



## LEARNER INITIATIVE AND ORAL PROFICIENCY: INVESTIGATING THE LINK IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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**Abstract:** In the context of 21st-century globalization and technological progress, English has become a crucial worldwide lingua franca, especially in non-native English-speaking nations such as Indonesia. Although English has been included into the Indonesian education system at all levels, numerous students encounter difficulties in attaining oral fluency despite extensive formal training. This study examines the correlation between learner initiative and students' oral competency in English, specifically targeting learners in the English Language Education Department of a private institution in Yogyakarta. Utilizing a quantitative correlational study methodology, data were gathered from 97 students through a validated questionnaire to evaluate learner initiative and academic records to assess speaking competence. Descriptive analysis revealed a high level of learner initiative ( $M = 45.20$ ) and good speaking ability ( $M = 3.35$ ). Spearman's rho correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant albeit modest positive association ( $r_s = 0.367$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) between learner initiative and speaking proficiency. These findings suggest that while initiative is meaningful in oral language development, it is not the sole determinant of speaking proficiency. The study highlights the need for instructional strategies that foster learner autonomy and address other influencing factors such as anxiety, interaction opportunities, and feedback. The findings supplement the expanding literature highlighting the significance of internal learner traits, especially initiative, as crucial determinants of success in EFL speaking performance.

**Keywords:** learner initiative; oral proficiency; English as a Foreign Language (EFL); speaking skills development; autonomous learning.

### INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, globalization and rapid technological innovation have markedly increased the significance of English as a worldwide communication medium. English serves as the global lingua franca, facilitating cross-cultural interaction and cooperation across several domains, including science, technology, commerce, tourism, diplomacy, and education. (J. Zeng & Yang, 2024). This widespread usage reflects the dominance of English in global communication and the necessity for individuals to acquire English proficiency to participate in global

conversations and opportunities (Roshid & Kankaanranta, 2025). As Oweis (2025) emphasizes, English is vital for accessing global knowledge and staying informed in rapidly evolving disciplines, particularly in education and scientific research. Its strategic function is not limited to native-speaking countries but extends globally, including non-English-speaking nations like Indonesia. Consequently, English is now seen not simply as an academic topic but as an essential life skill for academic achievement, professional progression, and global citizenship (Belabcir, 2024; Choi, 2025; Palmer, 2024). This reality

underscores the urgency of effectively integrating English instruction at all education system levels.

In the Indonesian educational context, English is classified as a foreign language. Nevertheless, its role as a gateway to international knowledge and communication has led to its inclusion in the national curriculum from primary through tertiary education. Across these levels, English is viewed as a crucial subject that contributes to the development of globally competent students. The Indonesian government recognizes the importance of English in preparing students to compete in a globalized workforce and to engage with global academic and cultural discourses. However, despite this strong emphasis, there remains a notable gap between the expected proficiency outcomes and the actual communicative abilities of learners. Although exposed to years of English instruction, many students still face challenges in practical language use, mainly in speaking. This disconnection suggests that deeper learner-related factors influence language acquisition beyond curriculum design and instructional delivery.

Language learning is a multifaceted process encompassing four primary skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Among these, speaking is often considered the most immediate and observable indicator of communicative competence, particularly in real-world and interactive contexts. The interaction, especially in speaking effectively in English, reflects a learner's proficiency and readiness to engage in academic or professional conversations (Mingyan et al., 2025; Salih & Omar, 2024). Speaking requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the confidence and fluency to convey ideas spontaneously and coherently. Wang et al. (2022) argue that speaking is often regarded as the goal in foreign language learning, as it signifies the learner's capacity to apply what they have learned in meaningful communication. Despite this importance, many learners struggle to achieve fluency and confidence in oral expression. These struggles are evident in EFL contexts, where opportunities for real-life English conversation are limited outside the classroom.

The development of speaking skills is widely acknowledged as a challenging endeavor for English learners, especially in environments where English is not used as a medium of daily communication. Speaking proficiency demands the integration of multiple sub-skills, such as accurate grammar, a broad vocabulary, clear pronunciation, and overall fluency, all of which must be managed simultaneously during speech

production (Terzioğlu & Kurt, 2022; Yan et al., 2024). Furthermore, learners must also be able to comprehend their interlocutors and respond appropriately, which requires cognitive processing and social awareness. In EFL settings like Indonesia, the lack of immersion in an English-speaking environment adds to these difficulties, as learners have fewer chances to practice authentic communication (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025; Azwar et al., 2021; Sabilla & Kaniadewi, 2025). Without sufficient practice and feedback, students may feel reluctant or anxious about speaking, which in turn hampers their oral development (Alharbi, 2021; Ignacio et al., 2025). This highlights the need to identify and support internal learner factors that can compensate for the external limitations of the learning context.

