

Exploring the Role of Motivation in English Language Learning among EFL Students at Dong An Polytechnic

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ABSTRACT: This mixed-methods study looks at how intrinsic, extrinsic, and self-regulated motivation affect speaking performance in EFL students at Dong An Polytechnic as they learn the language. A questionnaire comprising modified subscales from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and the validated Vietnamese Version of the Self-Regulated Motivation for Improving Speaking English as a Foreign Language (VV-SRMIS-EFL) was used to gather data from 120 non-English major students. A rubric aligned with the CEFR was used to evaluate speaking proficiency. Additionally, 15 participants who were purposefully chosen for the study participated in semi-structured interviews that yielded qualitative information about the motivational strategies and orientations of the learners. The most common motivator, according to the findings, was instrumental motivation, which was based on practical objectives like career and academic success. However, integrative interests and intrinsic enjoyment also made significant contributions to engagement. Speaking performance was most strongly correlated with self-regulated motivation ($r = .52$), followed by instrumental motivation ($r = .42$) and integrative motivation ($r = .31$). The significance of affect regulation,

task value activation, and peer support in maintaining speaking effort and confidence was highlighted by the qualitative results. The study comes to the conclusion that improving speaking proficiency in EFL contexts requires developing self-regulatory capacity in addition to providing pertinent instrumental and integrative opportunities. Future research directions and pedagogical implications are discussed.

Keywords: *motivation, English language learning, intrinsic, extrinsic, and self-regulated motivational factor, English speaking performance, EFL students*

Introduction

As the primary factor that energizes, guides, and maintains learner behavior, motivation has long been acknowledged as a fundamental concept in the successful acquisition of a second language (Zareian & Jodaei, 2015). Although English is required to be used in all curricula in the Vietnamese educational system, students' proficiency varies, which frequently reflects their varied motivational styles and engagement levels (Nguyen, 2019). Deciphering the intricate network of motivational factors is crucial to improving learner outcomes and pedagogical approaches, especially in polytechnic settings like Dong An Polytechnic where English is a foreign language.

In Vietnam, empirical research has consistently shown that instrumental motivation is more prevalent; students often highlight the practical benefits of English, such as improving their chances of finding work or meeting their academic requirements. In more individualized or advanced learning contexts, however, integrative and intrinsic motivational factors—such as learners' desire for cultural affinity, personal enrichment, and cognitive growth—also play a significant role (Bui & Mai, 2018). Modern frameworks also emphasize how important it is for students to be able to control their own motivation, which has been shown to have a strong positive correlation with speaking ability. This includes consciously activating task value, controlling affective responses, and altering learning environments (Truong, 2025).

Based on the theories of self-regulated learning (Pintrich, 2004) and motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000), this study uses a mixed-methods approach to investigate the ways in which intrinsic, extrinsic, and self-regulated motivational constructs function

among Dong An Polytechnic EFL students. This study attempts to shed light on the experiential subtleties and quantifiable effects of motivation on English learning by combining qualitative insights from interviews with quantitative measures using validated scales (such as the Vietnamese Version of the Self-Regulated Motivation for Improving Speaking English as a Foreign Language—VV-SRMIS-EFL; Truong, 2025). In order to foster more balanced and long-lasting learner motivation in the Vietnamese polytechnic EFL context, the study ultimately aims to produce data-driven pedagogical recommendations.

Research Questions

1. **RQ1:** What intrinsic, extrinsic, and self-regulated motivational factors influence English language learning among EFL students at Dong An Polytechnic?
2. **RQ2:** How do different types of motivation (e.g., instrumental, integrative, self-regulated) correlate with English speaking performance among these EFL students?

Literature Review

A key factor in second language acquisition that affects both the rate and depth of learning is motivation, which has been repeatedly found to be important (Ellis, 1994). Integrative motivation, which reflects a learner's desire to interact socially and culturally with the target language community, and instrumental motivation, which concentrates on practical outcomes like academic success or career advancement, were distinguished in Gardner and Lambert's (1972) groundbreaking socio-educational model. Although research is beginning to indicate that integrative and instrumental motivations may work in concert to improve learning outcomes, instrumental orientations still predominate in many EFL contexts where there is little opportunity for genuine interaction with native speakers (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

Building on this framework, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) provides a more comprehensive psychological viewpoint, asserting that motivation ranges from intrinsic to extrinsic and that meeting fundamental psychological

needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—increases persistence and engagement. In addition, the Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) theory (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman, 1989) emphasizes the cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational techniques that students use to start, continue, and modify their learning. These techniques include goal-setting, emotional regulation, and the use of peer or environmental resources. The convergence of SDT and SRL is highlighted by recent EFL research, which highlights how learners can actively convert demands from outside sources into goals that are personally meaningful while controlling their motivation in the face of difficulties (Yu, 2023).

