

Factors Influencing the Decline of Students' Motivation in Higher Education Speaking Classes at the University of Riau Kepulauan

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Abstract: Speaking motivation plays a fundamental role in second language learning; however, many students experience a decline in motivation when participating in speaking classes. This study aims to investigate the contributing factors behind this decline by focusing on classroom environment, teaching methods, lecturer behavior, and students' self-confidence. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, involving the distribution of questionnaires to 35 students and semi-structured interviews with 8 selected participants. The questionnaire findings reveal that a lack of confidence is the dominant factor, affecting 62% of respondents, who reported feeling fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, and anxiety when speaking English. The classroom environment was also influential, with 53% of respondents stating that noise, discomfort, and poor facilities reduced their motivation. Additionally, 52% agreed that monotonous instructional strategies contributed to boredom, while 48% indicated that lecturer behavior affected their willingness to participate. The interview data further support these results, showing that psychological discomfort and limited interaction negatively affect participation. Overall, the findings indicate that both internal and external factors contribute to demotivation in speaking classes. Therefore, lecturers need to create a supportive learning atmosphere, apply varied interactive teaching methods, and provide positive feedback to help students develop confidence and enhance motivation.

Keywords: classroom environment, demotivating factors, speaking skills, student learning motivation, teaching methods

INTRODUCTION

Motivation plays an important role in the second language learning process, because it functions crucially in triggering and maintaining the continuity of learning activities so that they can take place optimally. Pamuji (2019) states that there is a positive correlation between learning motivation, expectations, and

academic achievement. The results of this study indicate that students with higher levels of learning motivation tend to achieve better academic outcomes, accompanied by greater participation and autonomous learning initiatives. According to Dewi and Wilany (2022), foreign language speaking ability is not only determined by linguistic competence but also influenced by psychological and pedagogical factors, with motivation being an important factor shaping learners' speaking ability. In line with this view, Dewi and Wilany (2023) emphasize that motivation is the main predictor of student success, especially in developing speaking skills.

In addition, recent research also shows that affective barriers, such as speaking anxiety, can interfere with students' motivation and oral performance. Meyriza et al. (2024) found that speaking anxiety is still a significant problem in English language learning, with 65% of students falling into the moderate anxiety category, which is influenced by communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

Motivation in this study is discussed through the lens of Self-Determination Theory. This theory helps explain what drives individuals to learn and how strong their learning motivation is. As a broad theoretical model, it is used to identify the factors that can enhance or reduce intrinsic motivation, autonomous extrinsic motivation, and overall psychological well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

In addition, various studies show that internal factors, such as speaking anxiety, low self-confidence, and limited learning autonomy, are the main causes of decreased student motivation. One of the main causes of decreased motivation is speaking anxiety. Through meta-analysis, Kayhan (2025) concluded that speaking anxiety is the most influential psychological barrier in limiting students' verbal involvement in foreign language subjects. These results are consistent with Khafidhoh et al (2023) study, which indicates that emotional burden and fear of language errors suppress students' confidence levels when practicing speaking in English.

Furthermore, Qin and Poopatwiboon's (2023) show that students with elevated anxiety levels tend to avoid active participation in speaking tasks, even though they have adequate linguistic competence. Other emotional and affective factors, such as burnout, boredom, and lack of social support, also play a significant role. In addition, peer interaction is a factor that often emerges as a motivator; when this interaction is minimal, students lose the opportunity to learn from their peers and build a sense of community in language learning (Meşe et al., 2021). Furthermore, research by Peng (2021) shows that a lack of teacher appreciation for student efforts has an impact on decreasing their motivation and academic engagement. Meanwhile, a study by Goodarzi and Namaziandost (2025) confirm that assessment systems that cause pressure, such as formal speaking tests, worsen students' affective conditions, thereby reducing their motivation to speak spontaneously.