One of the internal factors that has gained increasing attention in recent years is learner initiative. This refers to a learner's proactive disposition toward their own education, encompassing behaviors such as self-motivation, goal setting, preparation, and active engagement (Frese et al., 2016; Hector & Kohtala, 2022; Heflin & Macaluso, 2021; Husky et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2024; Polovina, 2014; Van Hell et al., 2009). Learner initiative reflects a student's willingness to take ownership of their learning process rather than relying solely on external instruction (Folwell & Brennan, 2025; Namaziandost et al., 2024). According to Mohammadi Zenouzagh et al., (2025), students who exhibit higher initiative are more likely to seek additional learning opportunities, take risks in using the target language, and engage meaningfully in classroom activities. Such behaviors are essential for developing oral language skills, which require continuous and intentional practice. In contrast, students who lack initiative may become passive learners, participating minimally and showing limited improvement in their speaking abilities (Slavkov, 2023). Thus, fostering learner initiative may be a key strategy for improving speaking performance in EFL contexts.

Despite the recognized importance of learner initiative, it remains a persistent challenge in many Indonesian English classrooms. A study on teachers' perceptions found that only 31% of teachers were optimistic about promoting learner autonomy, while the majority, 69%, expressed pessimism due to various challenges in their teaching environments (Lengkanawati, 2017). Kosasih (2021) points out that many students cannot speak English fluently even after years of English education. This gap between formal

learning and practical application suggests that conventional teaching methods may be insufficient in developing oral proficiency unless complemented by learner-driven efforts. Students may perform well in written assessments and memorize vocabulary or grammar rules, yet remain hesitant to speak due to a lack of initiative or confidence. Observations from English classrooms also indicate that students often wait for teacher instructions, rarely take the initiative to ask questions, or contribute voluntarily during discussions. This pattern of passivity can significantly hinder oral language development, which thrives on active and spontaneous use of the language (Budiana & Nurwaliyah, 2019).

Preliminary observations conducted at a private university in Yogyakarta provide further support for these concerns. Although many students demonstrate an understanding of English sentence structures and vocabulary, they often experience difficulty when speaking in front of others (Gan, 2013; Kashinathan & Abdul Aziz, 2021). Even in structured tasks like presentations or peer dialogues, students exhibit signs of nervousness, limited vocabulary recall, and reduced fluency. These symptoms are frequently linked to low initiative—students are less likely to prepare in advance, practice speaking outside of class, or seek feedback from peers or instructors. Such lack of initiative limits their opportunity for growth in oral communication and may negatively affect their confidence over time. Therefore, understanding the role of learner initiative in the speaking development process is critical for designing instructional strategies that can foster more active and autonomous learning behaviors.

Based on these observations and theoretical foundations, this study aims to investigate the correlation between learner initiative and students' oral proficiency within the context of English language instruction. The research aims to investigate whether students who exhibit higher levels of initiative tend to perform better in speaking tasks, thereby providing empirical insights into the relationship between personal learning behaviors and language outcomes. Understanding this relationship can provide educators with a stronger foundation for promoting learner autonomy in communicative language teaching. Furthermore, the study contributes to the growing body of research recognizing internal learner factors—such as motivation, self-efficacy, and initiative—as critical to second language acquisition success. These insights are particularly relevant for enhancing English instruction in

Indonesian EFL classrooms, where fostering communicative competence remains a persistent challenge.

The learner initiative refers to students' ability and willingness to engage in self-directed actions without needing external prompting. Polovina (2014) defines initiative as a personal quality that reflects a tendency to engage in independent, proactive learning behaviors. Frese et al. (2016) conceptualize initiative as a behavioral syndrome, characterized by actively pursuing goals, overcoming obstacles, and maintaining persistence in challenging learning conditions. Learners who demonstrate high initiative typically do not wait for instructions but instead take ownership of their educational experiences. Lisbona et al. (2020) further emphasizes that initiative also encompasses the formulation of new ideas, problem-solving abilities, and an internal motivation to engage in meaningful learning activities. In language learning, initiative is crucial because it encourages students to extend their learning beyond classroom boundaries (Lin et al., 2024). Without initiative, even the most well-structured instruction may fail to produce meaningful and lasting learning outcomes, especially in developing productive language skills such as speaking.

