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SELF-MOTIVATION FOR ENGLISH ORAL COMMUNICATION IN JUNIOR MIDDLE SCHOOL: A COMPARISON BETWEEN CHINA AND LATVIA

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The growing importance of English as an international language has increased the need to understand the factors that motivate students to engage in oral communication. While previous studies have examined individual motivational constructs, comparatively little research has investigated self-motivation for English oral communication within a comprehensive framework and across different educational and sociolinguistic contexts. This study aimed to compare self-motivation for English oral communication among junior middle school students in China ($n = 114$, Feb–Mar 2026) and Latvia ($n = 102$, Feb–Mar 2026) and to identify the psychological and educational factors associated with its development. The study was grounded in Gardner's socio-educational model of second language acquisition and Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System. A multidimensional conceptual framework was developed incorporating intrinsic interest in English communication, perceived usefulness of English, self-confidence in speaking English, future-oriented self-image, educational environment, and communication anxiety as explanatory factors of self-motivation. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to **216 students** from secondary schools in China ($n = 114$) and Latvia ($n = 102$). The questionnaire demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency for most scales. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, independent-samples t -tests, Mann–Whitney U tests, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression. The findings revealed no statistically significant differences between Chinese and Latvian students regarding overall self-motivation for English oral communication, intrinsic interest, perceived usefulness of English, self-confidence, or future-oriented self-image. However, Latvian students reported significantly higher self-assessed English proficiency and evaluated their educational environment more positively, whereas Chinese students experienced significantly higher communication anxiety. Correlation analysis demonstrated that self-motivation was positively associated with intrinsic interest, perceived usefulness of English, self-confidence, future-oriented self-image, and educational environment, while communication anxiety was negatively related to self-motivation. Multiple regression analysis indicated that intrinsic interest in English communication represented the strongest independent predictor of self-motivation, followed by future-oriented self-image, self-confidence, perceived usefulness of English, and educational environment. The study contributes to the literature by integrating major motivational perspectives into a single comparative framework for investigating English oral communication motivation. The findings suggest that fostering students' intrinsic interest, strengthening self-confidence, supporting positive future self-images, and creating encouraging classroom environments may enhance learners' willingness to communicate in English across different educational contexts. The proposed framework may serve as a useful basis for future comparative and longitudinal studies of second language motivation.

Keywords: English oral communication, self-motivation, second language motivation, psychological and educational factors, junior middle school, China, Latvia.

Pašmotivācija angļu valodas mutiskajai komunikācijai pamatskolā: Ķīnas un Latvijas salīdzinājums

Angļu valodas kā starptautiskās saziņas valodas pieaugoša nozīme ir palielinājusi nepieciešamību izprast faktoros, kas motivē skolēnus iesaistīties mutiskajā komunikācijā. Lai gan iepriekšējos pētījumos ir analizēti atsevišķi motivācijas konstrukti, salīdzinoši maz pētījumu ir veltīti pašmotivācijai angļu valodas mutiskajai komunikācijai, aplūkojot to vienotā konceptuālā ietvarā un dažādos izglītības un sociolingvistiskajos kontekstos. Šī pētījuma mērķis bija salīdzināt pašmotivāciju angļu valodas mutiskajai komunikācijai pamatskolas skolēnu vidū Ķīnā ($n = 114$, 2026. gada februāris–marts) un Latvijā ($n = 102$, 2026. gada februāris–marts), kā arī identificēt ar tās attīstību saistītos psiholoģiskos un izglītības faktoros. Pētījums balstīts uz Gārdnera otrās valodas apguves sociāli izglītojošo modeli un Dērnjei (Dörnyei) otrās valodas motivācijas pašsistēmas (L2 Motivational Self System) teoriju. Tika izstrādāts daudzdimensionāls konceptuālais ietvars, kas ietver iekšējo interesi par saziņu angļu valodā, angļu valodas uztverto lietderību, pašpārliecību angļu valodas runāšanā, nākotnes pašidentitāti (ideal L2 self), izglītības vidi un komunikācijas trauksmi kā pašmotivāciju skaidrojošus faktoros. Dati tika iegūti, izmantojot strukturētu aptaujas anketu, kuru aizpildīja 216 pamatskolas skolēni Ķīnā ($n = 114$) un Latvijā ($n = 102$). Lielākajai daļai skalu anketa uzrādīja pieņemamu līdz izcili iekšējo konsistenci. Datu analīzē tika izmantota aprakstošā statistika, ticamības analīze, neatkarīgo izlašu t tests, Manna–Vītnija (*Mann–Whitney U*) tests, Pīrsona korelācijas analīze un daudzskārtējā lineārā regresijas analīze. Pētījuma rezultāti neuzrādīja statistiski nozīmīgas atšķirības starp Ķīnas un Latvijas skolēniem attiecībā uz kopējo pašmotivāciju angļu valodas mutiskajai komunikācijai, iekšējo interesi par saziņu angļu valodā, angļu valodas uztverto lietderību, pašpārliecību vai nākotnes pašidentitāti. Tomēr Latvijas skolēni statistiski nozīmīgi augstāk novērtēja savu angļu valodas prasmes līmeni un pozitīvāk vērtēja izglītības vidi, savukārt Ķīnas skolēniem

bija raksturīgs augstāks komunikācijas trauksmes līmenis. Korelācijas analīze parādīja, ka pašmotivācija ir pozitīvi saistīta ar iekšējo interesi par saziņu angļu valodā, angļu valodas uztverto lietderību, pašpārliecību, nākotnes pašidentitāti un izglītības vidi, bet komunikācijas trauksme ir negatīvi saistīta ar pašmotivāciju. Daudzkārtējās regresijas analīzes rezultāti liecināja, ka spēcīgākais neatkarīgais pašmotivācijas prognozētājs ir iekšējā interese par saziņu angļu valodā, kam seko nākotnes pašidentitāte, pašpārliecība, angļu valodas uztvertā lietderība un izglītības vide. Pētījums sniedz ieguldījumu zinātniskajā literatūrā, integrējot nozīmīgākās motivācijas teorētiskās pieejas vienotā salīdzinošā ietvarā angļu valodas mutiskās komunikācijas motivācijas izpētei. Rezultāti liecina, ka skolēnu iekšējās intereses veicināšana, pašpārliecības stiprināšana, pozitīvas nākotnes pašidentitātes attīstīšana un atbalstošas mācību vides veidošana var sekmēt skolēnu gatavību sazināties angļu valodā dažādos izglītības kontekstos. Piedāvātais konceptuālais ietvars var kalpot par pamatu turpmākiem salīdzinošiem un longitudināliem pētījumiem par otrās valodas motivāciju.

Atslēgvārdi: angļu valodas mutiskā komunikācija, pašmotivācija, otrās valodas motivācija, psiholoģiskie un izglītības faktori, pamatskola, Ķīna, Latvija.

Introduction

English has become one of the most important languages of international communication, education, science, and economic cooperation. As a result, the ability to communicate orally in English is increasingly regarded as a key competence for young people participating in a globalized world. However, successful oral communication in a foreign language depends not only on linguistic knowledge but also on learners' motivation to actively use the language in communicative situations. Among the various motivational factors discussed in second language acquisition research, self-motivation occupies a particularly important position because it encourages learners to engage voluntarily in language learning and communication beyond external requirements and formal assessment (Gardner 1985; Dörnyei 2005).

The importance of self-motivation for English oral communication should be considered within the broader sociolinguistic context in which language learning occurs. In China, language policy increasingly emphasizes multilingualism, intercultural communication, and the practical value of language competencies in a rapidly changing and globally connected society (Qu 2021). English occupies a prominent position within the educational system and is widely perceived as an important resource for educational advancement, employment opportunities, and participation in international communication (Long et al. 2013; Yao 2024). At the same time, research has shown that many Chinese students remain strongly influenced by examination-oriented motivations and may demonstrate a discrepancy between motivation to learn English and motivation to use English in authentic communicative situations (Scott 2019).

