



## Predictors of Performance of Iranian English Language Learners on Speaking Skill: A Study of Socially-Oriented Personal Attributes

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### Abstract

The present quantitative study examined the role of a set of socially-mediated personal attributes that might intervene in the speaking performance of Iranian EFL learners. The possible relationship between three factors (namely, Willingness to communicate (WTC) in L2, L2 communication confidence, and Beliefs about L2 group work in L2 speaking), which are hypothesized to influence learners' oral performance, was investigated. In fact, a model reflecting the hypothesis that these three variables would influence the learners' speaking performance was constructed and tested by collecting data from a convenient sample of 100 B.A. university students in Iran. In order to collect the required data on the above-mentioned variables, a comprehensive questionnaire developed by Fushino (2010) and IELTS speaking test module 1 were utilized. The structural equation modeling confirmed that these three variables were very good predictors of performance of Iranian EFL learners on speaking skill. In other words, the measurement model of this study was approved and the conceptual model of research had an acceptable level of fit index. In addition, the result of multiple regressions indicated that L2 communicative confidence made a higher level of contribution in explaining the L2 speaking performance of the learners, which corroborates the association of these two constructs. The findings of present study also implied that increasing EFL learners' WTC, communication confidence and beliefs about L2 group work is likely to help to improve their speaking ability and learners who have higher levels of L2 WTC and confidence are likely to achieve higher scores on their speaking performance.

**Keywords:** Beliefs about L2 group work, L2 communication confidence, personal attributes, speaking performance, structural equation modeling (SEM), willingness to communicate

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### Introduction

For millions of individuals around the world, speaking in the second language is a daily activity. Therefore, it is important that research in applied linguistics should experimentally investigate spoken language interaction in the second language. Speaking skill is considered as one of the most difficult aspects of language learning because human communication is a complex process (Harmer, 2007). Research shows that FL learners with low language competence often choose not to risk using or speaking the target language (Liu 2018). Therefore, the main aim of English language teaching is to give learners the ability to use English language

effectively and correctly in communication (Davies & Pearse, 2000). However, despite these efforts, it appears that language learners are not able to communicate with adequate level of fluency and accuracy since they do not have enough command in this aspect of language. If teachers want to help learners overcome problems in learning speaking skill, they should recognize some factors that affect their speaking performance.

A number of studies have sketched upon the factors influencing L2 speaking. For example, Park and Lee (2005) investigated the possible associations among L2 learners' anxiety, self-confidence and speaking performance. This study showed that the learners' anxiety level had a negative correlation with their oral performance. In another study, Tanveer (2007) explored the possible factors that cause anxiety for

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language learners in learning speaking and how anxiety can influence the quality of their communication in target language contexts. They concluded that the learners' feeling of stress, anxiety or nervousness can to some extent impede their language learning performance and attainment. Furthermore, Lukitasari (2008) intended to identify the strategies learners use in overcoming speaking problems in speaking class. The findings of the study pointed to the fact that in speaking class, the students encountered some problems like inhibition, having nothing to say, low or uneven participation and mother tongue use. The findings of the study also pointed to deficiencies in the learners' speaking performance since they had not effectively mastered the three main building blocks of speaking, namely vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.

Several studies have focused on how group dynamics shape the learners' decision to interact with others. For example, Saint Léger and Storch (2009) examined a group of learners' self-perceptions of their speaking abilities; quality of their contributions to oral classroom tasks activities (whole class and small group discussions); their personal attitudes towards those activities; and the way those perceptions and attitudes affected learners' WTC over time. Their study found that students' perceptions of the speaking activities as well as their perceptions of themselves as learners influenced their WTC and participation in classroom discussions. Furthermore, these researchers determined that (1) WTC increased over time as learners became more self-confident in their L2 skills; (2) that WTC with peers was not uniform; and (3) that WTC was influenced by affiliation motives. With respect to students' attitudes towards oral activities, Saint Léger and Storch found that whole-class discussions were perceived as the most difficult oral activity, which eroded learners' confidence due to the potential risk of being negatively judged by their peers or to a diminished self-perceived assessment of their L2 skills. Other reasons for not speaking up in whole-class discussions dealt with the high demands of on-line processing when required to think of an answer and to respond on the spot. Conversely, other students in their study declared that they remained silent during whole-class interactions out of concern about speaking too much and dominating the discussion. Similar results were obtained by Cao (2011) who considered learners' perceived whole-class interactions as an anxiety-provoking situation due to peer pressure and fear of embarrassment. The level of difficulty of the questions and apprehension about being redundant were also among the factors that contributed to their decision to remain silent in whole-class discussions