Beyond psychological dimensions, pedagogical factors also contribute to demotivation. Alyousif and Alsuhaiban (2021) revealed that a lack of variety in learning topics, limited opportunities to speak, and teaching approaches that are overly focused on formal aspects (form- focused instruction) result in a decline in student interest and engagement in speaking classes. Zhou et al.(2023) complement these findings by stating that online or blended learning models that are not supported by meaningful interaction actually exacerbate boredom and reduce student participation in learning. In the realm of technology utilization, a study by Puri et al. (2025) indicates that the integration of digital media and mobile-based learning applications can increase students' motivation to speak when designed through interactive and communicative approaches. Conversely, if the application of technology is passive or focused exclusively on mechanical tasks, motivation actually decreases because students feel that they are losing meaningful social interaction (Ebadi et al., 2025)

Furthermore, in English language teaching, there are four basic skills, namely listening, reading, writing, and speaking. However, speaking skills are often the biggest challenge for students, because this skill often causes nervousness and fear when students are faced with the situation of performing in front of the

class. In addition to linguistic skills and vocabulary mastery, mental, emotional, and social readiness are also required, including the courage to speak in public, the readiness to make mistakes and learn from them, and the ability to manage uncertainty when you don't know the right words or structures. Based on research by Ningrum and Fahmi (2020), motivational factors that influence students' use of English can be categorized into internal and external motivations. Internal barriers, such as low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, feelings of inferiority, and anxiety, are the main triggers for decreased learning motivation. From an external perspective, ineffective teaching methods, limited opportunities to speak, and an uninteresting classroom environment also significantly reduce students' motivation to learn (Ameen & Ergenekon, 2023). In the context of speaking classes, many students view speaking as a challenging task because mistakes are easily detected and can cause embarrassment or disapproval from teachers and classmates. Students often fear making mistakes and are anxious about negative assessments from friends or teachers, so they tend to be passive during speaking activities (Getie, 2020).

This phenomenon has attracted substantial attention from students and researchers alike, as motivation not only plays a role in language competency development but also contributes to improving the overall quality of learning. Although many studies have been conducted on motivation for learning English, most of them focus on positive motivation or strategies to increase motivation rather than mechanisms of decreased motivation or demotivation. Previous research by Zolkapli et al. (2023) emphasizes the relationship between motivation and academic achievement, but has not thoroughly examined how pedagogical and psychological elements influence the decline in students' speaking motivation. In addition, previous research has focused more on general or written learning than on speaking skills, which present greater emotional and social challenges.

Moreover, current research tends to be quantitative in nature because it only measures students' motivation levels without studying their subjective experiences and perceptions. Affective factors such as anxiety, academic fatigue (or academic exhaustion), and embarrassment over mistakes are often overlooked due to the

survey research design. Therefore, we still do not fully understand how students' personal experiences, social interactions in the classroom, and teachers' approaches influence their desire to speak.

In addition, several studies on demotivation have been conducted in countries outside Indonesia, such as Thailand, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, which have different education systems, cultural characteristics, and classroom dynamics from Indonesia. Thus, it is necessary to conduct more contextual research on Indonesian students' experiences of declining desire to speak in English class.

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to fill this gap by using a descriptive qualitative approach to comprehensively understand the elements that cause student demotivation in the local context. In addition, this study also provides relevant pedagogical suggestions for teaching speaking at the higher education level in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to describe in depth the factors that influence student learning motivation in speaking classes. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on understanding the meaning and subjective experiences of students regarding phenomena that occur naturally.

The subjects in this study consisted of third-semester students who took speaking classes at the University of Riau Kepulauan. The participant selection process began with the distribution of a Likert scale questionnaire to 35 students to map initial tendencies related to motivation levels, anxiety, perceptions of teaching methods, and classroom comfort. The questionnaire was adapted from a study by Hiep and Phuong (2025) that examined factors of demotivation in English-speaking classes. This questionnaire was not used as a basis for statistical analysis, but only as a supporting instrument to identify initial patterns. After obtaining a general overview through the questionnaire, the researcher used purposive sampling to select eight students as informants for in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling was used because the researcher needed informants who could provide relevant data according to the research criteria, as suggested by Sugiyono (2020) that the

selection of participants in qualitative research should be based on the relevance of information, not the representation of numbers.

In addition, data collection was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved distributing questionnaires to all students to obtain a general overview of the level of motivation in speaking classes. The second stage involved in-depth interviews as the main source of data. Interviews were conducted individually in a conducive atmosphere so that informants felt comfortable and free to share their experiences. Each interview session lasted between 5 and 15 minutes and was recorded with the informants' consent to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. The researcher maintained research ethics by explaining the purpose of the research, guaranteeing the confidentiality of the participants' identities, and ensuring that participation in the research was voluntary.

