



University of  
Sistan and Baluchestan



Uppsala University

## The Effect of Regulatory Focus Orientations on Iranian EFL learners' Speaking Fluency and Willingness to Communicate

Abdullah Sarani<sup>1</sup> , Masoud Kord<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Corresponding author*, Associate Professor, English Language Department, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Zahedan, Iran, Email: [Sarani\\_ling@hamoon.usb.ac.ir](mailto: Sarani_ling@hamoon.usb.ac.ir)

<sup>2</sup> M.A., English Language Department, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Zahedan, Iran, Email: [masoudkord.1993@gmail.com](mailto:masoudkord.1993@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the effects of regulatory focus orientations (i.e., prevention and promotion) on Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) and speaking fluency. The initial population of the study included 56 Iranian male and female EFL learners, who were selected through convenience sampling, from a language institute. Upon administering Oxford Placement Test (OPT) as a proficiency test, 48 students were selected who were the upper-intermediate level of proficiency based on the OPT results. Next, they were divided into three groups, namely promotion-focused, prevention-focused, and control group. Then, the WTC questionnaire and the speaking test were administered as the pretests. Then the treatments, which lasted 12 1-hour sessions, were performed. The first experimental group received the instructions using promotion-focused condition, and the second experimental group were taught through the prevention-focused condition. In addition, the control group received the conventional treatments of the institute based on the syllabus. At the end of the treatment sessions, the students took WTC questionnaire and the speaking test as the posttests. The results of one-way ANOVA revealed that the promotion feedback increased WTC and speaking fluency of the Iranian EFL students, while the prevention feedback negatively influenced their WTC and speaking fluency. Finally, the implications of the study were provided.

**Keywords:** EFL learners, regulatory focus orientations, speaking fluency, willingness to communicate

Received: June 10, 2022

Revised: October 11, 2022

Accepted: March 16, 2023

Article type: Research Article

DOI: 10.22111/IJALS.2023.46895.2388

Publisher: University of Sistan and Baluchestan

© The Author(s).



How to cite: Sarani, A., & Kord, M. (2023). The Effect of Regulatory Focus Orientations on Iranian EFL learners' Speaking Fluency and Willingness to Communicate. *Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 15(1), 191-208.

<https://doi.org/10.22111/IJALS.2023.46895.2388>

## 1. Introduction

Speaking is the most complex and challenging language skill to learn since it involves listening and comprehending at the same time and depends on situational context and communication skills (Koran, 2015); therefore, it is the most demanding language skill to master (Tarone, 2005). In addition, the ultimate goal of foreign language learners is to become fluent speakers and one aspect of communicative competence and efficient speaking is fluency (Ellis, 2005). Generally, fluency refers to naturally occurring language during meaningful communication (Richards, 2006), and in particular, it describes the ease, fluency, and eloquence of speech output with a minimal amount of hesitations, pauses, or reformulations (Michel, 2017; Namaziandost et al., 2019). Fluency makes communication comprehensible and ongoing despite limitations in one's communicative competence (Ellis, 2005).

Moreover, speaking skill is affected by different factors, including willingness to communicate (WTC) which was applied to second language (L2) context to explore the factors contributing to L2 learners' psychological readiness to initiate communication (Xie, 2011). Based on Clement et al. (2003), WTC is the most immediate determinant of L2 use. Due to research showing that WTC influences L2 learners' communication behaviors, educators are becoming interested in this topic. The WTC notion was first introduced as a personality tendency (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987), referring to students' motivation to participate in communication with others. According to Dornyei (2003), L2 competence is not enough. Apart from learners' competence to communicate in L2, they should also be willing to communicate in the L2. Learners with higher level of WTC can have greater achievement and have a greater inclination to communicate in real classroom contexts (Dornyei, 2003). The level of learners' WTC influences their frequency of engaging actively in communication with others in an L2 classroom (Clement et al., 2003).

According to a number of studies (e.g., Bergil, 2016; Husna, 2019; Karnechanachari, 2019), learners may not be willing to utilize the L2 they are studying despite their level of language ability. According to these research, WTC can either promote or inhibit students' communicative activities. Consequently, the factors that may influence WTC have piqued the interest of researchers (e.g., Jongsermtrakoon & Vibulphol, 2010; Knell & Chi, 2012; Lee & Drajiati, 2019; Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Wu & Lin, 2014).

Some factors affecting students' language learning and developing speaking fluency include their motivation to engage in activities which are affected by their regulatory focus orientations (Davoudian Dehkordi et al., 2021). Regulatory focus theory (RFT) (Higgins, 1997, 2000, 2001) represents a classic self-regulatory approach to the study of human motivation assuming that human behavior is heavily influenced by the standards and reference points that are salient and relevant in a given situation or chronically accessible in the individual's mind (Keller, 2008). RFT specifies two basic modes of self-regulation: Promotion-focused and prevention-focused self-regulation (Higgins, 2000, 2001). English as a foreign language (EFL) learners are also affected by regulatory

focus orientation. L2 learners with a promotion focus take advantage of every opportunity they encounter to use the target language (Papi & Khajavy, 2021) and are risk-takers (Scholer et al., 2010). On the other hand, L2 learners with a prevention focus, who are more risk-averse have lower levels of speaking competence due to their tendency to minimize the possibility of making errors by avoiding the unnecessary use of L2. According to Crowe and Higgins (1997), the promotion and prevention foci also reflect different strategic tendencies in achieving goals. Individuals with a promotion focus are more likely to have an eager strategic tendency in their goal pursuit (Crowe & Higgins, 1997) to ensure that they maximize their opportunities for achieving gains even though there are risks of committing errors (Schokker et al., 2010). On the other hand, individuals with a prevention focus are more likely to have a vigilant strategic tendency (Crowe & Higgins, 1997) to ensure they minimize their losses and try to be more careful to avoid wrong choices and errors. Thus, the promotion and prevention foci represent two qualitatively different chronic motivational systems distinguished in terms of the goals that motivate individuals (growth vs. security) as well all the strategic tendencies (eager vs. vigilant) they use to achieve their goals.

