagree, 4.50-5.00 = Strongly disagree (Chotipaktanasook, 2014)

The other six statements were statistically insignificant (Statements 5-10). However, Statement 5 "I am not afraid of making mistakes." reveals the change of the participants' agreement level from "neutral" to "agree" which

means the students ignored and overcame their fear in using English in the virtual classroom during the intervention. They had also boosted their confidence in English communication, which can translate into greater WTC in English in class.

The data from the focus-group interviews support the findings from the questionnaire. When asked about the participants' WTC in English in the synchronous virtual classroom during the teaching intervention, communication anxiety was found to be the major factor that prevented them from speaking in class at the beginning of the course. This concurs with earlier research studies showing that Thai students were unwilling to communicate in English both inside and outside of the classroom (Kamprasertwong, 2010; Pattapong, 2015).

The participants reported that they were afraid of making mistakes while speaking English at the beginning of the course. The main constraints that prevented them from communicating in English was the lack of vocabulary knowledge, their worries about English grammar and tenses, their accent and pronunciation. In other words, they were not confident using English, resulting in an unwillingness to speak English, which stifled opportunities to exhibit communicative behavior in class. These reflect the characteristics of East Asian learners who were also fearful of evaluation and making mistakes (Cao & Philp, 2006; Shao & Gao, 2016).

However, the participants agreed that their anxiety in communicating in English had gradually decreased during the intervention. They mentioned that having the opportunities to practice English before submitting the technology-mediated oral tasks had helped them reflect on their learning in terms of communicative goals as well as familiarize them with useful vocabulary and important language forms from the lessons. This resulted in their gaining more confidence in speaking English. This finding supports positive evidence in terms of self-confidence gained from the use of technology-mediated tasks in language classes (Cherrez, 2019; Difilippantonio-Pen, 2020). One student explained:

> I'm quite shy and not talkative. I found it difficult to record a video of myself speaking English. But the more I'd practiced, the more I felt familiar with the tasks. I think I've become more confident to speak English.

Moreover, the participants explained that when they became more confident, they were more willing to speak in class. They found that when they struggled to communicate, the instructor and peers tried to help them. Mistakes were accepted and they learned from them. The classroom environment had become more relaxing due to the absence of their fear of evaluation. This increased their willingness to participate in the class

discussions, whereby they would now volunteer to provide answers and present their opinions. Some interesting comments as a result of their lowered anxiety levels were:

> I used to be nervous when I had to speak English. But now I'm quite brave as I've learned that experience is the mother of wisdom.
>
> When I was about to turn on the microphone to say something, my friends were fast and already gave the answer. Though my microphone was muted, I always answer the questions during the lesson.

Interestingly, the participants admitted that it was not easy to communicate in the virtual classroom because only one person was able to talk at a time. Besides, with the limited class time, not everyone had a chance to share their opinions. Despite this limit, some participants found themselves a way to participate in class activities. Talking to themselves or speaking with a muted microphone can be considered communicative behavior, which shows their WTC in an online context. Yet, the teacher may be unaware of this practice.

Perceptions towards the Use of Technology-mediated Oral Tasks

To answer Research Question 2: "What are Thai EFL learners' perceptions towards the use of technology-mediated oral tasks in the virtual classroom?", the quantitative data from the Flipgrid questionnaire were analyzed and presented in Table 4. Overall, the results demonstrate positive perceptions towards the use of technology-mediated oral tasks on the Flipgrid platform (M=3.68). The participants rated the usefulness of Flipgrid in terms of academic engagement (M=4.25), speaking and listening skills improvement (M=3.82), affective perceptions (M=3.47), social engagement (M=3.38) and tasks (M=3.21).

