

## The relationship between student motivation and spoken English proficiency in higher education

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## ANNOTATION

This study examines how student motivation influences spoken English proficiency among undergraduates at Altynsarin University. The research is based on survey data from eighteen students who evaluated their motivation level, confidence, speaking difficulties, and use of English outside the classroom. The findings show that although many students report moderate or high motivation, their speaking confidence remains low. Most participants struggle with hesitation, vocabulary limitations, and lack of practice. The study concludes that motivation alone does not lead to fluency; regular exposure and supportive speaking environments are essential for improvement.

**Keywords:** motivation, spoken English, confidence, exposure, university students, learning barriers.

## **Abstract**

Spoken English remains one of the most difficult skills for university students, even for those who believe they are motivated to learn the language. This study explores how motivation affects students' spoken English development, using data collected from eighteen undergraduates at Altynsarin University. The survey asked students to evaluate their motivation, describe their reasons for learning English, rate their confidence when speaking, and identify barriers that influence their communication.

The results show a noticeable gap between motivation and real speaking behavior. While many students identify personal interest and future opportunities as strong motivators, their confidence during speaking tasks is significantly lower. Most respondents often hesitate, struggle to find the right words, or avoid speaking entirely. Limited exposure outside the classroom and emotional discomfort were also identified as major obstacles. The findings suggest that motivation contributes to speaking development, but it must be supported by frequent practice, linguistic preparation, and environments that make communication less stressful.

## **1. Introduction**

For most university students, English is an essential part of their education. They encounter it in textbooks, academic articles, scholarship applications, and workplace communication. Despite this growing importance, spoken English continues to cause difficulties. Some students can understand complex texts or complete grammar tasks without trouble, yet find it hard to express even simple ideas in real conversations.

This contrast between passive knowledge and active speaking ability raises questions about what actually supports spoken English development. Motivation is often considered the main factor that drives students to study a language. However, real life shows a more complex picture. Many motivated students still hesitate during speaking tasks, while some less motivated learners speak more freely. This suggests that motivation alone cannot explain speaking performance.

This research examines how motivation interacts with other factors by analyzing the experiences of eighteen undergraduates from Altynsarin University. Their responses highlight the difficulties students face, the conditions that support speaking, and the ways motivation influences their learning. Instead of focusing only on theoretical explanations, this paper reflects how students themselves understand their relationship with English. The goal is to identify patterns that can help universities create better conditions for spoken English practice.

## **2. Background / Literature Review**

Researchers have long argued that motivation is one of the strongest predictors of language learning success. Motivation is typically divided into intrinsic (learning for personal satisfaction or interest) and extrinsic (learning for external goals such as career growth or academic requirements). Both types shape how students approach learning tasks and how persistently they study.

However, speaking a foreign language requires more than desire. It demands immediate retrieval of vocabulary, emotional stability, and fluency developed through repeated practice. When students feel nervous or fear being judged, their ability to speak naturally decreases. Several studies note that anxiety can block even well-prepared students from expressing their thoughts.

Exposure is another crucial factor. Learners who hear and use English outside the classroom develop fluency much faster. Without exposure, students rely only on theoretical knowledge, which is often insufficient for spontaneous speaking. This aligns with many students' complaints about not having real-life situations where English is spoken.

Confidence also plays an essential role. Students who trust their abilities attempt to speak even if they make mistakes. Those who doubt themselves avoid conversation, and avoidance gradually weakens their progress. These factors—exposure, confidence, emotional comfort, and linguistic readiness—interact with motivation and can either strengthen or weaken its influence.

### 3. Methodology

To understand how motivation affects spoken English development, a descriptive survey was conducted among undergraduates at Altynsarin University. A Google Forms questionnaire was used because it allowed students to respond anonymously and comfortably.

#### 3.1 Participants

A total of **18 students** took part:

- 29.4% — 1st-year students
- 17.6% — 2nd-year students
- 52.9% — 3rd-year students

This distribution shows that over half of the respondents have already spent several years studying English at the university.

#### 3.2 Research Instrument

The survey included questions about:

- motivation level
- personal reasons for learning English
- speaking confidence

- ability to express ideas
- difficulties during communication
- barriers that prevent frequent speaking
- frequency of English use outside class

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Responses were summarized using percentages. This helped identify dominant trends and compare how motivation interacts with speaking challenges.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Motivation Levels

Motivation varied among the group:

- 5.6% — very high motivation
- 27.8% — high motivation
- 50% — moderate motivation
- 16.7% — low motivation

Most students fall into the “moderate” category, meaning they value English but may not consistently practice.

### 4.2 Reasons for Learning English

Students selected several motivations:

- 44.4% — personal development
- 27.8% — study/work abroad goals
- 11.1% — future professional needs
- 16.7% — no specific motivation

The large percentage choosing personal development suggests students see English as a tool for self-improvement.

### 4.3 Speaking Confidence

Confidence was noticeably lower than motivation:

- 16.7% — confident
- 22.2% — usually confident
- 27.8% — sometimes struggle
- 33.3% — often struggle

More than half of the students experience hesitation or discomfort when speaking.

### 4.4 Ability to Express Ideas

Students reported:

- 38.9% — difficulty expressing ideas
- 38.9% — frequent hesitation
- 16.7% — running out of words
- 5.6% — able to express freely

These results indicate that spontaneous speaking remains problematic for most learners.

#### 4.5 Barriers to Speaking

Main obstacles identified:

- 44.4% — lack of time
- 16.7% — grammar weaknesses
- 11.1% — fear of mistakes
- 11.1% — lack of vocabulary
- 11.1% — no English-speaking environment

Time constraints appear to be the most limiting factor.

#### 4.6 English Usage Outside Class

Exposure was limited:

- 27.8% — never use English
- 22.2% — rarely
- 22.2% — monthly
- 11.1% — weekly
- 16.7% — daily

Most students use English passively and rarely speak it actively.

### 5. Discussion

The findings show that motivation influences students' approach to English but cannot alone produce strong speaking skills. Many students feel interested in improving, yet they do not practice enough to develop fluency. Confidence plays a crucial role: those who hesitate or fear mistakes avoid speaking, which weakens their progress.

Exposure is another key element. Students rarely use English outside class, so their speaking skills remain limited. Language becomes something they “study,” not something they “use.” This separation slows real improvement.

Linguistic limitations—vocabulary gaps and grammar uncertainty—lead to pauses and hesitation. Emotional barriers, such as nervousness, increase the difficulty. These factors reinforce each other, reducing the effect of motivation. Therefore, motivation works best when supported by frequent practice and supportive environments.

### 6. Conclusion

This study shows that motivation contributes to spoken English development, but does not guarantee fluent communication. Students need regular speaking practice, emotional support, and exposure to real communication environments. Without these conditions, even motivated learners can hesitate or avoid speaking.

Universities can help by offering conversation clubs, peer-speaking activities, and low-pressure speaking tasks. These environments give students a chance to use English freely and build confidence gradually. Over time, regular practice combined with personal motivation can lead to stronger, more confident spoken English skills.

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