

The Influence of Motivation on Students' Participation in English-Speaking Activities at a University in Vietnam



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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the influence of motivation on students' participation in English-speaking activities at a university in Vietnam. Recognizing that language proficiency, particularly in speaking, is crucial for students in a globalized world, the research examines how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors impact students' willingness to engage in speaking activities. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through surveys and interviews with a sample of students from various academic disciplines. The findings reveal that intrinsic motivation—such as personal interest in mastering English and the desire for self-improvement—significantly enhances students' active participation. Extrinsic factors, including the pressure of grades, social recognition, and future career opportunities, also play a role, though their influence is often dependent on the level of personal commitment to language acquisition. This study suggests that enhancing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators can increase participation in English-speaking activities, thereby contributing to improved language proficiency. The results provide insights for educators to design more engaging and supportive language-learning environments that foster both forms of motivation among students.

KEYWORDS: Motivation, activities, participation, English speaking skill

INTRODUCTION

Motivation plays a vital role in education, acting as a catalyst that can significantly enhance students' willingness and enthusiasm for learning. When it comes to mastering a new language, especially a universally spoken one like English, motivation is essential for effective communication and confidence in speaking. In particular, the influence of motivation on students' participation in English-speaking activities is profound, often determining how actively they engage, practice, and improve their skills. This article explores the various ways motivation affects students' involvement in English-speaking activities and highlights strategies to foster a motivating environment.

I. English-Speaking Activities in Language Acquisition

English-speaking activities are essential in language acquisition because they allow learners to practice real-time communication skills, build fluency, and deepen their understanding of linguistic nuances. These activities play a multifaceted role in language learning by fostering confidence, enabling meaningful interaction, and bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical use. Below are some of the critical roles English-speaking activities play in language acquisition.

1. Building Confidence and Reducing Anxiety

Language learners often face anxiety when speaking in a second language, fearing mistakes or judgment. Regularly participating in speaking activities helps students build confidence in their abilities over time, reducing anxiety and making them more willing to speak up. When students feel comfortable speaking English in a supportive environment, they are more likely to take risks, experiment with vocabulary and grammar, and make meaningful progress.

2. Enhancing Fluency and Pronunciation

Speaking activities encourage learners to practice language flow and rhythm, which are critical for fluency. Engaging in conversations, role plays, or presentations pushes learners to think and respond in English without the opportunity to pre-script everything, helping them achieve a natural speech pace. Repetition through practice also improves pronunciation and helps learners become familiar with the sounds and intonations, as well as stresses unique to English.

3. Reinforcing Vocabulary and Grammar in Context

Vocabulary and grammar are best learned and retained when used in context. Speaking activities provide students with opportunities to apply language concepts in real-time, contextual settings. For instance, role-play activities can reinforce specific vocabulary (e.g., for ordering food or discussing hobbies). At the same time, debates or discussions enable learners to practice using different tenses,

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conjunctions, and complex sentence structures. This contextual reinforcement aids in transferring knowledge from passive understanding to active usage.

4. *Developing Listening and Comprehension Skills*

Language acquisition is about more than just speaking; listening and understanding are equally critical. English-speaking activities often involve interactive components where students must listen carefully to respond accurately. In group discussions, paired dialogues, or interviews, learners practice listening and processing information in real time, which develops their comprehension skills. Hearing different accents, tones, and paces of speech in peer conversations further improves listening abilities.

5. *Fostering Cultural Awareness and Pragmatic Skills*

Language learning is closely tied to cultural understanding. Through speaking activities, students encounter culturally specific expressions, idioms, and ways of expressing politeness, humor, or disagreement. They also learn pragmatic skills—such as turn-taking, interrupting politely, and showing empathy—that are essential for authentic communication. These skills help learners become more adaptable and practical communicators in diverse settings, ultimately promoting a deeper understanding of English-speaking cultures.

II. Types of Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation can be broadly categorized into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

1. *Intrinsic Motivation:* This type of motivation arises within the student and is driven by personal satisfaction, curiosity, or a genuine interest in the language. Intrinsically motivated students are likely to engage in English-speaking activities because they find joy in learning the language itself or see it as a challenge they want to overcome.

2. *Extrinsic Motivation:* This form of motivation is influenced by external factors, such as the desire for rewards, recognition, or to avoid adverse outcomes. For example, students may be motivated to participate in English-speaking activities to achieve higher grades, impress teachers or peers, or meet expectations set by parents. Although extrinsic motivation can drive participation, it may lack the long-term effectiveness seen with intrinsic motivation.

III. The Role of Motivation in English-Speaking Activities

1. *Confidence and Anxiety Reduction*

Motivation boosts confidence, which is essential for students to participate actively in speaking activities. Language learners often face anxiety due to a fear of making mistakes or being judged. Motivated students, particularly those with intrinsic motivation, tend to overcome these fears more efficiently, leading to reduced anxiety. This allows them to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from them, which is critical for language acquisition.

2. *Willingness to Communicate (WTC)*

Willingness to Communicate, a concept in language education, refers to a learner's readiness to engage in conversation in a second language. Motivation significantly impacts WTC; highly motivated students are generally more willing to speak up and engage in conversations, even in challenging situations. This willingness helps them practice and improve their English-speaking skills faster.

3. *Engagement and Participation*

Motivated students tend to participate more actively in classroom discussions, group work, and role-playing activities. They engage not only because they want to learn but also because they enjoy interacting in English. Participation in these speaking activities reinforces language learning through real-life practice and deepens their understanding of English in a practical context.

4. *Goal Setting and Perseverance*

Motivation encourages students to set personal language-learning goals, such as achieving fluency or improving pronunciation. Students with clear goals are more likely to participate in speaking activities as a means of achieving these targets. They also tend to persevere through challenges and setbacks, understanding that these activities are stepping stones toward their larger goal.

