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# MODERATION ROLE OF TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS ON CORRELATION BETWEEN L2 MOTIVATION AND L2WTC

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#### Article Info **Abstract** Article History Received: April 2024 Revised: June 2024 Published: October 2024 Keywords Teacher-student relationships; L2 motivation;

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Large body of researches has been consistently linked L2 motivation to L2WTC, indicating a significant positive correlation between the two. Yet, the influence of teacher-student relationships on this correlation remains understudied. This research investigates how teacher-student relationships influences the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC, as well as to investigate the variations in this influence across varying qualities of teacher-student relationships. Utilizing established scales, questionnaires were distributed to the entire population of SMP Negeri 51 Surabaya, resulting in 222 responses for analysis. Moderation analysis via regression analysis was employed to analyse the data. The findings showed that teacher-student relationships do not significantly moderate the correlation between students' L2 motivation and their L2WTC, nor do they significantly differ in influence across varying qualities. Although statistical significance was not achieved at the conventional threshold, the study hints the potential significance of teacher-student relationships in sustaining L2WTC, particularly in contexts where L2 motivation may be lacking. Thus, while not meeting statistical significance at conventional thresholds, the results underscore the importance of fostering positive teacher-student relationships in language learning contexts.

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## INTRODUCTION

The concepts of L2 motivation and L2WTC have been the focus of considerable researches in the field of L2 education, as they are acknowledged as major factors in successful language acquisition (Bower, 2019; Cao, 2022; Phuong et al., 2019; Yashima, 2019). L2 motivation has been identified as a significant factors determining L2WTC, with research consistently indicating a significant positive correlation between the two (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019; Lamb et al., 2019; Lan et al., 2021, 2023; Lee & Chen Hsieh, 2019; Lee & Lu, 2023; X. Ma et al., 2019; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2024; Wei & Xu, 2022). Surprisingly, despite the extensive focus on L2 motivation and L2WTC, not much focus has been given to how teacher-student relationships might shape this correlation. Yet, studies consistently demonstrate the profound impact of positive teacher-student interactions on academic performance and student engagement (Li et al., 2022; L. Ma et al., 2022; Martin & Collie, 2019; Mensah & Koomson, 2020). Could it be that the student-teacher relationships act as a moderator, influencing the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC? Additionally, how much do varying quality of teacher-student relationships differ in their influence on the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC?

Considering this research gap, this research investigates how teacher-student relationships influences the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC, as well as to investigate the extent of the differences in influence among varying qualities of teacher-student relationships on the correlation. By exploring into these questions, we aim to highlight an overlooked aspect of language education and offer insights that could reshape language teaching practices. With this in mind, we pose the following research question:

- 1. Does the teacher-student relationship significantly moderate the correlation between L2 motivation and L2 willingness to communicate (WTC)?
- 2. To what extent do varying qualities of teacher-student relationships differ in their influence on the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC?

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

## Students' L2 Motivation and Students' L2 Willingness to Communicate (L2WTC)

Initially, willingness to communicate (WTC) originated in researching personal characteristics that influence communication in one's mother tongue (L1) (Katsaris, 2019). Jajarmi et al. (2019) defined L2WTC as the willingness to converse in a second language with particular people at a given time. Various factors influence L2WTC. To identify these factors Macintyre et al. (1998) developed heuristic model which encompasses a pyramidal structure to include various variables influencing L2WTC. The model offers a thorough understanding of how these factors interact to affect language use in the present time. Due to its crucial role in language acquisition, L2WTC is still very popular in second language (L2) learning research (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019). It is crucial to comprehend the variables that affect L2WTC to establish a setting where effective second-language communication can occur.

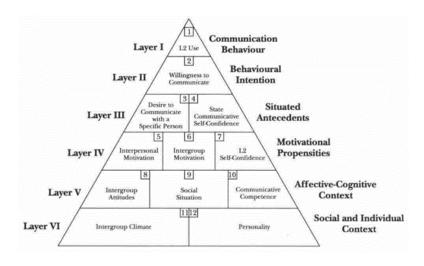


Figure 1. Macintyre et al.'s heuristic model of L2 WTC (1998)

Theoretically, L2 motivation has been identified as a significant factors determining students' L2 WTC (Lan et al., 2023). Mahmoodi and Yousefi (2022) defines L2 motivation as a synthesis of positive emotions toward the language, and a desire to become proficient in the language. As a fundamental component of the fourth tier of the The heuristic model of L2 WTC proposed by Macintyre et al., in 1998 (see *Figure 1*), motivation is thought to be an internal psychological state that drives learning behaviours toward specific objectives and encourages L2 learners to take part in learning activities (Filgona et al., 2020).

