

Teacher-student rapport and willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language: A study of teachers' and students' perceptions in the Chilean context

Matías Reyes

Escuela Los Triguales - Temuco

matiasreyest@gmail.com

Daniela Ortega

Colegio El Labrador - Victoria

daniortega0605@gmail.com

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Abstract

In order to successfully learn the target language, *EFL* students must devote an important amount of time producing the language. However, students do not often feel confident to speak in English in front of their classmates and teacher. To analyse this issue, this article examines the association between the teacher-student rapport and the student's willingness to communicate in English. The methodology was mixed, not experimental and correlational, including a sample of 140 students and 5 teachers from southern Chile.

Firstly, the results show that the teacher-student relationship is superior among male students and, furthermore semi-private schools possess higher levels of rapport compared to public schools. Additionally, speaking student's anxiety and the number of students per classroom were also considered as significant factors influencing student's *L2 WTC*.

Introduction

Participation is a remarkable element within communication whether we consider learning a second or a foreign language (Brown, 2001; Luoma, 2004). Warayet (2011) suggests that participation is an action in which students interact through verbal and non-verbal communication. According to Ur (1997) there are two types of interaction when communicating, they are classified into active and passive interactions. In this study, we are going to focus on the active interaction which is related to spoken communication. Speaking may be considered as the paramount part among the four communicative skills considering people generally refer to “speakers” of a language (Ur, 1996) instead of “writers” or “readers” of a language. Furthermore, Saeed Al-Sobhi and Preece (2018) agreed that the use of spoken communication is far more frequent than written in everyday language. Additionally, speaking as a communicative skill is considered to be a process where meaning is built and shared by interlocutors in different contexts (Chaney & Burk, 1998). Nonetheless, there are often cases inside the classroom where even students who though they are proficient in relation to linguistic competence, they commonly abstain from speaking in front of the class (Başöz & Erten, 2019). On that account, a genuine concern originates from this phenomenon so as to ascertain whether teacher-student relationships influence the participation during English lessons.

The bond between teachers and their students or rapport is defined by Brown (2001) as ‘a relationship based on mutual trust and respect which leads students to feel capable, competent and creative’. Rapport may be essential to increment students’ motivation and participation into the learning of English as a foreign language as this element concerns the connection between two or more human beings, to the psychological and emotional harmony needed to produce changes in one of the parts involved (Tiberius, 1993). This applied to teaching gains vital importance. A teacher connected with their students makes the learning process far more enjoyable, especially if the process involves the creation, interest, promotion and motivation of students (Fleming, 2003). This is the case of the English subject as a foreign language where the active rapport factor would be considered as the key within the teaching-learning process of a foreign language.

Due to the relevance of the English language, the Chilean government has fostered various public educational policies and programmes. One of the most highlighted programmes is called “Inglés Abre Puertas” in which the focus not only relies on the improvement of teaching and learning processes but also on the development of in-service *EFL* teachers (Arancibia et al., 2011). Nevertheless, Arancibia et al. (2011) indicate that in Chile there is a tendency in which most high school students demonstrate limited English proficiency.

A number of scholars suggest that this trend is partly explained by a lack of strong bonds of trust between teachers and their students (Rodríguez-Perez, 2012; Sánchez et al., 2013), and accordingly, this creates difficulties in boosting students' motivation and a sense of familiarity inside the classroom. Buskist and Saville, (2001) explain the relationship between teacher and student is frequently seen by researchers as complex in terms of exploring it in depth. Hence, this relationship is incorporated into this study with the aim of examining its influence on the teaching and learning process of English as a foreign language considering the fact that the classroom is the exclusive site where students can practise the target language (Suryati, 2015).