A somewhat different sociolinguistic context can be observed in Latvia. Contemporary Latvia is characterized by widespread multilingualism and a language policy that promotes competence in several languages, including English, while emphasizing the practical role of language skills in education, labour market participation, and social integration (Druviete et al. 2022). Recent educational reforms have increasingly encouraged learners to view languages as tools for communication and knowledge acquisition rather than merely academic subjects (Druviete et al. 2022). Consequently, Latvian students develop their English-language competencies within a multilingual environment where the use of multiple languages in everyday life is relatively common. Previous research has consistently demonstrated that self-motivation is associated with learners' willingness to communicate, confidence, persistence, and oral language performance (Navas Colón 2023; Salsabila et al. 2025). Studies have identified numerous factors contributing to self-motivation, including intrinsic interest, positive learning experiences, future-oriented goals, supportive classroom environments, opportunities for authentic communication, and perceptions of the practical value of English (Tang, Hu 2022; Valdivieso-Arcos, Argudo-Serrano 2022; Zheng 2024). At the same time, oral communication may be inhibited by anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and language barriers,

which can reduce learners' willingness to speak despite possessing adequate linguistic knowledge (Oxelind 2019; Zhantaskyzy, Tazhitova 2025).

Despite the growing importance of English oral communication in contemporary education, significant differences may exist in the factors shaping students' willingness to communicate in English across different sociolinguistic and educational environments. China and Latvia represent two distinct contexts of language learning. While English is taught as a foreign language in both countries, students are socialized within different linguistic landscapes, educational traditions, and language policy frameworks. These differences may influence not only the perceived value of English but also learners' readiness to use the language in oral communication. At the same time, adolescence represents a particularly important stage for investigating motivation, as learners between the ages of 12 and 15 actively develop educational aspirations, self-concepts, and communication patterns that may affect their future language-learning trajectories.

Against this background, the present study aims to compare self-motivation for English oral communication among junior middle school students in China and Latvia. The study is based on a quantitative sociological survey conducted in February–March 2026 among students aged 12–15 years in Nanjing, China ($n = 114$), and Daugavpils, Latvia ($n = 102$). The research seeks to identify similarities and differences in students' self-motivation for English oral communication and to examine how this motivation is manifested within two different sociolinguistic contexts. By providing comparative empirical evidence from China and Latvia, the study contributes to a better understanding of motivational processes underlying foreign language communication among adolescents and expands the limited body of cross-national research on English oral communication at the junior middle school level.

Literature review

Self-motivation as a theoretical concept in foreign language learning. Motivation has long been regarded as one of the central determinants of success in foreign language learning. Early research conceptualized motivation as a combination of learners' effort, desire to achieve language-learning goals, and positive attitudes toward the target language and its speakers (Gardner 1985). Within this perspective, motivated learners are more willing to invest time and energy in language learning and are therefore more likely to attain higher levels of proficiency. Motivation is thus understood not merely as a personal preference but as a psychological mechanism that directs and sustains learning behaviour over time.

Contemporary approaches have expanded this understanding by emphasizing learners' self-concepts and future-oriented aspirations. One of the most influential frameworks is Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, which explains language learning motivation through the interaction of three components: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience. The ideal L2 self refers to learners' vision of themselves as competent future users of the target language, whereas the ought-to L2 self reflects perceived expectations and obligations imposed by significant others. The L2 learning experience encompasses learners' perceptions of their immediate learning environment, including classroom atmosphere, teachers, and previous language-learning experiences. Applying this framework to Chinese junior middle school students, Tang and Hu (2022) found that learning experience constituted the strongest motivational factor, followed by the ought-to L2 self and the ideal L2 self. Their findings suggest that motivation is shaped not only by future aspirations but also by learners' everyday experiences within the educational environment.

Recent studies increasingly view self-motivation as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a stable individual trait. Wang (2022) argues that learners' motivation changes over time in response to educational experiences, perceived progress, and future opportunities associated with language

proficiency. From this perspective, self-motivation is sustained when learners develop a clear vision of their future selves and perceive language learning as meaningful for their academic, professional, and personal development. Such future-oriented motivation encourages learners to invest greater effort in language learning and to engage more actively in communicative activities.

The importance of self-motivation has also been emphasized within self-determination theory, which highlights the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in sustaining engagement with learning activities. According to Musa and Salim (2025), self-motivated learners demonstrate greater persistence, stronger commitment to language learning, and higher levels of achievement than learners who rely primarily on external pressure or rewards. Self-motivation is therefore closely connected with learners' ability to regulate their own learning, set personal goals, and maintain engagement despite difficulties and setbacks.

Taken together, the theoretical literature suggests that self-motivation in foreign language learning is a multidimensional construct that integrates learners' goals, attitudes, self-perceptions, learning experiences, and future aspirations. Rather than being determined by a single factor, self-motivation emerges through the interaction of personal, social, and educational influences that shape learners' willingness to invest effort in language learning and communication.

Sociolinguistic and educational context of motivation. Motivation for foreign language learning develops within broader sociolinguistic and educational contexts that shape learners' attitudes toward languages, perceptions of their usefulness, and opportunities for language use. Consequently, understanding students' self-motivation for English oral communication requires consideration of the linguistic environments in which language learning takes place. In the case of China and Latvia, learners are exposed to different language policies, educational traditions, and patterns of multilingualism, which may influence both the perceived value of English and students' willingness to use it for communication.

In China, language education operates within a multilingual society characterized by significant linguistic diversity and increasing engagement with global communication. According to Qu (2021), contemporary Chinese language planning extends beyond the promotion of Standard Chinese and incorporates issues related to bilingualism, minority languages, language education, and communication across diverse linguistic communities. Within this context, English has acquired considerable educational, economic, and social significance, serving as an important resource for academic advancement, international mobility, and participation in global networks. The growing emphasis on practical language competencies reflects broader educational efforts to prepare students for communication in an increasingly interconnected world (Qu 2021). As a result, Chinese students are exposed to strong institutional support for English learning and to social expectations that associate English proficiency with future educational and professional opportunities.

At the same time, educational research suggests that Chinese students' motivation is influenced by both external and internal factors. Yao (2024) found that English learning motivation among junior middle school students is shaped by supportive school environments, family expectations, and broader social attitudes toward English, as well as by learners' previous experiences and personal attitudes toward language learning. These findings indicate that motivation emerges through the interaction between individual characteristics and the educational and social environments in which students study.

The Latvian context differs in several important respects. Latvia is characterized by a multilingual sociolinguistic environment in which the acquisition and use of multiple languages constitute an important aspect of education and everyday life. According to Druviete et al. (2022), recent language policies and educational reforms have increasingly emphasized multilingual competence, intercultural communication, and the practical value of language skills for education, employment, and social participation. Language attitudes are regarded as a central component of language development

alongside language proficiency and language use, reflecting the close relationship between learners' perceptions of languages and their motivation to acquire them (Druviete et al. 2022). Educational policies further encourage students to perceive languages not merely as academic subjects but as tools for communication, knowledge acquisition, and participation in contemporary society.

Although both China and Latvia recognize the importance of English as an international language, the sociolinguistic conditions in which English is learned differ considerably. Chinese students typically learn English within a large monolingual national environment where English functions primarily as a foreign language, whereas Latvian students often develop their language competencies within a more visibly multilingual environment. These differences may influence learners' perceptions of English, opportunities for language use, and motivations for engaging in oral communication. Therefore, the sociolinguistic and educational contexts of China and Latvia provide an important foundation for understanding potential similarities and differences in students' self-motivation for English oral communication.