Table 4

Perceptions towards the Use of Technology-mediated Oral Tasks on the Flipgrid Platform (N=34)

Statement	Mean	Level of agreement
Academic engagement		
1. I re-recorded my Flipgrid when I found a mistake.	4.50	Strongly agree
2. I checked my Flipgrid before submitting it.	4.35	Agree
3. I wrote a script for my Flipgrid.	4.26	Agree

4. I practiced my Flipgrid before recording it.	4.24	Agree
5. My recordings on Flipgrid are more well thought out than if I were speaking face to face.	3.91	Agree
Total mean	**4.25**	**Agree**
Speaking and listening skills improvement		
6. Comments from the instructor and classmates helped develop my listening and speaking skills.	4.00	Agree
7. The speaking models helped my learning.	3.94	Agree
8. Flipgrid helped develop my speaking skills.	3.79	Agree
9. Flipgrid helped develop my English pronunciation.	3.82	Agree
10. Flipgrid helped develop my listening skills.	3.56	Agree
Total mean	**3.82**	**Agree**
Affective perceptions		
11. Flipgrid application is easy to use.	3.79	Agree
12. I enjoyed watching my classmates' Flipgrid.	3.79	Agree
13. Flipgrid served as a learning aid in this course.	3.38	Neutral
14. Flipgrid helped my learning in this class.	3.35	Neutral
15. I like using Flipgrid in language learning.	3.03	Neutral
Total mean	**3.47**	**Neutral**
Social engagement		
16. Flipgrid helped me participate in speaking activities.	3.59	Agree
17. Flipgrid helped increase my willingness to communicate in the virtual classroom.	3.59	Agree
18. Flipgrid helped me develop confidence in my public speaking skills.	3.38	Neutral
19. I felt close to my instructor and classmates with the use of Flipgrid.	3.21	Neutral
20. Flipgrid helped me relate better with students in this class.	3.15	Neutral
Total mean	**3.38**	**Neutral**
Tasks		
21. I like to do an exit ticket task on Flipgrid.	3.53	Neutral
22. I like to do an entrance ticket task on Flipgrid.	3.44	Neutral
23. Exit ticket motivated me to participate better in the next class.	3.26	Neutral
24. Entrance ticket encouraged me to communicate in class.	3.18	Neutral
25. The number of tasks for each lesson is appropriate.	2.62	Neutral
Total mean	**3.21**	**Neutral**
Overall mean	**3.68**	**Agree**

Among the five categories, academic engagement had received the highest overall mean score (M=4.25) with the interpretation of agreement of all statements. It can be seen that before submitting the tasks, the students wrote a script (M=4.26), practiced speaking before recording the videos (M=4.24), checked their recordings before submitting (M=4.35), and most importantly, re-recorded the videos when they found mistakes (M=4.50). Noticeably, Statement 1 "I re-recorded my Flipgrid when I found a mistake." was the single most striking result since it was the only statement with the interpretation of "strongly agree" level among all 25 statements. Additionally, they agreed that their performances on technology-mediated oral tasks were better than face-to-face performances (M=3.91). One student commented,

> I spent lots of time working on each task since I had to practice a lot before recording the video. Sometimes it took several

> hours even the task was only for one minute. Most of the time, I forgot what to say while recording the video. So, I had to record the video many times. Also, when I found some mistakes, I had to re-record the video.

The present results, in accordance with previous studies, have demonstrated that the use of technology-mediated oral tasks on Flipgrid, can be considered a safe platform and a low-anxiety environment for learners. It provides learners with opportunities to repeatedly practice their speech, in addition to providing them with sufficient time to be well prepared, to monitor themselves, and to recognize their own mistakes (Mango, 2021; Tuyet & Khang, 2020). Mango (2021) highlighted that such practice could help learners become more active. Moreover, Tuyet and Khang (2020) pointed out the advantage of the re-recording function on Flipgrid as helping learners become less worried about making mistakes. However, the findings from the present study are quite different. This is because the participants tended to be concerned about their mistakes and were likely to spend a great amount of time revising the content. This revision, while academically correct, could conversely lead to a lack of enthusiasm, confidence, and WTC.

Secondly, the second highest overall mean score was in the category of speaking and listening skills improvement (M=3.82) where all statements can be interpreted with a level of agreement. The participants noted that the technology-mediated oral tasks could improve their speaking skills (M=3.79), listening skills (M=3.56), and pronunciation (M=3.82). Besides, they found the speaking models provided by the instructor useful (M=3.94) whereas the comments from the instructor and classmates were helpful for their learning (M=4.00). Two students elaborated,

> I like the subtitle function in the app. I turned it on after I had uploaded the video to check my pronunciation. This way, I could study about the words I mispronounced.