The majority of people in Iranian context do not require English in their daily lives and instead utilize it as a foreign language. According to Avanaki and Sadeghi (2013), spoken communication is rarely used in the classroom, making it the only setting in which the majority of Iranian university students utilize English. Iranian students' usage of English appears to be impacted by their limited opportunities for classroom communication and paucity of access to communication in everyday situations (Avanaki & Sadeghi, 2013). It should come as no surprise that earlier research (e.g., Alemi, 2012; Goldoust & Ranjbar, 2017) indicated that Iranian students had poor WTC and lacked the inclination to initiate or carry on an independent English discussion. Therefore, this study was an attempt to explore the effects of regulatory focus orientations on Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency and their WTC.

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1. Theoretical Backgrounds*

#### *2.1.1. Willingness to Communicate (WTC)*

According to Cleary and Conrod (2001), WTC is the intention of initiating communication when given the option. When it came to first language interaction, McCroskey (1992) and McCroskey and Richmond (1987) defined WTC as personal differences. MacIntyre and Charos (1996) then applied WTC to L2 communication. Based on MacIntyre et al. (1998), "The ultimate goal of the learning process should be to engender in language students the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness actually to communicate in them" (p. 547). WTC, or learners' desire to look for opportunities for appropriate communication in a foreign language, has long been recognized as a key idea in EFL instruction. Originally described as "unwillingness to

communicate,” it was also known as “shyness” (Brown, 2002). WTC is the theory in L2 learning that language learners who want to engage seek for chances to speak. As a result, engendering the WTC in L2 learners would be the ultimate goal of l2 education (MacIntyre et al., 1998). There is a prevailing trend in language education to place more focus on meaningful engagement. Consequently, the concept of WTC has gained increasing importance in research on second language acquisition (SLA). Therefore, a multitude of studies have been conducted to examine the many factors that might influence the WTC of second and foreign language learners (e.g., Cao & Philip, 2006; Wen & Clement 2003). The concept of WTC includes situations where communication does not really occur, but rather where the speakers have and signal the WTC. It is also relevant to situations when oral or textual contact occurs. For instance, when a teacher poses a question, students typically raise their hands as an obvious example of this context. As a consequence, only a small portion of the students could communicate verbally; however, the students who raised their hands and shown a desire to communicate are considered to have WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

## ***2.2. Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT)***

Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT) was first proposed by Higgins (1997). This theory is of great importance to both psychology and related disciplines. The pivotal assumption of RFT is that individuals create their pleasure/pain objectives in unique ways and that specifies the strategic orientations they take during purpose-pursuing process. In particular, maximal purposes (e.g., ideal, gain, and advancement) result in individuals' adaptation of a promotion-focused strategy that is referred to as “eagerness,” whereas minimal purposes (e.g., ought, non-loss, and security) make peoples' adaptation of a prevention-focused strategy referred to as “vigilance.” Distinguishing these purposes and unique strategies created differential predictions of affection, cognition, motivation, and behavior in the self-regulation of purpose-pursuing process across multiple occupational (e.g., general and work), hierarchical (e.g., employees, managers, and executives), social (e.g., intra- and interpersonal and group), and temporal (e.g., trait and state) contexts (Baas et al., 2008; Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Sassenberg & Hamstra, 2017; Sassenberg & Woltin, 2009). Accordingly, regulatory focus has been utilized to investigate different organizational practices, including leadership, motivation and work behavior, performance management, recruitment and selection, and training and development (Gorman et al., 2012). Higgins' RFT (1997) highlights two motivational systems that regulate individual's goal-directed behaviors: the promotion system and the prevention system. In the promotion system, characterized by achieving goals, individuals with a predominant promotion focus are concerned with accomplishments, advancement, and growth. On the other hand, in the prevention system, characterized by avoiding losses, individuals with a predominant prevention focus are concerned with security, safety, and stability.

### ***2.3. Empirical Background***

Davoudian Dehkordi et al. (2021) examined how L2 students with different motivational compositions perform on L2 oral tasks. To do so, 52 intermediate students were first categorized into two groups: prevention-oriented or promotion-oriented based on their dominant motivational compositions. Afterward, the research was conducted in two stages: the first one with a conditionally neutral speaking task (regulatory focus) and the second one with two conditionally charged speaking tasks, each designed to either induce prevention condition or promotion condition in the mind of the test takers to see how task condition and motivational orientation of the participants tended to interact (regulatory fit). However, results did not reveal any significant causal relationship between the participants' motivational orientation/task condition and their fluency and accuracy.