Factors influencing self-motivation for English oral communication. Research indicates that self-motivation for English oral communication is shaped by a complex interaction of individual and environmental factors. While some influences originate from learners' personal characteristics and aspirations, others emerge from the educational and social environments in which language learning takes place. Understanding these factors is essential for explaining why some students actively seek opportunities to communicate in English whereas others remain reluctant to use the language despite possessing sufficient linguistic knowledge.

Among the internal factors, intrinsic motivation is consistently identified as one of the strongest predictors of willingness to communicate. Learners who study English because they enjoy the language, find communication meaningful, or derive satisfaction from personal improvement tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement in speaking activities than learners motivated primarily by external rewards or academic requirements (Navas Colón 2023; Salsabila et al. 2025). Similarly, self-confidence plays a crucial role in motivating oral communication. Students who believe in their ability to communicate successfully are more likely to participate actively in classroom discussions and communicative tasks, whereas low self-confidence often results in avoidance of speaking situations (Long et al. 2013; Oxelind 2019).

Future-oriented goals and self-perceptions also contribute significantly to self-motivation. According to the L2 Motivational Self System, learners who can imagine themselves as successful future users of English are more willing to invest effort in language learning and communication (Tang, Hu 2022). Such future self-images may include aspirations related to higher education, international travel, professional development, or participation in global communities. Likewise, learners who perceive English as useful for achieving personally meaningful goals tend to maintain stronger motivation over time (Wang, 2022). Personal autonomy represents another important factor. Students who are able to regulate their own learning, set personal objectives, and independently seek opportunities to practice English often demonstrate higher levels of communicative motivation than those who rely primarily on external guidance (Musa, Salim 2025; Valdivieso-Arcos, Argudo-Serrano 2022).

Alongside these individual factors, self-motivation is strongly influenced by external conditions. The educational environment plays a particularly important role in shaping students' willingness to communicate. Research has shown that supportive teachers, positive classroom climates, and communicative teaching methods contribute significantly to learners' motivation to speak English (Ikhsan, Akhsan 2023; Oxelind 2019). Students are generally more motivated when they perceive the classroom as a psychologically safe environment where mistakes are treated as a natural part of learning rather than as failures. Positive feedback, encouragement, and opportunities for meaningful interaction help learners develop confidence and reduce communication anxiety.

Teaching methods and learning activities also influence motivation. Interactive approaches such as role-play, collaborative learning, discussions, and task-based communication have been found to increase learners' engagement and willingness to participate in oral communication (Ikhsan, Akhsan 2023; Musa, Salim 2025). Such activities provide authentic communicative experiences that allow students to use English for meaningful purposes rather than merely practicing isolated language forms. Furthermore, recent studies suggest that digital technologies and artificial intelligence may enhance motivation by creating personalized and interactive learning environments. AI-assisted speaking practice, immediate feedback, and adaptive learning systems can increase learners' confidence and provide additional opportunities for oral communication beyond the traditional classroom setting (Zhang, Iliško 2025).

Family support and broader social attitudes toward English also contribute to motivational development. Students are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward English when parents, schools, and society emphasize its educational, professional, and communicative value (Yao 2024). At the same time, opportunities to use English in authentic situations strengthen learners' perception that the language is relevant to their lives and future aspirations. Research suggests that motivation becomes particularly strong when learners perceive English not merely as a school subject but as a practical tool for communication, social participation, and personal development (Scott 2019).

Overall, the literature suggests that self-motivation for English oral communication emerges through the interaction of internal and external influences. Intrinsic interest, self-confidence, autonomy, and future aspirations interact with classroom experiences, teaching practices, technological support, family encouragement, and societal attitudes toward English. Consequently, self-motivation should be understood as a multidimensional construct that develops within both the individual learner and the broader social and educational environment.

Self-motivation and willingness to communicate. Although motivation has traditionally been studied as a factor influencing language learning achievement, increasing attention has been devoted to its relationship with learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) and their readiness to use the target language in authentic situations. This distinction is particularly important because successful language learning does not automatically lead to active language use. A learner may achieve high academic performance in English while remaining reluctant to participate in oral communication. Consequently, recent research has emphasized the need to distinguish between motivation to learn English and motivation to use English for communication.

One of the most influential contributions to this discussion is Scott's (2019) concept of *L2 transfer motivation*. The author argues that learners may be motivated to acquire English knowledge for examinations and academic achievement without being equally motivated to transfer this knowledge into real-life communicative situations. Based on a study of Chinese junior high school students, Scott (2019) found that learners' willingness to use English outside the classroom depended on several factors, including the perceived relevance of learning content, the practical usefulness of English, opportunities for language use, and learners' orientation toward global citizenship. The study suggests that motivation becomes particularly strong when students perceive English as a meaningful tool for communication rather than merely an academic subject. This perspective is highly relevant to the concept of self-motivation for English oral communication because it shifts attention from language learning itself to the actual use of language in social interaction.

The relationship between motivation and oral communication has also been demonstrated through studies of speaking proficiency and classroom participation. Salsabila et al. (2025) found a strong positive relationship between students' motivation and their speaking ability, showing that highly motivated learners were more active, confident, and engaged during speaking tasks than their less motivated peers. Similarly, Long et al. (2013) reported that students with stronger motivation demonstrated greater persistence, confidence, and commitment to English learning, all of which

contribute to greater readiness to communicate. These findings indicate that motivation influences not only learning outcomes but also learners' willingness to participate in oral interaction.

However, willingness to communicate is affected not only by positive motivational factors but also by psychological barriers that may inhibit speaking behaviour. Oxelind (2019) emphasizes that students' readiness to communicate in English depends heavily on self-confidence, perceived competence, and emotional safety within the classroom. Learners are more likely to participate in oral communication when they feel supported by teachers and peers and when mistakes are treated as a natural part of the learning process. Likewise, Zhantaskyzy and Tazhitova (2025) found that communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and concern about pronunciation errors frequently discourage students from speaking English even when they possess sufficient linguistic knowledge. Their findings suggest that willingness to communicate is determined not only by language competence but also by learners' perceptions of risk, confidence, and psychological comfort.

The literature also suggests that willingness to communicate is closely linked to learners' perceptions of the practical value of English. Students who view English as useful for future education, employment, international communication, or participation in global society tend to demonstrate stronger motivation to engage in oral communication (Scott 2019; Navas Colón 2023). Such learners are more likely to seek opportunities to use English outside formal classroom settings and to regard communication as an essential part of language learning rather than as a source of anxiety. Furthermore, research on learning transfer indicates that motivated learners are more inclined to apply acquired knowledge in new situations, suggesting a stronger readiness to communicate beyond the immediate instructional context (Zheng 2024).

Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that self-motivation and willingness to communicate are closely interconnected constructs. Self-motivation provides the psychological energy that encourages learners to engage in communication, whereas willingness to communicate represents the behavioural manifestation of this motivation in actual speaking situations. Oral communication therefore emerges not simply as a consequence of language proficiency but as the result of a complex interaction between motivation, self-confidence, perceived usefulness of English, communicative opportunities, and psychological readiness to speak. While numerous studies have examined these relationships within individual educational settings, comparative research involving adolescents from different sociolinguistic contexts remains limited. In particular, little is known about potential differences in self-motivation for English oral communication between Chinese and Latvian junior middle school students. This gap provides the rationale for the present comparative study.

The reviewed literature suggests that self-motivation for English oral communication emerges from the interaction of sociolinguistic context, educational environment, personal aspirations, and communicative experiences. While numerous studies have examined motivation in individual national settings, comparative quantitative research involving junior middle school students from different sociolinguistic environments remains limited. In particular, little is known about how self-motivation for English oral communication differs between Chinese and Latvian adolescents. This gap provides the rationale for the present study.