Based on it, the purpose of this study focuses on the perception that teachers and high school students possess about their own teacher-student rapport and how this relationship is associated with the students' *L2* willingness to communicate during English lessons. *WTC* has been arousing the interest of scholars over the years and MacIntyre et al. (2001) defined *WTC* as the intention to commence an act of communication when an opportunity appears. Since the teacher's role goes beyond merely teaching specific knowledge of an area, Hildebrand (2002) points out that good teachers must have strong confidence in themselves and in their students to interact without limitations. Moreover, Vilar-Beltrán, (1995); García et al. (2011) concur in teacher's practices may impact on students' trust and motivation. Notwithstanding, no substantial research has been done on how rapport and *WTC* may be affecting each other.

Thus, it is critically important to comprehend the potential relationship between teacher and student bonds and the willingness of students to communicate in *L2*, since it may provide valuable orientations to teachers upon teaching strategies and approaches. Concerning teachers' tasks, Sánchez et al. (2013) agree that results of activities will be positive by creating a non-threatening work environment in which students may feel confident both individually and with the rest of the class. Furthermore, with this study, the researchers try to deepen the understanding about the possible benefits of rapport within the learning of the English language in Chilean students. Particularly, in the strategies used by teachers to form a relationship with their students and their potential impacts associated with different components (attitudinal, motivational, affective) that may evoke a stimulus or interest in the interaction and willingness to communicate in English, all this with the sole purpose of guiding current and future Chilean teachers on the improvement of their own practices and methodologies.

Methodology

Sample

Seven different classes or groups from four different high schools participated in this study comprising a total of 140 students. The age of students oscillated between 15 and 18 years old. Owing to access issues, convenience sampling was implemented to select the subjects. From the entire sample, 51% of the participants were male students, whilst 49% were female. Additionally, this research encompassed a considerable number of participants who belong to the Mapuche ethnic group.

Regarding this extent, 48% of the respondents indicated they considered themselves as Mapuche. Moreover, 42% of the participants belonged to 2nd grade high and 58% were students from 3rd grade high.

The groups which took part of this study are all from schools located in Chile, specifically in La Araucanía Region. Two of the schools are in Cholchol, one in Temuco and one in Victoria. The different demographic characteristics of the sample are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic profile

		n	%
Gender	Female	69	49.3
	Male	71	50.7
Ethnicity	Mapuche	67	47.9
	Non-Mapuche	73	52.1
Groups	Group 1	30	21.4
	Group 2	27	19.3
	Group 3	31	22.1
	Group 4	6	4.3
	Group 5	14	10.0
	Group 6	26	18.6
	Group 7	6	4.3
Schools	School 1	30	21.4 ¹
	School 2	58	41.4 ²
	School 3	20	14.3 ³
	School 4	32	22.9 ⁴

¹ Group 1

² Groups 2 & 3

³ Groups 4 & 5

⁴ Groups 6 & 7

Instruments

A general sociodemographic questionnaire was utilised to collect data associated with each participant's profile (gender, school level, ethnicity). Quantitatively, two questionnaires were used to measure the respondents' perception about the teacher-student rapport and the students' *WTC*. The Professor-Student Rapport Scale (Wilson et al., 2010) and the Willingness to Communicate in a Foreign Language Scale (*WTC-FLS*) (Baghaei & Dourakhshan, 2012). The former contains 44 items based on a likert scale beginning with "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and Cronbach's alpha for this study was $\alpha = 0,95$. The latter questionnaire has three dimensions, a) willingness to communicate with native speakers (*WTC-NS*), b) willingness to communicate with non-native speakers, and (*WTC-NNS*) c) willingness to communicate in school context (*WTC-SC*). Cronbach's alpha for the three dimensions was above $\alpha = 0,80$. Despite the three dimensions, only the results from the last dimension are going to be reported due to school context is the focus of this article.

Qualitatively, a semi-structured interview was conducted based on the following research questions related to the teacher's perception about the relationship between the willingness to communicate in English and the teacher-student rapport:

- What are the teachers' perceptions related to their students' participation and interaction in *L2*?
- What are the teachers' perceptions regarding their students' motivation?
- What are the teachers' perceptions about their own relationship with their students?

