

## **Student Demotivation in Speaking Classes: A Systematic Literature Review Study**

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### **Abstract**

This systematic literature review investigates key factors contributing to the decline of student motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking classes. Based on 30 peer-reviewed studies from 2015 to 2024, the review identifies four recurring themes: psychological barriers, teaching strategies, social dynamics, and institutional or technological challenges. Guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), it explores how unmet needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness negatively impact learners' willingness to speak in class. The review also addresses recent developments, such as the influence of online learning environments in the post-pandemic era. These digital shifts have introduced both opportunities and obstacles for student engagement. Despite offering useful insights, many of the reviewed studies have limitations, including small participant numbers and a lack of longitudinal data. The review concludes with practical implications for educators, administrators, and researchers, emphasizing the importance of fostering supportive classroom environments that meet students' psychological needs and encourage active participation in speaking activities.

**Keywords:** EFL speaking, pedagogy, psychological factors, student motivation, systematic review

### **Introduction**

Motivation plays a pivotal role in second language acquisition, serving as both the catalyst and sustainer of learning behaviors. Among the four core language skills, listening, reading, writing, and speaking, speaking is widely considered the most anxiety-inducing and challenging. Unlike receptive skills, speaking demands that learners actively produce language in real-time contexts, often under the observation of peers and instructors. Consequently, high levels of motivation in speaking classes are essential for fostering learner participation, fluency, and communicative competence.

Despite its importance, a growing body of research conducted across diverse cultural and educational contexts has consistently documented a decline in learners' motivation to engage in speaking activities (e.g., Nguyen, 2024; Herlina, 2023; Mahbub, 2021). This motivational downturn is influenced by a complex interplay of factors. Internally, learners may grapple with psychological barriers such as fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, or language anxiety. Externally,

pedagogical shortcomings—including uninspiring classroom activities, rigid assessment systems, and ineffective instructional strategies—further exacerbate the issue. Additionally, social dynamics like peer pressure and classroom atmosphere, as well as institutional constraints such as inflexible curricula or insufficient technological infrastructure, contribute to the problem.

This systematic literature review offers a comprehensive synthesis of empirical studies published between 2015 and 2024 that investigate the causes and contexts of declining motivation in speaking classes. Guided by the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the review analyzes 30 peer-reviewed articles to uncover common themes, evaluate methodological strengths and limitations, and propose actionable recommendations. Ultimately, this review aims to inform future research, support evidence-based teaching practices, and influence policy decisions to counteract the decline in speaking motivation among EFL learners.

## **Method**

This systematic literature review adhered to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and rigor in the research process. A total of 30 peer-reviewed journal articles were selected based on clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they: (1) were published between 2015 and 2024, (2) focused explicitly on student motivation within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) speaking contexts, and (3) employed empirical methods with accessible full texts in English.

A structured search was conducted across major academic databases, including Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect, using keywords such as "*EFL speaking*," "*student motivation*," "*language anxiety*," and "*Self-Determination Theory*." After removing duplicates and screening titles, abstracts, and full texts, the final selection comprised studies meeting all relevance and quality benchmarks.

Each study was then analyzed thematically through a qualitative coding process. Themes were identified inductively and refined through repeated reading and cross-comparison. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) served as the primary analytical framework, guiding the interpretation of findings based on the motivational dimensions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Psychological and Emotional Factors**

One of the most prevalent themes across the literature is the negative impact of psychological and emotional factors on student motivation in speaking classes. Several studies emphasize that speaking anxiety, a common barrier in EFL classrooms, plays a substantial role in reducing learners' willingness to communicate. For instance, Dwi Astuti (2018) identifies fear of making mistakes and being judged by peers as significant deterrents, which is supported by Nguyen (2024), who reports that perceived linguistic incompetence often leads students to withdraw from classroom speaking

activities. Similarly, Siregar (2022) explores the correlation between speaking anxiety and demotivation, finding that even students with adequate vocabulary may choose silence due to emotional insecurity.

Andriani (2022) and Herlina (2023) further reinforce that students who experience constant performance pressure—either from teacher expectations or peer comparison—tend to feel less competent and thus become disengaged. These findings align with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that learners must feel psychologically safe and competent to sustain intrinsic motivation. When these needs are unmet, learners' affective filters are elevated, impeding language acquisition and willingness to participate (Krashen, 1982, as cited in Wulandari, 2019).