Conceptual framework and research methodology

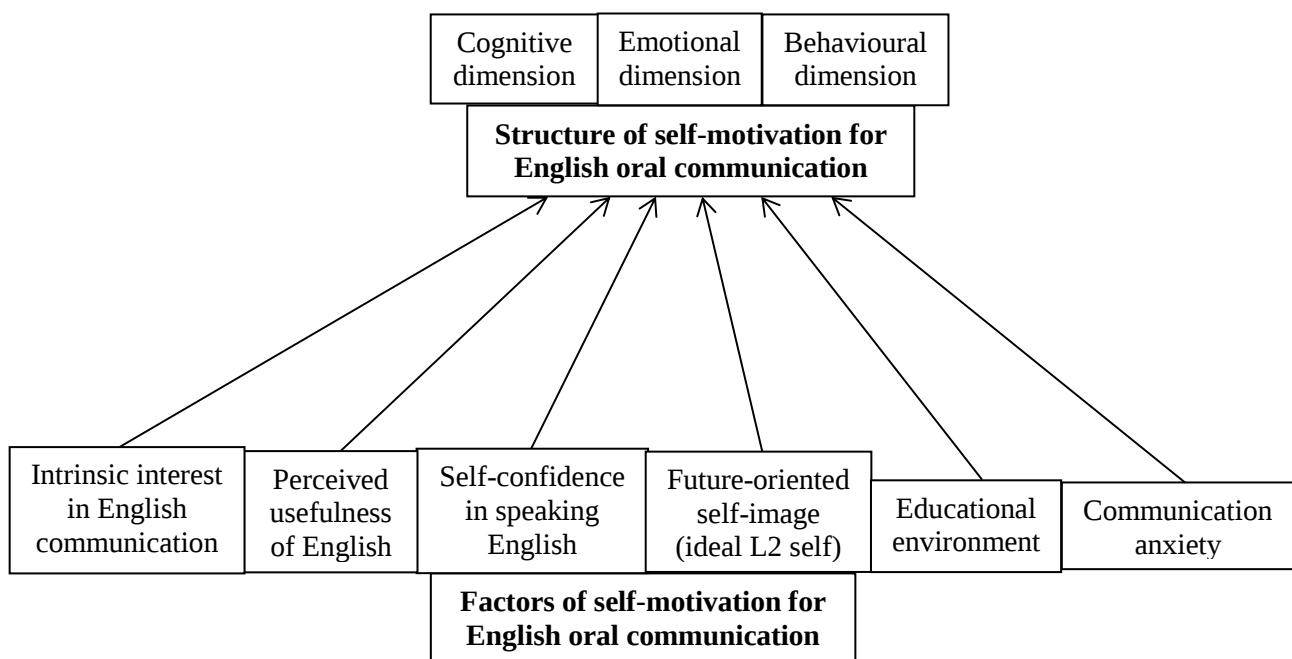
Conceptual framework. The present study conceptualizes self-motivation for English oral communication as a learner's internally driven willingness and readiness to use English in spoken interaction despite potential difficulties, anxiety, or lack of external pressure. This understanding integrates Gardner's (1985) view of motivation as a combination of effort, desire, and positive attitudes

toward language learning, Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System, and more recent research emphasizing willingness to communicate and transfer motivation (Scott 2019).

Unlike general motivation to learn English, self-motivation for English oral communication refers specifically to learners' desire to actively use English in oral interaction both inside and outside the classroom. It therefore combines cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions (Figure 1). Cognitively, learners perceive English as useful and valuable; emotionally, they experience confidence and interest in communication; behaviourally, they demonstrate readiness to participate in conversations and speaking activities.

Figure 1

Conceptual model of self-motivation for English oral communication



Source: elaborated by the authors based on Gardner 1985; Dörnyei 2005.

Based on the reviewed literature, self-motivation for English oral communication is assumed to be influenced by six groups of factors:

- (1) intrinsic interest in English communication – enjoyment of speaking English and interest in using the language for communication (Navas Colón 2023; Salsabila et al. 2025);
- (2) perceived usefulness of English – beliefs that English is important for education, employment, travel, international communication, and future personal development (Scott 2019; Yao 2024);
- (3) self-confidence in speaking English – learners' perceptions of their ability to communicate successfully in English and overcome communicative challenges (Long et al. 2013; Oxelind 2019);
- (4) future-oriented self-image (ideal L2 self) – learners' vision of themselves as successful future users of English (Dörnyei 2005; Tang, Hu 2022);
- (5) educational environment – perceived support from teachers, classroom atmosphere, communicative teaching practices, and opportunities for speaking (Ikhsan, Akhsan 2023; Musa, Salim 2025);

(6) communication anxiety – fear of making mistakes, negative evaluation, embarrassment, and speaking-related stress (Oxelind 2019; Zhantaskyzy, Tazhitova 2025).

The conceptual model (Figure 1) assumes that higher levels of intrinsic interest, perceived usefulness, self-confidence, future-oriented self-image, and educational support contribute positively to self-motivation for English oral communication, whereas communication anxiety negatively affects it. Based on the reviewed literature, the study further hypothesizes that the structure of self-motivation may differ across the Chinese and Latvian contexts. In China, where English learning is often associated with educational achievement, future academic opportunities, and international competitiveness, self-motivation is expected to be more strongly influenced by perceived usefulness of English and future-oriented self-image (Long et al. 2013; Scott 2019; Yao 2024). In Latvia, where students develop language competencies within a more multilingual environment and are more frequently exposed to the practical use of multiple languages, self-motivation is expected to be more closely associated with intrinsic interest in communication, self-confidence, and opportunities for authentic language use (Druviete et al. 2022). At the same time, given the global status of English and the common educational emphasis on communicative competence in both countries, no substantial differences are expected in the overall level of self-motivation for English oral communication. Rather, the study assumes that similar motivational outcomes may be supported by different combinations of motivational factors in the two sociolinguistic contexts.

Research methodology. The study employs a quantitative comparative research design. Data were collected through a standardized questionnaire administered in February–March 2026 among junior middle school students aged 12–15 years in two countries:

- Nanjing, China (n = 114);
- Daugavpils, Latvia (n = 102).

The questionnaire was administered anonymously in classroom settings. Participation was voluntary. The same questionnaire (Table 1) was translated and adapted for Chinese and Latvian respondents to ensure conceptual equivalence.

Table 1

Structure of the questionnaire for a quantitative comparative survey in China and Latvia, 2026

Variables		Scale
Section 1. Background variables		
Socio-demographic characteristics	Characteristics: - country - age - gender - school grade	Nominal or open scales: - China, Latvia - age (years) - male, female - number of school grade
Self-assessed English proficiency	How would you assess your current level of English? - Very poor (I know only a few words and phrases) - Poor (I can understand and use some basic expressions) - Average (I can understand and communicate in simple everyday situations) - Good (I can communicate on familiar topics with relative confidence) - Very good (I can communicate fluently on a wide range of topics)	1 – Very poor 2 – Poor 3 – Average 4 – Good 5 – Very good
Frequency of English use outside school	How often do you use English outside school lessons (e.g., when watching videos, playing games, using social media, reading websites, chatting online, or communicating with others)? - Never	1 – Never 2 – Rarely 3 – Sometimes