There are a number of studies which have examined the facilitating and inhibiting factors of learners' speaking performance. Boonkit (2010) carried out a study on the factors increasing the development of learners' speaking skill. The design of the study, i.e., a task-based pedagogical design, provided opportunities for the participants to speak in various situations, which helped to make 'passive' vocabulary 'active' and also expanded the English lexicon derived from varied speaking topics. The researcher pointed to the significance of listening skills in improving the participants' speaking: listening to music, watching movies, and frequent practice of listening and speaking skills from multimedia sources. The results represented that the use of appropriate activities for speaking skill can be a good strategy to decrease speakers' anxiety. The results also revealed that the freedom of topic choice urged the participants to feel comfortable, persuaded them to speak in English, and increased the speaking confidence among EFL learners. Mahripah (2014) also found that EFL learners' speaking skill is affected by some linguistic components of language like phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics and psychological factors such as motivation and personality. Moreover, Tuan and Mai (2015) found that learners' speaking performance is influenced by factors like performance and task conditions (e.g., time pressure, planning, the quality of performance, and the amount of support), affective factors, comprehension skill, and provision of feedback during speaking tasks. Zarrinabadi (2014) revealed that teachers' attitude, support, and teaching style can influence learners' oral performance. The findings also indicated that teachers' wait time, error correction, decision on the topic, and support exert influence on learners' WTC. Eddy-U (2015) pointed to the fact that the effectiveness of group-based tasks in L2 classes depends mostly on individual students' WTC during their engagement on the task and factors such as the level of their personal interest, perceived effectiveness, good classroom social situation and groupmates, personal vision and self-confidence. Pawlak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2015) intended to examine the fluctuations in learners' willingness to speak and changes in their performance in a conversation class. The findings revealed that the participants' WTC was in a state of flux influenced by issues like "the topic, planning time, cooperation and familiarity with the interlocutor, the opportunity to express one's ideas, the mastery of requisite lexis, the presence of the researcher, and a host of individual variables"(p. 28). Finally, Fatima, Ismail, Pathan, and Memon, (2020) unraveled the positive impact of personality factors (e.g., openness to experience, and

extraversion), affective factors (e.g., perceived communicative confidence (PCC), and L2 speaking anxiety), and English classroom environment on L2 speaking performance.

As for the studies which have designed and tested models which have attempted to identify factors influencing L2 speaking, a reference can be made to Yu (2011) who found significant relationships among communication apprehension (CA), self-perceived communication competence (SPCC), integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation, motivation, instrumental orientation, teacher immediacy, and second language WTC. Furthermore, Fushino (2012) reported on the causal relationships between three factors in second language (L2) group work settings: beliefs about group work, communication confidence (i.e., confidence in one's ability to communicate), and willingness to communicate (WTC). Moreover, Myers and Claus (2012) found close associations between students' motivation and willingness for communicating with their instructors (i.e., relational, functional, participatory, excuse making, and sycophantic) and their perceptions of the classroom environment (i.e., classroom climate, classroom connectedness, and personalized education). Ghonsooly, Khajavy, and Asadpour (2010), proposing an Iranian version of L2 communication model, showed that L2 self-confidence and attitudes toward international community were two key predictors of L2WTC in Iranian context. Fallah (2014) also intended to test a model of L2 communication examining the hypothetical connections among willingness to communicate in English (L2WTC), three individual differences variables (namely, shyness, motivation, communication self-confidence) and one contextual factor (teacher immediacy). The results of model analyses indicated significant positive paths from motivation and communication self-confidence to L2WTC, from immediacy to motivation and from motivation to self-confidence and negative paths from shyness to self-confidence and motivation and from teacher immediacy to shyness. Khany and Nejad (2017) also conceptualized two dimensions of personality (e.g., openness to experience, and extraversion) with Iranian EFL learners' L2 performance. The findings of the SEM model showed that both openness and extraversion personality traits were closely interlinked and predicted learners' L2 communicative competence.

