



Motivation of English majors in developing speaking skills

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Abstract

Motivation is a decisive factor in determining whether students succeed or fail in learning a foreign language. Without sufficient motivation, progress becomes nearly unattainable. At Thai Nguyen University of Technology, many students—particularly English majors—find it difficult to sustain the motivation needed to speak English with confidence. Speaking is not only a fundamental language skill but also an essential tool for everyday communication. This study investigated the factors that shape English-major students' motivation in speaking classes at the university. The research involved 30 English majors and three lecturers, with data collected through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. Results highlighted four interconnected categories influencing motivation: the students themselves, the lecturers, the classroom environment, and the textbooks. Based on these findings, several recommendations were proposed to enhance students' motivation: (1) both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are crucial for improving speaking skills; (2) lecturers should design engaging, student-relevant activities; and (3) lecturers should foster a supportive classroom atmosphere and demonstrate enthusiasm in their teaching. Ultimately, this study aims to help English language learners strengthen their motivation to speak and, in turn, improve their overall speaking proficiency.

Keywords: Motivation, factors, speaking, majored, skills

Introduction

In today's world, English has become a global language, widely used as a foreign or third language across many countries. Mastering English requires proficiency in four core skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, speaking is often regarded as the most essential, since individuals who know a language are typically identified as its speakers (Ur, 1996).

Language acquisition is shaped by numerous factors, with motivation standing out as one of the most influential. It significantly affects both the pace and success of learning a second or foreign language. Studies by Ely (1986) and Gardner (2000) confirm that learners with stronger motivation achieve greater efficiency and success in language learning.

At Thai Nguyen University of Technology (TNUT), English majors often struggle with low motivation in speaking practice, which hinders their ability to communicate effectively in English. To enhance their speaking competence, it is crucial to examine the motivational factors that influence their learning process and develop strategies to help them overcome these challenges.

Methodology

1. The subjects

To collect the necessary data for achieving the objectives of the study, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed to students. The participants consisted of 31 English majors from classes K55NNA, K56NNA, K57NNA, and K58NNA, all of whom completed the survey. These students, aged over 18 and coming from diverse regions, had already acquired basic English knowledge during secondary and high school. At university, they continued to study English with a stronger emphasis on advanced skills, aiming to fulfill various goals such as personal interest, parental

expectations, financial benefits, mastery of the language, career advancement, and other motivations.

2. The instruments

The quantitative methods used to collect data were questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The first reason for choosing questionnaires is that this instrument might largely collect students' opinions. The questionnaire consists of 10 closed questions and was designed in English

3. Data analysis

To ensure reliable results, this study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques for accurate and objective data analysis. The frequency of specific issues was determined by tallying questionnaire responses and converting them into percentages. These findings were then examined and interpreted through the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, allowing for a more comprehensive evaluation.

Results and discussion

1. Motivations to study English speaking.

Initially, 31 questionnaires were prepared and distributed, all of which were completed appropriately. Among the respondents, 19 were female and 12 were male. Each participant had studied English for more than eight years, acquiring fundamental knowledge during their earlier education. To gain deeper insights into the factors influencing English majors' motivation, a semi-structured interview consisting of 18 questions was conducted with ten randomly selected students from classes K55NNA to K58NNA.

After collecting the data, the motivation of English majored students to study English in speaking classes is shown obviously on the pie charts as follows:

Question 1. How much time do you spend practicing speaking daily?

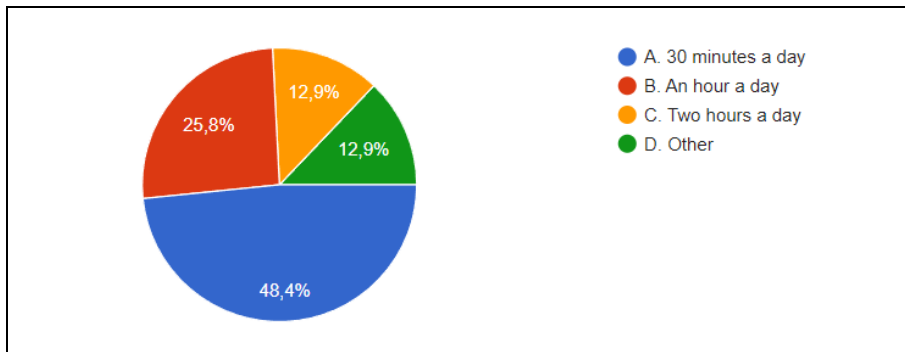


Fig 1: Time for practicing speaking

The pie chart illustrates that students devote relatively little time to daily study and speaking practice. The majority reported spending only about 30 minutes each day on speaking activities. Very few students—just 12.9%—practiced for an hour or longer. This limited amount of practice time has a significant impact on their overall effectiveness in developing speaking skills.