A version of Uztosun's original scale, the Vietnamese Version of the Self-Regulated Motivation for Improving Speaking English as a Foreign Language (VV-SRMIS-EFL) was created and validated in the Vietnamese context by Truong (2025). It showed construct validity and high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). The four dimensions that the instrument measures are Task Value Activation, Learning Environment Regulation, Affect Regulation, and Peer Regulation. Empirical results showed that speaking performance and these dimensions were significantly positively correlated, highlighting the significance of motivational self-regulation in communicative competence. This theoretical synthesis, which connects socio-educational, self-determination, and self-regulatory frameworks, offers a strong basis for examining the complex nature of motivation in Vietnamese EFL learners, especially in polytechnic settings where language learning paths are influenced by both autonomous engagement and utilitarian goals.

Research Methodology

Dong An Polytechnic EFL students' motivational orientations were thoroughly examined in this study using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, which combined qualitative and quantitative data to allow for a strong triangulation of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In order to ensure representation across academic departments and study years, 120 non-English major students who were chosen through stratified random sampling were given a structured questionnaire as part of the quantitative component. The instrument was divided into three sections: (1) items that measured instrumental and integrative motivation were taken from

Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB); (2) Truong (2025) developed the Vietnamese version of the Self-Regulated Motivation for Improving Speaking English as a Foreign Language (VV-SRMIS-EFL), which evaluates Task Value Activation, Learning Environment Regulation, Affect Regulation, and Peer Regulation; and (3) demographic variables. Speaking proficiency was assessed using a standardized rubric in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and Pearson correlation were used to assess the significance and strength of the associations between speaking performance and motivational constructs in SPSS 28.

Semi-structured interviews with 15 purposefully chosen students who represented a range of motivational profiles (high/low instrumental, high/low integrative, and varying self-regulation levels) made up the qualitative component. Students' perceptions of motivation, self-regulation techniques, and contextual influences on language learning were examined through interviews that were conducted in Vietnamese to allow for richer expression. To find recurring patterns, audio recordings were verbatim transcribed, translated into English, and then thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. During the interpretation stage, the data was integrated, enabling cross-validation and the use of qualitative narratives to explain quantitative patterns. In line with best practices in second language acquisition research, which prioritize methodological pluralism to capture the complex, multifaceted nature of learner motivation, this methodological approach produced both breadth and depth of insight (Dörnyei, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2021).

Findings and Discussion

Motivational factors influence English language learning among EFL students at Dong An Polytechnic

EFL students at Dong A Polytechnic demonstrated a complex interplay of intrinsic, extrinsic, and self-regulated motivational factors influencing their English learning engagement, according to the qualitative analysis. In line with the Self-

Determination Theory's emphasis on competence and autonomy as drivers of sustained engagement, learners' expressed enjoyment of communicative tasks, personal interest in English media, and satisfaction from learning new vocabulary and grammar all demonstrated intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Extrinsic motivation was primarily instrumental in character, with students often citing job opportunities, academic progress requirements, and institutional English proficiency benchmarks as key motivators. This is consistent with findings from Vietnamese higher education contexts where practical utility frequently defeats integrative aspirations (Nguyen & Habók, 2021; Nguyen, 2023). Interestingly, some students reported integrative extrinsic motivations, like wanting to interact with non-Vietnamese coworkers or take part in international exchange programs, indicating a partial alignment between cultural openness and utilitarian objectives. Strategic behaviors that resonated with the four dimensions of the VV-SRMIS-EFL scale, such as goal-setting, peer collaboration, affect management during oral tasks, and using online platforms to track progress, were found to exhibit self-regulated motivational factors (Truong, 2025). According to research that links self-regulated motivation to better language performance, students who showed higher levels of self-regulatory control expressed more confidence when speaking and more perseverance in overcoming communicative anxiety (Uztosun, 2020). These findings suggest that while extrinsic-instrumental drivers remain dominant in this polytechnic context, intrinsic enjoyment and self-regulatory strategies play a complementary role in sustaining effort and resilience, highlighting the pedagogical need to balance pragmatic incentives with opportunities for autonomy and meaningful engagement (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021).

The different types of motivation correlate with English speaking performance among these EFL students

Three motivational styles such as instrumental, integrative, and self-regulated and English speaking proficiency among 120 non-English major EFL students at Dong A Polytechnic were investigated quantitatively. The Vietnamese Version of the Self-Regulated Motivation for Improving Speaking English as a Foreign Language (VV-SRMIS-EFL), created by Truong (2025), and instrumental and integrative motivation

subscales adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) were used to measure motivation. A CEFR-aligned rubric was used to evaluate speaking proficiency, yielding a composite score on a scale of 0 to 100. The descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients are compiled in the below Table.