As the investigation of literature revealed, many psychological, cognitive, affective, and situational constructs can facilitate or inhibit learners' oral performance; however, few studies have explored the role of socially-mediated personal attributes that might

intervene in the speaking performance of Iranian EFL learners. In the same vein, the present study is set out to probe the role of a set of socially-mediated personal attributes that might intervene in the speaking performance of Iranian EFL learners. The possible relationship between three factors (namely, Willingness to communicate (WTC) in L2, L2 communication confidence, Beliefs about L2 group work in L2 learners) is explored.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is defined as "readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons using a L2" (MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei & Noels, 1998, p. 28). Willingness to communicate WTC has been considered a contextual and individual difference variable in applied linguistics and it has been considered an important part of the language learning and communication process, playing a pivotal role in the development of language learners' communicative competence (Elahi Shirvan, Khajavi, MacIntyre, & Taherian, 2019). Results of studies conducted in this regard had indicated that a variety of factors contribute to willingness to speak, including issues such as task type and mode, topic of discussion, role of interlocutor, personality of teacher, class atmosphere, and learners' own personality and self-perceived speaking ability (Baran-Lucarz 2014; Compton, 2007; Khajavy et al. 2016; MacIntyre, Baker, Clement & Donovan, 2003; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak 2017). WTC studies have shown that language learners with high WTC are more likely to use the L2 in authentic contexts (Kang 2005), have more willingness to practice in L2 (MacIntyre et al. 2001; MacIntyre & Legatto 2011), have more potential to achieve higher levels of language fluency (Derwing, Munro, & Thomson 2008), generally achieve greater language proficiency (Yashima 2002) and, as a result, show more improvement in their communication skills (MacIntyre & Serroul, 2015; Yashima, Zenk-Nishide, & Shimizu 2004).

Perceived communication competence appears to have a strong connection to developing a willingness to initiate communication (Kim 2004; MacIntyre et al. 1999; Yu, 2011). Confidence is an inner feeling of self-belief and makes you feel that you have the right information necessary for communication (Atkin, 2012). Self-perceived communication competence is defined as the self-perception of "adequate ability to pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing" (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, p. 109). A point worth-mentioning is that state communication confidence is distinguished from trait-like L2 self-confidence (Clément, 1980). State communication confidence,

which consists of a low level of state communication anxiety and a high level of perceived communicative competence, has also been found to be the most immediate antecedent of L2 WTC since it is believed that learners who have higher levels of state communicative competence and lower levels of communication anxiety are more willing to communicate (Clément et al., 2003; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Rafiee & Abbasian-Naghneh, 2018; Yashima, MacIntyre & Ikeda, 2018). In MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) L2 WTC theoretical model, L2 communicative confidence, which is made up of perceived communicative competence and communication anxiety, is hypothesized as a predictor of L2 WTC.

In addition, second and foreign language learners of all ages, from young children to teenagers and adults, have beliefs about language learning. A possible impact on the ability of the student and the WTC to speak to members of the group on L2 is what they believe in the value of group work (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2012). It is felt that student beliefs about L2's group work are formed according to their experiences in the social contexts, including conditions for learning the language. In fact, they are both cognitive and social constructs formed in the discourse communities in which learners face problems and gain experiences (Barcelos, 2006). These relatively stable but changeable beliefs can also influence learners' L2 learning behavior (Horwitz, 1985, 1987, 1988; Woods, 2006). Desirable attitude toward group work of student includes beliefs that group work helps in learning, contributes to productive use of time and helps learners learn (Fushino, 2010). They show the pleasure of participating in group work and feel that group work is easier and more interesting than working alone. Additional desirable attitudes include feelings of relaxation while working in group settings and confidence in one's ability to make a personal contribution to group outcomes (Cantwell & Beverly, 2002). Past research has shown that positive attitudes toward group work are associated with higher levels of sociability, lower levels of social anxiety, stronger mastery of performance goals, and higher levels of learning awareness (see e.g., Cantwell & Beverly, 2002; Gardner & Korth 1998; Kaenzig, Hyatt, & Anderson 2007).