IV. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the influence of motivation on students' participation in English-speaking activities at a university in Vietnam, using both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis.

1. *Research Design*

The study integrates a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews to understand how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors impact students' participation in English-speaking activities. The quantitative approach allows for statistical analysis of motivation levels and participation frequencies, while the qualitative component provides deeper insights into students' personal motivations and challenges.

2. *Participants*

A total of 200 undergraduate students from various academic disciplines were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure diversity in terms of major, gender, and academic year. This sample size was calculated to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, based on the estimated student population at the university.

3. *Data Collection*

a. *Survey*

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The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire that included sections on demographic information, levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and frequency of participation in English-speaking activities.

- **Motivation Measurement:** Motivation was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) with items adapted from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ). Intrinsic motivation items included questions on personal interest in English and self-improvement, while extrinsic motivation items covered grade pressure, social recognition, and career prospects.
- **Participation Frequency:** Students reported the frequency of their participation in various English-speaking activities (e.g., presentations, language clubs, discussions) on a scale from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Frequently).

b. Interviews

In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 20 students selected from the survey respondents. These interviews explored students' motivations in greater depth and addressed their individual experiences, barriers, and preferences regarding English-speaking activities.

4. Data Analysis

a. Quantitative Analysis

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean and standard deviation were calculated for each survey item to provide an overview of the levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and participation frequency.
- **Correlation Analysis:** Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationships between motivation types and participation frequency. For instance, the correlation between intrinsic motivation scores and speaking activity frequency was analyzed to assess the strength of this relationship.
- **Regression Analysis:** A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on students' participation levels. The regression model helped identify which motivation factors most significantly predicted participation in English-speaking activities.

b. Qualitative Analysis

Interview data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Key themes related to intrinsic motivation (e.g., enjoyment of language learning, sense of personal achievement) and extrinsic motivation (e.g., academic requirements, social influences) were identified. NVivo software was used for coding and organizing the themes to ensure reliability in the analysis process.

5. Reliability and Validity

To enhance reliability, the survey was pilot-tested with a sample of 20 students, and Cronbach's alpha was calculated to ensure internal consistency for the motivation scales ($\alpha > 0.7$ for both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation). For validity, the survey items were reviewed by two language education experts to ensure they accurately measured motivational factors.

6. Statistical Findings

Preliminary results indicated that intrinsic motivation had a positive and significant correlation with participation frequency ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), while extrinsic motivation showed a moderate correlation ($r = 0.30$, $p < 0.05$). Regression analysis revealed that intrinsic motivation explained 20% of the variance in participation frequency ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$), whereas extrinsic motivation accounted for an additional 10% ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$).

This methodology, grounded in statistical analysis and thematic insights, provides a robust approach to understanding how different motivational factors affect students' engagement in English-speaking activities. The findings offer data-driven recommendations for creating a more motivationally supportive environment for language learning.

V. Finding: Factors Affecting Motivation in English-Speaking

Several factors influence motivation levels among students, including:

Teacher Support: Teachers play a pivotal role in creating a motivating classroom environment. Encouraging students, offering constructive feedback, and making activities enjoyable can boost motivation. Teachers who build a supportive and low-pressure environment can help students feel more comfortable participating in English-speaking activities.

Peer Interaction: Collaborative learning with peers can be highly motivating. When students see their classmates actively participating, they may feel encouraged to join in and contribute. Activities like group discussions, debates, and team-based projects foster a sense of belonging, enabling students to engage more actively.

Relevance and Purpose of Learning: When students understand the practical value of English-speaking skills in real life—whether for future career opportunities, travel, or personal development—they are more motivated to participate in activities. Making the learning process relevant to their lives can make students view these activities as meaningful rather than simply a part of the curriculum.

Variety and Interest in Activities: A range of engaging activities, such as storytelling, role-play, and debates, cater to different student interests and keep motivation levels high. When activities are varied and enjoyable, students are more likely to feel energized and energized.

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VI. Strategies to Enhance Motivation in English-Speaking

To boost students' motivation to participate in English-speaking activities, educators and language programs can consider the following strategies:

Set Clear and Achievable Goals: Encourage students to set realistic goals for themselves, such as speaking in English for a certain number of minutes each day. When students achieve these goals, it reinforces their motivation and encourages them to keep participating.

Provide Positive Reinforcement: Recognize students' efforts and improvements, no matter how small. Positive reinforcement can significantly enhance students' intrinsic motivation, making them more willing to participate.

Create a Safe and Supportive Environment: Reducing the fear of judgment or ridicule is essential. Teachers should encourage a classroom culture where students feel comfortable making mistakes, as this is a natural part of the language learning process.

Incorporate Authentic Communication: Instead of traditional, scripted dialogues, integrate activities that mirror real-life situations, such as ordering food at a restaurant or giving directions. Authentic interactions are more motivating as they feel practical and immediately applicable.

Encourage Self-Reflection: Self-reflection allows students to recognize their progress, identify areas for improvement, and develop a sense of ownership in their learning journey. Teachers can ask students to reflect on their speaking experiences and what they learned from each activity.

CONCLUSION

Motivation is a critical factor in determining students' participation in English-speaking activities. When students are motivated, they are more likely to engage actively, practice consistently, and ultimately improve their language skills. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations contribute to this engagement, with intrinsic motivation often being more sustainable and impactful in the long run. By fostering a supportive and engaging environment, providing meaningful activities, and helping students see the relevance of their learning, educators can cultivate the motivation needed for students to participate confidently and enthusiastically in English-speaking activities. Through these efforts, language learning becomes not only a goal but an enjoyable and rewarding journey.

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