Procedure

The participants were voluntarily recruited at their schools through prior communication with schools' principals. All of them were invited and elaborately informed about the background and aim of the study. The questionnaires were applied at the schools' facilities during English class hours. The survey application time was approximately 15 minutes. Subsequently, the data gathered was stored on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and exported to the SPSS software afterwards. Conversely, teachers' interviews were recorded on digital devices, transcribed into a word processor, and lastly exported to the Atlas.ti software. All the data was collected over a period of 3 weeks.

Analysis

Quantitative information analysis was carried out using SPSS (v20) software. Prior to the analysis, values were examined in order to verify accurate data entry. To treat the demographic information, it was submitted to a frequency analysis.

Then, the following negative items 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, 17, 19, 23, 27, 29, 34 and 43 were analysed as new and different variables. After that, the two instruments and their dimensions were submitted to reliability tests through an internal consistency method.

Ultimately, every factor was taken into account as a variable which, in turn, was included in the normality, correlation and independent-sample t tests.

To analyse the qualitative data, it was processed using Atlas.ti software by implementing a content analysis method for each participant interview (Cáceres, 2003). This analysis explored narrative passages in texts and included the following stages based on Lieblich et al., (1998) 'categorical-content perspective': selecting text, defining content categories and sorting material into categories (coding), and drawing conclusions from the results.

Results

As the mixed design nature of this study, quantitative and qualitative results are divided and shown separately in this section. The first results concerns the students' perception of the teacher-student rapport, whereas the second portrays the findings from the content analysis categorization. These categories are summarised and illustrated with quotations from the participants. Real names of the respondents are anonymous in order to protect their identities.

Quantitative results

According to gender results from the Professor-Student Rapport Scale, descriptive data shows male students have a slightly better relationship with their teachers. In terms of ethnicity, findings suggest that non-mapuche students reached a higher level of rapport in relation to their Mapuche counterparts. Regarding the *WTC-SC* scale, results favour female students reaching higher levels of willingness to communicate in the school context. Similarly, Mapuche students showed higher levels of *WTC-SC* compared to non-mapuche students. Mean score results are outlined in table 2.

Table 2
Mean scores

		Rapport	WTC-SC
Gender	Female	3.88	3.61
	Male	3.89	3.40
Ethnicity	Mapuche	3.86	3.52
	Non-Mapuche	3.90	3.49

Institutional differences

Firstly, normality and homogeneity assumptions of variance were verified in order to conduct independent samples t-tests. In the case of institution differences, Levene's test ($F=0.349$; $p>0.05$) indicated these assumptions were accomplished.

Subsequently, a t-student test showed that there was a significant difference which favoured semi-private students ($M = 4.07$; $DE = 0.48$; $n = 50$) over those from public schools ($M = 3.77$; $DE = 0.54$; $n = 90$), $t(138) = -3.14$; $p = 0.002$; 95% *IC* [-0.47; -0.10] in relation to the teacher-student rapport. After that, the size effect for this difference was calculated and classified as an intermediate effect ($d=0.554$). Conversely, there were no significant differences between public schools ($M= 3.48$; $DE= 0.80$; $n= 90$) and their semi-private equivalents ($M= 3.54$; $DE= 0.60$; $n= 50$), $t(138) = -0.46$; $p= 0.645$; 95% *IC* [-0.31; 0.19] concerning the *WTC-SC* results.

Ethnic differences

With regard to ethnic differences, there were no statistically significant differences in either rapport and *WTC-FLS* scales. Results from the rapport questionnaire showed ($M=3.86$; $DE=0.55$; $n=67$) for Mapuche students whereas ($M=3.90$; $DE=0.53$; $n=73$), $t(138)= -0.41$; $p=0.680$; 95% *IC* [-0.22; 0.14] for non-mapuche students. Perception associated with *WTC-SC* yielded ($M=3.52$; $DE=0.61$; $n=67$) for mapuche students and ($M=3.49$; $DE=0.83$; $n=73$), $t(132)= -0.22$; $p=0.825$; 95% *IC* [-0.21; 0.27] for non-mapuche students.

