ENGLISH LEARNING GOALS AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS IN A JAPANESE EFL CONTEXT[1]

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Abstract: This study examined the differences in English learning goals and specific actions for goal achievement according to the degree of willingness to communicate (WTC) among Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners through qualitative analysis. This study aimed to ascertain: 1) the characteristics of English learning goals among learners with higher or lower levels of WTC, and 2) the differences in learner actions for goal achievement among learners with higher or lower levels of WTC. The participants were 84 undergraduate students in Japan, and they were divided into high-WTC and low-WTC groups using the WTC scale (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). Open-ended responses of the goals for learning English and actions for goal achievement were compared between these two groups using KH Coder 3. Coded data were analyzed in a co-occurrence network diagram. Results showed that high-WTC learners tended to have high-level goals, whereas low-WTC learners tended to have the lowest possible goals. High-WTC learners also had more interest in foreign countries and studying abroad. Furthermore, high-WTC learners tended to take a variety of specific actions for goal achievement, while low-WTC learners took rather general and common actions. The results showed clear differences between these two groups.

Extensive research has shown that having specific learning goals improves learners' task performances and academic achievement (e.g., Locke, 1996; Locke & Latham, 1990; Schnell et al., 2015). Locke (1996) explains that goal setting is based on an "action caused by a purpose" and that a goal is "the object or aim of an action" (p. 118). According to Locke, goal-setting theory involves a motivational principle of fundamental importance, which is supported by many

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prior studies. As Han and Lu (2018) state, goal setting is closely related to motivated behavior and as such is also linked to final achievement. It is considered that the more learners commit to a goal, the better performance they achieve, meaning that setting a clear and challenging goal can be crucial for improving learner performances (Mikami, 2012). Setting a clear goal by learners themselves, they can notice their own strengths and weaknesses; therefore, these goals directly affect learner performances (Öztürk, 2019).

Öztürk (2019) stresses the advantages of goal setting, as students can organize their learning, assess their own performances, and make necessary adjustments when they set goals. For example, as Schnell et al. (2015) note, when students are facing an upcoming exam, they compare their alternative performance goals and finally decide on the goal they want to achieve. This is why goal setting plays an essential role in students' self-regulated learning and enables them to plan and initiate their learning processes, which leads to better academic performance (Locke & Latham, 1990; Schnell et al., 2015).

A number of studies highlight the importance of goal setting in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom contexts (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014; Han & Lu, 2018; Luo, 2018; Mikami, 2012; Mikami, 2017; Satake, 2019). These studies have shown the significant relationships between goal setting and positive learner outcomes, such as increasing achievement motivation, promoting autonomous learning, and improving learner attitudes in EFL learning. Mikami (2012) investigated the effects of goal setting and self-monitoring instruction on learner goals in the classroom and motivation for learning English in extensive reading programs. Through her implementation of educational intervention, students' awareness of goals and motivation for learning English increased in the classroom. On the other hand, Satake (2019) examined whether goal-setting activities reduced Japanese EFL learners' demotivation. Although the demotivation factor did not decrease significantly, students' consciousness of goal setting enhanced in all goal factors as a result of educational intervention. The findings of these studies indicate the importance of goal-setting activities that could positively influence learners' attitudes toward their learning.

Recently, some studies revealed the relationships between goal setting and other related factors. Han and Lu (2018) examined the correlation among learners' achievement motivation, goal setting, and strategy use. They found significant correlations between goal setting and six learning strategies and positive correlations between learners' intention to achieve success and goal setting. In addition, the intention of avoiding failure was found to be positively related to "short-term goals" and "mastery goals." Similarly, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) explored the relationship between motivation and vision (i.e., a combination of cognitive goal and sensory representation). They claimed that vision is closely linked to the concept of "self" because vision is a self-image of one's desired possible future. In addition, they pointed out that one's possible future self is conceptualized as the "ideal self" or "ought-to self" and these two possible selves serve as a future goal to reach. Having clear images of future selves may lead to setting appropriate goals that are achievable for each of them.

As Öztürk (2019) pointed out, "setting personal goals offers many advantages to overcome some negative affective variables which may influence learner's self-efficacy, motivation, and performance levels" (p. 91). Therefore, it is essential to consider how English learning goals relate to learners' individual factors and attitudes toward learning and how they could eventually lead to positive outcomes in EFL learning. Among others, this study focuses on learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) as an essential factor that could have possible interrelationships with learners' goal setting and actions for goal achievement.

WTC is one of the individual factors that has been widely researched by scholars in the EFL contexts in recent years (e.g., Freiermuth & Ito, 2020; Fujii, 2021; Gallagher, 2013; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Mahmoodi & Moazam, 2014; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima et al., 2004). The concept of WTC was originally proposed in the field of first or native language (L1) communication by McCroskey and Baer (1985). Thereafter, MacIntyre et al. (1998) applied the construct of WTC to second language acquisition (SLA) studies as one of the individual factors and conceptualized a well-known pyramid model of WTC in the second language (L2). MacIntyre et al. (1998) defined L2 WTC as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (p. 547). In their model, both state and trait variables, including self-confidence, interpersonal motivation, intergroup attitudes, and personality, are shown to influence learner WTC in a L2. They explained that WTC is not simply based on perceived communication competence, but on various learner variables related to L2 learning and communication.

WTC in EFL classroom settings, as Shimamura (2010) pointed out, can be a situation-specific WTC, since communication that takes place in the classroom is usually limited to teacher-student or student-student communication. In Japanese EFL contexts, communicative English classes have been called for in recent years, as in the Course of Study by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT, 2017). English education in Japan has put increasing emphasis on developing learners' communicative competence; thus, promoting WTC in the English classroom is considered a fundamental issue.