This study used in-depth interviews as the main source of data, while the questionnaire served as supporting material to strengthen the findings. The data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, following the steps outlined by Naeem et al. (2023). The analysis began with reading the interview transcripts several times to become familiar with the content. After that, important sections of the data related to the research focus were coded. Once the coding process was completed, similar codes were grouped to form initial themes. These themes were then reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the data. After refinement, each theme was clearly labeled to reflect the key idea it represented. The final step was writing the results based on the themes that emerged from the analysis.

Meanwhile, the questionnaire data were not analyzed in depth like the interview results. Instead, they were used only to support the interpretation of the themes. The questionnaire helped confirm whether the interview findings were consistent, but it was not used as a basis for statistical or quantitative analysis.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the study applied method triangulation. This was done by comparing the interview results with the supporting questionnaire data to check for consistency in responses. As stated by Ahmed (2024), triangulation helps strengthen the validity of qualitative research by using more than one method or data source to verify the accuracy of the findings.

In addition, in this study, the researcher acted as the main instrument directly involved in the entire research process, from planning and data collection to analysis of the results. This is in line with Sugiyono's statement that in qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument. In line with this, Sugiyono (2020) also emphasizes that qualitative researchers have a central role in understanding the context and meaning of the data obtained in the field. The data analysis process is carried out continuously from collection to conclusion. The analysis refers to the Miles and Huberman model in Sugiyono (2020), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. These stages are carried out inductively to find the meaning contained in the data and gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Finally, data validity was tested using source and method triangulation techniques. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from questionnaires and interviews to enhance the credibility and validity of the research findings. According to Sugiyono, (2020) triangulation method is a way to ensure data reliability through the use of various complementary sources or methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings from the questionnaire, four main factors were identified as contributors to the decline in students' motivation in speaking classes. The analysis was based on the percentage of respondents who selected Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA) as indicators of problem significance, theoretical or practical consequences of the results.

The results of the questionnaire as stated in Chart 1, reveal four main factors contributing to the decline in students' motivation in speaking classes. The most dominant factor is students' lack of confidence, reported by 62% of respondents, indicating that internal psychological barriers play a significant role in limiting participation. This is followed by the classroom environment (53%), suggesting that external conditions such as atmosphere, peer interaction, or classroom setting also influence students' motivation. Additionally, 52% of respondents identified boring lectures as a contributing factor, implying that teaching methods may not be

sufficiently engaging to sustain students' interest. Lastly, the lecturer's behavior accounts for 48%, showing that the way instructors interact with students and deliver material also affects motivation, although to a slightly lesser extent compared to the other factors. Overall, both internal and external factors collectively contribute to the decline in students' speaking motivation.

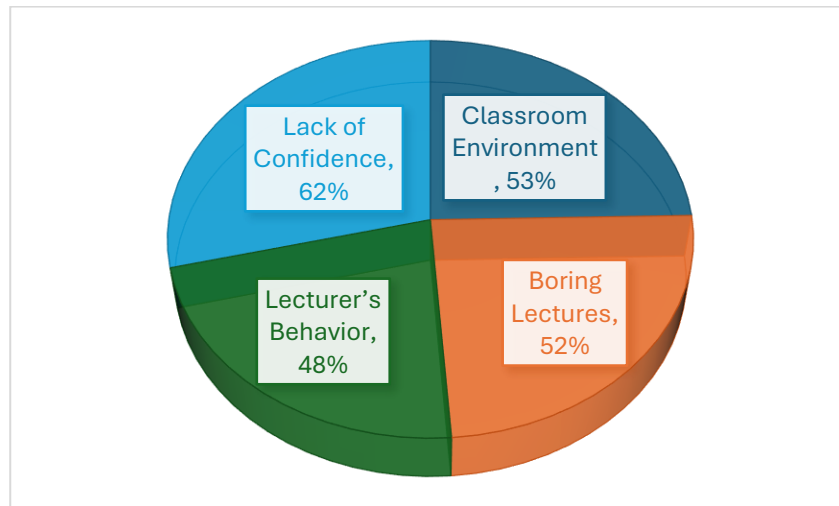


Chart 1. The Result of the Questionnaire

The results of the interview are presented as follows.