L2 motivation has been explored through various theoretical lenses, signifying this field's rich and evolving research landscape (My, 2021). Theoretical frameworks such as the Vygotskian sociocultural theory, Ryan & Deci's Self-determination theory (2000), Gardner's Socio-educational model (2006), and Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) (2009), have all, over several decades, helped to shape our knowledge of L2 motivation. According to Dörnyei & Ushioda (2009), with their L2MSS frameworks, one's L2MMS determines their L2WTC, arguing that L2WTC is "the result of the interaction between ideal L2 self and linguistic self-confidence." Further, extensive research across multiple contexts has verified the significant effect of L2 motivation in L2WTC, stating that L2WTC in the classroom was higher for those who were more motivated in their second language, indicating a significant correlation between the two (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019; Lamb et al., 2019; Lan et al., 2021, 2023; Lee & Chen Hsieh, 2019; Lee & Lu, 2023; X. Ma et al., 2019; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2024; Wei & Xu, 2022).

# **Teacher-student Relationships**

Teacher-student relationships, the dynamic interaction that occurs between students and teachers in a classroom, are pivotal in shaping students' academic performance (Sherub Gyeltshen & Gyeltshen, 2022). In a large body of empirical research, teacher-student relationships are crucial for learning foreign languages (FL) (Li et al., 2022; L. Ma et al., 2022; Martin & Collie, 2019; Mensah & Koomson, 2020). Positive teacher-student relationships is defined as emotional bond built on mutual respect, understanding, and caring (Zhou, 2021). This close bond allows for collaboration in classroom settings (Dörnvei & Muir, 2019). Additionally, the effect of the relationships between teachers and students goes beyond academic success. Strong bonds between teachers and students create a warm learning atmosphere that increases students' motivation to learn (Irena Puţaru & Rusu, 2023; Scales et al., 2020). On the other hand, relationships in ongoing conflict between students and teachers and between students and peers are linked to lower achievement and self-esteem (Krause & Smith, 2022; Mallik, 2023; Scales et al., 2020; Woodis, 2019). Additionally, research has consistently indicated that students with better relationships with their teachers typically perform better academically (Cai, 2021; Lei et al., 2023; L. Ma et al., 2022; Song et al., 2022). Hence, relationships between teachers and students profoundly impact various factors, including students' academic performances, motivation to learn and even the growth of social, emotional skills.

## The Present Research

While several studies have established a strong correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC, no scientific research has investigated the potential role of teacher-student relationships in moderating this correlation, influencing the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC, despite vast amount of research found that teacher-student relationships is crucial for FL languages, influencing various aspect of students' academic development and wellbeing.

Student relationships with their teacher and their L2 motivation may interact, affecting their L2WTC. For instance, positive teacher-student relationships could ensure students feel supported and motivated, thereby increasing their likelihood of engaging in L2 communication, even if their L2 motivation is not particularly high. Conversely, if the teacher-student relationship is characterised by negativity, students could be less likely to take part in L2 communication tasks, regardless of their level of L2 motivation. Thus, the following hypotheses are put forth:

#### **Hypothesis 1:**

- a. H<sub>0</sub>: The teacher-student relationship does not significantly moderate the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC.
- b. H<sub>1</sub>: The teacher-student relationship significantly moderates the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC.

## **Hypothesis 2:**

- a. H<sub>0</sub>: There are no significant differences in the influence of varying qualities of teacherstudent relationships on the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC.
- b. H<sub>1</sub>: Varying qualities of teacher-student relationships differ significantly in their influence on the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC.

#### RESEARCH METHOD

## **Participants**

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 51 Surabaya, located in the Wiyung subdistrict of Surabaya, which comprises of 18 classes spanning grades 7 to 9, with a total student population of five-hundred-twenty-two students (N=522). The questionnaire printout was distributed to the entire student population, ensuring that every student had an equal opportunity. To choose the appropriate sample size for this research, population sample size calculation (95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, 50% population proportion) was performed, resulting in a sample size of 222 students.

