

Beyond the Classroom: EFL Students' Perceptions of Discord in Affecting Their Speaking Motivation

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ABSTRACT

Discord has become a widely used platform for language learning interactions, yet students' perceptions of its influence on their motivation to speak English remain underexplored. This study investigates how English as a foreign language (EFL) students perceive Discord's influence on their motivation to engage in speaking practice. This study employed a case study design. Fifteen EFL high school students participated in this study, selected for their active use of Discord for English practice. Data were collected through a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The findings indicate that students generally feel more confident speaking English on Discord, and most are encouraged to continue improving their speaking skills on the platform. Students also show positive engagement, demonstrated by their interest in participating, willingness to communicate, and persistence even when making mistakes. However, Discord has not yet become their preferred environment for speaking activities, as some students still favor traditional or other interactive learning contexts. This study concludes that Discord positively affects students' speaking motivation by providing a supportive, flexible communication space. These insights highlight the potential of integrating communication-based platforms into language learning practices to enhance students' willingness to engage in speaking beyond the classroom.

Keywords: *Discord; motivation; speaking skills*

INTRODUCTION

English-speaking skills are in high demand in global communication, requiring English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to be strongly motivated to develop fluency. However, for many students, sustaining that motivation is challenging in classrooms, where opportunities for authentic, engaging speaking practice are limited. Moreover, classroom speaking activities are typically linked to performance assessments, which may lead to students' speaking anxiety, making mistakes, and receiving negative evaluations (Tuan & Mei, 2015). These conditions can further reduce their confidence and willingness to speak, making classroom speaking practice stressful instead of motivating. To address these challenges, some EFL students seek an alternative environment to practice speaking by exploring online communication platforms that offer flexibility and autonomy. They can choose when, how, and with whom to communicate.

Among those platforms mentioned above, Discord has gained attention. Initially developed for online gamers, it has evolved into a multifunctional platform that supports social and educational interactions (Arifianto & Izzuddin, 2021). It is proved as it became an alternative for teachers to teach their students when the Covid-19 happened (Wahyuningsih & Baidi, 2021). Furthermore, it also has 'huge potential' as a place to do the teaching and learning activities, specifically, in English language subject (Uong, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2022).

Discord itself offers features such as text channels, voice and video calls, and screen sharing, enabling users to communicate in real time and engage in authentic, informal interactions. It creates a low-pressure and casual environment that allows students to practice English more comfortably than in classrooms (Lauricella, et al., 2024).

Recent studies have reported that Discord can enhance students' speaking skills and participation (e.g., Munibi et al., 2024; Odinokaya, et al, 2021; Ramadhan & Albaekani, 2021). Munibi et al. (2024) found that Discord makes speaking practice more engaging and interactive through its real-time communication and collaborative learning opportunities. Odinokaya et al. (2021) reported improvements in EFL students' vocabulary acquisition and its application in speaking, while Ramadhan & Albaekani (2021) highlighted students' positive perceptions of Discord as a user-friendly tool that supports comfortable and consistent speaking practice.

Despite the evidence of its benefits for developing speaking performance, how students perceive Discord as a tool for improving their speaking motivation remains underexplored. Understanding their attitudes toward Discord is crucial to help educators evaluate its role as a supportive tool for maintaining students' motivation and enhancing speaking outcomes. It can also be used to promote autonomous learning. This study addresses the gap by investigating EFL students' perceptions of Discord in relation to speaking motivation.

METHOD

This study adopted a case study design to explore how EFL students perceive the role of Discord in motivating them to speak English. The case study was selected because it allows an in-depth understanding of a contemporary phenomenon in its natural setting, as emphasized by Yin (2018). It also supports a holistic understanding of how participants experience and interpret the phenomenon in their real-world context (Shank, Brown, & Pringle, 2014). In this study, Discord serves as an informal learning platform where English-speaking practice occurred authentically outside the classroom.

The participants were 15 senior high school students with prior experience using Discord to practice English speaking. They took the initiative to join and actively engage in Discord as part of their interest in improving their speaking skills. These learners are considered digital natives since they have grown up in the digital age and are naturally familiar with online communication platforms (Helsper & Eynon, 2010; Prensky, 2001). Purposive sampling was used to ensure that only EFL students with direct and meaningful experience using Discord as a tool for English-speaking practice were included (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Palys, 2008).

Data were collected through an online questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was adapted from Kassem (2018), initially used to measure students' motivation. It consisted of 12 statements, rated on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strongly disagree (SD) and 5 indicating strongly agree (SA). The data were interpreted qualitatively to identify patterns in EFL students' perceptions regarding their motivation to practice English speaking. Both data sources were repeatedly read and coded, and the findings were integrated to provide a rich description of students' experiences. Dependability and confirmability were ensured through careful documentation of all procedures and by supporting interpretations with direct evidence from participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored EFL students' perceptions of Discord's influence on their speaking motivation. The findings show that the majority of the EFL students perceive Discord positively as a platform that boosts confidence, encourages improvement, and helps them practice English, although it is not yet their favorite environment for speaking activities. The interview data confirm that Discord provides a supportive environment where students can practice regularly, interact with native speakers, and gain confidence without fear of judgment. An overview of students' perceptions of Discord's impact on their English-speaking motivation, based on the questionnaire responses, is shown below.