In the same vein, Zarinabadi and Saberi (2021) investigated the effect of reference of comparison (self-referential vs. normative) and regulatory focus orientation (promotion-focused vs. prevention-focused) on WTC among EFL learners who were assigned to the self-referential, normative, prevention, promotion, and control feedback groups. They received different types of feedback over 15 sessions. The students were tested for their WTC, anxiety, and communication competence before and after the intervention. The results indicated that self-referential, normative, and promotion feedback positively impacted WTC and communication competence and decreased anxiety. However, prevention feedback decreased WTC and communication competence and increased anxiety.

Similarly, Hodis and Hodis (2021) examined the relationship between key motivation factors and three important communication constructs, including communication apprehension, self-perceived communication competence, and WTC using regulatory focus and self-determination theories. The findings indicated that promotion focus and competence satisfaction/frustration were strong predictors of differences in communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence. In addition, the results suggested that self-perceptions of communicative competence could positively predict WTC.

Along a similar line of studies, Prasetyanto et al. (2019) conducted a study to determine what type of reinforcement triggers students' WTC. The data was collected from 28 college students. The findings revealed that teacher reinforcement in EFL classroom affect students' WTC, particularly their self-confidence, interpersonal motivation, and intergroup motivation.

Furthermore, Han and McDonough (2018) conducted a study to find whether Korean L2 speakers' trait-based and task-induced regulatory focus could impact their oral task performance. To do so, 62 Korean learners completed a questionnaire to find about their prevention or promotion orientation, and then, were randomly assigned to promotion or prevention task-induced conditions to carry out an oral task. The results indicated that the task-induced prevention condition facilitated fluency and led to lower error rate or accuracy than the promotion condition.

Additionally, regulatory focus orientation can also affect their speaking performance in an EFL context.

Likewise, Han and McDonough (2018) explored whether L2 speakers' regulatory focus orientation could impact their oral task performance. For this purpose, 62 Vietnamese university students completed a questionnaire to assess their L2 prevention or promotion orientation. They were randomly assigned to promotion or prevention task-induced conditions, and then carried out an oral task. The results indicated that whereas the participants' general motivational tendencies did not impact their task performance, the task-induced prevention condition facilitated faster speech rate (i.e., fluency) and lower error rate (i.e., accuracy) than the promotion condition.

The issue of whether or not students communicate in English when they have an opportunity and what motivates or demotivates them to interact with others is the central concern of the concept of WTC in L2 acquisition (Fallah, 2014; Hüseyin et al., 2015). However, despite the substantial research studies conducted to investigate the factors that might moderate on the L2 WTC, there still exists a gap in SLA literature about developing L2 students' WTC through regulatory focus orientations (Zarinabadi & Saberi, 2021). In addition, more should be identified about developing speaking fluency through promotional and preventive strategies and for these reasons, this study is about to fill the gap in the literature. Accordingly, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Does Regulatory focus orientations have any significant effects on involving students in communication?

**RQ2.** Does regulatory focus orientations have any significant effects on improving speaking fluency of Iranian EFL learners?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

The initial population of the study included 56 Iranian male and female EFL learners aged between 15-19 years old, who were selected through convenience sampling (Ary et al., 2018), from a language institute. These participants had been learning English for 5-7 years. They were high school and university students studying different majors. Moreover, their first language was Persian. Upon administering Oxford Placement Test (OPT) as a proficiency test, 48 students were selected who were the upper-intermediate level of proficiency based on the OPT results. Next, they were divided into three groups: promotion-focused, prevention-focused as experimental groups, and a control group.

#### 3.2. Instruments

The following instruments were used in this study to collect the data.

### ***3.2.1. Oxford Placement Test***

The first instrument was Oxford Placement Test (OPT), which was given to the initial population prior to the study to determine the proficiency level of the participants and select the upper-intermediate students. This test is designed to measure: 1) test takers' knowledge of English language, including their grammatical and pragmatic knowledge; and 2) their ability to use this knowledge to communicate a range of meanings while listening. This test can also be used to place the students as accurately as possible into different levels (David, 2011). Furthermore, the OPT reliability index was measured, and it was in acceptable range ( $r=.82$ ), and the construct validity of this test was confirmed (Wistner et al., 2009).

### ***3.2.2. WTC Questionnaire***

Willingness to Communicate in a Foreign Language Scale (WTC-FLS), developed and validated by Baghaei (2012), was distributed both before and after the study to check the effect of treatments on learners' WTC. The scale is composed of three subscales measuring: a. Willingness to communicate with native speakers of English (WTC-NS), b. willingness to communicate with foreigners who are not native speakers of English (WTC- NN), and c. willingness to communicate in the school context (WTC-SC). It is in 20 Likert-based items (i.e., strongly disagree to strongly agree). The construct validity of the questionnaire was measured and reported by Baghaei (2012), and its reliability was estimated through the Cronbach's alpha ( $r=.87$ ).

### ***3.2.3. Regulatory Focus Questionnaire***

The regulatory focus questionnaire developed by Higgins et al. (2001) was used to examine the participants' regulatory focus. The questionnaire consists of 11 items using five-point Likert scales in the questionnaire (i.e., strongly disagree to strongly agree). Six questions quantify Promotion, and five questions quantify Prevention. There are three reverse-scored questions for the promotion subscale, and four reverse-scored questions for the prevention subscale. This set of questions asked how frequently specific events actually occurred or have occurred in one's life.

### ***3.2.4. Speaking Pretest and Posttest***

The speaking test measured the participants' speaking fluency which was administered as both pretest and posttest to check the effects of different interventions on their speaking fluency. The topics of the test were taken from Summit 1A and 1B coursebooks, which are designed for upper-intermediate students. The reliability of the tests was ensured via inter-rater reliability ( $r=.91$ ). In addition, three experts in the field reviewed the test and confirmed its content validity.