A number of researchers have considered several factors that facilitate learner's WTC (Denies et al., 2015; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). As a study in the Japanese EFL context, Freiermuth and Ito (2020) investigated learner WTC in relation to their personality and previous experiences. They found the affiliation with others as a key factor to enhancing learner WTC and suggested the need for providing learners with more authentic communication experiences and a clearer vision of their future goals. In addition, through an extensive review of preceding studies, Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014) suggested that while focusing on past communication experiences can be beneficial to increase learner WTC, looking into the future may also be advantageous. That is, "learners who see results in their daily effort to achieve their immediate goals feel a stronger sense of personal relevance because they are using language for communication and relating themselves to the world, becoming more increasingly aware of their potential and ways to contribute" (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014, p.

219). This statement posits that paying attention to learners' potential future goals in using English plays a pivotal role in encouraging learner WTC.

Some recent studies have examined the interrelationship between WTC and learner goals in EFL classrooms. Al-Murtadha (2019) examined the effects of goal setting and visualization on WTC among Yemeni EFL learners. By introducing visualization and goal-setting activities, he assessed its effects on L2 WTC enhancement by comparing the experimental and control groups. From his study findings, Al-Murtadha contends that EFL learners who set language learning goals demonstrate higher WTC levels. Munezane (2015) also studied the effects of goal setting and visualization on enhancing the WTC of Japanese EFL learners. She placed participants into three comparative groups: a visualization group, a visualization plus goal-setting group, and a non-treatment group. When she combined visualization with goal setting, the increase in learner WTC was larger than in the visualization group. However, she did not find significant differences among the three groups. Unlike Al-Murtadha (2019), Munezane could not obtain significant results on the relationship between goal setting and WTC. Since findings from these studies are contradictory, it seems that the interactions between English learning goals and WTC remain under-researched. There is still room for investigation on the relationship between English learning goals and WTC, especially in Japanese EFL contexts. The current study aims to fill this gap by focusing on this issue.

As Al-Murtadha (2019) noted, even if learners visualized their ideal goals to become fluent language learners, acting on these visions was another matter. That is, even if learners set goals for learning English, it is very difficult for them to take action to accomplish those goals. Therefore, examining the goals of learners and the actions they are taking to reach their goals is imperative. The current study seeks to establish the differences in learners' goals and actions for goal achievement according to their WTC levels using a qualitative approach. Until recently, studies on WTC have tended to rely on data collected via a single instrument and considered only quantitative findings (de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009). This work will generate fresh insights into the qualitative inquiry of English learning goals and actions for goal accomplishment. The importance and originality of this study are that it analyzes students' open-ended questionnaire responses related to goal setting and goal achievement using text mining and compares the differences between high-WTC students and low-WTC students. Accordingly, this study posed the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the characteristics of English learning goals among learners with higher or lower levels of WTC?

RQ2. What are the differences in learners' actions for goal achievement among learners with higher or lower levels of WTC?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of the study were 84 non-English major undergraduate students at a national university in Japan (male=53, female=31). These students were taking a required elective class for studying general English, which was taught by the author. The overall English proficiency levels of the students were at or above intermediate level (TOEFL-ITP score $\geqq$ 421). Through the use of the WTC Scale (Peng & Woodrow, 2010), students' WTC levels (i.e., how willing they are to communicate in English) were determined by calculating the scores from their responses. The WTC scale consists of 10 items to be answered based on a 6-point Likert scale; therefore, the WTC scores generally range from the minimum score of 10 to the maximum of 60. In this study, the median score of all participants was 36.00; thus, this value was used as a cutoff point in dividing the students into high-WTC (n=41) and low-WTC (n=43) groups. Questionnaire responses from the students in these two groups were examined.

Data Collection

The survey questionnaire comprised two main sections: closed-ended questions including the WTC scale (Peng & Woodrow, 2010) (e.g., I am willing to do a role-play in English at my desk with my peer.) and open-ended questions asking about student goals for learning English and their specific actions for goal achievement. The open-ended questions were prepared as follows: "1. Do you have goals for learning English? If so, what kind of goals do you have? Please explain." and "2. What actions do you take to achieve those goals for learning English?" These questions were originally asked in Japanese and could be answered freely without any word limits. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants beforehand, and those who agreed to answer the questionnaire participated in the study. All data were collected online during the academic year of 2021.

Data Analysis

The open-ended questionnaire responses were analyzed qualitatively using a free text-mining software called KH Coder 3, which was developed by Koichi Higuchi. KH Coder is a well-organized coding tool for text-mining and content analysis that enables researchers to analyze qualitative data automatically without arbitrary bias. This study applied one of the basic analysis functions of KH Coder called co-occurrence network. The author decided to use this analysis function because it illustrates the characteristics of the coded texts clearly through diagrams and allows for comparison between the high-WTC and low-WTC groups.

The co-occurrence network displays a network diagram among words with similar appearance patterns, i.e., with high degrees of co-occurrence, connected by lines (Higuchi, 2017).

The words connected with lines enable researchers to understand their co-occurrence structures. The co-occurrence network diagram illustrates a number of subgraphs consisting of correlated words. The constituents of subgraphs in the diagram are determined by the word groups, which are connected by solid lines, while words connected with dotted lines are outsiders of subgraphs. The solid lines show strong correlations, and the dotted lines show weak correlations. However, the words connected by dotted lines function as connectors of other subgraphs and keywords. The size of the circle represents the term frequency (see Figures 1-4). The Jaccard Similarity Measure was adopted to calculate the strength of word associations in the co-occurrence network. In carrying out the analysis, the minimum number of occurrences of the extracted words was set to two, and the network was configured to draw the top 40 co-occurrence relationships (edge) in the diagram. All the data were analyzed in Japanese, and the final results were translated into English for this paper.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Overview of the Obtained Data

A summary of the data analyzed using KH Coder 3 is shown in Table 1. Text data of English learners' goals and actions for goal achievement were coded through text-mining. Using the text-mining procedure, KH Coder 3 reveals the total number of words (i.e., tokens) and the number of different words (i.e., types). Texts of High-WTC students (n=41) contained 611 tokens of 216 types for their learning goals and 553 tokens of 208 types for their actions for goal achievement. Low-WTC students' (n=43) texts included 445 tokens of 155 types for learning goals and 474 tokens of 168 types for actions for goal achievement. There was an overall tendency of high-WTC students exceeding the total word counts of low-WTC students in the descriptions of learning goals as well as learners' actions for goal achievement.