#### Measures

Teacher-student relationships. Relationships between teachers and students were assessed through the use of an 11-item questionnaire derived from Murray and Greenberg's (2006) research. The questionnaire encompassed two subcategories: teacher affiliation and teacher alienation. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of these subcategories was evaluated, resulting in coefficients of .90 and .68, respectively.

L2 motivation. The assessment of students' L2 motivation was carried out using L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) framework, which covers the attitudes toward learning English, ought-to L2 self, and ideal L2 self. The 18-item survey that was used in this research was modeled after Papi's (2010) work. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the reliability of these sub-variables. The scores were .77 for ideal L2 self items, .71 for ought-to L2 self items, and .85 for English learning experience items.

L2 willingness to communicate (L2WTC). A 9-item questionnaire was adapted from Lan et al.'s (2021) L2 WTC scale, which drew inspiration from studies conducted by Cao & Philp (2006) and Peng & Woodrow (2010) to evaluate students' L2 willingness to communicate (L2WTC). The reliability of these items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in an average coefficient of .78.

A five-point Likert scale was used to rate every variable, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree." However, the scale will be reversed for the teacher alienation subcategory in the teacher-student relationships variable. Although the scales were already assessed for reliability by previous researchers, the reliability of the scales utilised in this research was independently assessed through an analysis using the Cronbach alpha method, resulting in a total Cronbach alpha of .880 for L2 motivation, .847 for teacher-student relationships, and .833 for L2 willingness to communicate. Therefore, based on these reliability coefficients, the scales used in this research are reliable measures for assessing each variable.

## **Procedures**

The questionnaire printout was distributed to the entire student population, resulting in 478 submissions. Participants were given explicit instructions on how to complete the questionnaire in order to guarantee the truthfulness of the responses. Prior to initiating the data analysis process, a meticulous screening mechanism was devised to identify and eliminate any potentially unreliable responses, such as zigzagging or straight-lining responses, responses with a standard deviation of 0.5 or lower, and responses with one or more unanswered questions were systematically removed (Memon et al., 2019). The researcher then turned to random.org to generate a randomized sequence of numbers of which the first 222 numbers were selected to

form the core dataset for the research. Afterward, Microsoft Excel 2016 and IBM SPSS Ver 27.0 were utilized to process the data.

To investigate the first hypothesis, moderation analysis employing a regression analysis approach is used. This methodological choice aligns with the hypothesis, which is to clarify if teacher-student relationships significantly influence the relationship between students' L2 motivation and L2WTC. Regression analysis was chosen for testing hypotheses due to its suitability for examining moderation effects (Memon et al., 2019). Regression analysis proceeded in two steps. First, on L2WTC, only L2 motivation was regressed. Secondly, the moderator (teacher-student relationships), the independent variable (L2 motivation), and the interaction term (teacher-student relationships × L2 motivation) were regressed on L2WTC.

To investigate the second hypothesis, data were split three quartiles (low, middle, and high) according to the teacher-student relationship scores. Then regression analysis was performed into each quartile resulting in three distinct results.

# RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION **Descriptive Analysis**

Results revealed that scores on the teacher's and students' relationship scale varied from 17 to 55 (M = 42.05, SD = 6.16), with a little positive kurtosis (0.962) and little negative skewness (-0.504). However, generally, the distribution was close to normal. Similarly, students' L2 motivation scores varied from 31 to 88 (M = 59.36, SD = 10.34), with a distribution of the data looked to be close to normal despite the small positive skewness (0.125) and rather low positive kurtosis (0.349). Additionally, students' L2 willingness to communicate scores varied from 9 to 41 (M = 27.59, SD = 5.93), with the data showing a somewhat modest positive kurtosis of 0.724 and a moderate negative skewness of -0.800. However, overall, the distribution was close to normal which shown by absolute z-value for skewness and kurtosis that is below 3.29 (Kim, 2013). Overall, although the skewness and kurtosis values were not exactly as predicted in a normal distribution, the data distribution was roughly normal, which allowed for legitimate statistical studies based on the premise of normality.

#### **Hypothesis Testing**

The first step of regression analysis for the first hypothesis showed that L2 motivation positively affected L2 WTC significantly ( $\beta = 0.533$ , p < 0.001), indicating that higher motivation levels are associated with greater L2 willingness to communicate. However, the second step of regression analysis showed that statistically there was no significant connection within teacher-student relationships and L2 WTC ( $\beta = 0.092$ , p = 0.130). Similarly, the interaction term (TSrL2M) did not demonstrate a significant effect ( $\beta = -0.076$ , p = 0.171).