Personal initiative comprises three key components: self-starting, proactivity, and persistence (Balluerka et al., 2014; Ulacia et al., 2017). These three dimensions work interdependently to create a comprehensive learner profile capable of autonomous learning (Lejeune et al., 2023; Petrou et al., 2024). Self-starting behavior refers to the learner's ability to pursue academic goals independently, without explicit directives from others (Lejeune et al., 2023). This includes setting personal learning targets and actively seeking opportunities for practice. Proactivity, on the other hand, refers to the learner's inclination to anticipate future learning challenges and take preventative action, such as reviewing material in advance or preparing questions before class discussions (Papi & Hiver, 2025). Persistence is the third component and represents the learner's consistency in overcoming obstacles and maintaining effort even when facing setbacks (Vallerand et al., 2023). These elements form the behavioral foundation for a self-regulated and autonomous learning process (Ismail et al., 2023; Moradoff et al., 2021). In language acquisition, especially in speaking, these traits enable students to continuously practice and reflect on their language use, improving proficiency over time.

Expanding on these foundations, Ponton, (2020)

provides a broader framework of personal initiative in autonomous learning. This framework identifies five behaviors: goal-directedness, action-orientation, self-startedness, active problem-solving, and persistence in overcoming obstacles. Goal-directedness involves establishing specific learning goals and working consistently to achieve them (Liando & Lumettu, 2017; Ponton, 2020). Action-orientation refers to creating actionable plans that support goal achievement (Liando & Lumettu, 2017; Ponton, 2020). Self-startedness relates to the internal motivation to begin and maintain learning activities independently (Liando & Lumettu, 2017; Ponton, 2020). An active approach to problem-solving involves learners devising strategies to overcome barriers in their learning processes (Liando & Lumettu, 2017; Ponton, 2020). Lastly, persistence is reflected in the learner's ability to maintain their efforts even in the face of repeated challenges (Liando & Lumettu, 2017; Ponton, 2020). All these components reinforce the role of personal initiative as a catalyst for continuous improvement, particularly in skill-based learning like speaking.

Speaking is one of the four foundational language skills—alongside listening, reading, and writing—and is regarded as a primary mode of communication in real-life settings (Adem & Berkessa, 2022; Robert & Meenakshi, 2022). Additionally, many researcher argue that speaking is a vital skill for expressing ideas, conveying emotions, and participating in social interactions (Chollet et al., 2022; Nggawu & Thao, 2023; Tai & Chen, 2024). Mastery of speaking requires the integration of multiple elements, including pronunciation, grammar, intonation, vocabulary usage, and confidence (Al-khresheh, 2024). According to Yan et al. (2024), speaking is using language to communicate effectively with others. Sato et al. (2025) add that individuals express intentions, exchange ideas, and achieve communicative goals through speaking. Therefore, speaking ability is crucial for academic success and functional interaction in formal and informal contexts (Kashinathan & Abdul Aziz, 2021; Qiao & Zhao, 2023; Tai & Chen, 2024). Through speaking, language learners are most visibly judged regarding their communicative competence.

Speaking ability comprises several interrelated components that must be developed in tandem. Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) identify five essential components: vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and comprehension. Vocabulary mastery refers to the learner's ability to understand and use a wide range of words, including knowledge

of word forms and collocations (Teng & Cui, 2024; Y. Zeng et al., 2022). Pronunciation involves articulating words correctly, using proper stress, intonation, and rhythm. Grammar refers to correctly constructing sentences, enabling learners to convey meaning accurately (Ma et al., 2024; Mohammed Awadh et al., 2024; Sonsaat-Hegelheimer & Levis, 2025). Fluency relates to the smoothness and flow of speech, allowing learners to express themselves without unnatural pauses or hesitations (Peltonen, 2024). Comprehension is the listener's or speaker's ability to process spoken information and respond appropriately. Mastery of these components determines how much learners can participate effectively in spoken communication. Any deficiency in one area can affect speech's overall clarity, confidence, and coherence (Cai et al., 2025; Mekheimer & Fageeh, 2025; Xiao, 2025).

The development of speaking skills requires not only instructional support but also significant personal effort. One of the internal learner factors that directly influences speaking performance is initiative. Learner initiative encourages students to take charge of their learning by creating practice opportunities, seeking feedback, and actively participating in communicative tasks. Liando and Lumettu (2017) assert that students who show initiative are more likely to apply the theoretical knowledge they gain to real communication. Speaking ability, as an applied language skill, demands repeated and meaningful practice, which is often driven by student motivation and autonomy. Kashinathan and Abdul Aziz (2021) highlight that speaking proficiency is as crucial as any other skill in language learning and should be continuously improved through consistent exposure and use. Thus, initiative and speaking ability are closely intertwined, particularly for students who actively engage in language use and pursue communicative competence, and are more likely to improve their speaking performance over time.