### ***3.3. Materials***

#### ***3.3.1. Summit Series***

The Summit 1A and 1B coursebooks were used as the materials in the present study. The Summit Series are authored by Saslow and Ascher (2009), which include students' book, teachers' book, workbooks, along with audio CDs and TV video programs. The series aim to develop the four language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In addition, the series develop students' knowledge on frequent vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and pronunciation. This coursebooks were selected as the primary goal of the course was to teach communicative competence; that is, the ability to communicate in English according to the context, purpose, and roles of the participants.

#### ***3.3.2. Fluency Measure***

Speech rate, or the number of syllables stated per second in pruned speech (i.e., segments of utterances without reformulation, repetition, or replacements (Yuan & Ellis, 2003), was used to determine fluency. To further account for the participants' disfluency, filled pauses and repair were estimated every 60 seconds (Skehan & Foster, 2005).

### ***3.4. Data Collection Procedure***

This study followed a quasi-experimental pretest posttest design to find out whether regulatory focus orientations could affect the learners' speaking fluency and their WTC. Having selected the participants of the study through OPT, they were divided into three groups, including promotion-focused, prevention-focused as experimental groups, and a control group. The division of the students to the promotion-focused and prevention-focused groups was done based on the results of the questionnaire on regulatory focus analysis. The WTC questionnaire and the speaking test were administered as the pretests. Then the treatments, which lasted 12 1-hour sessions, were started. The first experimental group received the instructions using promotion-focused condition, and the second experimental group were taught through the prevention-focused condition. In addition, the control group received the conventional treatments of the institute based on the syllabus.

To evaluate the effect of regulatory focus on the students in the experimental group one (promotion-focused condition), the researcher focused on their success and accomplishments when they used correct linguistic items during the class and promoted them to speak more. However, learners in the prevention condition were stopped in the middle of their speech when they went wrong and they were told that a mistake had occurred to prevent and protect them from failure when what they used was incorrect. No promotion was given to this group when their language use was correct. And the participants in the control group received no intervention. When they made



an error, they were not stopped and they did not receive any promotion to use correct linguistic forms. During the treatment sessions, different topics were presented to the students to talk about them. At the end of the treatment sessions, the students took WTC questionnaire and the speaking test as the posttests to check which treatment had been more effective in developing their speaking fluency and WTC.

### 3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to examine the data. One-way ANOVA analysis was used to examine the quantitative data, and SPSS version 24 was utilized. To check if the current data were normal, the skewness, kurtosis, and their ratios over standard errors were used.

## 4. Results

The first research question addressed “the effects of regulatory focus-orientation on learners’ WTC of Iranian EFL learners.” To answer this question, the learners’ mean scores to the items of the questionnaire on WTC were investigated by running one-way ANOVA.

**Table 1**

*Results of One- Way ANOVA for Learners’ WTC after the Treatment*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	13.028	2	6.514	23.555	.000
Within Groups	8.296	30	.277		
Total	21.324	32			

As Table 1 shows, the P value is significant at 95% confidence interval,  $p=0.000$ ; therefore, the first null hypothesis, indicating no significant differences between the three groups in terms of their WT, is rejected. Thus, the regulatory focus-orientation had significant effects on learners’ WTC. Then, in order to see which group had a higher WTC, post-hoc Tukey’s test was conducted.

**Table 2**

*Results of Post-Hoc Tukey’s Test for Post WTC*

(I) VAR00003	(J) VAR00003	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
promotion	Prevention	1.41065*	.19951	.000	.9188	1.9025
	Control	1.42883*	.19951	.000	.9370	1.9207
Prevention	promotion	-1.41065*	.19951	.000	-1.9025	-.9188
	Control	.01818	.19951	.995	-.4737	.5100
Control	promotion	-1.42883*	.19951	.000	-1.9207	-.9370
	Prevention	-.01818	.19951	.995	-.5100	.4737

\*.The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results of Tukey’s test indicated that there is a significant difference between the promotion and prevention groups in terms of their WTC. In addition, there is a significant difference between the

promotion group and the control group regarding the learners' WTC. In other words, those EFL learners who were treated with promotion method were more willing to communicate in their classes than those who were prevented from speaking and those who were neither promoted nor prevented. However, the difference between the prevention group and the control group was not significant in terms of their WTC.

The second research question addressed "the effects of regulatory focus orientation on speaking fluency of Iranian EFL learners." To answer this question, the learners' speaking were analyzed using the fluency measure (materials section), and one-Way ANOVA was run on their posttest scores once for the number of syllables produced per minute of speech (Rate A) and then for the number of meaningful syllables per minute of speech (Rate B).

**Table 3**  
*One-Way ANOVA on the Results of Fluency Scores in Posttest*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4736.098	2	2368.049	22.784	.000
Within Groups	4053.391	39	103.933		
Total	8789.489	41			

Table 3 indicates that P value is significant at 95% confidence interval,  $p=0.000$ ; therefore, the second hypothesis, indicating no significant differences between two experimental groups and the control group regarding the effects of regulatory focus orientation on speaking fluency of Iranian EFL learners, is rejected. As a result, there is significant difference between two experimental groups and the control group regarding the effects of regulatory focus orientation on speaking fluency of Iranian EFL learners in terms of number of syllables (Rate A). In the next stage, to see which group had a better improvement in terms of speaking fluency, post-hoc Tukey's test was conducted. The results of Tukey's test indicated that there is a significant difference between the performance of the promotion group and the prevention group on one hand and the performance of the promotion group and the control group on the other hand. In other words, those EFL learners who were receiving promotion had a better performance than the students who were treated with prevention or not promotion and prevention. In addition, the difference between the performance of the prevention group and control group was not significant, which means that both prevention and conventional methods had almost the same effects on the learners' speaking fluency.

