



The role of extrinsic motivation in the development of speaking skills in high school students

Mala Quinapallo Marcos Argenis

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Director: MSc. Rider Eloy Mendoza Saltos

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Autores

Marcos Argenis Mala Quinapallo (1)

(1) Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí

Estudiante de la Maestría en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros Mención

Inglés

Chone – Ecuador

marcos.mala@pg.ulead.edu.ec

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4941-5568>

Rider Eloy Mendoza Saltos (2)

(2) Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí

Docente de la Maestría en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros Mención

Inglés

Chone – Ecuador

rider.mendoza@uleam.edu.ec

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3520-3628>

Abstract

Oral English skills represent one of the greatest challenges for English language learners in Ecuadorian classrooms, where students experience limited opportunities for oral interaction and low confidence when participating in communicative activities. Motivation is a relevant pedagogical factor associated with students' willingness to engage in oral production. This study analyzes the role of extrinsic motivation in the development of oral skills among ninth-grade students at a private educational institution in El Carmen during the 2025-2026 academic year. The research employs a mixed-methods approach with a convergent parallel design, utilizing surveys, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data are examined using descriptive statistics, while qualitative evidence is organized through thematic categorization. The findings reveal that external and identified regulation constitute the predominant forms of extrinsic motivation associated with oral participation. English educators implement strategies such as verbal recognition, symbolic rewards, and extra credit to encourage student participation in oral activities. It is concluded that extrinsic motivation functions as a situational trigger for oral participation, rather than as a stable mechanism for the long-term development of oral competence. These findings highlight the importance of integrating external incentives with pedagogical practices aimed

at progressively fostering more autonomous and meaningful participation in oral communication in English.

Keywords: extrinsic motivation, speaking skills, language students, English learning process

**El rol de la motivación extrínseca en el desarrollo de las habilidades orales en
estudiantes de secundaria.**

RESUMEN

Las habilidades orales en inglés representan uno de los mayores desafíos para los estudiantes de inglés en las aulas ecuatorianas, donde experimentan oportunidades limitadas para la interacción oral y baja confianza al participar en actividades comunicativas. La motivación es un factor pedagógico relevante asociado con la disposición de los estudiantes a participar en la producción oral. Este estudio analiza el rol de la motivación extrínseca en el desarrollo de las habilidades orales entre estudiantes de noveno grado en una institución educativa privada en El Carmen durante el ciclo académico 2025-2026. La investigación emplea un enfoque de métodos mixtos con un diseño paralelo convergente, utilizando encuestas, observaciones en el aula y entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los datos cuantitativos se examinan mediante estadística descriptiva, mientras que la evidencia cualitativa se organiza a través de la categorización temática. Los hallazgos revelan que la regulación externa e identificada constituyen las formas predominantes de motivación extrínseca asociadas con la participación oral. Los docentes frecuentemente implementan estrategias como el reconocimiento verbal, las recompensas simbólicas y los puntos extra para incentivar la participación de los estudiantes en actividades orales. Se concluye que la motivación extrínseca funciona como un desencadenante situacional para la participación oral, más que como un mecanismo estable para el desarrollo a largo plazo de la competencia oral. Estos hallazgos resaltan la importancia de integrar incentivos externos con prácticas pedagógicas orientadas a fomentar progresivamente una participación más autónoma y significativa en la comunicación oral en inglés.

Palabras clave: motivación extrínseca, habilidades orales, estudiantes de idiomas, proceso de aprendizaje del inglés.

Introduction

English currently occupies an important position in academic, professional, and intercultural communication, as in Ecuador, where English proficiency is associated with both academic development and future opportunities.

The teaching of English today maintains a substantial role within the educational system, as it is considered an important tool for personal and professional development (Bazurto et al., 2022). Despite this relevance, developing communicative competence in English continues to represent a considerable challenge for many students, especially with regard to oral production.

Oral communication remains one of the most difficult skills for English learners, given the limitations they experience when participating in communicative activities in the classroom. Difficulties related to pronunciation, lack of vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and low confidence often affect students' oral participation, which in turn reduces their willingness to communicate in the target language. In many cases, students avoid interacting during oral activities due to the anxiety and insecurity they experience when expressing ideas in English.

Wang (2024), based on Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, explains that emotional factors such as anxiety, insecurity, and negative attitudes interfere with language acquisition processes and students' participation in communicative tasks. Both emotional and motivational conditions influence students' willingness to participate in oral activities in English classes.