Table 1. Summary of Text Data Used for Analysis

Group	n	Learning Goals		Learner Actions	
		Tokens	Types	Tokens	Types
High-WTC Students	41	611	216	553	208
Low-WTC Students	43	445	155	474	168

Characteristics of English Learning Goals

Goals of High-WTC Students

For examination of the high-WTC students' English learning goals, a co-occurrence network diagram was created (Figure 1). Seven subgraphs accounting for student goals were formulated: 01) advanced English skills, 02) integrative motivation, 03) English proficiency for studying abroad, 04) academic English, 05) instrumental motivation, 06) interpersonal communication, and 07) knowledge-based skills.
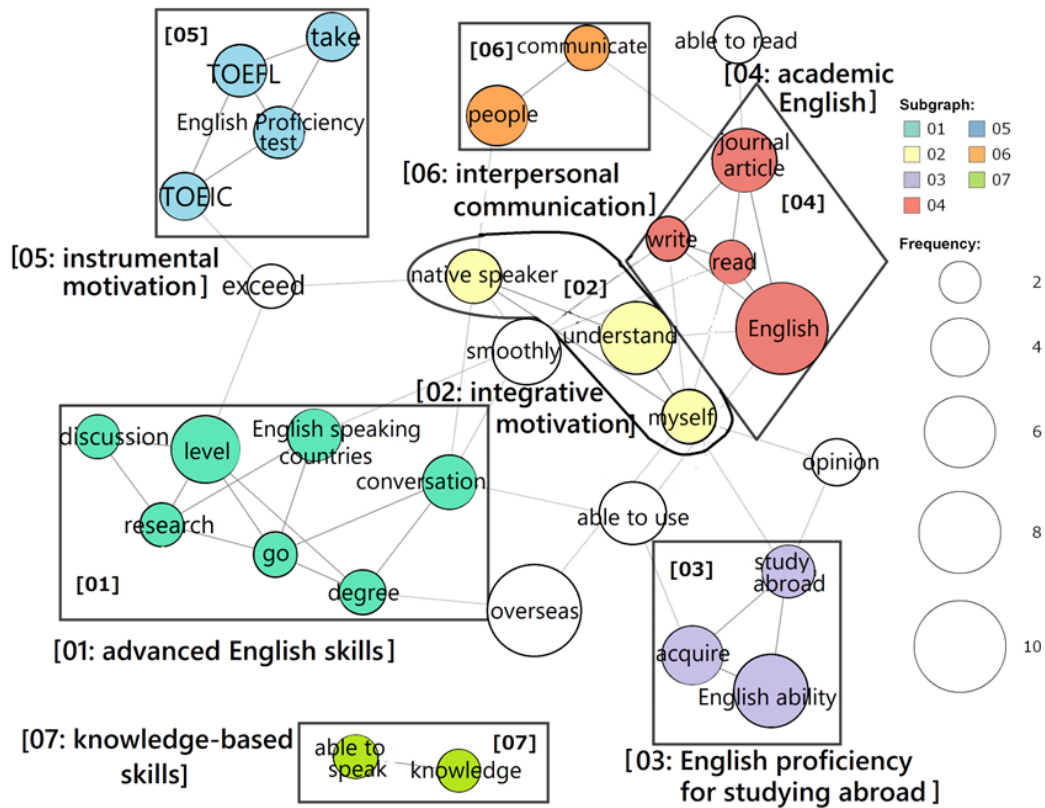
Figure 1. Co-occurrence Network Diagram of High-WTC Students' Goals

Subgraph 01 is the largest group of high-frequency and shows a distinctive tendency in the high-WTC group. That is, words displayed in this subgraph show high-level goals of students, as seen in comments such as "I want to improve my English skills to the *level* at which I can have *discussion* on my *research* with foreign researchers" and "I want to *go* to *English-speaking countries* to become a fluent speaker." The outsider term, *overseas*, which is not included in this

subgraph but was frequently observed, is weakly correlated with *degree*, as in "I want to acquire English *conversation* skills to a *degree* at which I won't be inconvenienced during *overseas* travels." The keyword centered in this group, *level*, which co-occurs with *discussion, research, go, English-speaking countries*, and *degree*, shows students' goals to reach a certain level of proficiency. Thus, this subgraph was named: advanced English skills.

In Subgraph 02, the term *understand* is in the centered position, characterized by "I want to make myself *understood* in English" and "I want to *understand* many different perspectives and have a broader view." Another construct in this subgraph, *native speaker*, is weakly correlated with *smoothly*, an outsider term, *conversation* in Subgraph 01, and *people* in Subgraph 06. Most of the comments containing the term *native speaker* are relevant to high-WTC students' desire to communicate with people in English; therefore, Subgraph 02 was named: integrative motivation.

In Subgraph 03, *English ability, acquire,* and *study abroad* co-occur. Students mention, "I want to *acquire* the *English ability* needed to *study abroad*" or "I am planning to *study abroad*, so I want to brush up my *English ability*." The key term in this subgraph is *study abroad*, and it is correlated to the outsider term *opinion* and *myself* in Subgraph 02. Students with high-WTC have goals to be able to "express their *own opinions* in English" or "prepare *themselves* to reach the level of *studying abroad*." From these results, Subgraph 03 was named: English proficiency for studying abroad.