English has become the global lingua franca in this era of globalization and technological advancement, serving as a vital tool for academic, business, and intercultural communication. Its prominence underscores the urgent need for individuals, particularly in non-English-speaking countries like Indonesia, to develop English proficiency. In response, Indonesia has made English a core subject at all educational levels to prepare globally competent graduates. However, many students still struggle with oral proficiency despite this educational emphasis. This gap between instructional goals and student outcomes suggests that curriculum design alone may not be

sufficient. Internal learner-related factors, particularly those affecting verbal communication skills, warrant further investigation.

Among these internal factors, learner initiative has gained increasing attention and serves as the independent variable in this study. Informed by Polovina (2014), Frese et al. (2016), and Ponton (2020), learner initiative encompasses self-starting behavior, proactivity, perseverance, and problem-solving. Self-starting learners engage in independent activities like setting goals or preparing in advance. Proactive learners anticipate challenges and take initiative, while problem-solving and ownership reflect active engagement in learning. Perseverance involves sustained effort despite setbacks. Collectively, these traits support autonomous learning, which is crucial for developing complex skills such as speaking.

In this study, speaking ability is the dependent variable, comprising vocabulary, pronunciation and intonation, grammatical accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. As noted by Brown and Abeywickrama (2019), Al-khresheh (2024), and Yan et al. (2024), speaking effectively in a foreign language requires real-time processing, often under social pressure. Mastery of these components allows learners to communicate clearly and confidently. Unlike receptive skills, speaking is highly visible and often viewed as the main indicator of communicative competence. Its development depends not only on instruction but also on the learner's initiative, engagement, and persistence.

In the Indonesian EFL context, challenges such as a lack of fluency and confidence highlight the need for greater learner initiative. Although English instruction is widespread, students often exhibit passivity and rely heavily on teacher direction, as noted by Budiana and Nurwaliyah (2019). Lengkanawati (2017) found that many educators are skeptical about fostering learner autonomy. This results in limited preparation, reduced participation in speaking activities, and minimal use of English outside class. Such patterns reflect low learner initiative, which hampers speaking development. Conversely, students with higher initiative are more likely to practice speaking, seek feedback, and engage actively in communication tasks.

This study proposes a positive correlation between learner initiative and speaking proficiency. Greater initiative leads to more active engagement in language learning through practice, communication, and sustained effort, which can significantly improve oral performance. The

conceptual framework guiding this research illustrates a link: learner initiative shapes learner behaviors such as task preparation, feedback-seeking, and communicative engagement, which in turn correlate to speaking skills. By examining this relationship empirically, the study aims to provide insights into how internal learner factors can be harnessed to address contextual limitations and relate to speaking ability in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

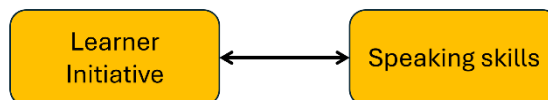


Figure 1. *The relationship between learners' initiative and speaking ability*

Based on the literature review and conceptual framework, the following hypothesis is proposed: Ho: In the English Language Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta, there is no significant correlation between students' initiative level and their speaking ability. Ha: In the English Language Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta, there is a significant correlation between students' initiative level and their speaking ability.

## METHOD

This research employed a quantitative research approach with a correlational design to examine the relationship between students' initiative in learning English and their speaking ability. Quantitative methods allow researchers to

collect and analyze numerical data using statistical tools, offering objective insights into the nature and strength of variable relationships (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Correlational design is particularly suitable for this study because it aims to identify whether a significant relationship exists between two naturally occurring variables without manipulating them (Becker et al., 2016; Curtis et al., 2016; Han & Wang, 2021). In this study, the independent variable (X) is students' initiative in learning English, while the dependent variable (Y) is students' speaking ability. By employing this design, the research aims to generate evidence on how personal learning behaviors may contribute to language proficiency outcomes.