Motivation plays an important role in the English teaching and learning process, as it influences students' participation and engagement in classroom activities. Rodríguez et al. (2024) and Maldonado et al. (2024) explain that motivation contributes to students' engagement in language learning activities. *Self-Determination Theory* distinguishes between intrinsic motivation, which arises from personal interest and satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, which is associated with external stimuli such as rewards, recognition, grades, or contextual incentives that encourage participation.

From a pedagogical perspective, teachers use external incentives to stimulate students' oral participation and increase their confidence during communicative activities. External rewards, verbal recognition, and academic incentives aim to encourage the

participation of students who show reluctance or insecurity when speaking English. While motivation receives considerable attention in research on English language learning in Ecuadorian classrooms, little research has been done on how extrinsic motivation can influence the development of oral skills at the secondary education level in Ecuador, specifically regarding students' oral participation in classroom interaction.

This study analyzes the role of extrinsic motivation in the development of oral English skills among ninth-grade students at a private educational institution in El Carmen. The study seeks to understand how external incentives influence students' oral participation in English classes and communicative activities.

Motivation in Ecuadorian classrooms receives considerable attention in English language learning research. Considering the above, the following research question arises: What is the role of extrinsic motivation in the development of oral English skills in ninth-grade students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation

Motivation, according to Pandya (2024) and Maldonado et al. (2024), is the mental process that drives an individual's behavior when performing a task. Similarly, Mora et al. (2024) note that motivation is important in the educational process, as it drives student perseverance. Therefore, motivation is an important part of both personal and educational development, as it encourages individuals to engage in particular activities.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory states that motivation can originate from both self-interest and voluntary choice as well as from external rewards (Ryan & Deci, 2022). Ryan and Deci add that the motivation that drives individual development can be of two types: intrinsic, when it arises from one's own will, and extrinsic, when it is induced by factors or stimuli external to the individual.

Extrinsic Motivation (EM)

Ryan and Deci (2000) describe extrinsic motivation as the performance of activities oriented toward outcomes that are not inherent in the action itself; that is to say, it is useful when observing student behavior in contexts where learning does not always generate immediate interest. Within Self-Determination Theory, as mentioned earlier, extrinsic

motivation is not understood as something fixed; its form changes according to how students internalize external demands.

Extrinsic Motivation in Education

Extrinsic motivation in English teaching is related to external incentives that educators use to motivate students to achieve language-related academic goals (Álvarez & Rojas, 2021; Mora et al., 2024). For some authors (González & Jurado, 2022; Pandya, 2024; Caballero et al., 2025), extrinsic motivation in education can generate excessive dependence on external stimuli, a factor that can weaken intrinsic motivation.

Language educators must manage external stimuli in the language learning process with the aim of guiding students towards their goals without neglecting internal stimuli such as enjoyment of learning. Ryan and Deci (2000) classified motivation into four types or forms of regulation, identified by the degree of autonomy an individual experiences when acting.

External regulation is described by Fuente et al. (2022) as the way in which the design and characteristics of a given context influence the exercise of self-regulation, which includes thoughts, emotions, and actions that exhibit the lowest degree of self-determination, with behavior primarily oriented toward obtaining external stimuli (Rojas et al., 2022). Put simply, external regulation is an adaptive response to the environment that promotes proactive adjustments.

Introjected regulation, according to Bieg et al. (2024), is associated with the search for self-approval, considering that individuals guide their behavior based on the evaluations or judgments of others, and may partially internalize behaviors that do not fully align with their true desires. Thus, introjected regulation is a form of emotional regulation in which the individual acts to gain approval from others, even if not out of their own desire.

Identified regulation, for Méndez et al. (2012), occurs when a person performs an activity that, although not appealing, is recognized as valuable because it contributes to achieving personal goals. Furthermore, Rojas et al. (2022) argue that in identified regulation, the person performs an activity driven by the value or benefit it provides, without depending on the pleasure they may experience while performing it. From the authors' perspective, identified regulation drives individuals to commit to tasks they perceive as important or useful, focusing on results that contribute to their personal goals rather than on the immediate satisfaction of the activity.

Integrated regulation is the most autonomous type of extrinsic motivation because the activity that the individual develops aligns with values and beliefs that are similar to intrinsic motivation (Wang, 2024). Therefore, in integrated regulation, students participate autonomously when they internalize the value of learning activities.