Group differences

From the one-way *ANOVA* test analysis, which is used to compare more than two independent groups, results demonstrated that there are significant differences amongst the 7 participating groups. Group 5 obtained the most positive perception towards the teacher-student rapport. On the contrary, group 6 showed the lowest perception. According to these results, therefore, the equality of means hypothesis is rejected amidst the groups $F(6.133) = 4.32$; $p= 0.001$; with a big size effect ($f= 0.4528$).

Similarly, significant differences were found in the respondent's perception connected with the *WTC-SC* sub-scale. In this case, group 7 reached the highest whilst group 3 the lowest perception. Hence, the equality of means hypothesis related to *WTC-SC* is rejected $F(6.133) = 2.92$; $p = 0.011$; with an intermediate size effect ($f= 0.3626$).

Correlations

After validating normal distributions and with the intention of measuring the size between the variables analysed, Pearson coefficient correlation was performed.

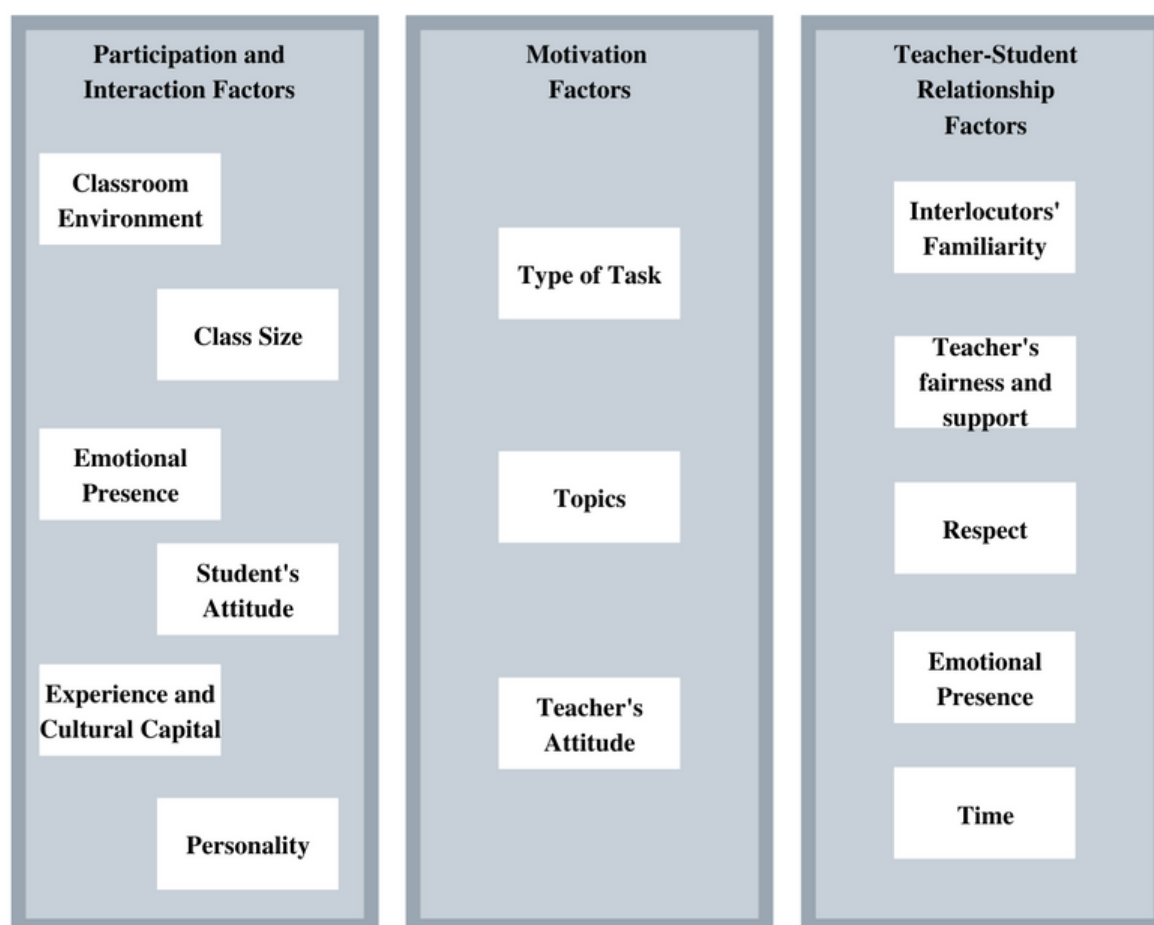
Data analysis evidenced the existence of a positive correlation between the teacher-student relationship (rapport) and the *L2 WTC* in the school context (*WTC-SC*) $r(140)= 0.21$; $p=<0.05$. This value explains the 4.41% of the variance.