Subgraph 04 contains one of the most frequently occurring words in the whole diagram, *English*, which co-occurs with *journal article, read*, and *write*. The distinct feature of this subgraph is that students' comments are related to the ultimate goals of English, such as "In the future, I want to be able to *write* a *journal article* in *English*" and "My goal is to be able to *read* and *write journal articles* related to my research interests in *English*." Since many of the comments in this group were related to research and journal articles, this subgraph was named: academic English.

Subgraph 05 is grouped from the words *take, TOEFL, TOEIC,* and *English Proficiency Test*, which are all related to English certificate exams. Students state their goals as "I want to get good scores in *TOEFL* to become a graduate school student" and "I want to *take* the *TOEIC* test and obtain a score of 900." Among this group, *TOEIC* is also related to the term *exceed*. *Exceed* was not only used in comments related to test scores, but also in comments such as "I want to *exceed* the language *level* of ordinary *native speakers*." The term *exceed*, which is outside of Subgraph 05, is correlated with Subgraphs 01 and 02 as well. Subgraph 05, which is related to students' motivation to improve English skills for exam scores, was named: instrumental motivation.

Subgraph 06 has two main constituents: *people* and *communicate.* This group is characterized by comments such as "I want to be able to *communicate* with many foreign *people* in the future" and "I want to *communicate* with *people* in English as much as I can." The term *people* is weakly correlated to *native speaker* in Subgraph 02 as well, which is seen in comments

like "I want to be able to *communicate* with *people* like a *native speaker*." Accordingly, Subgraph 06 was named: interpersonal communication.

Subgraph 07 is formed of two keywords: *able to speak* and *knowledge*. This subgraph is isolated from all the other subgraphs. Although this group is a minority group, students mentioned steady goals such as "I think having *knowledge* of a language is not enough, so I want to apply my *knowledge* so that I *can speak* fluently" and "I will try using my *knowledge* to be *able to speak* well." Student goals were related to making the best use of their knowledge; thus, this subgraph was named: knowledge-based skills.

As an overall tendency, high-WTC students had a variety of specific goals, such as exceeding high scores in TOEFL tests, gaining the ability to communicate smoothly with English native speakers, and acquiring English writing skills to publish articles in journals. All these goals had very high levels, which revealed these students' high willingness to use English as a means of communication. As stated by Al-Murtadha (2019), setting goals makes students want to work hard because they allow students to imagine how the present could influence the future. High-WTC students in this study possessed specific learning goals possibly because they were already visualizing future uses of their English. In addition, many of the students had ultimate goals of studying abroad or traveling overseas in the near future, as seen in keywords such as *overseas, study abroad*, and *English-speaking countries*. According to Yashima et al. (2004), international posture, that is, "interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, and a readiness to interact with intercultural partners" (p. 125), highly correlates with WTC among Japanese learners of English. High-WTC students in this study had relatively high interest in foreign countries and cultures, as frequently expressed in their English learning goals, which is in agreement with Yashima et al.'s findings. In Japanese EFL contexts, learners are exposed to limited amounts of English in their daily lives, thus becoming interested in foreign countries and cultures is very important for visualizing their English learning goals.

Goals of Low-WTC Students

The co-occurrence network diagram that explains the English learning goals of low-WTC students is shown in Figure 2. A total of six subgraphs were created: 01) ideal English skills, 02) reaching the basic level, 03) conversation in simple English, 04) minimum required skills, 05) English for fun, and 06) English as a compulsory subject.

Subgraph 01 contains eight interrelated keywords: *English, journal article, able to read, acquire, English ability, degree, book*, and *trouble*. The term *English* is strongly correlated with *able to read* and *journal article*. Another similar term, *English ability*, highly correlates with *acquire, journal article, degree*, and *trouble*. These terms are characterized by students' comments such as "I want to be *able to read English books* and *English journal articles*" and "I want to improve my *English ability* to a *degree* at which I will not be in *trouble* speaking in

foreign countries." Overall, students' comments in this subgraph were related to goals of ideal self-images of mastering English. Subgraph 01 was accordingly named: ideal English skills.
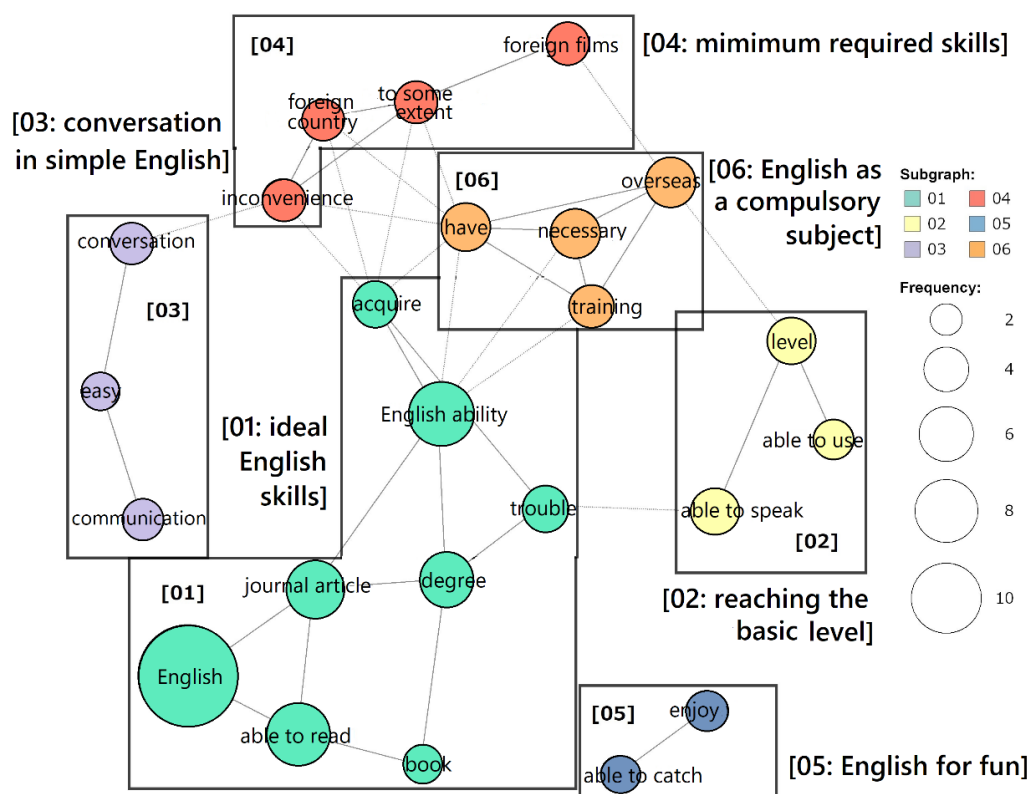
Figure 2. Co-occurrence Network Diagram of Low-WTC Students' Goals