Question 2. Do you have good exposure to English at school as well as out-of-school English classes via various sources such as foreign TV programs, movies, cartoons, the internet, English music, or interacting with English-speaking people?

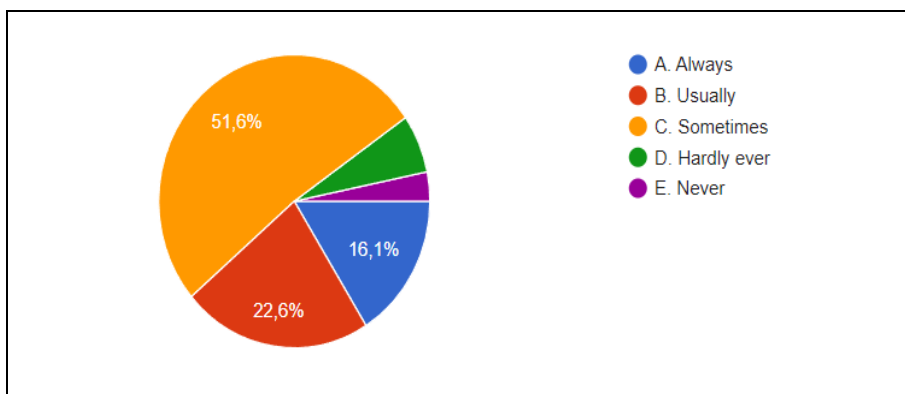


Fig 2: Exposure to English at school

Survey results show that 51.6% of students occasionally practiced English using different methods, 22.6% practiced regularly, and only 16.1% practiced consistently. Despite this, nearly half of the students remained unsure about effective learning strategies suited to their needs. After classes, most preferred entertainment activities such as watching foreign TV programs, movies, cartoons, browsing the internet, or listening to English music. Although these

resources provide valuable exposure to spoken English, students tended to use them primarily for leisure rather than study. Consequently, these potentially useful tools contributed little to improving their overall learning and speaking skills.

Question 3. What activity do you often do to prepare before the speaking lesson?

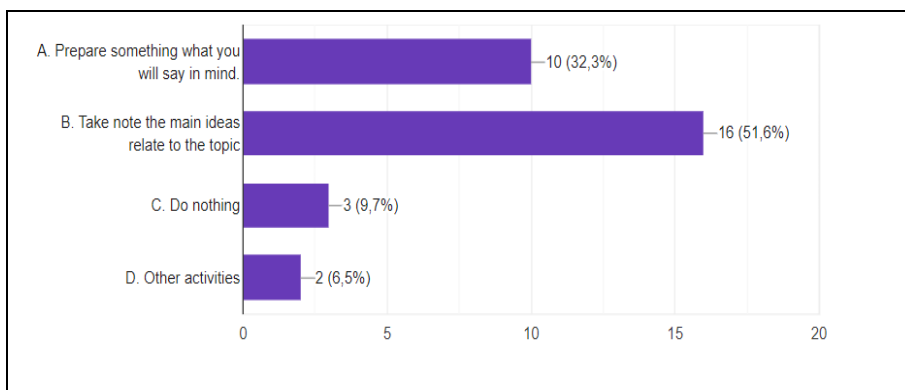


Fig 3: Preparations for speaking classes

The chart indicates that a considerable proportion of students (32%) in the speaking class often prepared the topic content mentally before speaking. More than half (52%) prepared by noting down the main ideas, while 10% did not prepare at all. Only 6% engaged in other activities prior to speaking.

In summary, preparation plays a vital role in boosting students' confidence and fluency. Those who prepare are

more likely to speak effectively compared to those who make no effort beforehand.

Question 4. Factors motivating and demotivating students to speak English in speaking classes

The questionnaires and semi-structured interviews also had the target to find out the factors that motivated and demotivated the students when they chose to study English, especially when they participated in speaking classes.