Qualitative results

The qualitative analysis was executed from a rigorous analysis from the transcriptions of the interviews using the software Atlas.ti, creating categories that provide answers to the questions of the investigation. The questions of the interviews were intended to know the perception that the five teachers had about the following 3 subtopics of the interview: i) participation and interaction, ii) motivation and, iii) the teacher-student relationship. Next, every subtopic is thoroughly explained based on the research questions. Resulting categories are portrayed in figure 1.

Figure 1

Categorization according to subtopics.



Subtopic 1. Participation and interaction

In relation to the question “What perception does the teacher have about the participation and interaction of their students in English classes?” and as a consequence of the later analysis of the information obtained, the following categories were identified: i) classroom environment, ii) class size, iii) emotional presence, iv) student’s attitude, v) experience and culture capital, vi) personality. Every category, definitely, represents an influential factor in every subtopic which emerged from the information provided by the interviewees.

Classroom environment

As stated by the participating teachers, classroom environment may influence either positively or negatively the student’s participation and interaction in the classroom. All of the teachers interviewed agree that building and maintaining a good in-class environment is critical if they want students to participate and be willing to speak in English during the lessons.

“... when I told them to have a good time - because they needed to understand that it was a game- they started to relax and began to speak more in English, so a big part of our job is to make children relax and enjoy the activities...” (Teacher 1).

In addition, a male interviewee underscored the use of humour in the classroom as an effective strategy he adopted.

For him, telling funny and occasional jokes during lessons may produce a convivial and less tense atmosphere in the classroom. Accordingly, teachers indirectly encourage students to participate and interact.

“.... So, those are the strategies that I use, sometimes, like jokes, always in a respectful manner, but I always use those resources and it works for me, so the students already have a different disposition towards the lesson” (Teacher 5).

Class size

This element is mentioned by four of the five teachers interviewed. They give considerable importance to the participation and interaction of their students during English classes. These teachers admit that having less students in a class would boost the interaction and would promote the participation of all the students during the English class. This results in having more time to plan other kinds of activities, to correct oversights and give suitable feedback for each student. Here is an example related to the previous information:

“The number of students in the classroom should be definitely less, (...) generally, the number of students here ranges from 35 to 40 per classroom, it is very tough (...). So, a better class would definitely be with fewer students per classroom” (Teacher 1).

Emotional presence

The emotional presence is a factor that would affect the student's participation. The interviewed teachers point out that several times the interaction is often obstructed by the student's fear to participate, in addition to their anxiety as it is mentioned before. The fear of communicating in English is something that directly affects the willingness to communicate, since students feel that it is difficult for them to produce some English sounds and/or words correctly. They are afraid of making mistakes or feeling embarrassed while performing a task, and consequently they may get deficient marks because of this. Considering this, teacher 1 points out the following:

“There is a thought that in Chile we punish mistakes a lot, so students, for fear of their parent's criticism, don't make mistakes or don't want to make them. Additionally, the wish to pronounce every word just like a native speaker is also related to this” (Teacher 1).

Students' attitude

All of the interviewees indicated that they evidence anxiety and insecurity from their students during English lessons. As a consequence, pupils develop a negative attitude towards class participation, this tendency seems to become greater during speaking activities and talking in front of the class. Based on this statement, 4 out of 5 teachers agree that this negative attitude towards speaking activities may emerge from the student's reluctance to produce the target language orally as a result of not feeling enough confidence in their language competence.