To sum up, conducting studies on the factors influencing mastery of speaking among EFL learners can be highly informative and revealing in terms of the insights it can provide us for selecting language teaching methods and approaches, establishing effective conditions for learning speaking, designing appropriate materials for use in speaking classrooms

and even adopting effective methods for assessing the learners' oral competence. Accordingly, the present study suggested and tested a model of socially-mediated personal attributes (including willingness to communicate, L2 communicative confidence, and beliefs about L2 group work) that might influence Iranian EFL learners' speaking performance. Generally, the present study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the socially-oriented model of personal attributes (including willingness to communicate, L2 communicative confidence, and beliefs about L2 group work) influencing L2 speaking give satisfactory fit indexes based on the data collected in Iranian EFL context?
2. Which variable can best predict the student's oral competence (as measured by the speaking test)?

## Method

### Participants

In this study, the researchers purposefully selected EFL participants from two universities (Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman and Islamic Azad University of Kerman) through convenient sampling. A total of 100 B.A. level (Junior and Senior) students of English Language Teaching participated in the study with ages ranging from 18 to 23. A point worth-mentioning is that the data were collected from a larger sample, but some students did not regularly participate in data collection sessions and at the end the researchers came up with 100 matching questionnaire and speaking test responses. Among them, 40 were males, 50 were females, and 10 did not indicate their gender; their mother tongue was Persian and they were also from a variety of ethnic and educational background. Their proficiency levels were from intermediate to advance. Moreover, due to the objectives of the study in terms of evaluating the personality attributes that might influence the learners' speaking skill, all the participants had passed 12 credits conversation courses and all basic courses related to their language proficiency.

### Instruments

The data used in this study were solely obtained from test and questionnaire. A comprehensive questionnaire was used to explore learners' personality attributes that might affect their speaking performance: willingness to communicate in L2, L2 communication confidence, and beliefs about L2 group work. This instrument was taken and modified from Fushino (2010). Originally, the questionnaire had ninety eight items, consisting of

8 parts: (a) communication apprehension in L2 group work comprising, (b) self-perceived communicative competence in L2 group work regarding what verbal actions students were likely to take in L2 group work (c) the value of cooperation, (d) the efficiency of group work, (e) knowledge co-construction/peer scaffolding in group work, (f) relationships with other group members, (g) teacher–student roles in college English classrooms, and (h) WTC in L2 group work. However, after a pilot administration and a factor analysis (Fushino, 2010), only six factors were extracted, and only high-loaded items were retained in the final version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire used in this study consisted of sixty four 5-point Likert-scale items (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neutral; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree) in six sections providing information on three key variables of the study. The reliability index estimated for this questionnaire was .76 Cronbach's alpha.

As for assessing the participants' speaking ability, a set of questions from IELTS speaking test module 1 were selected and given to the participants. In fact, they were required to answer the questions on a personal topic related to the location and accommodations of the place they are living. In the administration procedure, the participants were required to answer the interview questions carefully and interviews are conducted with each person individually and separately, and then the recorded voice of each individual was scored according to speaking rating scale developed for use with EFL speakers (see Birjandi, Farhadi, & Jafarpour, 1995). The rating of the interviewers consists of accent, structure, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. These ratings are then weighed and added up to determinate a final score for their speaking performance. The total estimated reliability index for the scores obtained from this test was .68 Cronbach's alpha.

**Table 1.**

*Descriptive Statistics for the Main Variables of the Study*

	Accent	Structure	Vocab.	Fluency	Comprehension	Speaking	Confidence	Beliefs	WTC
<b>M</b>	5.0400	4.96	5.41	5.32	5.80	26.52	63.64	115.04	36.89
<b>SD</b>	.85185	.751	.767	.803	.402	3.180	7.014	12.423	6.886
<b>Min.</b>	3	3	3	3	5	17	48	84	23
<b>Max</b>	6	6	6	6	6	30	94	139	75

According to Table 1, speaking ability has the mean of 26.52 and SD of 3.180; L2 communication confidence with the mean of 63.64 and SD of 7.014; Beliefs about L2 group work with the mean of 115.04

## Procedure

In order to collect the required data, the participants in various classroom sessions responded to willingness to communicate, L2 communicative confidence and beliefs about L2 group work questionnaire. Then they completed the module 1 speaking test of IELTS as a measure of their oral competence. The participants' performances on this test were analytically scored. These numerical indexes were used to test the socially oriented model of personal attributes influencing Iranian EFL learners' speaking ability. Subsequently, the data were analyzed by using SPSS 23 and Amos software since the aim was to test the suggested model by using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). In fact, "linear structural equation modeling is a useful methodology for statistically specifying, estimating, and testing hypothesized relationships among a set of substantively meaningful variables" (Bentler, 1995, p. ix). A full SEM model allows researchers to estimate both the links between the latent variables and their observed measures (the measurement portion of the model) and the direct effects among the variables (the structural portion of the model) (Winke, 2013). To assess the overall model fit, chi-square and a pair of fit indices proposed in the SEM literature (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011; McDonald & Ho, 2002) were used: the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA).