> I feel more confident speaking English because I had practiced (speaking English) a lot from the Flipgrid tasks. The speaking models and comments from peers and the instructor were useful for me to improve my listening and speaking skills.

Consistent with the literature, the current study found that the participants' language skills had been enhanced (Mango, 2021), their confidence in speaking in English had been increased (Cherrez, 2019; Difilippantonio-Pen, 2020), and their pronunciation had been improved (Tuyet & Khang, 2020) due to practicing oral tasks on Flipgrid. The affordance of technology from the platform with regard to feedback reflects a finding from a study of Stoszkowski (2018) who also found the built-in

feedback mechanism on Flipgrid to be a key advantage, allowing learners to take control of their own learning.

Thirdly, the results of the affective perceptions towards the Flipgrid application from the questionnaire show that although the participants felt neutral about the application in terms of serving as a language learning aid, they agreed that the application was easy to use (M=3.79). On the one hand, these mixed neutral and positive responses towards the overall use of Flipgrid is in line with a study by Petersen et al. (2020) who also found mixed attitudes among their Japanese freshmen participants. On the other hand, the positive feelings in terms of it being a user-friendly platform is in agreement with previous studies (Mango, 2021; Stoszkowski, 2018; Tuyet & Khang, 2020). Additionally, the participants of this study enjoyed watching their classmates' videos (M=3.79). This broadly supports the work of Stoszkowski (2018) by linking the strength of Flipgrid with its appeal, as students prefer video-based interaction. One student said,

> Personally, I think it's a good app. After I submitted my work, I liked to watch my classmates' videos. I really enjoyed hearing their various opinions towards the topics. I can learn from them. I think it's fun.

The neutral feeling towards the app as a language learning aid was clarified from the focus-group interviews. Some participants reported that sometimes they had technical problems uploading their videos. They noted that they had audio problems. For example, their voices had been distorted sometimes after uploading their videos to the platform. They got frustrated as they could not get their work done on time. Similar struggles while using technology in a learning context was also found in a study from Stoszkowski (2018) who mentioned that equipment could be one of the potential barriers while using the platform. It is recommended that learners should have a suitable digital device and good internet signal. Moreover, some participants in this study suggested that they would like the application to have notification function whenever a new grid was added so that they would not miss any new assignments or deadlines.

Fourthly, overall, the participants felt neutral in the category of social engagement (M=3.38), particularly in terms of connectedness with classmates in general (M=3.15) and with the instructor and classmates on the virtual classroom (M=3.21). When asked about connectedness, two participants put it as follows:

> I didn't feel closer with my classmates because of the use of Flipgrid. But I think I got to know them better from social media such as Facebook or Instagram.

> I think I would feel more related (with classmates) if the tasks were for two-way communication. So, I could talk and ask my peers to clarify their talks while getting to know them better.

A few factors could explain these findings. First, the primary purpose of the Flipgrid platform is academic. The talks shared on Flipgrid might not allow the participants to get to know each other well compared to other kinds of social media where the students can share about their personal lives. This is in contrast to a study by Stoszkowski (2018) who found that Flipgrid can facilitate social learning and encourage peer interaction. Secondly, the technology-mediated oral tasks took the form of one-way communication, in which students had to work on their own. Even though they were encouraged to watch their peers' videos and to give comments, a majority of them said that they preferred to talk with their peers in person. The need for more communicative tasks was also found in a study by Cherrez (2019) who suggested future research to work on tasks designed for communicative purposes.

Nevertheless, they agreed that the technology-mediated oral tasks on the Flipgrid platform increased their WTC in English (M=3.59) and to participate in the speaking activities in the virtual classroom (M=3.59). These results match those found in earlier studies by Cherrez (2019) and Mango (2021) who found that the use of Flipgrid could foster student engagement and participation in class. Results of this study are also in line with that of Tuyet and Khang (2020) who noted that their participants felt comfortable and less anxious performing their speaking in class after doing the oral tasks on Flipgrid.