“The spoken interaction and participation are always active, but when they are asked to speak or respond in English, participation decreases, (...), the pronunciation issue for example, it complicates them a lot, the insecurity of not being able to say something and not knowing how to say it ...” (Teacher 5).

“(...) they don't trust that they can say something in a correct way, they tend to say “teacher, I don't speak English”, “I can't read English”, therefore, they don't reproduce it because they find the language difficult or they think they don't know it” (Teacher 4).

Experience and cultural capital

Personal experience and sociocultural contexts in which students live result in another pertinent factor. The teachers agree that lessons should be planned depending on the student's traits and shared background knowledge so as to adapt the activities according to each class group. For instance, if we compare rural and urban schools, casual conversation topics may significantly vary based on the school settings and the prior knowledge students acquire from family beliefs. Regarding this, teacher 2 notes the following:

“In the topics we always try to focus on the experience, for example, if we are talking about professions and what they would like to be in the future, if there is someone related to that profession in their families, try to find out how to put this in context and its daily life” (Teacher 2).

Personality

The student’s personality was considered a factor that takes part in the participation and interaction during the English teaching process. Although all the interviewed teachers mentioned that working with teenagers is mostly complex, only some of them allude explicitly to the personality variable. Specifically, teacher 4 mentioned that personality is an important factor to consider, as the English subject implies communication and interaction among people, shy students have difficulties when they have to produce the language or participate using English. Thus, this teacher states that, even though some of their students have the knowledge and the necessary skills to express themselves in English, their passive personalities reduce their willingness to participate or even pay attention to the class. Regarding the foregoing, the following examples are mentioned:

“There are students who feel confident to respond, to raise their hands, to go in front of the class, however, there are others who know, but do not have the personality to do so, and there are those who do not know and are not motivated to participate” (Teacher 4).

Subtopic 2. Motivation

From the data gathered and referring to the question: What is the perception teachers have about students’ interest and motivation in relation to the use of English in-class? We identified the following categories: i) type of task, ii) topics, iii) teacher’s attitude.

Type of task

The five teachers interviewed agree that working in pairs is the most preferred type of speaking task. This type of activity provides the opportunity to express and share opinions at the same time students interact and complete the required task. Moreover, these instances foster and encourage students to participate, motivating those who frequently do not. The act of observing classmates working and performing duties, entices those reticent learners and empowers them to bolster their confidence when producing the target language.

“Generally, I try to plan activities in pairs, and they indirectly support each other, so you can see confidence improves as they take turns and overcome the fear of being wrong as well. Otherwise, when it comes to working in groups only the confident students participate” (Teacher 2).

Topic

Another motivating element for students mentioned in several occasions is the topic used for teaching English. Despite the fact that teachers must abide by the Chilean Ministry of Education, the interviewees indicate that they mostly provide activities and conversations related to interesting topics for their students. This, with the purpose of students may demonstrate a higher motivation and willingness to communicate and being involved in future tasks of the subject. Related to this point, the most mentioned topics that motivate students were music, games and videogames. Examples of the previously mentioned are shown below:

“Games are what I use the most. Games that they propose and games that I propose. That is the most motivating thing for them” (Teacher 3).

Teacher’s attitude

As intrinsic motivation, external factors like teacher’s attitude heavily influences students’ motivation. Some of the participating teachers conveyed that teachers play a critical role in making students participate in class. Similarly, they agree that teachers should contribute to build a friendly, warm and peaceful atmosphere by demonstrating a positive and cheerful attitude in front of students. Teacher 2 sees increasing motivation as a challenging goal to achieve as it is stated below.

“It is important that students see you happy. Also, that they see we like to do what we do, that they perceive that we enjoy teaching, that we would take the time to explain, that it doesn’t matter that they don’t know or don’t understand and that next time, we will teach and explain them again” (Teacher 2).