Classroom Environment

These findings align with interview responses from participants (P1, P3, P7, and P8), who explained that noise, distractions, and uncomfortable seating arrangements significantly reduce their focus and willingness to participate. Some respondents also mentioned that the class atmosphere influences their anxiety levels, especially if the environment feels tense or unsupportive.

Boring Lectures

These results were reinforced by interviews, in which the majority of participants (P2, P4, P7, and P8) stated that passive and less interactive learning methods reduced their enthusiasm in speaking classes. Conversely, active methods such as role-play, games, discussions, and group work were consistently mentioned as methods that increased motivation.

Lecturer's Behavior

Interview results further confirm this theme. Participants (P2, P3, P4, P5, and P7) emphasized that supportive lecturers boost their confidence, while strict or intimidating behavior creates fear and hesitation to speak. Several interviewees also noted that the way feedback is delivered determines whether they feel encouraged or discouraged.

Lack of Confidence

Interview responses strongly support this finding. Many participants (P1, P4, P5, P6, and P7) reported that anxiety, fear of judgment, and feelings of inadequacy prevent them from speaking confidently in class. However, they also noted that constructive feedback and a supportive class environment can help reduce anxiety and improve confidence.

The comparison between the questionnaire and interview findings shows a strong alignment regarding the key factors influencing the decline of students' motivation in speaking classes. The questionnaire results revealed that the most dominant factor was a lack of confidence (62%), and this was strongly supported by the interview data, where many students expressed anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and embarrassment when speaking English in front of others. Similarly, the questionnaire indicated that the classroom environment affected motivation (53%), and this was confirmed through interviews where students described difficulty concentrating in noisy or uncomfortable classrooms. The factor of monotonous teaching methods (52%) also appeared consistently across both data sources. While the questionnaire data highlighted boredom with lecture-based approaches, interviews further explained that students preferred interactive activities such as role-play, group work, and games as they made the learning experience more engaging. Lastly, the questionnaire showed that lecturer behavior affected nearly half of the students (48%), which was reinforced in the interviews, where students expressed that supportive feedback increased confidence, whereas strict or intimidating behavior heightened fear and reduced participation. Overall, both sources consistently suggest that the decline in speaking motivation is influenced by a combination of internal psychological challenges and external

teaching and classroom conditions, demonstrating coherence between the quantitative and qualitative findings.

This section discusses a summary of the results. The interview results show that the classroom environment plays an important role in encouraging students to learn. Most students said that competitive, noisy, and uncondusive classrooms made them anxious and difficult to focus. Not only that, most students experience mixed emotions when attending classes conducted in English. The majority of them feel anxious, worried, and lack confidence, especially when they have to speak in front of their classmates. They often feel uncomfortable and burdened by the competitive classroom atmosphere. This burden makes them afraid of making mistakes when speaking, which ultimately reduces their involvement in classroom activities. They also fear negative evaluations or assessments from their peers or lecturers. In addition, the classroom atmosphere becomes boring and does not encourage active participation due to a lack of interesting learning media and little two-way interaction. This is in line with the research by Taqwa et al. (2022), which shows that a friendly and interactive learning environment increases students' desire to learn in speaking classes. In addition, a positive classroom atmosphere has been proven to reduce anxiety and increase students' confidence in their language skills. After highlighting the influence of the classroom environment, the next aspect that emerged from the interview findings was the teaching methods used by lecturers.

Furthermore, teaching methods greatly influence students' enthusiasm for learning in speaking classes, highlighting the need for methods that involve active interaction and practical application in the learning process. Students feel more focused and enthusiastic when lecturers provide direct speaking exercises, allow room for discussion, and utilize interesting teaching materials. On the other hand, boring teaching approaches, such as long lectures without student involvement, cause boredom and a loss of focus. Students emphasize that monotonous lectures that do not involve students in speaking activities reduce their desire to learn and are considered boring if the lectures lack variety, projects, or group interaction.