On the other hand, external stimuli in extrinsic motivation are factors from the educational context that aim to encourage learner effort and participation (Cedeño & Hernández, 2022). According to Khaliq et al. (2023), they take the form of rewards, praise, prizes, or positive comments that reinforce desired behaviors. Franco et al. (2024) and Tivan and Zambrano (2024) emphasize that extrinsic rewards provide immediate and tangible motivators for students to fulfill their academic responsibilities.

Therefore, external stimuli in the learning process are valuable tools for developing pedagogical activities, serving as factors that generate changes in individuals exposed to them by promoting participation and self-confidence.

Speaking Skills

Oral expression, or the ability to speak in English, is one of the most difficult skills for students to develop in countries such as Ecuador, where English is not the mother tongue, according to Lara et al. (2022) and Salamea and Fajardo (2023) and Alvarez et al. (2024). In Ecuador, one of the main challenges faced by learners is the development of English expression due to a notable lack of vocabulary and grammatical mastery.

According to authors such as Figueroa and Intriago (2022) and Intriago et al. (2025), oral expression in English learning is composed of strategies that students use to communicate, a process that can be complex because it requires learners to coordinate their linguistic knowledge in order to communicate orally using the target language.

In the words of Ismail (2021) and Suadi (2019), speaking competence requires several components such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and the appropriate use of vocabulary and grammar. Gao and Sun (2020) and Jong (2018) state that fluency in oral expression is the ability of language learners to express ideas continuously and with minimal pauses.

Accuracy for learners, like fluency, is based on the correct use and reduction of errors in the grammatical and linguistic rules of the target language (Ismail, 2021; González & Díaz, 2020). Therefore, accuracy is a component of speech that focuses on producing correct

linguistic forms, determining whether the speaker demonstrates mastery of grammatical rules or lexical knowledge.

Pronunciation, in the words of Yusriati and Husni (2019) and Yang and Kongjit (2022), is the production of speech sounds that are part of oral communication, as it represents a critical component in the development of English-speaking skills, despite being one of the most challenging aspects for language learners.

Vocabulary, as a factor in language skills, is integrated into English language learning, promoting fluency, lexical enrichment, and correct pronunciation; to put it differently, it directly influences the development of speaking skills in this language (Leticia et al., 2020; Figueroa & Intriago, 2022). Consequently, expanding vocabulary knowledge contributes not only to more effective communication but also to the development of creativity and independence in using the second language.

Grammatical competence in oral expression is the speaker's ability to use language structures correctly to construct and interpret coherent and accurate messages, which supports students in expressing themselves clearly in English and promotes structured thinking (Rasul & Suseno, 2018; Martínez, 2021). Thus, understanding grammar strengthens more coherent and fluent communication.

Extrinsic Motivation strategies in Speaking Skills

Acharya (2026) states that extrinsic motivation strategies are pedagogical tools used by teachers to improve the development of students' oral skills, as they integrate the use of external incentives that motivate language learners to participate in activities that may seem unattractive due to limited personal interest (Saka et al., 2023).

To put it differently, extrinsic motivation is an effective resource for stimulating participation and learning in English, supporting the development of communication skills, even among those who show little initial interest, while contributing to the sustained development of oral expression skills.

METHODOLOGY

To analyze the role of extrinsic motivation in the development of oral expression in English, this study was developed under a mixed-methods approach, structured through a convergent parallel design, which enabled the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data within the same phase of the research process. In line with the considerations proposed

by Creswell (2014), the integration of both strands permitted a more balanced interpretation between statistical trends and classroom-based evidence.

The study followed a descriptive and cross-sectional design because the intention was to identify patterns related to extrinsic motivation and its association with students' oral expression in English, without introducing any form of controlled intervention. Data were collected at a specific point in the academic period to preserve the natural conditions under which students participated in classroom activities.

The population consisted of 635 students enrolled in a private educational institution located in El Carmen in the 2025–2026 academic year. A sample of 39 ninth-grade students (parallel A and B) and three English teachers was selected. The sampling process followed a non-probabilistic convenience strategy, mainly due to accessibility conditions and institutional authorization.

To address the research objective, three data collection techniques were employed. A survey was administered to students using a 12-item questionnaire adapted from the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery developed by Robert Gardner (2004). The adaptation involved reorganizing the items according to the four types of extrinsic motivation proposed within Self-Determination Theory by Ryan and Deci.