**Table 4**  
*One-Way ANOVA on the Results of Fluency Scores in Posttest*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2184.442	2	1092.221	9.156	.001
Within Groups	4652.229	39	119.288		
Total	6836.671	41			

Based on Table 4, the results of Rate B analysis also indicates that P-value is significant at 95% confidence interval,  $p=0.001$ ; therefore, the related hypothesis, indicating no significant differences between two experimental groups and the control group on the number of meaningful syllables, is rejected. Therefore, there is significant difference between two experimental groups and the control group on the number of meaningful syllables. In the next stage, a post-hoc Tukey's test (Tables 5 and 6) was conducted to see the differences between the group and their improvements in terms of Rate A and Rate B.

**Table 5**

*The Results of Post-Hoc Tukey's Test for Fluency Scores in Posttest for the Number of Syllables*

(I) Scores	(J) Scores	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Promotion	Prevention	16.91071*	3.85326	.000	7.5230	26.2984
	Control	25.57143*	3.85326	.000	16.1837	34.9591
Prevention	Promotion	-16.91071*	3.85326	.000	-26.2984	-7.5230
	Control	8.66071	3.85326	.076	-.7270	18.0484
Control	Promotion	-25.57143*	3.85326	.000	-34.9591	-16.1837
	Prevention	-8.66071	3.85326	.076	-18.0484	.7270

**Table 6**

*The Results of Post-Hoc Tukey's Test for Fluency Scores in Posttest for the Number of Meaningful Syllables*

(I) Scores	(J) Scores	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Promotion	Prevention	14.77643*	4.12809	.003	4.7191	24.8337
	Control	15.77214*	4.12809	.001	5.7148	25.8294
Prevention	Promotion	-14.77643*	4.12809	.003	-24.8337	-4.7191
	Control	.99571	4.12809	.968	-9.0616	11.0530
Control	Promotion	-15.77214*	4.12809	.001	-25.8294	-5.7148
	Prevention	-.99571	4.12809	.968	-11.0530	9.0616

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results of Tukey test indicated that there is a significant difference between the performance of the promotion group and the prevention group on one hand and the performance of the promotion group and the control group on the other hand. In other words, those EFL learners receiving promotion had a better performance than the students who were treated with prevention or not promotion and prevention. In addition, the difference between the performance of the prevention group and control group was not significant, which means that both these methods had almost the same effect on the learners.

## 5. Discussion

The results of this study revealed that the promotion condition could help EFL learners increase their speaking fluency and WTC in the classroom and prevention condition had detrimental effects on their speaking fluency and WTC as according to MacIntyre (1994), communication apprehension affects WTC. The results of the present study are not in line with those of Davoudian Dehkordi et al. (2021) whose results did not reveal a significant causal relationship between participants' motivational orientation or task condition, and their fluency or accuracy during the tasks. However, the results are in agreement with those of Zarinabadi and Saberi (2021) who found that self-referential, normative, and promotion feedback significantly improved WTC and communication competence and reduced anxiety levels. In addition, the findings lend support to those of Prasetyanto et al. (2019) who found that teacher reinforcement in an EFL classroom influences students' WTC, particularly affecting their self-confidence, interpersonal motivation, and intergroup motivation.

In general, the results of this study confirm previous research that teacher's encouraging or discouraging phrases has significant effects on anxiety (Horwitz, 1986) and learners' willingness to engage in classroom activities (Zarrinabadi, 2014). In the same vein, Slimanis' study (2018) agrees with the current study since both studies pointed to the significant relationship between the students' WTC and their speaking performance. They found that communication is affected by the teacher's encouragement to the students to participate. The other part of the results of this study, that is the better performance and speaking fluency of the promotion group contradicts the results of the study conducted by Han and McDonough (2018) who found that the learners in the prevention condition were more accurate and fluent than the learners in the promotion condition.

The findings of the present study confirmed that the learners who feel anxiety during the class are more likely to consider themselves to be unable to communicate. Prasetyanto et al. (2019) reported that teacher reinforcement in the EFL classroom could help influence learners' WTC through affective factors, including self-confidence, interpersonal motivation, and intergroup motivation. Sapolsky (1998) highlighted that stress can be minimized by creating a supportive environment which supports the results of the present study. When the students perceive themselves to be competent, they take part in classroom activities with no stress and anxiety and try to find situations to show that their English has really improved. Such attempts led to more classroom participation and engagement in classroom tasks and activities (Prasetyanto et al., 2019).

Based on the findings of the present study, "face protection" makes students to be less likely to be involved in classroom communication because they are more sensitive towards others' judgments about their language behavior (Wen & Clement, 2003). Preventing students from speaking threatens their faces and make them anxious as according to Aubrey (2011), L2 anxiety often stems from a fear of exposure or risk of being judged by peers who may notice imperfections, and therefore, make them to avoid risks, and the expression of their feelings, emotions, and

thoughts in the classroom is frightening for them. Interrupting students to correct their mistakes decreases their participation and WTC (Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012), and their sensitive inclination causes minimal use of the target language to avoid making mistakes and its negative consequences (Papi et al., 2019). The teachers' use of negative phrases, such as "no, that's not correct" or correcting the students increases peer pressure since they compare themselves with the other classmates who receive encouraging phrases, which results in unfriendly atmosphere in the class that makes students afraid of talking in front of others as they feel that their English is not good which, in turn, creates doubt and stress about speaking in other sessions.