Subgraph 02 contains keywords of *level, able to speak*, and *able to use*. For example, students wrote "I want to be *able to use* English at a basic *level* when I go out into the world" and "My goal is to reach the *level* at which I can understand spoken English." The term *trouble*, which is included in Subgraph 01, is weakly connected to *able to speak* in this subgraph and is used in student remarks such as "I want to be *able to speak* English to prevent communication *troubles*." From the above words, Subgraph 02 was named: reaching the basic level.

Subgraph 03 consists of three key terms, *conversation, easy*, and *communication*. Students state goals such as "My goal is to have *easy conversations* in English" and "I aim to *communicate* in English using *easy* phrases." This subgraph represents the goals of students who are not very good at speaking English at this point but have willingness to communicate with others at a basic level. Therefore, this subgraph was named: conversation in simple English.

In Subgraph 04, the words *inconvenience, foreign country, to some extent,* and *foreign films* co-occur. Among these, the first three words (*inconvenience, foreign country*, and *to some extent*) are weakly correlated with other group's words, such as *acquire, have*, and *conversation*. These words are employed in students' statements such as "For the sake of going to a *foreign country* in the future, I want to *acquire* English skills *to some extent*" and "I aim to have conversations with people in English without any *inconvenience*." Another term included in this subgraph is *foreign films*, which emerges in students' comments such as "I want to be able to understand the meanings of *foreign films to some extent*." What is particular to this subgraph is that the term *to some extent* is in the center and is connected to all constituents of this group. Students explained that they want to improve their English skills *to some extent*, which is very different from high-WTC students' goals of reaching very high levels of English. Therefore, Subgraph 04 was named: minimum required skills, which appeared to be one of the symbolic subgraphs of low-WTC students' goals.

Subgraph 05 is a group of words that is independent from any other subgraphs in the diagram. This subgraph is composed of two terms: *able to catch* and *enjoy.* Students mentioned, "I want to *enjoy* reading novels written in English" and "I want to be *able to catch* the lyrics in English songs; if so, I can *enjoy* them more." This subgraph is related to students' goals to learn English motivated by their interest in foreign entertainment and was thus named: English for fun.

In Subgraph 06, four keywords co-occur: *have, necessary, training*, and *overseas*. The word *necessary* is centered in this subgraph and is correlated to the others. Students state the necessity of English in remarks like "because English is *necessary* in *overseas training*" and "I have to obtain the *necessary* scores in TOEFL to study *overseas*." This subgraph contains students' goals that arise from external factors and is therefore named: English as a compulsory subject.

In summary, low-WTC students tended to have the lowest possible goals, as seen in Subgraphs 02 (reaching the basic level), 03 (conversation in simple English), and 04 (minimum required skills). This may arise from the differences in learners' self-perceived English proficiency, which is in line with Alimorad and Farahmand's (2021) findings that "students who had higher level of L2 proficiency perceived themselves as more competent to communicate in English" (p. 17). As for the similarities observed in both low-WTC and high-WTC students' results, the key term *journal article* was frequently used in students' comments. Many students, irrespective of WTC level, were conscious about gaining the ability to read or write journal articles in the future, which is a somewhat surprising find. Another tendency of low-WTC students is their interest in foreign entertainment and cultures, which in turn motivated them to learn English. Kang (2005) pointed out that talking about topics in which learners are interested leads to feelings of excitement and is likely to affect learners' WTC. As such, piquing students' interest in foreign cultures could be a shortcut to enhancing learners' desire to communicate.