	- Rarely (less than once a week) - Sometimes (1–2 times a week) - Often (3–6 times a week) - Very often (every day or almost every day)	4 – Often 5 – Very often
Section 2. Self-motivation and influencing factors		
A. Self-motivation for English oral communication (dependent variable)	(1) I enjoy speaking English (2) I willingly participate in English speaking activities (3) I try to use English whenever I have the opportunity (4) I want to improve my ability to communicate orally in English (5) I am motivated to speak English even when it is difficult (6) I would like to communicate with people from other countries in English	Five-point Likert scale: 1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree
B. Intrinsic interest in English communication	(1) Speaking English is enjoyable for me (2) I find English communication interesting (3) I enjoy learning new ways to express myself in English (4) I like using English in conversations	Five-point Likert scale: 1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree
C. Perceived usefulness of English	(1) English will help me in my future studies (2) English will help me get a good job in the future (3) English is important for communicating internationally (4) English is useful in everyday life (5) Learning English is worth the effort	Five-point Likert scale: 1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree
D. Self-confidence in speaking English	(1) I feel confident when speaking English (2) I can express my ideas in English (3) I am able to participate in English conversations (4) I believe I can improve my speaking skills (5) I feel comfortable answering questions in English	Five-point Likert scale: 1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree
E. Future-oriented self-image (ideal L2 self)	(1) I can imagine myself speaking English fluently in the future (2) I would like to become a confident English speaker (3) English will be an important part of my future life (4) I see myself using English in my future career (5) I would like to communicate with international friends in English	Five-point Likert scale: 1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree

F. Educational environment	(1) My English teacher encourages me to speak English (2) My English classes provide enough opportunities for speaking (3) The classroom atmosphere makes me comfortable speaking English (4) My teacher supports students who make mistakes (5) Speaking activities in class are interesting	Five-point Likert scale: 1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree
G. Communication anxiety	(1) I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking English (2) I worry that others will laugh at my English (3) I feel nervous when I speak English in front of classmates (4) I avoid speaking English because I might make errors (5) Speaking English makes me feel stressed	Five-point Likert scale: 1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree

Source: elaborated by the authors based on the conceptual model of self-motivation for English oral communication (Figure 1).

Data analysis. The collected data will be analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. First, the internal consistency of each multi-item scale will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to evaluate the reliability of the measurement instrument. Second, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, where appropriate) will be calculated to summarize the characteristics of the sample and the distribution of the study variables. Third, differences between the Chinese and Latvian samples will be examined using independent-samples *t*-tests for continuous variables and Mann–Whitney *U* tests for ordinal variables when the assumptions of parametric testing are not satisfied. Finally, Pearson correlation analysis and multiple linear regression analysis will be employed to examine the relationships between self-motivation for English oral communication and the proposed explanatory factors and to identify the variables most strongly associated with self-motivation. All statistical analyses will be performed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

The proposed analytical framework enables self-motivation for English oral communication to be operationalized as a measurable multidimensional construct while simultaneously examining the relative importance of psychological, educational, and sociolinguistic factors associated with it. By combining descriptive, comparative, correlational, and regression analyses, the study is designed to compare motivational characteristics of junior middle school students in China and Latvia and to investigate the factors associated with self-motivation for English oral communication in the two sociolinguistic contexts.

Results of the study

The empirical analysis begins with a description of the demographic characteristics of the study participants. Examining the composition of the Chinese and Latvian samples is an essential preliminary step, as it allows assessment of their comparability before conducting cross-national analyses of self-motivation for English oral communication and its associated psychological factors. Table 2 presents the main quantitative characteristics of the respondents, including age, gender distribution, and school grade. These variables provide the contextual basis for interpreting the subsequent findings and evaluating whether potential differences between the two national groups are attributable to motivational factors rather than demographic variation.

Table 2

Quantitative characteristics of the survey sample, 2026

Characteristic	Nanjing, China (n = 114)	Daugavpils, Latvia (n = 102)
Age, years (Mean $\pm$ SD)	13.84 $\pm$ 0.94	13.71 $\pm$ 1.10
Gender:		
- Male, n (%)	60 (52.6%)	52 (51.0%)
- Female, n (%)	54 (47.4%)	50 (49.0%)
School grade (Mean $\pm$ SD)	7.84 $\pm$ 0.94	7.71 $\pm$ 1.10

Source: calculated by the authors using data processing software IBM SPSS Statistics based on Daugavpils University 2026.

The final sample consisted of 216 secondary school students, including 114 students from China (52.8%) and 102 students from Latvia (47.2%). The mean age of the Chinese participants was 13.84 years (SD = 0.94), whereas the Latvian participants had a mean age of 13.71 years (SD = 1.10). The gender distribution was balanced in both countries, comprising 60 males (52.6%) and 54 females (47.4%) in the Chinese sample and 52 males (51.0%) and 50 females (49.0%) in the Latvian sample. The average school grade was 7.84 (SD = 0.94) for Chinese students and 7.71 (SD = 1.10) for Latvian students. The Chinese and Latvian samples are statistically comparable with respect to age, gender distribution, and school grade. Therefore, the two samples are sufficiently homogeneous in their demographic structure, allowing valid comparative empirical analyses of differences in English oral communication motivation and its associated factors (Figure 1 and Table 1).

Comparison of self-assessed English proficiency and frequency of English use outside school.

Before assessing the reliability of the multi-item questionnaire scales, the Chinese and Latvian samples were compared in terms of two background variables directly related to students' experience with English: self-assessed English proficiency and frequency of English use outside school. Since both variables were measured using five-point ordinal scales, differences between the two independent national samples were examined using the Mann–Whitney U test. Descriptive statistics and test results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Comparison of self-assessed English proficiency and frequency of English use outside school, 2026

Variable	China (n = 114), M $\pm$ SD	Median (IQR)	Latvia (n = 102), M $\pm$ SD	Median (IQR)	Mann– Whitney U	p
Self-assessed English proficiency	3.32 $\pm$ 0.66	3 (3–4)	3.61 $\pm$ 0.90	4 (3–4)	4731.0	0.011
Frequency of English use outside school	3.32 $\pm$ 0.98	3 (3–4)	3.46 $\pm$ 1.14	4 (2–4)	5454.0	0.416

Note: Self-assessed English proficiency was measured from 1 = very poor to 5 = very good. Frequency of English use outside school was measured from 1 = never to 5 = very often. IQR = interquartile range.
Source: calculated by the authors using data processing software IBM SPSS Statistics based on Daugavpils University 2026.

As shown in Table 3, Latvian students reported a higher level of self-assessed English proficiency than Chinese students. The mean score was 3.61 (SD = 0.90) in the Latvian sample and 3.32 (SD = 0.66) in the Chinese sample. The difference was statistically significant (U = 4731.0, p = 0.011), although its magnitude was relatively small. The median proficiency category was “good” among Latvian

respondents and “average” among Chinese respondents. This finding suggests that Latvian students generally perceived themselves as somewhat more competent users of English.

The frequency of English use outside school was also slightly higher among Latvian students ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.14$) than among Chinese students ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.98$). However, the Mann–Whitney U test showed that this difference was not statistically significant ($U = 5454.0$, $p = 0.416$). Therefore, the two national groups may be considered broadly comparable in terms of the overall frequency with which they used English outside formal school lessons.

The results indicate that the Latvian sample had a modest advantage in perceived English proficiency, whereas the general level of extracurricular English use did not differ significantly between the two countries. The statistically significant difference in self-assessed proficiency should therefore be considered when interpreting subsequent cross-national comparisons of self-confidence, communication anxiety, and self-motivation for English oral communication.

Reliability analysis of the questionnaire. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each multi-item scale (Table 1). The results indicate that the questionnaire demonstrated satisfactory to excellent reliability for six of the seven constructs (Table 4). The scales measuring “Self-motivation for English oral communication” ($\alpha = 0.860$), “Intrinsic interest in English communication” ($\alpha = 0.896$), “Self-confidence in speaking English” ($\alpha = 0.908$), “Educational environment” ($\alpha = 0.922$), and “Communication anxiety” ($\alpha = 0.975$) exhibited high to excellent internal consistency. The “Perceived usefulness of English” scale also demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.740$), exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70.

Table 4

Reliability analysis of the questionnaire scales, N = 216, 2026

Scale	Items	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Self-motivation for English oral communication	6	0.860	Good
Intrinsic interest in English communication	4	0.896	Good
Perceived usefulness of English	5	0.740	Acceptable
Self-confidence in speaking English	5	0.908	Excellent
Future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)	5	0.565	Low
Educational environment	5	0.922	Excellent
Communication anxiety	5	0.975	Excellent

Source: calculated by the authors using data processing software IBM SPSS Statistics based on Daugavpils University 2026.