Finally, even though the overall mean score in the tasks category was neutral matching the overall mean scores of the previous two categories, the score in this part was the lowest (M=3.21), especially for Statement 25 "The number of tasks for each lesson is appropriate." which received the lowest score (M=2.62) of all 25 statements. The explanation was found from the focus-group interviews. Many participants complained that two technology-mediated oral tasks per lesson were too many for them. They spent lots of time working on the tasks and they preferred to do only one task per week. The comment below illustrates the reasons:

> I think the oral tasks were beneficial in terms of practicing our speaking skills but submitting both entrance and exit tickets for each lesson were too much. I think, for the entrance ticket, we could talk about it in the beginning of our virtual class. The exit ticket was practical and useful, but we needed more time to work on it. Some days we had lots of homework to do and recording the video could take time.

Interestingly, the findings related to the technology-mediated oral tasks and their WTC in English in the virtual classroom are quite contradictory. From Table 4, the participants rated neutral for Statement 24 "Entrance ticket encouraged me to communicate in class." and Statement 23 "Exit ticket motivated me to participate better in the next class." which means the tasks tend not to encourage and motivate them much in terms of WTC in class. In contrast, they rated agree for Statement 16 "Flipgrid helped me participate in speaking activities." and Statement 17 "Flipgrid helped increase my willingness to communicate in the virtual classroom." which can be interpreted as the use of technology-mediated tasks can enhance their WTC in English in the virtual classroom.

These contrasting opinions can be interpreted to mean that the participants actually valued the use of the technology-mediated oral tasks and acknowledged that the tasks affected their speaking skills and communication performances in the virtual class. However, because of the fear of making mistakes and the chance to re-record the video, the students spent lots of time working on the tasks. Possibly, having a hard time working on each task, despite the academic benefits they stood to gain, resulted in negative feelings about the number of tasks.

Conclusion

The present study investigated whether the intervention of technology-mediated oral tasks could promote Thai EFL learners' WTC in English in the synchronous virtual classroom and also examined their perceptions towards this implementation. The results clearly indicate that WTC in English of Thai EFL learners in the virtual classroom had been enhanced after the intervention. The findings show a statistically significant increase ($p<.001$) of both communicative behaviors and communicative self-confidence. It was found that learners had communication anxiety due to their fear of making mistakes at the beginning of the course. However, the use of interesting topics that were related to learners' personal life experiences, chances to prepare the material in advance from the asynchronous instruction, opportunities to practice oral tasks outside the classroom, and the pleasant virtual classroom environment are all key factors that increased their WTC in English in the virtual classroom.

In addition, the participants revealed overall positive attitudes towards the use of technology-mediated oral tasks on the Flipgrid platform. The most significant perception is related to academic engagement. Since the tasks had provided opportunities for learners to prepare, practice, review and re-record their verbal assignments, the participants improved their speaking and listening skills and also increased their self-confidence and WTC in

English in class. Comparison of the findings with those of other studies confirms that Flipgrid is an effective tool in language class that could create a safe and low-anxiety learning environment where students can be active and engage in learning (e.g. Cherrez, 2019; Mango, 2021; Petersen et al., 2020). Nonetheless, teachers should take into consideration the number of tasks, especially for those students whose fluency is limited. Anxiety over correct grammatical English could negatively affect the learners' confidence in speaking.

Accordingly, the findings of this research suggest some implications for classroom practices. To increase learners' WTC in class, topics have to be relevant and related to the students' interests and experiences. This makes it far easier for them to initiate or continue a conversation when their prior knowledge can be utilized. In the online learning context, having a chance to prepare the lesson in advance with opportunities to practice English outside the classroom are important factors in building up WTC levels in the virtual classroom. During the virtual class time, instructors need to create and maintain a pleasing, anxiety-free and supportive environment where mistakes are accepted with ease and sometimes with amusement. Most importantly, it should be noted that although the tasks are considered useful in developing the students' speaking and listening skills as well as increasing their WTC, instructors should be aware of the need to limit the number of tasks. Focusing on task quality, not quantity would be more appropriate.

Finally, there are a few limitations that need to be acknowledged. The present teaching intervention was limited to a small number of participants over a short period of time, in addition to an absence of classroom observation. Hence, further work needs to be conducted with a larger sample size for a longer period. Collecting data from observation could strengthen the validity and reliability of the study. It would also be interesting to compare the results between a control and experimental groups in a research study. Another possible area would be further investigation in both spoken and written WTC in English in the synchronous virtual classroom.

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