The low WTC in the students of the control group is due to the fact that their motivation for language learning reduced over the semester as they did not find anything special to increase their motivation and interest and they gradually became less willing as there was no encouragement or motivation. The students in this group received no encouragement on their performances and could not evaluate their progress and if they had any anxiety or stress before the class, they could not reduce them. Interestingly, the control group had better scores than the prevention condition which might be due to the fact that in the prevention condition the teacher provided feedback on unsuccessful performance, which seemed to create unfavorable results even in comparison to providing no feedback (Johnson et al., 2012).

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of the present study was exploring the effects of regulatory focus orientations on Iranian EFL learners' speaking fluency and WTC. The results showed that the promotion feedback increased the Iranian EFL students' WTC and speaking fluency, while the prevention feedback negatively influenced their WTC and speaking fluency. It can be concluded that many students speak and participate in the classroom only if they are absolutely sure their speech is correct since they believe that accuracy is important while speaking. They pay more attention to the grammaticality of their sentences before producing them and if they are unsure of their accurate speech, they prefer to remain silent. As argued by Mercer and Littleton (2007), learning is a social and communicative process and teachers have a central role in fostering communication and the relation with students during the daily learning activities. Teachers can support and help students to actively participate in the lesson. In general, from the results of this study, it can be concluded that teachers play a central role in encouraging active communication among their students. The teacher is considered to be the primary source of making the classroom environment conducive for learning by establishing a participatory learning community and a caring environment, wherein learners feel safe and are confident of their participation in the classroom to express themselves without anxiety. The teacher's behavior and orientation and their encouragement and motivation are important factors influencing the students' willingness to communicate inside the classroom and

can influence the students' motivation to participate in communication situations outside the classroom (Marentič Požarnik & Plut Pregelj, 2009).

This study had some implications for EFL teachers and EFL learners. EFL teachers can create a less threatening classroom environment to reduce anxiety and encourage students' motivation by presenting different motivating factors and reducing the use of teachers' authority. EFL teachers should be aware of the reasons for students' unwillingness to speak, and overcome this problem by being friendly, motivating, and academically reliable, and they should know how to create a supporting atmosphere for learning in the class. Moreover, EFL students should value the importance of the speaking skills and develop their oral proficiency through developing their WTC inside the classroom and seeking communication opportunities to communicate outside of the class. As EFL learners usually do not have the opportunity to use the L2 outside the classroom, the language classroom is the best context for practicing and communicating the L2 in EFL contexts and they should seek every opportunity to improve their speaking skills, especially their fluency. Moreover, studying about WTC can help L2 learners understand what factors affect their WTC. As a result, they could become aware of their own communication preferences, and consequently, foster their WTC and speaking skills.

This study suffered from some limitations. The data for the current study were collected from Iranian upper-intermediate students who were learning English as a foreign language and the results might not be generalized to other groups with different L1 backgrounds and at different language learning proficiency levels. Therefore, future studies could choose participants who are from different proficiency levels and different L1 backgrounds to replicate the present study. In addition, this study did not control for the learners' personality traits, such as extroversion and introversion. As a result, further studies could replicate the present study considering the role of learners' personality traits. The study did not consider different types of motivations, including the intrinsic and extrinsic or integrative and instrumental motivations. Thus, future studies could explore the effects of regulatory focus orientations on EFL learners' speaking skills and WTC regarding different types of motivations. Furthermore, participants' gender did not take into account in this study; as a result, the role of gender in future studies could also be taken into consideration to see whether they are affected by prevention and promotion in different ways or not. In addition, the current study only used survey, and future studies could employ other data collection tools, such as interview and classroom observation to add validity to the findings of current study. Future studies could investigate whether promotion and prevention conditions have significant impacts on changing language learners' attitudes towards speaking skills. Finally, future researchers are suggested to conduct an empirical study to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions toward employing promotion and prevention phrases in improving students' WTC and speaking fluency.