As Table 4 shows, the only exception was the “Future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)” scale, which yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.565, indicating relatively low internal consistency. To investigate this result, an item analysis was conducted using “corrected item – total correlations” and “Cronbach's alpha if an item was deleted” (Table 5).

Table 5

Item analysis of the “Future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)” scale, N = 216, 2026

Item	Corrected item – total correlation	Cronbach's α if item deleted
“I can imagine myself speaking English fluently in the future”	0.680	0.246
“I would like to become a confident English speaker”	0.336	0.527

“English will be an important part of my future life”	0.193	0.582
“I see myself using English in my future career”	0.130	0.618
“I would like to communicate with international friends in English”	0.392	0.466

Note: Cronbach's alpha values ≥ 0.70 are generally considered acceptable, ≥ 0.80 good, and ≥ 0.90 excellent (Nunnally, Bernstein 1994; Hair et al. 2022). Although the reliability of the “Future-oriented self-image” scale was below the conventional threshold, item analysis indicated that no single item accounted for the low internal consistency. Therefore, the scale was retained because it represents a theoretically multidimensional construct derived from Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei 2005) rather than a narrowly defined unidimensional measure.

Source: calculated by the authors using data processing software IBM SPSS Statistics based on Daugavpils University 2026.

The analysis shows that no individual item substantially reduced the reliability of the scale. Deleting the weakest item (“I see myself using English in my future career”) increased Cronbach's alpha only marginally ($\alpha = 0.618$), while removing other items produced similarly limited improvements. These findings suggest that the relatively low reliability reflects the multidimensional nature of the construct rather than the presence of a single problematic item. The five statements represent complementary aspects of learners' future self-concept, including future language competence, career aspirations, the perceived role of English in future life, and international communication. Consequently, the scale was retained in its original form based on its theoretical grounding in Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei 2005), although findings related to this construct should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

Comparison of self-motivation and influencing factors between Chinese and Latvian students. Following the assessment of the questionnaire's reliability, descriptive statistics were calculated for all study variables to examine the overall levels of self-motivation for English oral communication and its associated psychological factors among Chinese and Latvian students. To identify potential cross-national differences, independent-samples *t*-tests were performed for each variable. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

**Comparison of means for self-motivation and influencing factors
between Chinese and Latvian students, 2026**

Variable	China (n = 114) <i>M</i> $\pm$ <i>SD</i>	Latvia (n = 102) <i>M</i> $\pm$ <i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Self-motivation for English oral communication	3.99 $\pm$ 0.56	4.09 $\pm$ 0.59	−1.26	0.211
Intrinsic interest in English communication	3.76 $\pm$ 0.59	3.87 $\pm$ 0.73	−1.20	0.231
Perceived usefulness of English	4.67 $\pm$ 0.26	4.68 $\pm$ 0.33	−0.07	0.946
Self-confidence in speaking English	3.66 $\pm$ 0.60	3.82 $\pm$ 0.77	−1.69	0.093
Future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)	4.58 $\pm$ 0.31	4.59 $\pm$ 0.27	−0.39	0.700
Educational environment	3.81 $\pm$ 0.66	4.01 $\pm$ 0.53	−2.42	0.016
Communication anxiety	3.04 $\pm$ 0.92	2.76 $\pm$ 0.97	2.23	0.027

Source: calculated by the authors using data processing software IBM SPSS Statistics based on Daugavpils University 2026.

As shown in Table 6, the descriptive statistics reveal a generally similar pattern of responses among Chinese and Latvian students across most of the investigated constructs. Both groups reported

relatively high levels of self-motivation for English oral communication, with mean scores close to four points on the five-point Likert scale. Likewise, students in both countries expressed high perceptions of the usefulness of English ($M = 4.67$ in China and $M = 4.68$ in Latvia) and demonstrated a highly positive future-oriented self-image, with mean scores exceeding 4.5 in both samples. These findings suggest that students from both educational contexts recognize the importance of English for their future education, careers, and international communication.

The independent-samples t -tests indicated that no statistically significant differences were observed between Chinese and Latvian students in terms of “self-motivation for English oral communication” ($t = -1.26, p = 0.211$), “intrinsic interest in English communication” ($t = -1.20, p = 0.231$), “perceived usefulness of English” ($t = -0.07, p = 0.946$), “self-confidence in speaking English” ($t = -1.69, p = 0.093$), or “future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)” ($t = -0.39, p = 0.700$). These results indicate that students in the two countries share comparable motivational orientations toward English oral communication despite differences in their sociolinguistic and educational contexts.

However, statistically significant differences emerged for two variables. Latvian students evaluated their “educational environment” significantly more positively than Chinese students ($M = 4.01$ vs. 3.81 ; $t = -2.42, p = 0.016$), suggesting that they perceived greater teacher encouragement, more opportunities for speaking practice, and a more supportive classroom atmosphere. Conversely, Chinese students reported significantly higher levels of “communication anxiety” than Latvian students ($M = 3.04$ vs. 2.76 ; $t = 2.23, p = 0.027$), indicating greater fear of making mistakes and higher levels of nervousness during English oral communication.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that although the two groups exhibit broadly similar levels of motivation and positive attitudes toward English oral communication, differences exist in the perceived learning environment and emotional experiences associated with speaking English. These results provide an empirical basis for the subsequent analyses examining the relationships between self-motivation and its psychological and educational determinants in the Chinese and Latvian samples.

Correlation and multiple regression analysis. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationships between self-motivation for English oral communication and the six factors included in the conceptual model. Multiple linear regression analysis was subsequently used to determine which factors were independently associated with self-motivation when the remaining variables were controlled. Composite scores were calculated as the arithmetic means of the items belonging to each scale. The correlation and regression analyses were based on 216 complete observations, including 114 respondents from China and 102 respondents from Latvia.

Table 7

Correlations between self-motivation for English oral communication and the associated factors, 2026

Factor	Total sample ($n = 216$), r	China ($n = 114$), r	Latvia ($n = 102$), r
Intrinsic interest in English communication	0.897***	0.877***	0.923***
Perceived usefulness of English	0.809***	0.907***	0.730***
Self-confidence in speaking English	0.808***	0.858***	0.769***
Future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)	0.833***	0.880***	0.779***
Educational environment	0.368***	0.292**	0.500***
Communication anxiety	-0.680***	-0.754***	-0.592***

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; higher scores on communication anxiety indicate greater anxiety.

Source: calculated by the authors using data processing software IBM SPSS Statistics based on Daugavpils University 2026.

The correlation analysis showed that “self-motivation for English oral communication” was significantly associated with all six explanatory factors. In the total sample, the strongest positive relationship was observed for “intrinsic interest in English communication” ($r = 0.897, p < 0.001$). Strong positive correlations were also found with “future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)” ($r = 0.833, p < 0.001$), “perceived usefulness of English” ($r = 0.809, p < 0.001$), and “self-confidence in speaking English” ($r = 0.808, p < 0.001$). The relationship with the “educational environment” was positive but comparatively weaker ($r = 0.368, p < 0.001$). As theoretically expected, “communication anxiety” was strongly and negatively correlated with self-motivation ($r = -0.680, p < 0.001$).

The country-specific results revealed some variation in the strength of these relationships. Among Chinese students, perceived usefulness of English demonstrated the strongest positive bivariate association with self-motivation ($r = 0.907$), followed by “future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)” ($r = 0.880$), “intrinsic interest in English communication” ($r = .877$), and “self-confidence in speaking English” ($r = 0.858$). “Communication anxiety” was strongly negatively related to self-motivation ($r = -0.754$). Among Latvian students, “intrinsic interest in English communication” was the strongest correlate ($r = 0.923$), while “future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)” ($r = 0.779$), “self-confidence in speaking English” ($r = 0.769$), and “perceived usefulness of English” ($r = 0.730$) also demonstrated strong positive relationships.