## Findings

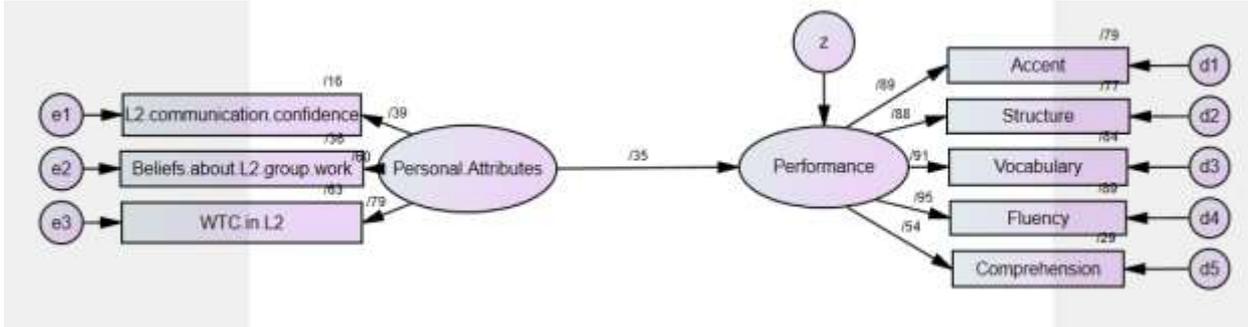
Before doing any analyses for responding to the main research questions, a set of descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviations, maximum and minimum and tests of normality of data were derived for the variables of the study. The following table presents the descriptive statistics for the variables of the study.

and SD of 12.432; Willingness to communicate with the mean of 36.89 and SD of 6.886. The parameters in the speaking test also led to the following results: Accent: M=5.0400, SD=.85185; Structure: M=4.96;

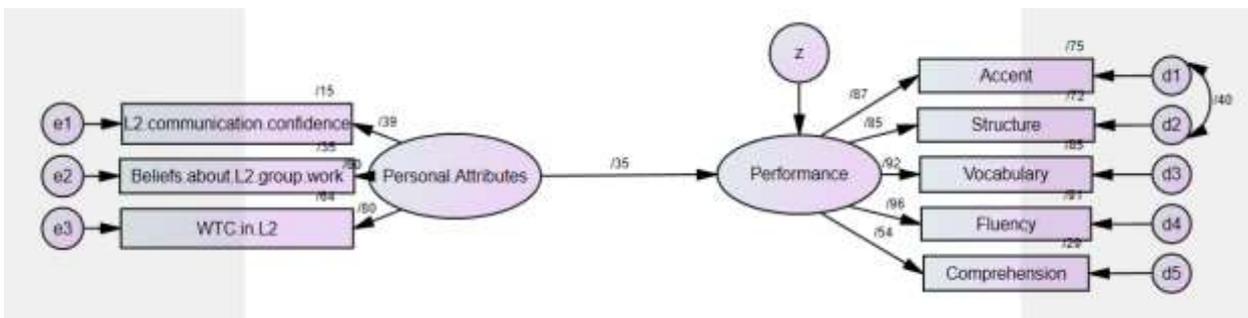
.751; Vocabulary: M=5.41, SD=.767; Fluency: M=5.32, SD=.803; Comprehension: M= 5.80, SD=.402. The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic also confirmed normality in the data.

Subsequently, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to evaluate the proposed model. Before examining the structural coefficients, model fit indexes were examined. The statistics for fitting of the initial model, based on the fit indices used in this study, is reported in the first row (formulated model) in Table

2, according to which some of the initial model fit indices indicated that the proposed model needs to be refined and optimized. For this purpose, in the following stages with respect to the modified indices (MI) at the output of 18 Amos covariance paths, the dimensions of the research variables (see Figures 1 and 2) were added to the model. After making these changes, another analysis was performed on the data, the results of which are the fit indices presented in the second row of Table 2.