The research was conducted at a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, during November 2024. The choice of location was based on the researchers' observations of varying student engagement levels, particularly in terms of their initiative in classroom participation. The

population of this study consisted of 129 students from the 2020 cohort in the English Language Education Department, divided into four classes: A, B, C, and D. Using convenience sampling, a total of 97 students were selected as the sample, following Cohen et al. (2018). This is a sample size table with a 95% confidence level. Convenience sampling, though limited in representativeness and prone to bias, is widely used in academic research due to its practicality. It enables researchers to collect data quickly and cost-effectively from accessible participants, making it particularly useful in time- or resource-constrained contexts and exploratory studies. This method is also valuable for reaching specific or hard-to-access populations, offering early insights that can guide further research. While its generalizability is limited, careful and transparent use helps maintain research integrity and supports future, more rigorous studies (Emerson, 2021; Stratton, 2021).

Two instruments were used to collect data: a questionnaire to assess students' initiative levels and document analysis to evaluate speaking ability scores. The questionnaire was adapted from Fay and Frese's (2001) framework on initiative consisted of 15 Likert-scale items, ranging from "Always" to "Never." This instrument measured self-starting, persistence, proactivity, and goal orientation. The researchers used student records from the Listening and Speaking for Daily Conversation course in the first semester for the speaking ability scores. The decision to utilize first-semester student records from the Listening and Speaking for Daily Conversation course as a foundation for assessing speaking ability scores is methodologically sound and pedagogically appropriate. This course is designed to develop essential oral communication skills, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and interactive competence, ensuring that the outcomes closely align with the concept of speaking ability. Furthermore, the course often employs authentic, task-oriented assessments—such as role-plays, dialogues, and oral presentations—that enhance the ecological validity of the data by simulating real-life communication contexts. The application of uniform and objective grading, using established rubrics, across multiple educators and student cohorts ensures the reliability of the data within this course. Moreover, institutional student records serve as a dependable and precise source of academic achievement, as they are systematically documented and maintained under administrative oversight. This first-semester course provides a

clear assessment of students' fundamental speaking abilities, which are crucial for evaluating first language proficiency and tracking development. If the course is mandated in the curriculum, it ensures that the dataset accurately represents the broader student population, hence enhancing the generalizability and reliability of the study findings.

To ascertain the validity of the questionnaire, the researchers utilized expert judgment from three assessors and applied the Aiken V formula for content validity testing. According to Heri Retnawati (2016), the results indicated that all 15 items scored above 0.8, confirming high validity (An Nabil et al., 2022; Muflikhun & Setyarsih, 2022). Instrument reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha through SPSS, resulting in a coefficient of 0.866, which falls within the "highly reliable" category (Cohen et al., 2018). These statistical validations ensured that the questionnaire was consistent and accurate in measuring its intended assessment. Such instrument validation is critical in correlational studies, where precision in data measurement can directly affect the reliability of findings.

The procedures of data collection involved two stages. First, the initiative questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms and shared through messaging platforms like WhatsApp. Respondents were informed of their voluntary participation, and once completed, their responses were compiled for analysis. Second, for the speaking ability variable, the researchers obtained and processed the final scores from the relevant course by requesting them from the administrative office. These two datasets were then used for comparative statistical analysis. This mixed collection approach ensured both efficiency and depth in evaluating the two core constructions of the study.

Data analyses were administered utilizing descriptive and inferential statistics, supported by SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics, including mean, median, and percentage distribution, were used to answer the first and second research questions regarding learner initiative and speaking ability. The categorization of learner initiative was with scores segmented into Low representing from 15-30, Moderate from 30.1 to 45, and High from 45.1 to 60. Similarly, speaking ability scores were classified using the university's grading scale. For the third research question, inferential statistical techniques were employed to examine the correlation between the two variables.



In this study, the data analysis procedures began with a normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method, which revealed that the data were not normally distributed. As a result, Spearman's rho correlation analysis was employed, as it is a non-parametric statistical technique appropriate for examining the strength and direction of monotonic relationships in non-normally distributed data. The statistical significance of each correlation was assessed through hypothesis testing, with correlations deemed significant when the p-value was less than 0.05. Although Spearman's rho differs from Pearson's correlation in terms of calculation, the interpretation is similarly based on proximity to  $\pm 1$ , which reflects the strength of the relationship. As correlation coefficients represent effect sizes, they were further described using a standardized scale: .00–.19 indicates a “very weak” correlation, .20–.39 is considered “weak,” .40–.59 is “moderate,” .60–.79 is “strong,” and .80–1.0 reflects a “very strong” correlation. This analytical framework allowed for a nuanced understanding of the associations between variables, balancing both statistical rigor and practical interpretation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings, addressing three primary research questions: (1) What is the level of learner initiative among students in the English Language Education Department of a private university in Yogyakarta? (2) What are the students' speaking abilities in the same department? Furthermore, (3) Is there a significant correlation between students' initiative levels and English-speaking proficiency? The researchers collected data through a validated questionnaire and institutional academic records to answer these questions. The questionnaire was designed to measure the degree of initiative demonstrated by students in their learning process. At the same time, the speaking ability was assessed using course results from the *Listening and Speaking for Daily Conversation* class. An analysis using descriptive statistics was used to answer the first two research questions, and inferential statistical analysis was applied to test the correlation hypothesis for the third. The results offer insights into the dynamics between self-regulated learning behaviors and oral language development in an EFL context.