To increase participation, several sources suggest adding media, group discussions, debates, language games, presentation projects, and alumni

experiences. This is supported by research conducted by Azis (2023), which shows that communicative teaching approaches and task-based learning can increase student interest and engagement in language classes. Activity-based learning methods are also considered effective because they reduce boredom and increase student engagement. Not only teaching methods, but the behavior and attitude of lecturers are also important factors that influence student motivation.

Furthermore, teacher behavior is an important aspect in the interview results. Students responded positively to lecturers who were friendly, encouraging, and provided constructive feedback. Conversely, lecturers who were rigid, uncommunicative, and unsupportive reduced students' confidence and made them reluctant to speak. Students emphasized the importance of a communicative environment and psychological support from instructors. Students emphasized the importance of a communicative environment and psychological support from instructors (Edrees & Stanikzai, 2024). The support provided by teachers can increase student engagement in speaking activities, thereby creating a more positive and productive learning atmosphere (Aqil et al., 2025). In addition to external factors such as lecturer behavior, internal factors also emerged clearly in the findings, particularly those related to student confidence.

Moreover, low self-confidence is a major obstacle for students. Many respondents feel worried about making mistakes, being ridiculed, and feeling anxious when called on suddenly. Concerns about not being able to say the right words or embarrassment about their English language skills make students reluctant to speak. Students who have had positive experiences with feedback and assistance are more effective in dealing with anxiety than those who have not. These results confirm Khafidhoh et al. (2023) research, which shows that speaking anxiety is one of the main factors in decreased motivation and performance in foreign language speaking classes. Other studies also show that self-confidence plays an important role in determining student speaking participation (Aulia & Apoko, 2022).

In addition, low self-confidence emerged as one of the main obstacles experienced by students in speaking classes. Many students stated that they often felt anxious when they had to speak in English, especially because they were afraid

of making mistakes and being ridiculed by their classmates. This anxiety became even stronger when the lecturer suddenly called on them to express their opinions or answer questions. Concerns about not being able to find the right words, saying sentences correctly, or even feeling embarrassed about their English skills, which they consider to be lacking, cause some students to prefer to remain silent and inactive during the learning process. Students who have had positive experiences through constructive feedback and support from lecturers or peers tend to be better at overcoming anxiety. Conversely, students who have not had such experiences are more prone to tension and loss of motivation to speak (Sulindra et al., 2023).

These findings are consistent with the results of research, which shows that anxiety about speaking in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes is often influenced by factors such as lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, unfamiliar learning tasks, and low motivation (Siagian & Adam, 2017). In addition, other studies have also shown that students' level of self-confidence greatly determines how far they dare to actively engage in speaking activities (Aulia & Apoko, 2022). Thus, self-confidence can be seen as an important psychological factor in encouraging student participation in the speaking learning process.

CONCLUSION

This study found four main components that influence students' willingness to speak in English class: classroom environment, teaching methods, teacher behavior, and student self-confidence. In general, the findings show that a combination of external factors, such as classroom environment and teacher attitude, and internal factors, such as student self-confidence and mental readiness are very important for successful speaking learning.

First, a positive classroom environment has been shown to increase student motivation and make them feel comfortable speaking. A safe, supportive, and non-judgmental classroom allows students to speak without fear. A noisy, competitive, or high-pressure classroom can inhibit students and lower their confidence.

Second, it has been proven that interactive, innovative, and practice-based teaching approaches are more effective than conventional lecture approaches. Task-

based learning, role-playing, debates, and group presentations give students the opportunity to improve their speaking skills. Therefore, educators must choose methods that are appropriate for students and learning objectives.

Third, student motivation and confidence are directly influenced by teacher behavior and communication. Teachers who are friendly, open, helpful, and provide constructive feedback can encourage students to actively participate in education. Conversely, a tense or threatening attitude can increase student anxiety and prevent them from speaking.

Fourth, successful speaking depends on students' self-confidence. Many students feel unsure of their abilities and are afraid of making mistakes. Therefore, educators need to encourage students' mental development through a humanistic, empathetic, and supportive learning approach that allows students to develop gradually.

Ultimately, this study confirms that successful speaking learning does not only depend on students' language abilities; students' psychological conditions, emotional support, learning design, and the quality of social interactions in the classroom are all factors that contribute to successful learning.

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