To estimate the independent contribution of each factor, a simultaneous multiple linear regression model was calculated for the total sample. Country was included as a control variable, with China serving as the reference category.

Table 8

Multiple regression predicting self-motivation for English oral communication, N = 216, 2026

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Standardized β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intrinsic interest in English communication	0.414	0.024	0.473	17.38	< 0.001
Perceived usefulness of English	0.284	0.076	0.149	3.71	< 0.001
Self-confidence in speaking English	0.173	0.045	0.205	3.81	< 0.001
Future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)	0.428	0.085	0.219	5.06	< 0.001
Educational environment	0.036	0.018	0.038	2.04	0.042
Communication anxiety	-0.031	0.029	-0.051	-1.07	0.288
Country: Latvia	0.009	0.019	0.017	0.48	0.633

Model summary: $R^2 = 0.942$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.940$, $F(7, 202) = 469.31$, $p < 0.001$.

Source: calculated by the authors using data processing software IBM SPSS Statistics based on Daugavpils University 2026.

The regression model was statistically significant and explained approximately 94.2% of the variance in self-motivation for English oral communication. After controlling for the other factors and country, “intrinsic interest in English communication” was the strongest independent predictor ($\beta = 0.473, p < 0.001$). “Future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)” ($\beta = 0.219, p < 0.001$), “self-confidence in speaking English” ($\beta = 0.205, p < 0.001$), and “perceived usefulness of English” ($\beta = 0.149, p < 0.001$) also made statistically significant positive contributions. “Educational environment” had a small but significant positive association ($\beta = 0.038, p = 0.042$).

“Communication anxiety” was strongly negatively related to self-motivation at the bivariate level but was not statistically significant in the simultaneous regression model ($\beta = -0.051, p = 0.288$). This result does not indicate that anxiety is unrelated to motivation. Rather, its unique contribution became small after accounting for its substantial overlap with intrinsic interest, self-confidence, future-oriented self-image, and the other predictors. Country was also not significant ($\beta = 0.017, p = 0.633$), indicating

that the overall level of self-motivation did not differ independently between China and Latvia after the motivational factors were controlled.

Separate regression models were also estimated to explore whether the pattern of associations differed between the two national samples.

Table 9

Country-specific multiple regression models predicting self-motivation, 2026

Predictor	China (n = 114), β	China (n = 114), p	Latvia (n = 102), β	Latvia (n = 102), p
Intrinsic interest in English communication	0.265	< 0.001	0.551	< 0.001
Perceived usefulness of English	0.322	< 0.001	0.145	0.002
Self-confidence in speaking English	0.070	0.168	0.732	< 0.001
Future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)	0.234	< 0.001	0.017	0.754
Educational environment	-0.021	0.270	0.119	< 0.001
Communication anxiety	-0.243	< 0.001	0.471	< 0.001
Model R^2	0.968	-	0.971	-

Source: calculated by the authors using data processing software IBM SPSS Statistics based on Daugavpils University 2026.

In the Chinese sample, “perceived usefulness of English” was the strongest positive independent predictor ($\beta = 0.322$, $p < 0.001$), followed by “intrinsic interest in English communication” ($\beta = 0.265$, $p < 0.001$) and “future-oriented self-image (Ideal L2 Self)” ($\beta = 0.234$, $p < 0.001$). “Communication anxiety” retained a significant negative association ($\beta = -0.243$, $p < 0.001$). “Self-confidence in speaking English” and “educational environment” did not make statistically significant independent contributions after the other factors were controlled.

In the Latvian sample, “self-confidence in speaking English” produced the largest positive standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.732$, $p < 0.001$), followed by “intrinsic interest in English communication” ($\beta = 0.551$, $p < 0.001$). “Perceived usefulness of English” and “educational environment” also remained statistically significant. However, “communication anxiety” changed from a negative bivariate correlation to a positive regression coefficient. This sign reversal should not be interpreted as evidence that greater anxiety promotes self-motivation. It is most likely a suppression effect caused by the very strong intercorrelations among the predictors.

Diagnostic analysis indicated substantial multicollinearity in several models. In the total-sample model, variance inflation factors reached approximately 10 for “self-confidence in speaking English”. In the Latvian model, the variance inflation factors for “self-confidence in speaking English” and “communication anxiety” exceeded 20. Consequently, the country-specific regression coefficients – particularly the positive coefficient for “communication anxiety” in Latvia – are unstable and should be interpreted cautiously. The bivariate correlations provide a clearer indication of the direction of the relationships, while the pooled regression model offers the more defensible assessment of their relative independent contributions.

Overall, the findings indicate that intrinsic interest is the factor most consistently associated with self-motivation for English oral communication. Perceived usefulness, self-confidence, and future-oriented self-image are also important, although their relative contributions vary between the two national contexts. Communication anxiety has a strong negative bivariate relationship with self-

motivation, especially among Chinese students, but its independent effect is difficult to separate from the effects of confidence and the other closely related motivational constructs. Because of the extremely high explained variance and observed multicollinearity, these regression results should be treated as exploratory and interpreted alongside the reliability and correlation analyses rather than as definitive causal evidence.

Discussion

The present study compared self-motivation for English oral communication among junior middle school students in China and Latvia and examined the psychological and educational factors associated with this motivation. Although the two countries represent different sociolinguistic and educational contexts, the findings indicate that the overall level of self-motivation for English oral communication is remarkably similar among students in both countries. At the same time, differences emerged in several contextual and psychological characteristics, suggesting that comparable motivational outcomes may be achieved through somewhat different motivational mechanisms.

The first important finding concerns the relatively high level of self-motivation observed in both national samples. No statistically significant differences were found between Chinese and Latvian students regarding self-motivation for English oral communication, intrinsic interest in English communication, perceived usefulness of English, self-confidence in speaking English, or future-oriented self-image. These findings support the conceptual assumption formulated before the empirical analysis that, despite different sociolinguistic environments, globalization and the international status of English have contributed to the development of broadly similar motivational orientations among adolescents. The results are consistent with Gardner's (1985) understanding of language learning motivation as a combination of positive attitudes, effort, and desire to use the language, as well as with Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System, according to which learners' future self-concepts encourage sustained engagement with language learning. The uniformly high ratings for perceived usefulness of English and future-oriented self-image further suggest that students in both countries recognize English as an important resource for future education, employment, and international communication, supporting previous findings reported by Long et al. (2013), Scott (2019), Tang and Hu (2022), and Yao (2024).

The comparison of the background variables provides additional insight into the two educational contexts. Latvian students reported significantly higher self-assessed English proficiency than Chinese students, whereas the frequency of English use outside school did not differ significantly between the two groups. These findings suggest that Latvian students perceive themselves as somewhat more competent English users despite engaging with the language outside school at a frequency comparable to that of Chinese students. One possible explanation is the multilingual sociolinguistic environment of Latvia, where exposure to several languages in everyday life may strengthen learners' confidence in language use, even when the actual frequency of English use is similar. This interpretation corresponds with Druviete et al. (2022), who argue that multilingual educational environments contribute to positive language attitudes and communicative competence. At the same time, the relatively small difference in perceived proficiency indicates that students in both countries have developed broadly comparable English-language experience, strengthening the validity of the subsequent cross-national comparisons.