### *Students' initiative level*

To measure the level of learner initiative among students, a 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire was

administered to 97 students from the 2020 English Language Education Department cohort. This instrument was designed to capture the frequency and consistency of behaviors that reflect proactive engagement in learning, such as setting goals, self-monitoring, and voluntarily participating in academic activities. Upon analysis, the descriptive statistical results revealed a mean score of 45.20, a median score of 44.00, and a mode of 42. These values suggest that the distribution of responses was symmetrical and stable, indicating minimal variability in how students perceived and reported their initiative-related behaviors. When interpreted using the initiative classification scale applied in this study, where scores ranging from 15 to 30 are categorized as Low, 30.1 to 45 as Moderate, and 45.1 to 60 as High, the average score places the participants in the High initiative group. This classification implies that most students frequently demonstrate self-directed learning behaviors. Such behaviors include independently reviewing instructional materials outside scheduled class time, actively asking questions to deepen understanding, and setting specific academic goals to guide their learning journey. These findings suggest that students are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but are actively shaping their learning experiences, which is a positive indicator of their readiness to thrive in autonomous and communicative learning environments.

### *Students' speaking ability*

The second research question in this study was on evaluating the students' speaking competency, a vital aspect of language competence in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. To evaluate this skill objectively, the researchers utilized documented course grades from the *Listening and Speaking for Daily Conversation* class, a core subject designed to build students' oral communication competence. The analysis was conducted on data collected from 97 students, revealing a mean speaking score of 3.35, with a median of 3.50 and a mode of 4.0. These statistical measures indicate that most students performed consistently, with scores clustering toward the upper end of the assessment scale. When interpreted using the institutional grading rubric—where scores greater than 3.5 up to 4.0 are classified as “Very Good,” those between 2.5 and 3.5 as “Good,” and so on—the results position the students' speaking performance within the “Good” category. This finding suggests that the learners generally exhibit functional speaking skills, enabling them to effectively express their thoughts

besides ideas in both academic and everyday conversational backgrounds. It also implies that learners have acquired a sufficient command of the language to engage in structured discussions, respond appropriately to questions, and demonstrate clarity in pronunciation, vocabulary use, and grammatical accuracy. These outcomes

reflect positively on the quality of instruction provided in the speaking course and hint at the benefits of pedagogical strategies such as interactive activities, task-based speaking practice, and continuous formative feedback, which likely contributed to students' oral language development.

Table 1. *One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test using unstandardized residual*

		Unstandardized Residual
N		97
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	6.63414205
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.116
	Positive	.114
	Negative	-.116
Test Statistic		.116
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.003c
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)	Sig.	.144d
	95% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound .074
		Upper Bound .214

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. Based on 97 sampled tables with starting seed 2000000.

Table 2. *Spearman's rho correlation*

		Speaking Ability Students Initiative	
Spearman's rho	Speaking Ability	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	97
	Students Initiative	Correlation Coefficient	.367**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	97

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### *Correlation between learner initiative and speaking ability*

The third question evaluated whether there is a statistically significant link between the degree of initiative learners have and their capacity for speaking. Prior to conducting the correlation analysis, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to assess the normality of the data. The results of this test indicated that the data did not follow a normal distribution. Following that, a Spearman rho correlation was carried out, which resulted in a correlation coefficient ( $r_s$ ) of 0.367 and a significance level ( $p$ ) of 0.001. These figures prove that there is a positive correlation between the two variables and that this correlation is statistically significant. Although the correlation strength is considered to be weak (ranging from 0.200 to 0.399), the relevance of the finding suggests that pupils who have greater levels of initiative likely to link with better speaking.