## References

- Alemi, M. (2012). Willingness to communicate in English among Iranian EFL engineering students. *Teaching English Language, 6*(1), 103-119.
- Avanaki, H. J., & Sadeghi, B. (2013). English language teaching (ELT) in Iranian universities in brief. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 3*(12), 2296-2302.  
<https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.12.2296-2302>
- Baas, M. M., De Dreu, C. K. W., & Nijstad, B. A. (2008). A meta-analysis of 25 years of mood-creativity research: Hedonic tone, activation, or regulatory focus?. *Psychological Bulletin, 134*(6), 779–806.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012815>
- Baghaei, P., Dourakhshan, A., & Salavati, O. (2012). The relationship between willingness to communicate and success in learning English as a foreign language. *MJAL, 4*(2), 53–67.
- Bergil, A. S. (2016). The influence of willingness to communicate on overall speaking skills among EFL learners. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2*(32), 177-187.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.10.043>
- Bernales, C. (2016). Towards a comprehensive concept of willingness to communicate: Learners' predicted and self-reported participation in the foreign language classroom. *System, 56*(12), 35-52.
- Brockner, J., & Higgins, E. T. (2001). Regulatory focus theory: Implications for the study of emotions at work. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 86*(1), 35–66.  
<https://doi.org/10.1006/obhd.2001.2972>
- Cao, Y. (2011). Interactional context and willingness to communicate: A comparison of behavior in whole class, group and dyadic interaction. *System, 34*, 480-493.
- Clement, R., Baker, S. C., & MacIntyre, P. (2003). Willingness to communicate in a second language the effects of context, norms, and vitality. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 22*(2), 190-209.
- Clements, D. H., & Sarama, J. (2003). Strip mining for gold; research and policy in educational technology-a response to fool's gold. *Educational Technology Review, 11*(1), 7-69.
- Crowe, E., & Higgins, E. T. (1997). Regulatory focus and strategic inclinations: Promotion and prevention in decision-making. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 69*(2), 117–132.
- Davoudian, P., Hashemian, M., & Alipour, J. (2021). Impact of regulatory focus orientations on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' fluency and accuracy in an L2 oral task performance. *Journal of teaching English Language and Literature Society of Iran, 15*(1), 1-28.
- Dornyei, Z. (2003). Attitudes, Orientations, and Motivations in Language Learning: Advances in Theory, Research, and Applications. *Language Learning, 53*(S1), 3–32.
- Ellis, R. (2005). Principles of instructed language learning. *Science Direct, 33*, 209-224.
- Fallah, N. (2014). Willingness to communicate in English, communication self-confidence, motivation, shyness and teacher immediacy among Iranian English-major undergraduates: A structural equation modeling approach. *Learning and Individual Differences, 30*, 140–147.
- Goldoust, A., & Ranjbar, H. (2017). Willingness or unwillingness? The investigation of Iranian EFL learners' tendency toward willingness to communicate. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research, 4*(1), 260-267.
- Gorman, C. A., Meriac, J. P., Overstreet, B. L., Apodaca, S., McIntyre, A. L., Park, P., & Godbey, J. N. (2012). A meta-analysis of the regulatory focus nomological network: Work-related antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 80*(1), 160–172.

- <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2011.07.005>
- Han, Y., & McDonough, K. (2018). Korean L2 speakers' regulatory focus and oral task performance. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 56(2), 181-203.
- Harmer, J. (2015). *The practice of English language teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Longman
- Higgins, E. T. (1987). Self-discrepancy: A theory relating self and affect. *Psychological Review*, 94, 319-340.
- Higgins, E. T. (1997). Beyond pleasure and pain. *American Psychologist*, 52(12), 1280-1300. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.12.1280>.
- Higgins, E. T. (1998). Promotion and prevention: Regulatory focus as a motivational principle. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 30, pp. 1-46). Academic Press.
- Higgins, E. T. (2000). Making a good decision: Value from fit. *American Psychologist*, 55(11), 1217-1230
- Higgins, E. T., Friedman, R. S., Harlow, R. E., Idson, L. C., Ayduk, O. N., & Taylor, A. (2001). Achievement orientations from subjective histories of success: Promotion pride versus prevention pride. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 31(1), 3-23.
- Higgins, S. (2014). Does ICT Improve Learning and Teaching in Schools?. *Creative Education*, 6(18).
- Hodis, G. M., & Hodis, F. A. (2021). Examining motivation predictors of key communication constructs: An investigation of regulatory focus, need satisfaction, and need frustration. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 180(2), 45-66.
- Horwitz, E. K. (1986). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 112-126.
- Hughes, R. (2011). *Teaching and researching speaking*. Longman.
- Hüseyin, Ö, Demirezen, M., & Pourfeiz, J. (2015). Willingness to communicate of EFL learners in Turkish context. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 37, 269-275.
- Husna, L. (2019). Students' unwillingness to speak in EFL classroom from cultural perspective. <https://doi.org/10.31227/osf.io/py7ur>
- Jongsermtrakoon, H., & Vibulphol, J. (2010). The model of English communication of secondary school students in Thai contexts. *An Online Journal of Education*, 5(2), 674-688.
- Kang, S. J. (2005). Dynamic emergence of situational willingness to communicate in a second language. *System*, 33(2), 277-292.
- Keller, J. (2008). On the development of regulatory focus: The role of parenting styles. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, 354-364.
- Khany, R., & Mansouri Nejad, A. (2016). L2 willingness to communicate, openness to experience, extraversion, and L2 unwillingness to communicate: The Iranian EFL context. *RELC Journal*, 48(2), 33-54.
- Kopenen, M., & Riggenbach, H. (2000). Overview: Varying perspectives on fluency. In H. Riggenbach (Eds.). *Perspectives on fluency* (pp. 5-24). Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Koran, S. (2015). The role of teachers in developing learners' speaking skill. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6(1), 72-80.
- Lee, J. S., & Drajeti, N. A. (2019). Affective variables and informal digital learning of English: Keys to willingness to communicate in a second language. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 35(5), 168-182. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.5177>
- Lee, J. S., & Hsieh, J. C. (2019). Affective variables and willingness to communicate of EFL learners in in-class, out-of-class, and digital contexts. *System*, 82, 63-73.