Characteristics of Learners' Actions for Goal Achievement

Actions of High-WTC Students

The next section of the qualitative results is concerned with learners' actions for goal achievements. Following the English learning goals of students, the ways in which students take actions for their goal achievement was investigated in detail. Figure 3 illustrates the co-occurrence network diagram of coded results among high-WTC students' responses, which were named 01) English language skills development, 02) English use on a daily basis, 03) practical English communication, 04) use of digital media, 05) vocabulary building, and 06) promoting social interactions.
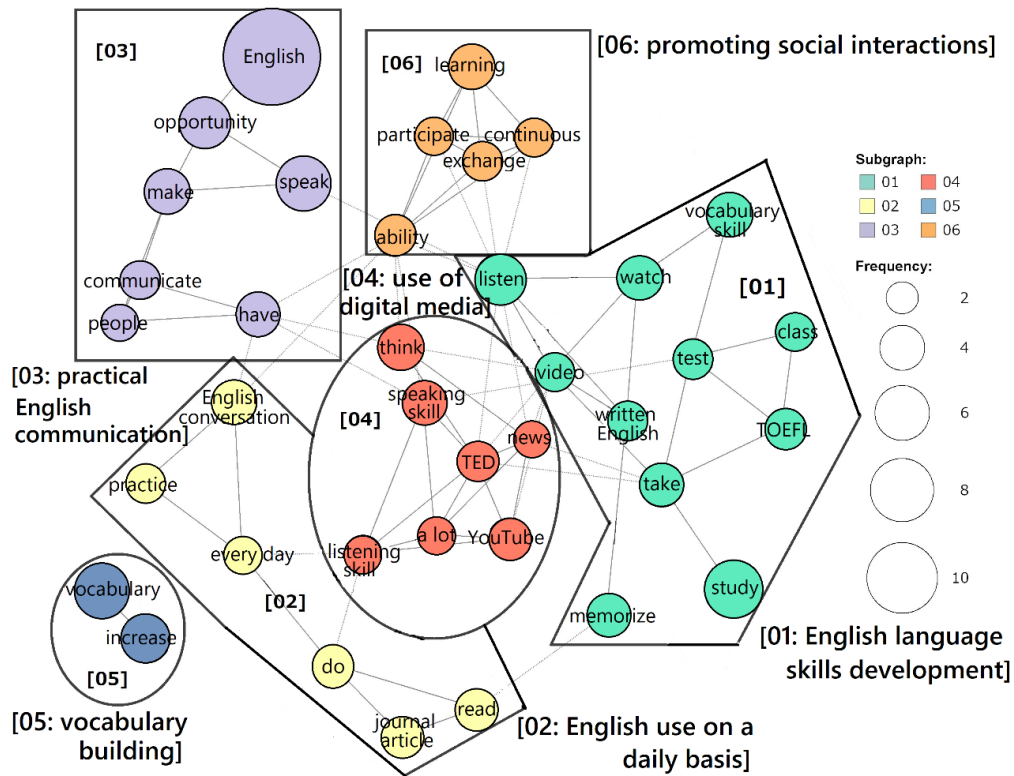
Figure 3. Co-occurrence Network Diagram of High-WTC Students' Actions for Goal Achievement

Subgraph 01 is the largest group and is comprised of 11 key terms: *listen, video, watch, vocabulary skill, written English, test, class, take, TOEFL, memorize*, and *study*. Students are making variety of efforts to acquire basic English skills in ways such as "*training listening* skills

and *vocabulary skills* through English *videos*," "proactively *taking* the *TOEFL* and other English *tests*," and "trying to expose themselves to *written English* every day." The terms *test* and *take* are centered in this subgraph and are connected to several other terms. It seems that students' actions in this group are intended to achieve good grades in tests and course exams by "*memorizing* texts *written in English*," "*watching* English *videos*," and "making a habit of *studying* English." Since the above terms are related to students' behaviors for developing English skills in many ways, Subgraph 01 was named: English language skills development.

Subgraph 02 contains six keywords of *English conversation, practice, every day, do, journal article*, and *read*. Students are working on English activities, claiming, "I go to an *English conversation* class to *practice* speaking skills," "I try reading short English *journal articles* in my area of interest," and "I try *doing* listening exercises *every day*." In this subgraph, *every day* and *do* are interrelated to several other terms, which shows the feature that students are trying to use English every day as a habit; thus, this subgraph was termed: English use on a daily basis.

Subgraph 03 includes some of the keywords with high frequency. The constituents of this subgraph are *English, opportunity, make, speak, communicate, people*, and *have*. Students state their positive attitudes, such as "I try *making opportunities* to *speak English*," "I aim to *have opportunities* to *communicate* with *people* using *English*," and "I *make* it a rule to *communicate* in *English* proactively during classes." This group is mainly composed of terms relevant to real communication in English. Accordingly, Subgraph 03 was named: practical English communication.

Subgraph 04 is in the center of the diagram and is connected to many other subgraphs (i.e., Subgraphs 01, 02, 03, and 06). It is comprised of the following words: *think, speaking skill, TED, news, listening skill, a lot*, and *YouTube*. Students' actions are characterized by remarks such as "I use *TED* on *YouTube* to train my *listening skills* as well as *speaking skills*" and "I have watched *a lot* of English *news* programs for *listening* practice." The above comments are related to students' use of video resources and Internet content to study English. Considering that this subgraph is correlated with many of the surrounding subgraphs, students' means of learning English may have been shifting to more digital and electronic-based forms in recent years. In relation to this idea, Hartnett (2016) indicates the growing demand of the application of digital technologies in learning, including distance, online, open, flexible, blended, and flipped learning. On a relevant note, Freiermuth and Huang (2018) pointed out that utilizing new technologies may develop EFL learners' linguistic competencies and intercultural knowledge. Subgraph 04 was accordingly termed: use of digital media.

Subgraph 05 is an individual group that is separate from all other subgraphs and consists of two terms: *vocabulary* and *increase*. Students mention, "I am trying to *increase* my *vocabulary*" and "*Increasing* my *vocabulary* is what I am working on right now." According to Folse (2006), through the vocabulary learning process, English learners "soon discover that their lack of vocabulary knowledge impedes their ability to comprehend or express themselves clearly in

English" (p.273). Students in this study also might have come to the conclusion that vocabulary is essential in English comprehension. Simply put, this subgraph is concerned with increasing ones' vocabulary knowledge and was named: vocabulary building.

In Subgraph 06, five keywords of *learning, participate, ability, exchange*, and *continuous* co-occur. The factors in this subgraph are firmly connected with each other with solid lines, which shows their strong correlations. The feature of this subgraph is exemplified by students' statements such as "I *participate* in English *learning* events where I can talk with *exchange* students" and "I know I lack in speaking *ability,* so I *participate* in language *exchange* programs *continuously.*" Students were participating in language programs or events spontaneously, which is supported by Cao's ideas (2011), noting that having suitable opportunities for talking contributes to promoting learners' WTC. Students in this study possessed high willingness to find chances to communicate; therefore, Subgraph 06 was named: promoting social interactions.