**Figure 1.**  
The Initial Model of Socially-Oriented Personal Attributes Influencing L2 Speaking



**Figure 2.**  
The Modified Model of Socially-Oriented Personal Attributes Influencing L2 Speaking

As the results in Table 2 shows, the first model is not well-fitted. In the later stages, by adding the

proposed MI (paths), the improved model and the final pattern give satisfactory fit indexes.

**Table 2.**  
*Fit Indexes for Formulated Model (Initial), Modified Model (Final) and Independent Model*

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
<b>Initial Model</b>	17	47.751	19	2.513	.895	.801	.943	.914	.942	.908	.124
<b>Modified Model (Final)</b>	18	35.482	18	1.971	.917	.834	.965	.945	.965	.932	.099
<b>Independent Model</b>	8	521.361	28	18.62	.393	.220	.000	.000	.000	.000	.422

For X2/Df fit index, values less than 5 and as close as zero indicates good model fit. For NFI, TLI, CFI, AGFI IFI and GFI values close to 0.90 and more are

considered as good fit indexes confirming the acceptability of the model. In relation to the RMSEA, values close to 0.05 or less indicate a good fit to the

model and a value of 0.08 or less indicates a reasonable approximation error; a value above 0.10 indicates the need to reject the model (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011; McDonald & Ho, 2002). Therefore, considering the values of the fit indices of the final model (formulated model) and the limit of acceptable values mentioned above, it can be said that the model presented in this study is acceptable. The path coefficients between the final pattern variables and their significance level are reported in Table 3. The regression coefficients of the model show that the socially-oriented personal variables well predict the performance of Iranian EFL learners on speaking skills.

Using the general fit indices, regardless of the specific values reported for the parameters, one can answer the question whether the model is generally supported by the modifications made to the empirical data collected or not? If the answer is yes, the model is acceptable. To interpret the values in Table 3, it should be noted: the presence of non-significant chi-square (CMIN) of 35.482 and significance level ( $p= 0.001$ ) show favorable results, but the role of degree of freedom (Df) is also important. In addition, given the

fact that the degree of freedom (Df) of the approved model (i.e., 18) is distancing zero and approaching the degree of independence of the model (i.e., 28), the model should be considered acceptable. The number of free parameters for the model developed (NPAR), which is 18, indicates that the researchers in the model development did not easily spend the degrees of freedom and this is acceptable. As for the relative indices, the relative chi-square value (CMIN / DF) is 1.971 in this table, indicating an acceptable status for the model. Also, the value of 0.099 for the second root mean square residuals (RMSEA) for the developed structural model indicates that the model is acceptable. In the corresponding table, the Tucker-Lewis fit index (TLI) is 0.945 and the adaptive fit index (CFI) is 0.965, and since their values are above 0.90, the estimated model can be considered acceptable. Also, goodness of fit index (GFI) is 0.965 and incremental fit index (IFI) is 0.965, which both show acceptable values. Therefore, generally the values of the general fit indices indicate the measurement model of this study is approved and the conceptual model of research has an acceptable fit.

**Table 3.**

*Structural Model of Paths and their Standard Coefficients in the Final Model*

Paths	Regression Weights			Standardized Regression Weights		
	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	Estimate		
Performance	<---	Personal Attributes	.046	.019	2.455	.345
Accent	<---	Performance	1.000			.865
Structure	<---	Performance	.865	.059	14.604	.848
Vocabulary	<---	Performance	.961	.072	13.396	.924
Fluency	<---	Performance	1.041	.073	14.230	.956
Comprehension	<---	Performance	.292	.051	5.772	.535
WTC in L2	<---	Personal Attributes	1.000			.801
Beliefs in L2 Group Work	<---	Personal Attributes	1.340	.420	3.188	.595
L2 Communication Confidence	<---	Personal Attributes	.498	.181	2.747	.392

The results of the tested model show that the coefficient of the relationship between socially-oriented personal characteristics of Iranian EFL learners, namely, willingness to communicate, beliefs in L2 group work and L2 communication confidence with their speaking performance/ability is 0.801, 0.595, and 0.392, respectively and since the p value is less than the significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , the hypothesis H0 is rejected at this level, so it can be concluded that there is a significant and positive relationship between these variables. In other words, per one-unit increase in willingness to communicate, beliefs in L2 group

work and L2 communicative confidence, the performance level of Iranian EFL learners increases to 0.801, 0.595 and 0.392, standard deviations, respectively.