Table 1. EFL Students' Perceptions of Discord in Influencing Their English Speaking Motivation

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. I am interested in learning to speak English on Discord.	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	2 (13.3%)	6 (40%)	4 (26.7%)
2. I find speaking English is fun and interesting on Discord.	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	5 (33.3%)	3 (20%)	6 (40%)
3. I like practicing English on Discord.	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (20%)	7 (46.7%)	3 (20%)
4. I am more confident in speaking English on Discord.	1 (6.7%)	2 (13.3%)	0 (0%)	9 (60%)	3 (20%)
5. Communicating with English native speakers through Discord is interesting.	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	4 (26.7%)	4 (26.7%)	6 (40%)
6. I enjoy speaking English the most on Discord.	1 (6.7%)	4 (26.7%)	6 (40%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)
7. Speaking in English on Discord encourages me to improve.	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	5 (33.3%)	6 (40%)
8. I plan to continue improving my English-speaking skills through Discord.	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	2 (13.3%)	5 (33.3%)	6 (40%)

9. I exert much effort to become fluent in speaking English through Discord.	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	5 (33.3%)	6 (40%)	2 (13.3%)
10. Making mistakes while using English on Discord does not stop me from communicating.	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (20%)	6 (40%)	4 (26.7%)
11. I plan to devote more time to practicing English on Discord.	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	4 (26.7%)	8 (53.3%)	2 (13.3%)
12. Using Discord contributes positively to my personal development in English speaking.	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	6 (40%)	5 (33.3%)
SD : strongly disagree	A : agree				
D : disagree	SA : strongly agree				
N : neutral					

Confidence

Table 1 shows that most students (80%) agree or strongly agree that Discord increases their confidence in speaking. Interview data reveal that Discord reduces the students' fear of judgment, allowing them to speak more freely and overcome shyness. They also noted that they feel less anxious and less afraid of being judged compared to speaking in classrooms. One participant stated:

"On Discord, I can speak more freely. I don't feel nervous because no one is staring at me." (R-5)

This supports Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive theory, which emphasizes that self-efficacy is a key factor in motivation. The supportive, low-pressure environment of Discord enhances EFL students' willingness to speak.

Motivation to Improve

A majority of the EFL students (73.3%) also view Discord as a tool that motivates them to continue improving their English-speaking skills. This includes encouragement to improve, intention to continue practicing, and perception that Discord supports their personal development in speaking English. The students reported that talking with native speakers and practicing regularly on Discord motivated them to expand their vocabulary and fluency. Some students said:

"I want to keep practicing because my speaking gets better when I talk on Discord." (R-7)

"I want to be more fluent, so I will use Discord more." (R-13)

These findings align with Deci and Ryan's Self Determination Theory (1985) where competence and autonomy are strong intrinsic motivators. Discord allows the students to control their learning pace and choose topics they enjoy. This supports long-term improvement.

Speaking Engagement

Many students (66.7%) agreed they are interested in learning to speak English on the platform and enjoy practicing it there. In addition, they also indicated that making mistakes does not prevent them from communicating. These perceptions suggest that Discord fosters a positive speaking environment where students feel encouraged to express themselves without fear of making mistakes. Interview data confirm this trend. One student stated:

“I still talk even if my grammar is not correct because my friends help me.” (R-11)

This finding is consistent with MacIntyre et al. (1998), who argue that learners are willing to communicate when they feel relaxed and interested in the setting. In this study, Discord provides a supportive, interactive environment that encourages participation. It helps students to develop greater confidence and persistence in speaking English.

Platform Preference

Although most students recognize the benefits of Discord, it is not yet their favorite environment for speaking English. One student said:

“I enjoy Discord, but I still like speaking in class with friends.” (R-6)

This shows that affective preference does not always match perceived learning value. Similar findings were reported by Satar and Akcan (2018), who found that learners may benefit significantly from digital platforms while still preferring traditional environments.

Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the data were collected from a small group of students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to wider learner populations. Future research could involve a larger, more diverse set of participants to yield stronger insights. Second, this research relied heavily on self-reported perceptions through questionnaires and interviews. As perceptions may not always reflect actual speaking performance, future studies are encouraged to include objective measures of speaking progress.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Discord positively influences EFL students' speaking motivation. Students feel more confident when communicating, are more encouraged to improve their English, and are more interested in speaking with others on the platform. They perceive Discord as a comfortable and non-judgmental environment where they can practice speaking without feeling anxious about making mistakes.

A key finding that advances psychological and educational understanding is the role of peer-supported online social presence in fostering motivation. When students feel connected to a supportive community, their fear of negative evaluation decreases, and their self-efficacy in speaking English increases. This suggests that motivation is not only generated by personal goals but also by digital social interactions that create a sense of belonging and encourage active participation.

The implications of this research highlight the potential of informal digital learning spaces, such as Discord, to complement classroom instruction by providing meaningful, low-pressure speaking opportunities. By integrating platforms that students genuinely enjoy, English learning can become more engaging, autonomous, and aligned with their psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and confidence.

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