### *Discussion of findings*

Analyzing the students' initiative levels revealed insightful evidence about the proactive learning behaviors within the English Language Education Department at a private university in Yogyakarta. Drawing from a robust quantitative methodology, the research employed a 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from Fay and Frese (2001) validated personal initiative framework. The findings, with a mean score of 45.20, a median of 44.00, and a mode of 42, consistently fell into the "High" category according to the classification scale, which designates scores above 45.1 as indicative of strong initiative. These results underscore that a significant proportion of the students actively engage in self-regulated learning behaviors such as setting academic goals, independently reviewing materials, initiating classroom participation, and seeking clarification, which are hallmarks of autonomous learners. These behaviors align well with the theoretical



assertions presented in the literature review, particularly those by Benson and Voller (2014), who emphasize that learner autonomy is indispensable for effective language learning, especially in higher education contexts where teacher direction is often limited.

Furthermore, this level of initiative resonates with Ponton (2020) extended autonomous learning framework integrates goal-directedness, self-startedness, and active problem-solving as essential dispositions that drive long-term academic success. The results also support findings by Güneş (2022), who observed that EFL learners with high initiative tend to demonstrate better metacognitive awareness, academic persistence, and language learning outcomes. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students in this study do not merely respond to external instructional cues; instead, they actively construct their own learning experiences. This internal motivation and behavioral engagement form a solid foundation for achieving academic success and communicative competence, particularly in skill areas like speaking, which require consistent and self-driven practice beyond classroom constraints (Güneş, 2022; Namaziandost et al., 2025; Slovák & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Whitehead & Greenier, 2019).

The current study's analysis of students' speaking ability provides an essential lens through which to evaluate the efficacy of language instruction in developing practical communication skills in an EFL context. Drawing on performance data from the Listening and Speaking for Daily Conversation course, the descriptive statistics—mean score of 3.35, median of 3.50, and mode of 4.0—place most students within the “Good” category according to the institutional grading rubric. This suggests that students have achieved functional oral proficiency through participation in discussions, presenting ideas, and responding appropriately in both academic and informal settings. These findings are particularly significant, given the challenges inherent in acquiring speaking skills in an environment where English is not the primary medium of daily interaction. Brown and Abeywickrama (2019) emphasize that speaking is a multifaceted productive skill that necessitates the synthesis of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. The students' success may reflect not only their efforts but also the pedagogical tactics employed in the courses, including pair work, group discussions, role-playing, and organized oral presentations, which are widely acknowledged as beneficial in enhancing oral communication (Chen et al., 2021;

Ponton, 2020). Furthermore, this degree of speaking proficiency aligns with the observations of Muslem et al. (2021), who noted that Indonesian EFL university students exhibit enhanced speaking performance when given frequent opportunities for engagement, practice, and corrective feedback. It is also noteworthy that the students' speaking success may be attributed to their engagement with a curriculum emphasizing communicative language teaching (CLT), where learner interaction and contextual language use are prioritized (Adem & Berkessa, 2022; Nggawu & Thao, 2023). Nevertheless, while the speaking ability results are promising, they also indicate the presence of untapped potential for further improvement, particularly in fluency and confidence, which often require more than classroom exposure to develop fully. Therefore, consistent with Terzioğlu and Kurt (2022). It is recommended that instructional practices be refined to incorporate real-life communicative scenarios, formative feedback, and learner-driven speaking initiatives that can sustain and elevate speaking performance over time.

The correlation analysis conducted in this study offers critical insight into the relationship between learner initiative and English-speaking proficiency among EFL students. Before analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test with a Monte Carlo significance value of 0.186 confirmed the normal data distribution, thereby validating the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation method. The resulting correlation coefficient ( $r_s$ ) = 0.367,  $p$  = 0.001 indicates a statistically significant, positive correlation between students' initiative levels and speaking performance. Although the strength of the relationship is categorized as low to moderate (0.200–0.399), the statistical significance of the result is crucial, as it indicates that the relationship observed is not due to chance. The findings are consistent with prior research by Heflin and Macaluso (2021) and Liando and Lumettu, (2017), who found that learner autonomy and initiative, especially in active feedback-seeking, engagement in practice, and goal-setting behaviors, play an integral part in enhancing oral skills in EFL environments. This relationship is further supported by Fay and Frese, (2001) conceptualization of personal initiative as a behavioral pattern characterized by self-starting, proactive, and persistent actions that go beyond formal instruction. In the language learning environment, particularly in skill areas such as speaking, requiring continual exposure, practice, and interaction, initiative enables students to take

responsibility for their learning progress rather than relying solely on teacher-directed activities (Moradoff et al., 2021). Students who demonstrate initiative are likelier to invest time in out-of-class speaking practice, join extracurricular activities such as English clubs, and engage in real-time communication tasks that simulate authentic language use, contributing significantly to speaking development (Bodolica et al., 2021; King et al., 2021).