In summary, the above results show that high-WTC students take a number of different actions to achieve their English learning goals, as many different keywords were used in students' comments (e.g., *TOEFL, journal articles, YouTube videos*, and *language exchange programs*). Moreover, specific approaches were described, such as "developing English skills through English news programs," "practicing English conversation every day," and "participating in events with foreign exchange students." Students with high WTC in English tended to take a variety of specific actions for goal achievement. From these results, it can be suggested that there is an association between a high degree of WTC and learners' proactive actions for goal achievement. This supports Al-Murtadha's (2019) suggestion of the possibility of a relationship between WTC enhancement and learners' actions for pursuing goals.
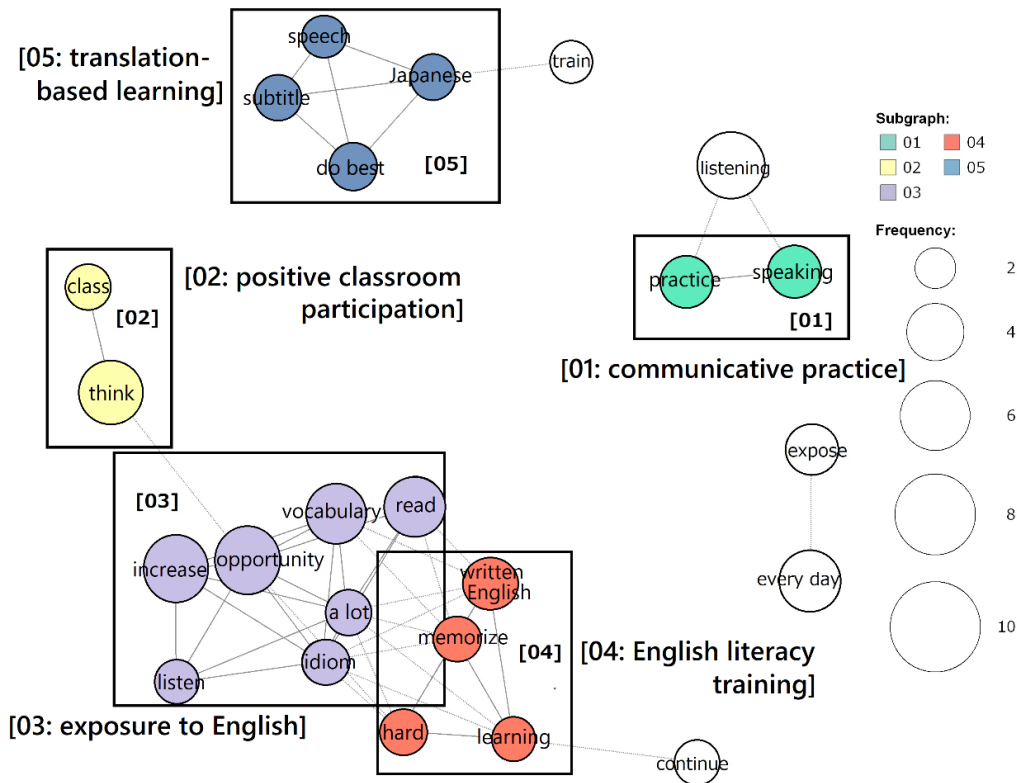
Actions of Low-WTC Students

Turning now to the coded results of low-WTC students' comments on their actions for goal achievement, Figure 4 provides the diagram of the co-occurrence network. As can be seen in this diagram, five different subgraphs were formed: 01) communicative practice, 02) positive classroom participation, 03) exposure to English, 04) English literacy training, and 05) translation-based learning.

Subgraph 01 is a small group comprised of two keywords: *practice* and *speaking.* This is an independent subgraph that is weakly correlated to one outsider term: *listening.* Students explain their actions for their English goals as "I *practice speaking* and trying to learn phrases for daily conversations," and "I *practice speaking* because I am not good at *speaking* and *listening.*" Since keywords in this group represent speaking and communication, Subgraph 01 was named: communicative practice.

Subgraph 02 is another small group and is composed of *class* and *think*. Students state perceptions such as "I *think* I have to speak positively in *class*, so I do my best" and "I am *thinking* of taking *classes* in which I can improve my English." As shown in these students'

comments, the term *think* symbolizes that not all students have put these thoughts into practice; they are simply *thinking* of taking actions in the near future. Even so, these students are trying their best to take positive actions, so this subgraph was named: positive classroom participation.

Figure 4. Co-occurrence Network Diagram of Low-WTC Students' Actions for Goal Achievement

Subgraph 03 is the largest group of terms with high frequency and comprises *increase, opportunity, vocabulary, read, listen, idiom*, and *a lot*. The constituents of this subgraph are firmly correlated, and the subgraph contains students' actions for pursuing English learning goals, such as "*increase opportunities* to *read* English," "make *a lot* of *opportunities* to *listen* to spoken English," and "*increase* knowledge of English *vocabulary* and *idioms*." These statements have the similarity of students' attempts to expose themselves to English in many ways, so Subgraph 03 was termed: exposure to English.

Subgraph 04 has a weak but definite connection with Subgraph 03 in dotted lines and consists of four key terms: *written English, memorize, hard*, and *learning*. This subgraph is

formed of students' comments such as "*memorize written English* and English *idioms* in textbooks" and "keep *learning hard* with good balance." The term *learning* is also weakly correlated with the outsider term *continue*. "*Continue learning*" can be either an objective or an action plan of learning English and was therefore cited by several students. In summary, Subgraph 04 was named: English literacy training.

Subgraph 05 is formed by four key terms: *speech, subtitle, do best*, and *Japanese*. This subgraph is distinctive from other groups in that the term *Japanese* co-occurs. In this subgraph, students mentioned "I study using English and *Japanese subtitles* when I watch English videos" and "I *do* my *best* to translate English *speeches* into *Japanese*." The outsider term *train* is also weakly correlated to *Japanese*, as seen in statements such as "I am trying to *train* code-switching skills from *Japanese* into English." Accordingly, Subgraph 05 was named: translation-based learning.