Classroom observations were conducted using a structured checklist composed of 12 items grouped into three dimensions: external incentives, behavioral response, and oral performance.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted using a guide that included 12 open-ended questions focused on the strategies used to encourage students' oral participation, as well as the perceived influence of extrinsic motivation.

Regarding instrument quality, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient in SPSS, obtaining a value of $\alpha = 0.846$. The instruments were also reviewed by three specialists in English language pedagogy; their observations led to minor adjustments in wording and structure to improve both clarity and coherence.

Finally, it is important to mention that authorization was requested from the highest authority of the educational institution to conduct interviews with teachers, surveys with

students, and classroom observations. It was also explained that the institution's name would not be mentioned directly to safeguard its reputation within the educational community.

RESULTS

Results of the surveys applied to the students

The quantitative data obtained from the surveys applied to the students was grouped into two dimensions: the level of extrinsic motivation and the types of motivation regulation in oral communication in English.

Table 1

Level of extrinsic motivation in speaking development

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Extrinsic motivation	39	2,42	2,00	4,42	3,38	,57

Table 1 shows a moderate level of extrinsic motivation; that is, student participation in oral activities is influenced by external factors that can be both rewards and recognition. This result implies that extrinsic motivation acts as a stimulus to initiate oral interaction, although the observed variability indicates that its effect is not equally sustained for all students.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of the types of extrinsic motivation regulation in speaking development

	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
External	39	3,33	1,67	5,00	3,46	,81
Introjected	39	2,67	2,00	4,67	3,35	,69
Identified	39	2,67	2,00	4,67	3,45	,77
Integrated	39	2,67	2,00	4,67	3,27	,67

According to Table 2 different types of extrinsic motivation reveal distinct patterns in student participation; for instance, external regulation ($M = 3.46$) and identified regulation ($M = 3.45$) exhibit the highest mean values. External regulation is based on obtaining rewards or avoiding punishments imposed by the environment, while identified regulation occurs

when the student internalizes the value and importance of the activity for achieving their personal goals. In simpler terms, extrinsic motivation acts as a substantial factor in participation in oral activities where clear external incentives are present.

Results of interviews with English teachers

To organize the information obtained from the interviews, the data were arranged into four dimensions: extrinsic motivation strategies, their influence on oral production, pedagogical limitations, and teachers' experience in applying these strategies in class.

Extrinsic motivation strategies

The interviews indicate that they use a variety of external incentives to encourage students to speak. The most frequent ones include additional points, reduced homework, free time, and verbal recognition. Rather than following a fixed plan, teachers tend to apply these strategies when participation drops in oral performance.

According to their accounts, rewards and public recognition often lead students to engage more actively. One teacher mentioned that "*awarding extra points usually results in more frequent participation*", while another highlighted that "*recognition in front of classmates increase students' confidence.*" In this sense, external incentives appear to lower initial resistance, especially among students who hesitate to speak.

Influence on oral participation

The three teachers noted that external incentives tend to increase student participation. Nevertheless, these contributions are brief and limited in scope. Language learners participate more, but their responses, as one educator notes, "*don't always become more elaborate.*" Extrinsic motivation operates primarily in an initial stage of participation where students respond because there is a reward involved, not necessarily because they feel confident using the language. Consequently, participation exists, but it remains somewhat controlled and dependent on external conditions.

Pedagogical limitations

The teachers also mentioned certain limitations in their pedagogical practice when using extrinsic motivation strategies. A common concern is that students participate "*only when they expect a reward.*" In their experience, prolonged use of incentives can reduce spontaneous participation, which over time can lead to dependency. For example, one teacher mentions that some students "wait for external stimuli rather than taking the initiative," which

limits their speech development. For this reason, educators tend to use external stimuli cautiously and only when they deem them necessary.

Application Experience

From a practical perspective, teachers consider extrinsic motivation useful, but not in all situations. They explained that it tends to work best to encourage participation when students are unmotivated. At such times, small rewards or recognition can make all the difference. Language educators also emphasized that the long-term goal is for students to speak out of their own interest, not due to external pressure.

The teachers explained that rewards encourage language learners to talk more in activities, but this motivation tends to disappear when the rewards are no longer present. Thus, extrinsic motivation is perceived more as a temporary support than a permanent strategy.

Results of the classroom observation sheets

The classroom observations were designed to examine how external incentives relate to students' behavior and oral performance in communicative activities; hence, the analysis focused on three dimensions such as external incentives, behavioral response, and oral performance.