In order to check which variable can best predict the speaking performance of Iranian EFL learners, a standard multiple regression was run. In fact, in order to know how independent variables, contributed to the prediction of speaking performance, and to compare the contribution of the variables, a set of values under Standardized Coefficients are reported (see Table 4). As it is seen in Table 4, none of the variables could

make a significant contribution to the speaking performance of the learners. Nevertheless, among these constructs, L2 communicative confidence

( $B=.078$ ,  $Beta=.046$ ,  $t=1.704$ ,  $p>.05$ ) had been in a better position to account for the L2 speaking performance of the learners.

**Table 4.**  
*Coefficients of Multiple Regressions*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		95% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero Order	Partial	Part
(Constant)	15.919	3.607		4.413	.000	8.759	23.079			
L2 CC	.078	.046	.172	1.704	.052	-.013	.169	.247	.171	.164
BGW	.021	.028	.083	.750	.455	-.035	.077	.212	.076	.072
WTC	.086	.052	.187	.101	.101	-.017	.190	.279	.167	.159

a. Dependent Variable: Speaking performance

In order to see how much of the variance in the dependent variable (speaking performance) is explained by the model which includes a set socially oriented variables, the R Square (multiplied by 100) in the model summary table is obtained. According to

Table 5, only 11.2% of the variance in total reported speaking competence is explained by the independent variables, which is rather negligible and proves the complexity of this skill and a variety of factors that affect L2 learners' speaking performance.

**Table 5.**  
*Model Summary*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.335 <sup>a</sup>	.112	.085	3.042

a. Predictors: (Constant), WTC.in.L2, L2.communication.confidence, Beliefs.about.L2.group.work

b. Dependent Variable: Speaking ability

Moreover, to assess the statistical significance of the results, the ANOVA table was used. This tests the

null hypothesis that multiple R in the population equals 0. Based on the information presented in Table 4.6, the results reached a statistical significance ( $Sig.=.009$ ; which means  $p<.05$ ). Consequently, we can have trust in the findings of the current study.

**Table 6.**  
*The ANOVA Table of the Standard Multiple Regression*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	112.392	3	37.464	5.874	.009 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	888.568	96	9.256		
	Total	1000.960	99			

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present study probed the role of a set of socially-mediated personal attributes that might intervene in the speaking performance of Iranian EFL learners. The first research question sought to examine how the socially-oriented model of personal attributes

influencing L2 speaking gave satisfactory fit indexes based on the data collected in Iranian EFL context. The quantitative analysis indicated that, considering the values of the fit indices of the final model (formulated model), the path coefficients between the final pattern variables and their significance level, the model presented in this study is acceptable. Therefore, generally the values of the general fit indices in the

measurement model of this study are approved and the conceptual model of research has an acceptable fit. In the same vein, Fushino (2010) also maintains that WTC in L2 group work would be influenced by Beliefs in L2 Group Work strengthened by Communication Confidence. She demonstrated that beliefs about L2 group work significantly predicted communicative confidence in L2 group work and the relationship between beliefs about L2 group work and WTC in L2 group work was mediated by communicative confidence in L2 group work. Fushino's results indicated that learner beliefs are direct predictors of L2 communicative confidence, and indirect predictors of L2 WTC.

The present study also confirmed the high predictive power of communicative confidence in L2 speaking performance. In a great deal of empirical studies, communicative confidence has been identified as the strongest predictor of L2 communication competence (e.g., Elahi Shirvan, et al., 2019; Ghonsooly, et al. 2013; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002; Yashima, et al., 2004) implying that perceived communicative competence is the most significant predictor of L2 WTC. In fact, L2 learners who are aware of their own abilities, love themselves or are aware of their own emotions have higher marks from their speaking courses than those who lack the essential self-confidence (McIntyre, 2004). In addition, Şar, Avcu and Işıklar (2010) stated the individuals with higher level of confidence have effective communication skills. In fact, students' speaking problems can be overcome by enhancing the individuals' level of self-confidence. As there are various studies about self-confidence and success (Covington, 1984; Laird, 2005), self-confidence and performance (Hanton, Mellalieu, & Hall, 2003), the positive effect on learners' speaking performance found in this study support previous findings.