Subtopic 3. Teacher-student relationship

Regarding the question ‘Which are the teacher’s perceptions about teacher-student relationship (rapport)?’, we recognized the following categories: i) interlocutors’ familiarity, ii) equity, iii) respect, iv) emotional presence, v) time.

Interlocutors’ familiarity

All the participating teachers assert that if they seek for a nurturing class environment with their students, it is almost compulsory for them to build and maintain trusting relationships with students. Two participating teachers declared that a practical strategy to increase motivation and willingness to participate consists of addressing students by their names. Learning their names since the very first lesson may evidence an interest from the teacher towards students, therefore, students may feel comfortable to easily engage with their teachers. Regarding this, teacher 1 asserts the following:

“Some of my strategies are always try to get to know my students, treating them warmly, greeting them with a smile, and always being cheerful...” (Teacher 1).

Additionally, teachers mentioned that casual or “hallway” conversations are essential to strengthen relationships with students. Interesting topics for students such as video games, music, films or hobbies cannot be only discussed in English, they can be conversed mixing *L2* and *L1* in order to allow students to envisage languages not only as a school subject but also as a tool to meet and share with people.

“Video Games is a non-academic topic, and it’s a good strategy to establish a relationship with students, besides acquiring vocabulary, they feel confident with the teacher and it allows them to ask us about other topics” (Teacher 4).

Teacher’s fairness and support

This element was indirectly mentioned on numerous occasions by our participants. They reckon teachers must avoid bias during lessons. No signs of any particular student or group preference should be aroused in classrooms. Nevertheless, teachers stated that there is always some affinity with certain students. Despite the difficulties bias may engender, participating teachers agree that collaborative work and classmates’ support are useful strategies to implement in class. Grouping advanced students with those who struggle with the *L2* linguistic competence may benefit both sides, according to teacher 2.

“Undoubtedly the student’s English level varies among every person. So, the best strategy for me was to group them and try to accompany and encourage students who are advanced by giving them the chance to teach their classmates who have more difficulties” (Teacher 2).

Respect

Another important element frequently mentioned by the teachers was ‘respect’. They emphasize that, in a harmonious relationship between teacher and student, respect must always prevail. They establish that finding a balance between “friendship” and “respect” results complex when working with teenagers. The teachers mentioned that by showing themselves as a trustful and friendly person, the students tend to take advantage of this in some occasions, and they seem to forget the authority “image” that teachers represent in the classroom. Nonetheless, teachers clarify that this student behaviour can be controlled, avoiding exceeding disrespectful thresholds between students and teachers. According to this, a teacher comments:

“I try to give students the confidence to speak to me as a person and as a teacher, always keeping the limit of the teacher-student relationship” (Teacher 4).

Time

Time is something significantly important when it comes to interpersonal relationships, and it is not the exception also when it comes to the task and responsibilities of the teachers. The interviewed agreed that time is a relevant factor when building a good relationship with students. As English is a subject that does not have many curricular hours during the week, the participants mentioned that achieving positive results is only possible over time, that an adequate relationship cannot emerge overnight. Furthermore, the teachers assure that learning the student's names, developing trust, getting to know them, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of every student are all processes that require time before observing results that contribute to the relationship between teachers and students and their willingness to communicate.

“Time is an important factor to achieve a good rapport, and the time you have with students should be used wisely” (Teacher 1).

Emotional presence

As natural communicative beings, people are always experimenting with an infinity of feelings and emotions. Under this premise, and according to the interviewed teachers, the emotional presence is a topic to take into consideration when it comes to building trustful relationships, especially with teenagers. Some participants of this investigation agree on the importance of being conscious about their students' emotionality, either seeking for conversation spaces about their personal life or attempting to show interest in them, to know how they feel or what they think. According to this, the following statement from an interviewee is presented:

“I don't consider I have a bad relationship with my students, I try to ensure that the trust that exists between us is good, I try to give them affection, that they feel confident with me, (...), that they feel that they can talk to me, there are occasions in which I can understand their reality and that we can also talk about it, and it helps me to have a better relationship with them” (Teacher 4).