External Incentives

Classroom observations revealed that teachers employ a variety of extrinsic motivation strategies to encourage participation. In nearly all observed classes, external incentives such as verbal recognition, extra credit, and symbolic rewards were used with moderate to high frequency, but not all types of incentives were applied consistently.

Practices such as public recognition of oral performance or the structured use of competitive activities appeared only occasionally. It could be argued that their implementation depends more on classroom conditions than on a planned approach. Ultimately, the data emphasize that external incentives are used regularly, but their application varies in both form and consistency.

Behavioral Response

Students' behavioral responses to external incentives generally showed moderate levels of participation, with periods of greater involvement when the incentives were clearly

present. Almost always, greater oral participation was observed when rewards such as extra points or reduced assignments or activities were offered.

Lower levels of participation were also observed when no external incentives were provided or when students expressed insecurity about speaking English, as some students avoided interaction altogether. The observed patterns suggest that students' willingness to participate is influenced by a combination of external stimuli and internal factors, particularly confidence. As a result, incentives tend to increase participation, yet they do not fully compensate for students' reluctance to speak due to the anxiety it may provoke.

Oral Performance

Students demonstrated moderate to relatively high levels of fluency in activities with external incentives. Specifically, there were fewer prolonged pauses and fewer repetitions in oral production, but the improvements were not uniform across all students. In some cases, oral production remained limited despite the presence of incentives because the effect of extrinsic motivation is partial and not uniform.

External incentives can contribute to improving the continuity and control of oral production, but their influence seems to be more evident in facilitating performance than in ensuring the sustained development of oral expression skills.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that extrinsic motivation plays an important, albeit limited, role in the development of oral expression in English. While survey data show a moderate to high level of extrinsic motivation, classroom observations and teacher feedback suggest that its effects vary depending on the educational context and student characteristics.

Khaliq et al. (2023) and Romero (2025) associate extrinsic motivation with greater student participation; nevertheless, current results suggest that this relationship is conditional and therefore not stable. Participation increases when incentives are introduced, but it is not maintained in their absence; in simpler terms, participation tends to decrease in the absence of incentives.

Chen (2023) describes external regulation as an important factor that stimulates student participation in communicative activities. In this study, although external regulation has the highest mean, its influence appears to be short-term, primarily affecting the frequency of participation rather than the quality of oral production.

Integrating diverse data sources provides a more nuanced interpretation. Surveys indicate a general trend toward extrinsic motivation, observations reveal that not all students respond in the same way, and interviews highlight the need to apply these strategies with caution. In other words, extrinsic motivation should be understood as a context-dependent mechanism, influenced by both teaching practices and the individual differences of each student.

In line with Castro et al. (2026), external incentives can stimulate participation, but the present findings add that their effectiveness depends on how they are implemented; to be more precise, when used excessively, they can generate dependence, as the teachers have pointed out and the data obtained from the observations confirm.

The limitations identified by the teachers coincide with the perspective of Shuhidan et al. (2025), who argue that extrinsic motivation should complement, rather than replace, intrinsic motivation. It is emphasized that external incentives appear to function effectively as initial triggers, but not as sustainable motivators.

Finally, Rodríguez et al. (2024) highlight the importance of using extrinsic motivation to promote intrinsic engagement. The evidence gathered in this research emphasizes that this transition between motivations is not automatic because it requires deliberate pedagogical planning. As a consequence, the role that extrinsic motivation will play in learning oral expression depends entirely on the teacher's ability to implement it in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

Extrinsic motivation plays an important but limited role in the development of oral expression in English, as it increases students' willingness to participate, but its influence does not consistently extend to the quality or complexity of their oral production, indicating that participation and communicative competence do not progress at the same rate.

The predominance of external and identified regulation suggests that students' motivation remains partially dependent on external conditions, which reflects an intermediate stage in motivational development where participation is influenced by rewards and recognition rather than by fully internalized learning goals. It is recommended to gradually reduce students' dependence on rewards to encourage more meaningful and self-directed participation in oral activities.

The effectiveness of extrinsic motivation depends on its strategic and balanced application, since excessive use may generate dependency, while controlled use can function as a transitional mechanism to stimulate participation and gradually promote more autonomous engagement in oral communication. Therefore, educators are advised to use extrinsic motivation in a balanced way to encourage students to participate orally and gradually develop more independent communication skills.

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