### **Pedagogical and Instructional Factors**

Teacher-related factors are widely recognized as critical to student motivation in speaking classes. Numerous studies emphasize that the teaching approach, classroom management, and feedback style can either enhance or hinder motivation. Jones (2017), in a case study of EFL learners, found that motivational teaching strategies—such as praising effort, offering autonomy, and incorporating humor—substantially improved student participation. Conversely, Mahbub (2021) highlights how rigid classroom structures and overly critical teachers demotivate learners by making them feel inadequate or incapable of improvement.

Astuti (2023) adds that students are more likely to participate when tasks are authentic, interactive, and relevant to their daily lives. This is echoed by Derakhshan and Malmir (2021), who argue that teacher immediacy, empathy, and scaffolding are powerful predictors of speaking engagement. Oktaviani (2022) stresses that inconsistent or unclear assessment criteria can also discourage students, especially when they do not understand how to improve. Therefore, the teacher's role extends beyond instruction—it involves creating an environment where students feel supported, autonomous, and competent.

### **Social and Environmental Factors**

The classroom social environment significantly shapes learners' willingness to speak. Positive peer interactions and a supportive group dynamic promote a sense of relatedness, as outlined in SDT. Herlina (2023) identifies peer judgment and fear of social embarrassment as key reasons for classroom silence, especially among introverted students. This is particularly prominent in collectivist cultures where face-saving behavior is highly valued (Fatimah, 2021).

On the other hand, Kurniawan (2022) demonstrates that peer feedback and collaborative tasks increase students' engagement and reduce anxiety. Rahmawati (2021) shows that a non-threatening atmosphere, where mistakes are seen as part of the learning process, encourages students to take risks and speak more frequently. Sari (2023) emphasizes the importance of classroom atmosphere, suggesting that when learners perceive the class as safe, respectful, and inclusive, their intrinsic motivation to speak increases. Thus, a collaborative, rather than competitive, learning environment plays a crucial role in sustaining motivation.

### **Institutional and Technological Factors**

Structural and technological barriers also influence student motivation, especially in the post-pandemic era. Hidayat (2021) found that online learning has introduced both opportunities and challenges—while some learners feel more comfortable speaking in virtual settings, others report feelings of disconnection and disengagement due to a lack of face-to-face interaction. Lestari (2020) notes that speaking tasks delivered through digital platforms often lack spontaneity and interaction, resulting in reduced authenticity and motivation.

Barjesteh and Vaseghi (2020) observe that curriculum rigidity and overemphasis on grammar-based instruction limit opportunities for meaningful speaking practice. Taheri and Salari (2020) emphasize the importance of technological infrastructure learners from under-resourced regions often struggle with unstable internet access and limited digital literacy, which exacerbates motivational issues. These findings suggest that, beyond classroom practices, institutional support and investment in digital resources are essential for sustaining speaking motivation in modern EFL contexts.

### **Trend and Gap Analysis**

Trends indicate a strong emphasis on psychological and pedagogical factors, with increasing attention to online learning post-2020. However, gaps include a lack of longitudinal studies, minimal research on younger learners, underrepresentation of diverse cultural contexts, and few intervention-based studies.

This systematic review reaffirms that motivation in EFL speaking classes is shaped by a dynamic interplay of psychological, instructional, social, and structural variables. Among psychological factors, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence consistently emerge as barriers to active participation (Nguyen, 2024; Siregar, 2022). These emotional challenges elevate learners' affective filters, reducing their willingness to speak and take linguistic risks.

Equally important are pedagogical influences, particularly the role of teacher behavior, feedback, and task design. Supportive teachers who use positive reinforcement and student-centered techniques tend to foster greater motivation (Mahbub, 2021; Astuti, 2023). Conversely, rigid teaching styles and lack of encouragement discourage student engagement.

The application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) across multiple studies provides a unifying theoretical framework. According to SDT, motivation is most likely to be sustained when students experience autonomy (a sense of control), competence (a sense of effectiveness), and relatedness (a sense of connection with others) (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Derakhshan & Malmir, 2021). While this theoretical alignment is evident, practical implementation in classrooms remains limited. The scarcity of intervention-based research means that concrete strategies for improving speaking motivation are still largely untested.

To bridge this gap, future studies should prioritize experimental designs that test the impact of specific instructional practices aligned with SDT principles. Such research would provide actionable insights into how educators can create conditions that consistently nurture and sustain student motivation in speaking tasks.

## Conclusion

The decline in student motivation in EFL speaking classes stems from a complex interplay of psychological, instructional, social, and institutional factors. Internal barriers such as anxiety and low self-confidence, combined with ineffective teaching methods, unsupportive peer environments, and structural limitations, collectively hinder students' willingness to actively participate in speaking activities. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and context-aware approach, one that is informed by motivational theories like Self-Determination Theory and grounded in learner-centered pedagogical strategies.

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