Unstandardized Coefficients Standardized Coefficients Model β Std. Error Beta t P-value Term Step 1 (Constant) 8.029 1.910 4.204 <.001 10.399 L2M.330 .032 .574 <.001 Step 2 5.869 2.335 .020 (Constant) 2.513 .533 <.001 L2m306 .035 8.858 TSr .089 .092 1.522 .130 .058 TSrL2M -.006 .004 -.076 -1.373 .171 <u>Step 1:</u>  $R^2 = .330$ L2M (p<.001)

Table 1 Spss Regression Analysis Results

Step 2:		_
$R^2 = .344$		
L2M (p<.001)		
TSr (p=.130)		
TSrL2M (p=.171)		
Step 2 Vs Step 1:		
$\Delta R^2 = .014$		

*Notes:* TSr = teacher-student relationship; L2M = L2 motivation; L2WTC=L2 willingness to communicate; TSrL2M= teacher-student relationships  $\times$  L2 motivation)

When focusing solely on L2 motivation in Step 1 of the research, the regression model was able to explain 33% (R2= .330) of the L2 WTC variance. The percentage of explained variance in Step 2 increased slightly to 34.4% (R<sup>2</sup>= .344) once the teacher-student relationship and L2 motivation (TSrL2M) interaction were included. However, this increase was not statistically significant ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.014$ , p = 0.171 > 0.05), leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. Therefore, the teacher-student relationship does not significantly moderate the correlation between L2 motivation and L2 willingness to communicate (L2WTC).

To examine the second hypothesis, the dataset were split into three quartiles according to the teacher-student relationship (TSr) scores, graphical lines were created to show the correlations between the variables (see Figure 2). The quartiles had three categories: low, middle, and high. To assess the differences between quartiles, regression analysis was performed on the low, middle, and high quartiles, as shown in *Table 2*. The results indicate that, across all quartiles, the relationship between teacher-student relationships and L2WTC, regardless of L2 motivation scores, are not statistically significant at the conventional threshold of  $\alpha = 0.05$  (p = 0.781 for low quartiles, p = 0.586 for middle quartiles, and p = 0.251 for high quartiles), leading to the acceptance of null hypothesis. Therefore, there are no significant differences in the influence of varying qualities of teacher-student relationships on the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC.

Table 2 **Linear Regression Results** 

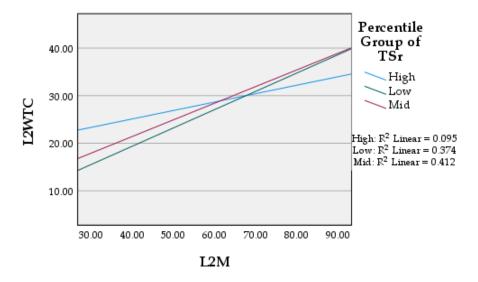
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model Term	β	Std. Error	Beta	t	P-value
Low Quartile	.004	.015	.063	.280	.781
Middle Quartile	.015	.028	.048	.547	.586
High Quartile	.027	.023	.406	1.156	.251

### Discussion

The present research investigated the moderation role of teacher-student relationships on correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC. First step of regression analysis showed that L2WTC was significantly influence by L2 motivation ( $\beta = 0.533$ , p < 0.001), suggesting that greater L2 motivation is linked to higher L2WTC. This finding further confirms previous research (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2019; Lamb et al., 2019; Lan et al., 2021, 2023; Lee & Chen Hsieh, 2019; Lee & Lu, 2023; X. Ma et al., 2019; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2024; Wei & Xu, 2022), highlighting how important motivation is for language learning. However, the results concerning the research's first research question indicated that teacher-student relationships do not significantly moderate the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC with p-value of .171, demonstrating that teacher-student relationship has no significant impact on the strength of the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC. Further, interaction term between L2 motivation and L2WTC only able to explain 34.4% of the variance ( $R^2 = .344$ ), implies that a significant portion of the variance in L2WTC remains unexplained by the variables included in

this research, indicating that the presence of other influencing variables not taken into consideration in the current research. These factors might include individual, social, psychosocial and psychocultural factors (Rafiee & Abbasian-Naghneh, 2019; Suvongse & Chanyoo, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Nonetheless, additional investigation is required to validate the effects of these possible variables on the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC.