Overall, the above results illustrate the tendency of low-WTC students to take similar and general actions, since the average frequency of all the terms used in low-WTC students' texts was higher than that of all the terms used in high-WTC students' texts, which can be seen in the size of the circles in Figures 3 and 4. This inclination can also be seen in the number of keywords used by low-WTC students, which was relatively small in contrast to keywords used by high-WTC students. In other words, high-WTC students tended to vary in their descriptions of actions for goal achievement, whereas low-WTC students had commonality in their responses. Another finding is that low-WTC students were prone to use general and abstract expressions in explaining their actions for goal achievement, such as "increase the amount of time they are exposed to English" and "try to use English every day," which do not include specific actions or concrete measures they are actually putting into practice. As Bloom (2013) notes, for those who are unable to think of specific steps they might take to reach the goals they have formed, instructors may add suggestions and help them go over their present progress, which will lead them to achieve their self-set goals.

Discussion

The current study posed two research questions concerning learners' goals and specific actions for goal achievements according to their WTC levels. By dividing learners into high-WTC and low-WTC groups, the open-ended questionnaire responses were compared through qualitative text-mining analyses.

RQ1 asked, "What are the characteristics of English learning goals among learners with higher or lower levels of WTC?" High-WTC students tended to show interest in visiting English speaking countries or studying abroad, which seemed to be the source of their motivation to realize their goals. These students were trying to acquire advanced English skills, or in some cases, learn academic English for their future study. In contrast, low-WTC students tended to set basic-level goals, such as reaching the basic level or gaining the ability to have conversations in

simple English. Taken together, these results suggest that learners with high willingness to communicate (WTC) in English have the aspiration to improve their language skills and therefore set more high-level goals compared to learners with low WTC. These results further support the idea of Alimorad and Farahmand (2021), who claim, "those language learners who are willing to communicate in the L2 actively seek out opportunities to communicate, and in fact, they do communicate" (p. 2). Likewise, Freiermuth and Ito (2020) suggest that learners' high levels of WTC come from their desire to use their English skills to communicate in practical situations in the present and the future. The present study adds to the growing body of research indicating that learners' degree of WTC can influence the goal levels that learners set for their language learning.

RQ 2 asked, "What are the differences in learners' actions for goal achievement among learners with higher or lower levels of WTC?" The biggest difference between high-WTC and low-WTC students' actions for goal achievement was the number of keywords they used to describe their actions. High-WTC students used a variety of actions to accomplish their goals, such as taking TOEFL tests, building their vocabulary, seeking opportunities to have social interactions, and utilizing digital media for self-learning. In contrast, low-WTC students tended to have commonality in their actions. One of the distinctive features in low-WTC students' comments was the use of subtitles in both English and Japanese shown in videos and movies as a tool of translation-based learning. In relation to RQ1, low-WTC students had the tendency to be interested in foreign entertainment such as English films, novels, and music, which motivated them to set their English learning goals, which is consistent with the above results. These findings align well with Freiermuth and Ito's (2020) results stating that low-WTC students tended to have instrumental and extrinsic motivation toward their English learning.

Since WTC in English is posited as a potentially important factor in the Japanese EFL context (Yashima et al., 2004), the relationship found between WTC and learners' self-set goals would be helpful in the future English education in Japan. However, as Mikami (2012) has stated, teachers need to provide students with increased opportunities to set their own goals and monitor their progress toward those goals in the classroom, which could eventually lead to their autonomous learning. As Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) indicate, teachers should guide learners until they become able to visualize their goals to reach their ideal selves through the learning process. The findings of the present study contribute in several ways to the current understanding of learners' self-set goals in relation to their WTC levels.

CONCLUSIONS

The present research aimed to examine how the characteristics of English learning goals and actions for goal achievement differ between high-WTC learners and low-WTC learners in the Japanese EFL context. Through qualitative text-mining procedure, this study has identified differences in the obtained comments from the two groups of students. An important implication

of this study is the possibility that a high degree of WTC is interrelated with the high-level goals students set for their future English learning. Students with high WTC tended to set clear and high-level goals compared to students with low WTC and take a variety of actions to accomplish their own goals for learning English. Many low-WTC students had the lowest possible goals, such as "being able to speak English to some extent" or "acquiring basic English skills." Possibly due to the low enthusiasm for English mastery, these students' actions to achieve their goals were vague and not described enough in their words compared to high-WTC students. Even if their present WTC is relatively low, having interests in English films, novels, or songs, seemed to motivate students to learn English more, which may enhance their future WTC. The findings reported here shed new light on the understanding of how the differences in learners' willingness to communicate relate to their English learning goals and the actions they take to accomplish their goals.

As a limitation, this study was carried out with a relatively small number of participants, with data collected at one point in time. It could be possible to collect additional data from the participants through interviews or follow-up surveys to gain a deeper understanding of their goals and actions for goal achievement. Further research could also apply the current findings of this study to a larger-scale, quantitative approach. It is also possible to consider this issue with learners of differing proficiency levels or age groups.

Continued focus on the interactions between learners' WTC and their English learning goals could produce instructive findings. As a recommendation for English teachers, Bloom (2013) explains an important point that teachers need to consider when having students set their own goals:

> If students have confidence in their ability to complete a given task, they will persevere in the face of difficulties and find ways to regulate their learning to achieve their goals. If, however, they feel overwhelmed at the outset, it is natural that motivation will be low, and increasing motivation becomes much more challenging…Students should feel that course goals as well as goals they have set for themselves are accessible and achievable. (p. 47)

Therefore, it is essential to have students set achievable goals, which enables them to take action to reach their goals. Setting goals and making efforts for goal achievement must be considered simultaneously since the latter is sometimes not considered. What is truly essential for English teachers is to promote learners' motivation and willingness to communicate in EFL classrooms through conscious goal setting and successful goal achievement.

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