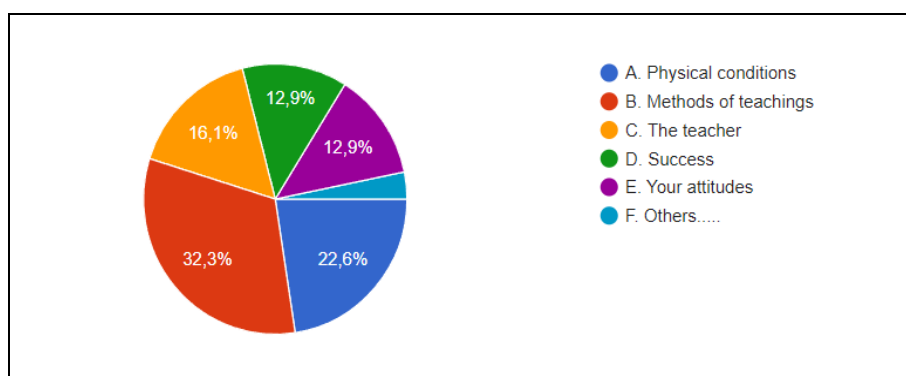


Fig 4: Motivating and demotivating factors

The pie chart highlights the key factors motivating English majors to speak in class. Teaching methods emerged as the most influential, accounting for 32.3% of responses. Physical conditions ranked second at 22.6%, followed by teacher-related factors at 16.1%. Meanwhile, 12.9% of students identified success and personal attitudes as motivators, and 5.6% pointed to other aspects such as passion, stress, or classroom facilities.

To gain deeper insights, a semi-structured interview was conducted. One participant from class K55NNA emphasized that English lecturers at Thai Nguyen University of Technology should have more teaching experience to better guide students in speaking activities. Another participant

noted that teachers play a crucial role in enhancing motivation by applying diverse teaching methods. Overall, most students agreed that teaching methods are the strongest factor influencing their motivation to speak English. Both the chart and interview responses clearly show that English majors at TNUT are more motivated when lecturers employ appropriate and innovative teaching strategies in speaking classes.

Suggestions to improve English majored students' motivation to study speaking English better in English classes.

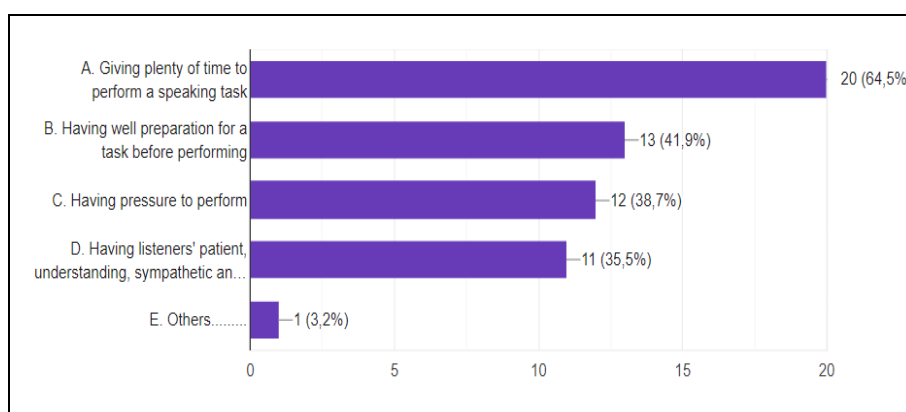


Fig 5: Suggestions to improve motivation

The bar chart presents students' suggestions for enhancing motivation in English-speaking classes. More than half of the respondents—20 students—believed that being given sufficient time to complete speaking tasks was the most effective way to boost motivation. Nearly all interview participants also emphasized that extended preparation time positively influenced their performance. For instance, Participant 3 from class K55NNA explained that having specific topics in advance would allow her to gain more knowledge, prepare thoroughly, and speak with greater confidence.

Meanwhile, 13 students highlighted the importance of having adequate time to perform, 12 suggested that teachers should apply meaningful pressure during speaking tasks, and 11 argued that support from listeners was essential. In contrast, only one student proposed alternative suggestions, representing a very small proportion of the group.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights for English majors, helping them better understand how to strengthen their motivation in speaking classes. It also gathered student

feedback at Thai Nguyen University of Technology (TNUT) to identify the factors that most influence motivation.

Motivational elements are essential for English learners, particularly for English majors at TNUT. According to the data, 33.3% of students reported that passing exams was their primary learning goal, while 30% indicated that teaching methods had the most positive impact on their motivation to speak English. Conversely, fear of failure was identified as a major demotivating factor.

Most participants emphasized that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are equally important in developing speaking skills. Specifically, they highlighted performance pressure and self-confidence as the most influential aspects of their learning experience. Students also suggested that having more time, engaging in additional speaking activities, and practicing independently could significantly enhance their motivation.

Overall, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors play a crucial role in learning to speak English. Despite these findings, challenges remain in improving speaking skills at TNUT. Addressing these issues requires continuous effort from both students and lecturers to foster a more effective and motivating learning environment.

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