Results concerning the research's second research question showed that there are no significant differences in the influence of varying qualities of teacher-student relationships on the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC. Suggesting that certain qualities (low, middle, high) of teacher-student relationships may not significantly enhance or diminish the relationship between L2 motivation and L2WTC to a greater extent than others. Further, by splitting the dataset into low, middle, and high quartiles, according to the teacher-student relationship (TSr) scores, graphical lines were created to show the correlations between the variables. Analysis showed that L2 motivation and L2WTC are positively correlated, regardless of the teacher-student relationship scores. As L2 motivation decreases, L2WTC also decreases. The downward slopes of the lines for all levels of teacher-student relationships in Figure 2 graphically represent this trend, which shows the positive relation between L2 motivation and L2WTC.



**Figure 2.** comparison of L2M and L2WTC scores across teacher-student relationship (TSr) quartiles (linear).

It is interesting to note that there was a some resemblance of difference between the low, middle and high quartiles. Although all groups showed a decline in L2WTC with decreasing L2 motivation, the rate of decrease is more pronounced for individuals with lower levels of teacher-student relationships score. As shown in Figure 2, the difference in slopes between the three groups is more significant for the high quartiles compared to low quartiles, as indicated by the lower *p-value* (.251) for high quartiles compared to the higher *p-value* (.781) for low quartiles (see *Table 2*). This result may indicate that even in circumstances where L2 motivation is declining, those with higher teacher-student relationship scores typically maintain greater levels of L2 WTC. Similarly, a number of researches found that positive teacher-student relationships positively influence students' L2WTC (Alrabai, 2022; Cai, 2021; Song et al., 2022). If educators foster a kind and encouraging environment, students are more likely to put in more effort and be more motivated to learn a language. This could be the reason why students with higher levels of teacher-student relationships tend to maintain higher levels of L2WTC than those with lower levels of teacher-student relationships. The result indicates the potential significance of teacher-student relationships in sustaining L2WTC, particularly in contexts where L2 motivation may be lacking. Nevertheless, neither *p-value* is below the traditional 0.05 significance limit. Consequently, neither comparison is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, even though the difference is comparatively more pronounced for the high quartiles.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The present research investigated the moderating role of teacher-student relationships on the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC. Results showed that teacher-student relationships do not significantly moderate the correlation between students' L2 motivation and their L2WTC (p = 0.171), indicating that the strength of the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC does not vary significantly depending on the quality of the teacher-student relationships. Further, analysis showed that factors beyond teacher-student relationships may have also influenced the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC, as indicated by interaction term between L2 motivation and L2WTC that only able to explain 34.4% of the variance.

Additionally, there are no significant differences in the influence of varying qualities of teacher-student relationships on the correlation between L2 motivation and L2WTC, suggesting that certain qualities of teacher-student relationships may not significantly enhance or diminish the relationship between L2 motivation and L2WTC to a greater extent than others. However, while statistical significance wasn't reached at the 0.05 level, this research hints at the potential significance of teacher-student relationships in sustaining L2WTC, particularly in contexts where L2 motivation may be lacking, as indicated by high quartiles having p-value of .251 compared to middle and low quartiles that have p-value of .586 and .781 respectively. Yet, without achieving statistical significance at the 0.05 level, this research cannot confidently determine the extent or reliability of this effect. Additional research with larger sample sizes and more rigorous methods may provide further insights into the effects of teacher-student relationships in L2WTC.

This research expands our comprehension of language learning success by exploring the potential role of teacher-student relationships in influencing language learning success. While large number of studies have explored the significance of language learning factors like L2 motivation and L2WTC, this research offers insights by examining how teacher-student relationships may moderate the correlation between these variables. Despite failed to reach statistical significance at conventional thresholds, the results highlight the importance of fostering positive teacher-student relationships in language learning contexts.

Despite the contributions of this research, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the research's findings are based on a single educational institution and might not be transferable to different settings. Future researchers could expand the research to include a more diverse range of educational institutions and cultural contexts to enhance the findings' generalizability. Additionally, the questionnaires used to assess teacher-student relationships, L2 motivation, and L2 WTC may need to capture these constructs' complexity fully. Other relevant factors or dimensions may not be included in the measurement instruments by exploring alternative methods for assessing teacher-student relationships, L2 motivation and WTC, such as interview or observational measures to minimise this limitation. Lastly, the sample size might be seen as being somewhat small, which can affect the statistical power of the analysis and limit how widely the findings can be used.

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