Although overall motivational levels were similar, statistically significant differences were observed for the educational environment and communication anxiety. Latvian students evaluated their educational environment more positively, while Chinese students reported higher communication anxiety. These findings correspond closely with previous studies emphasizing the importance of supportive classroom climates and psychologically safe learning environments for developing

willingness to communicate (Oxelind 2019; Ikhsan, Akhsan 2023). The higher level of communication anxiety among Chinese students is also consistent with Scott's (2019) observation that examination-oriented educational cultures may encourage successful language learning while simultaneously limiting learners' confidence in authentic oral communication. Similarly, Zhantaskyzy and Tazhitova (2025) reported that fear of mistakes and negative evaluation often reduce students' willingness to participate in English-speaking activities. The present findings therefore support earlier research suggesting that emotional barriers remain an important challenge even when students demonstrate generally positive motivational orientations.

The correlation analysis demonstrated that self-motivation for English oral communication is strongly associated with all six motivational factors included in the conceptual framework. In particular, intrinsic interest in English communication exhibited the strongest positive relationship with self-motivation across the entire sample. Strong positive correlations were also observed for perceived usefulness of English, self-confidence, and future-oriented self-image, whereas communication anxiety showed the expected negative association. These findings provide empirical support for the multidimensional conceptualization of self-motivation proposed in this study and agree with previous research indicating that intrinsic interest, confidence, perceived usefulness, and future aspirations collectively shape learners' willingness to communicate (Navas Colón 2023; Salsabila et al. 2025; Tang, Hu 2022; Musa, Salim 2025). The comparatively weaker association between educational environment and self-motivation suggests that classroom experiences influence motivation primarily through their effects on learners' confidence, interest, and emotional well-being rather than acting as direct motivational determinants.

The multiple regression analysis further demonstrated that intrinsic interest in English communication remained the strongest independent predictor of self-motivation after controlling for the other motivational factors. Future-oriented self-image, self-confidence, perceived usefulness of English, and educational environment also contributed positively to the prediction model, whereas communication anxiety was no longer statistically significant. This finding should not be interpreted as evidence that anxiety is unimportant. Rather, as indicated by the diagnostic analyses, substantial multicollinearity exists among several motivational constructs, suggesting that anxiety overlaps conceptually with self-confidence, intrinsic interest, and related psychological variables. Consequently, communication anxiety appears to influence self-motivation indirectly through its close relationship with these positive motivational characteristics rather than functioning as an independent predictor. This interpretation is consistent with Oxelind (2019), who emphasized the close relationship between confidence, emotional safety, and willingness to communicate, and with Zhantaskyzy and Tazhitova (2025), who viewed communication anxiety as one element within a broader psychological system influencing speaking behaviour.

The country-specific analyses suggest that motivational structures differ to some extent despite the similarity in overall motivational levels. Among Chinese students, perceived usefulness of English and future-oriented self-image were relatively more influential, whereas among Latvian students self-confidence and intrinsic interest demonstrated stronger independent associations with self-motivation. These findings correspond closely with the theoretical expectations formulated in the conceptual framework. Previous studies have shown that Chinese students often associate English with educational achievement, examinations, and future career opportunities (Long et al. 2013; Scott 2019; Yao 2024), whereas multilingual environments such as Latvia may encourage more communicative and confidence-based orientations toward language learning (Druviete et al. 2022). However, because the country-specific regression models were affected by considerable multicollinearity, these differences should be regarded as exploratory rather than definitive. Future research using structural equation modelling or longitudinal designs may provide a more robust understanding of the causal relationships among these motivational constructs.

The study also has several methodological implications. The questionnaire demonstrated satisfactory reliability for most scales, indicating that the proposed multidimensional measurement framework can be used in comparative studies of English oral communication motivation. Nevertheless, the relatively low reliability of the future-oriented self-image scale suggests that this construct may be more heterogeneous than originally assumed. Since Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System conceptualizes future self-image as a multidimensional psychological construct, future studies may benefit from distinguishing different dimensions of the ideal L2 self instead of measuring them as a single scale. Furthermore, the very high coefficients of determination obtained in the regression models and the observed multicollinearity indicate substantial conceptual overlap among several motivational constructs. Future research should therefore employ confirmatory factor analysis or structural equation modelling to distinguish more clearly between direct and indirect effects and to examine the mediating relationships among motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, and educational environment.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that self-motivation for English oral communication among adolescents is largely universal across the Chinese and Latvian educational contexts. Although differences exist in classroom experiences and communication anxiety, students in both countries share similarly positive attitudes toward English and recognize its importance for their future lives. The results suggest that strengthening students' intrinsic interest, developing self-confidence, fostering positive future self-images, and creating supportive communicative learning environments are likely to enhance learners' willingness to communicate regardless of national context. In this way, the study extends previous motivation research by providing comparative empirical evidence from two contrasting sociolinguistic environments and contributes to a better understanding of the common and context-specific determinants of English oral communication among junior middle school students.

Conclusions

This study investigated self-motivation for English oral communication among junior middle school students in China and Latvia and examined the psychological and educational factors associated with its development. Building upon Gardner's socio-educational model of second language acquisition and Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, a multidimensional conceptual framework was proposed that integrated intrinsic interest in English communication, perceived usefulness of English, self-confidence in speaking English, future-oriented self-image, educational environment, and communication anxiety as potential determinants of self-motivation for English oral communication. The empirical findings demonstrated that students in China and Latvia exhibited broadly similar levels of self-motivation for English oral communication despite differences in their educational and sociolinguistic contexts. No statistically significant differences were identified in overall self-motivation, intrinsic interest, perceived usefulness of English, self-confidence, or future-oriented self-image. However, Latvian students reported significantly higher self-assessed English proficiency and evaluated their educational environment more positively, whereas Chinese students experienced significantly higher levels of communication anxiety. These findings suggest that while students in both countries recognize the importance of English and maintain positive motivational orientations toward oral communication, the classroom environment and emotional aspects of language learning differ between the two educational contexts.

The correlation analysis confirmed that self-motivation for English oral communication is positively associated with intrinsic interest in English communication, perceived usefulness of English, self-confidence, future-oriented self-image, and educational environment, while communication anxiety demonstrated a significant negative relationship with motivation. Multiple regression analysis further indicated that intrinsic interest in English communication represents the

strongest independent predictor of self-motivation, followed by future-oriented self-image, self-confidence, perceived usefulness of English, and educational environment. These findings reinforce the view that learners' motivation for oral communication develops through the interaction of cognitive, affective, and contextual factors rather than through any single determinant.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the literature by integrating several complementary motivational perspectives into a single analytical framework applicable to comparative research on English oral communication. The results provide empirical support for the multidimensional nature of self-motivation and confirm that intrinsic motivational processes, positive future self-perceptions, and supportive educational environments play central roles in encouraging students to communicate in English. At the same time, the findings highlight the importance of considering emotional barriers, particularly communication anxiety, when interpreting learners' motivational behaviour.

The study also has practical implications for English language teaching. The findings suggest that efforts to improve students' oral communication should extend beyond the development of linguistic competence and place greater emphasis on fostering intrinsic interest, strengthening learners' self-confidence, creating supportive classroom environments, and reducing communication anxiety. Teachers should provide frequent opportunities for meaningful oral interaction, encourage students to view mistakes as a natural part of language learning, and design communicative activities that strengthen students' confidence and future-oriented aspirations for using English in academic, professional, and intercultural settings.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study relied on self-reported questionnaire data collected from students in two countries, which may be influenced by subjective perceptions and cultural response styles. The cross-sectional design does not permit causal inferences regarding the relationships among the investigated variables. In addition, the relatively low internal consistency of the Future-oriented self-image scale suggests that this construct may comprise several related dimensions that warrant further investigation.

Future research should expand the geographical scope by including additional countries and educational contexts, employ longitudinal designs to examine changes in motivation over time, and use advanced analytical techniques such as confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling to explore the direct and indirect relationships among motivational constructs. Further refinement of the Future-oriented self-image scale may also improve the measurement of this important psychological construct and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of self-motivation for English oral communication in diverse educational settings.

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