Moreover, the moderate yet significant correlation indicates that, while influential, learner initiative is not the only factor contributing to speaking ability. Language proficiency, especially speaking, is a multifaceted construct shaped by a constellation of variables including linguistic input, interactional opportunities, anxiety levels, fluency development, vocabulary range, pronunciation clarity, and even classroom dynamics (Barcomb & Iwashita, 2024; Kosasih, 2021; Mohammed Awadh et al., 2024; Peltonen, 2024; Slavkov, 2023; Teng & Cui, 2024; Terzioğlu & Kurt, 2022; Y. Zeng et al., 2022). For instance, students with strong initiative may still struggle with fluency if their learning environment does not provide adequate opportunities for spontaneous speech (Kosasih, 2021). Likewise, a student with limited initiative might still excel in speaking if immersed in a highly interactive, communicative learning context (Tang, 2024). However, this study has clearly shown that initiative is a foundational behavioral quality that amplifies the impact of instructional input and accelerates learner progress (Heflin & Macaluso, 2021). It acts as a catalyst that empowers learners to take charge of their development, bridge learning gaps, and convert theoretical knowledge into practical language use (Heflin & Macaluso, 2021). From a pedagogical standpoint, this reinforces the importance of cultivating learner initiative in speaking instruction (Alam & Mohanty, 2023; Tang, 2024). Teachers should consider embedding metacognitive training, reflective practice, goal-setting sessions, and learner autonomy projects into their curriculum to develop this main trait. Creating a learning culture where initiative is encouraged and rewarded may yield long-term benefits in speaking performance, students' overall communicative competence, and academic resilience (Alam & Mohanty, 2023; Amodu et al., 2025; Braine, 2024; Duan et al., 2024). In conclusion, the significant correlation between learner initiative and speaking ability underscores the importance of proactive learner engagement in language education. It highlights the need for instructional

strategies that move beyond passive knowledge transmission to empower learners and facilitate self-directed learning pathways.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

English proficiency has transitioned in 21st-century education from a curricular goal to an essential life skill for global engagement and career advancement. Despite Indonesia's implementation of comprehensive English language instruction throughout all educational tiers, a persistent gap remains between formal education and students' conversational communication skills. This article studied the correlation between learner initiative and speaking proficiency among undergraduate EFL students at a private university in Yogyakarta. Despite a weak correlation, the findings indicated that learner initiative, exemplified by self-directed behaviors such as goal setting, proactive learning, persistence, and problem-solving, significantly correlates with enhanced speaking proficiency.

The study revealed that students generally exhibit considerable initiative and robust verbal skills, suggesting that intrinsic motivational and behavioral factors substantially impact their speech development. Although not highly significant, the positive link highlights the role of initiative as a facilitator in developing communicative proficiency, particularly in environments with limited opportunities for spontaneous use of English. The results underscore student initiative as a catalyst that associates the effectiveness of instructional practices and facilitates out-of-class engagement, therefore empowering learners to apply theoretical knowledge to practical communicative tasks; however, it is not a singular determinant.

This research presents a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at enhancing English language instruction and improving students' speaking skills by promoting learner initiative. Educators are encouraged to incorporate learner-centered strategies into their instructional design, including reflective journals, personal goal-setting, and choice-driven speaking exercises, which foster student ownership of their learning. Establishing authentic communication settings—such as English clubs, peer tutoring, immersion camps, and discussion forums—enhances student involvement, diminishes reliance on instructors, and fosters spontaneous language utilization. Curriculum design must prioritize the cultivation of students' metacognitive and self-regulated learning capabilities, allowing them to assess and enhance their speaking talents proactively.

Feedback methods should be helpful and foster autonomy by directing students to pursue and implement feedback for their own personal and professional development. Moreover, continuous professional development is crucial for equipping educators with the competencies required to promote student initiative and cater to varied learner needs through individualized instruction.

Assessment techniques must correspond with communicative competence by integrating performance-based activities and rubrics that evaluate initiative-related behaviors, including planning and active involvement. Institutional policies should endorse these activities by revising national standards and advocating for adaptable, learner-centered methodologies. The study advocates for more research on the interplay between learner initiative and elements such as language anxiety, digital engagement, and sociocultural dynamics, proposing that longitudinal studies may enhance comprehension of initiative's significance in comprehensive language development.

In short, although the learner initiative may not be the sole determinant of speaking competency, it is a crucial factor in achieving communicative competence. Incorporating this internal learner component into pedagogy, evaluation, and policy might facilitate the connection between English language teaching and proficient speaking performance, especially within Indonesia's EFL setting.

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