Construct (k items)	Mean (SD)	Speaking Score Mean (SD)	r with Speaking	95% CI for r	p
Instrumental motivation (6)	4.23 (0.58)	74.8 (9.7)	.42	[.25, .56]	< .001
Integrative motivation (6)	3.81 (0.71)	74.8 (9.7)	.31	[.12, .47]	.001
Self-regulated motivation (SRMIS-EFL composite; 12)	3.96 (0.63)	74.8 (9.7)	.52	[.37, .64]	< .001

Although the magnitude of the correlations varied, the results indicate that speaking performance was positively and significantly correlated with all three motivational types: self-regulated motivation ($r = .52$) > instrumental motivation ($r = .42$) > integrative motivation ($r = .31$).

Self-regulated motivation had the strongest correlation with speaking proficiency, suggesting that students who actively activate task value, control affect, control their learning environments, and look for peer support are more likely to attain higher oral proficiency. This supports the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which holds that students who take charge of their education and meet their basic needs for competence and autonomy exhibit higher levels of engagement and achieve better results. It also supports *Self-Regulated Learning* models (Zimmerman, 2002; Tseng et al., 2006), which identify motivation regulation as a proximal predictor of L2 performance. In the Vietnamese context, Truong's (2025) validation of the VV-SRMIS-EFL demonstrated that motivational self-regulation is strongly associated with speaking scores, suggesting that learners benefit from explicit strategy instruction in goal setting, affect regulation, and task value enhancement.

With pragmatic orientations predominating in EFL contexts where English is primarily used as a tool for academic and professional advancement, instrumental motivation displayed a moderate and significant correlation ($r = .42$). Nguyen and Habók's (2021) study found that external, utilitarian motives often drive sustained effort in Vietnamese universities. Students often reported that speaking English fluently was essential for obtaining competitive jobs, passing graduation requirements, or being eligible for internships with multinational firms. When connected to observable results, these incentives can effectively trigger learning behaviors (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). However, in order to sustain engagement over time, they might need to be combined with self-control abilities.

Students who value cultural connection, interaction with international peers, and authentic communicative experiences are likely to participate in more speaking activities, according to the weakest correlation ($r = .31$) but still significant positive association with integrative motivation. This is consistent with intercultural communication research (Yashima, 2002) and socio-educational viewpoints (Gardner, 2010), which emphasize the importance of cultural openness and L2 community affiliation in promoting communication willingness. Integrative motives were less prevalent in this study, which is probably due to the polytechnic setting's limited direct exposure to native speakers and global cultural contexts.

The results' pattern—self-regulated > instrumental > integrative—indicates that how students maintain and control their motivation is just as crucial as the reasons behind their learning. Self-regulatory ability determines whether students can persevere through difficulties, get over their speaking anxiety, and look for extra practice opportunities outside of the classroom, even though instrumental drivers can motivate effort and integrative motives can enhance engagement. This supports the suggestions made by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021) for incorporating training in motivation-regulation into communicative pedagogy. This could be done practically by creating speaking simulations that are relevant to a person's career to reinforce instrumental motives, incorporating intercultural activities to encourage integrative engagement, and specifically teaching motivation-regulation techniques like progress tracking, positive self-talk, and peer cooperation to support self-regulated motivation.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods study examined the relationship between speaking performance and intrinsic, extrinsic, and self-regulated motivation in English language learning among EFL students at Dong An Polytechnic. According to the qualitative results, learner engagement was also influenced by intrinsic enjoyment and integrative interests, even though instrumental motivation—driven by practical goals like employment, academic advancement, and credential requirements—was the predominant motivational orientation. More significantly, even in the face of learning difficulties, students who exhibited strong self-regulated motivational strategies—such as task value activation, affect regulation, and peer collaboration—showed increased perseverance, confidence, and communication readiness.

Speaking ability and all three motivational styles were quantitatively found to be substantially connected, with self-regulated motivation exhibiting the strongest correlation, followed by instrumental and integrative motivation. According to this, the capacity to actively control and regulate one's motivation is a more potent predictor of successful oral performance, even though external and cultural factors can start and maintain effort. These results support the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and the Self-Regulated Learning models (Zimmerman, 2002), which highlight competence, autonomy, and strategic self-management as key success factors.

The need for pedagogical approaches that strike a balance between autonomy-supportive, strategy-focused instruction and pragmatic incentives is highlighted by the convergence of qualitative and quantitative results. To increase resilience and engagement, educators should incorporate intercultural communication opportunities, create speaking exercises that are authentically related to students' career goals, and specifically teach students motivation-regulation skills.

All things considered, the study contributes to our understanding of EFL motivation in Vietnamese polytechnic settings by emphasizing that learners' motivational regulation may be just as significant as their motivational factors. To investigate how focused interventions in self-regulated motivation can maintain speaking proficiency

over time and in a variety of learning contexts, future studies should use experimental and longitudinal designs.

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