- <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.03.002>
- Lennon, P. (2000). The lexical element in spoken second language fluency. In H. Riggenbach (Eds.), *Perspectives on fluency* (pp. 25-42). The University of Michigan Press.
- Leong, L. M., & Ahmadi, S. M. (2017). An analysis of factors influencing learners' English speaking skill. *International Journal of Research in English Education (IJREE)*, 2(1), 34-41.
- Li, Y. (2016). The role of promotion and prevention orientations in secondary school students' motivation to study. A qualitative study. A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education Victoria University of Wellington
- MacIntyre, P. D. (1994). Variables underlying willingness to communicate: A causal analysis. *Communication Research Reports*, 11(2), 135-142.
- MacIntyre, P. D. (2007). Willingness to communicate in the second language: Understanding the decision to speak as a volitional process. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91, 564-576.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K.A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situated model of confidence and affiliation. *Modern Language Journal*, 82, 545-562.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Babin, P.A., & Clément, R. (1999). Willingness to communicate: Antecedents and consequences. *Communication Quarterly*, 47(2), 215-229.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Baker, S. C., Clément, R., & Conrod, S. (2001). Willingness to communicate, social support, and language-learning orientations of immersion students. *Studies in second language acquisition*, 23(3), 369-388.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Baker, S. C., Clément, R., & Donovan, L. A. (2003). Talking in order to learn: Willingness to communicate and intensive language programs. *Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes*, 59(4), 589-607
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Charos, C. (1996). Personality, attitudes, and affect as predictors of second language communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 15, 3-26.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Legatto, J. J. (2011). A dynamic system approach to willingness to communicate: Developing an idiodynamic method to capture rapidly changing affect. *Applied Linguistics*, 32(2), 149-171.
- McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond, V. P. (1987). Willingness to communicate and interpersonal communication. In J. C. McCroskey, & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *Personality and Interpersonal Communication* (pp. 129-156). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Michel, M. (2017). Complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF). In Shawn Loewen & Masatoshi Sato, *The Routledge Handbook of Instructed Second Language Acquisition*. Routledge.
- Molden, D. C., & Miele, D. B. (2008). The origins and influences of promotion-focused and prevention-focused achievement motivations. In M. Maehr, S. Karabenick, T. Urdan, *Advances in Motivation and Achievement: Social Psychological Perspectives* (pp.81-118).
- Murphy, R. J., Gray, S. A., Straja, S. R., & Bogert, M. C. (2004). Student learning preferences and teaching implications. *J Dental Educ*, 68, 859- 866.
- Namaziandost, E., Shatalebi, V., & Nasri, M. (2019). The impact of cooperative learning on developing speaking ability and motivation toward learning English. *Journal of Language and Education*, 5(3), 83-101. <https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2019.9809>.
- Papi, M., & Khajavy, Gh. H. (2021). Motivational mechanisms underlying second language achievement: A regulatory focus perspective. *Language Learning*, 71(2), 44-58.

- Parupalli, S. R. (2019). The importance of speaking skills in English classrooms. *Alford Council of International English & Literature Journal*, 2(2), 6-28
- Prasetyan, B. T., Wibawani, D. A., Wardani, E. N., Drajadi, N. A. (2019). Teacher's reinforcements affecting students' willingness to communicate (WTC): A photovoice in EFL classroom. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 4(1), 57-71
- Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. Cambridge University Press
- Sassenberg, K., & Hamstra, M. R. W. (2017). The intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics of self-regulation in the leadership process. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 1(55), 38-57. Elsevier Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.aesp.2016.08.001>
- Sassenberg, K., Jonas, K. J., Shah, J. Y., & Brazy, P. C. (2007). Why some groups just feel better: The regulatory fit of group power. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(2), 249-267. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.2.249>
- Sassenberg, K., & Vliek, M. L. W. (2019). Self-regulation strategies and regulatory fit. In K. Sassenberg & M. L. W. Vliek (Eds.), *Social psychology in action* (pp. 51-61). Springer Nature. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13788-5\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13788-5_4)
- Schokker, M. C., Keers, J. C., Bouma, J., Links, T. P., Sanderman, R., R, H., & Hagedoorn, M. (2010). The impact of social comparison information on motivation in patients with diabetes as a function of regulatory focus and self-efficacy. *Health Psychology*, 29(4), 438-445.
- Scholer, A. A., Zou, X., Fujita, K., Stroessner, S. J., & Higgins, E. T. (2010). When risk seeking becomes a motivational necessity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 99, 215.
- Slimani, S. (2018). The impact of the willingness to communicate on EFL learners' speaking performance inside the classroom: The case of third year LMD students of English at Guelma University. <http://dspace.univ-guelma.dz/jspui/handle/123456789/2525>
- Tarone, E. (2005). Speaking in a second language. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 485-502). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Thonbury, S. (2000). *How to teach speaking*. Longman
- Thornbury, S. (2005). *How to teach speaking*. Longman
- Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching. Practice and theory*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wu, C. P., & Lin, H.-J. (2014). Anxiety about speaking a foreign language as a mediator of the relation between motivation and willingness to communicate. *Perceptual and motor skills*, 119(3), 785-798. <https://doi.org/10.2466/22.pms.119c32z7>
- Xie, Q. M. (2011). Willingness to communicate in English among secondary school students in the rural Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. AUT University, New Zealand.
- Zarrinabadi, N. (2014). Facilitating willingness to communicate in the second language classroom and beyond. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 87(5), 213-217.
- Zarinabadi, N., & Saberi, E. (2021). The effects of reference of comparison (self-referential vs. normative) and regulatory focus (promotion vs. prevention) feedback on EFL learners' willingness to communicate. *Language Teaching Research*, 1-21.