Discussion

This research examined the association between teacher-student rapport and the student's L2 willingness to communicate. Results showed the rapport between teachers and male students was stronger in terms of gender. This finding concurs with Minasnyan (2017) who identified gender bias or preferences for male students from teachers. In her study, she observed that male students received more attention from their teachers than female students during interactions in English lessons.

Additionally, teacher-student rapport was superior in semi-private schools. This result is coherent with Zepeda's findings (2017) which examined teacher-student relationships between different types of institutions in Santiago, Chile. In regards to *L2 WTC* findings, we evidenced that there was no significant gender difference. This result differs from Gardner's (1985) or Canary and Hause's (1993) studies which registered higher *L2 WTC* levels upon female students with small size effects.

In relation to ethnic results, it is interesting to note that no significant differences were observed in this area. Furthermore, research including related variables contrasting Mapuche and non-Mapuche samples have not been carried out. In spite of this, we suspect the equivalence between these two groups of students is the result of the integration of multiple policies and programs the Chilean Ministry of Education have been implementing throughout the years.

The 'English Open Doors' program and the provision of free English textbooks with rural outreach are some of the most relevant initiatives in order to improve English teaching in Chile (Arellano, 2018).

Despite the correlation evidence discovered between rapport and *L2 WTC* in this study, Wenis et al. (2020) did not find any significant correlation between these variables in their research about classroom environment and *WTC* in *L2* contexts.

Qualitatively, there are some elements which were mentioned in every interview. We highlighted anxiety as a salient factor for teachers when it comes to students' in-class participation in *L2*. This finding supports the idea that higher levels of anxiety may negatively affect students' willingness to participate in speaking tasks (Silva, 2005). Also, the five participating teachers emphasised the relevance of the class size during English lessons. They indicated the number of students in class should not exceed 20 people per classroom. In this way, teachers would ensure meaningful teacher-student and student-student interactions, offering them better and longer personalized feedback opportunities (Finn and Achilles, 1999). We categorized this factor as the foremost finding owing to it precisely explained quantitative results which determined smaller classes built better teacher-student rapport than classes with larger numbers of students.

Considering the motivation of students, teachers agreed one of the main influencing factors are teachers themselves. This finding follows Riasati's assertions which demonstrated students would reach higher levels of motivation if they had a teacher with a positive and inspiring attitude (Riasati, 2012). Also, this may result in an improvement in student's marks (Yunus et al., 2011).

Another motivational factor raised by teachers consists in having casual conversations with students related to their interests and real-life situations as Badroeni (2018) suggests. This may even boost students' *WTC* in the target language since they are not feeling the pressure of being assessed.

Regarding teachers' perceptions related to teacher-student relationship, findings suggest that building rapport with students may help both teachers and students to identify strengths and weaknesses, benefiting *L2* learning processes at the same time (Chang, 2018). Findings from Riasati (2012) and Joe et al. (2017) also confirm some specific results of this study, particularly in relation to teachers' emotional support and respect fostered by them. These authors maintain such factors may substantially increase *L2 WTC*.

Overall, these findings may represent not only a contribution to *EFL* teaching but also to interpersonal relationships in other school subjects as teacher-student rapport benefits may enhance students' participation and interaction during lessons. Hence, the research group invites teachers and pre-service teachers to reflect on strategies to develop good relationships with students so as to include them in the teaching-learning process.

Despite the effort undertaken, limitations can be found in this study. In the first place, the limited time available was insufficient to execute deeper procedures and broaden data collection methods. Additionally, the national social context of riots and citizenship disconformity in which the investigation was carried out, delayed the gathering procedures and diminished the sample size.

Nonetheless, this work can be the foundation for further research. This can be done by integrating the other communicative skills as Zarrinabadi and Tanbakooei (2016) suggest that comprehending willingness to read, listen or write would be especially appealing. As a final point, the research group recommends taking into account English lesson hours per week and adding observations during lessons in order to conduct further analysis.

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