The findings of present study also add specific empirical evidence for the positive impact of L2 WTC on learners' speaking performance, which implies that increasing EFL learners' WTC is likely to help to improve their speaking ability and learners who have higher level of L2 WTC are likely to achieve higher on their speaking performance. Previous research (Brown 2014; Khatib & Nourzadeh 2014; MacIntyre et al. 1998) has shown that WTC plays a pivotal role in second language acquisition process, and a good level of WTC can lead to more engagement with the communicative tasks and hence more language attainment. Previous studies have indicated that L2 WTC can promote the learners' frequency of speaking practice (MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). As a result, students who practice their

speaking skill more frequently have better chance to learn and improve the language skill (McDonough, 2004; Saeed, Khaksari, Eng & Ghani, 2016). The students who had high level of anxiety tend to have low speaking achievement (Zhang & Liu, 2013).

Nonetheless, language learners are different from one another in terms of cognitive, affective, and demographical variables; these variables are recognized to have mediating influence on learners' L2 communication competence (Brown 2014; Donovan & MacIntyre 2004; Khatib & Nourzadeh 2014). In the present study, the researcher also operated on the assumption that beliefs about L2 group work are strongly related to willingness to communicate and hence their speaking performance. As Fushino (2010) stated, students' willingness to communicate with group members in L2 is related to their beliefs about L2 group work. The previous literature has indicated that EFL students' interpersonal communication skills and their previous educational experiences may disadvantage them in a pedagogical culture that rewards the assertive, communication, and cooperation (Beaver & Tuck, 1998; Holmes, 2004), so they need to revisit their beliefs and adjust them based on the purpose of their learning.

As for the implications of the study, it can be stated that teachers should consider the fact that their students' willingness to communicate and communication confidence can improve their speaking performance and choose the best teaching methods to keep their learners engaged in speaking activities since it is believed that increasing EFL students' Communication Confidence in L2 can enhance their level of Willingness to communicate in L2 and therefore would have positive effects on their speaking performance. Modern pedagogic approaches have attached great importance to authentic L2 communication confidence in the sense that frequent communicative practice is helpful in developing speaking performance. It could thus be deduced that learners with higher L2 WTC would seek out more opportunities for better speaking performance, both in class and out of class, to engage in L2 speaking than those with lower WTC.

The study also suggested that beliefs about group work have also impact on improving the quality of speaking skills which is likely to trigger active student interaction in the L2. Without interaction, which is likely to include interactional modification (Long, 1983), comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), and comprehensible output (Swain, 1985), language development cannot be expected. From a sociocultural perspective, too, ability to speak is very important as it

enables learners to convey their meaning and words correctly and fluently to the listener. Finding a way to elevate learners' speaking performance and find the variables that affect this skill directly is very important. In addition, using group work activities in classrooms might be helpful in improving the quality of speaking skill, because this discussion could encourage students to reflect on their speaking performance, and this reflection could lead to high-quality interaction. After all, effective cooperation only becomes possible when students experience quality interaction.

Several limitations existed for this study that warrant caution in interpreting the derived findings. For one limitation, since language learners are different in terms of psychological and affective variables and these variables can have mediating influence on their L2 speaking performance, the findings of the present study cannot be generalized to other EFL/ESL contexts. In addition, the present study has only investigated the role of a limited number of factors influencing L2 speaking performance. The recognition of these factors and the way they are related to L2 speaking can shed further light on the nature of learners' performance and can enable teachers to provide equal opportunities for all language learners to improve their oral competence. Another limitation of this study is its small sample size. In order to support the results presented here and improve the external validity of the findings, this research could be repeated with further variables and with more L2 learners and raters. Another limitation of this study is the respondents' concern about the topic of interview question and its implementation, which implies that to generate positive atmosphere and more willingness to speak among learners, they need to discuss topics they are interested in, with which they are familiar and are prepared to talk which can enhance both the quantity and quality of their performance. Finally, supplementing questionnaire data with more reliable and valid data collection means such as interviews and observations could have enabled the present researchers to have a better understanding of how various factors might influence L2 speaking. Consequently, further research endeavors are merited to cross-validate the findings derived in this research and obtain a more comprehensive understanding of these relationships. In future studies, researchers can also explore the role of other socially-mediated personal attributes such as Positive Classroom Climate, Teacher support, Situational Motivation and Group Cohesiveness in L2 learners' speaking performance.

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