

## Factors Influencing Chinese Student Not Want to Speak English: A Case Study of Rangsit University Student, Rangsit University, International College

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### Abstract

At present, Chinese students account for the largest proportion of international students in the world. With the increasingly globalized world, many students want to practice and enhance their English-speaking skills. In China, students begin to learn English as early as second grade and continue through the university level. But many of them still cannot speak English fluently. Not only are they not speaking English well, but they are not willing to speak. This phenomenon is common in Chinese universities. This can be understandable because there is no language environment in China, so they don't need to speak English. But for some students, even they study abroad, they still don't like to speak English. So this study is aimed to find some effective factors to explain this phenomenon. The author mainly wants to understand the current level of spoken Chinese students in foreign countries and the reasons why they don't speak English. The researcher conducted a 19-question questionnaire survey on some of the English-speaking feelings and experiences. This research using qualitative methodology, provided data about some possible reasons of this situation. As a result of completing the above procedure, the results show that there are possible 5 factors that can explain this phenomenon, like most Chinese students would feel nervous when they speak English, standard accent problem and so on. The above findings would like to help Chinese students to find their hindrances and improve their ability to speak English.

**Keyword:** Chinese student, spoken English, china English, English education, anxiety, learning way

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### 1. Introduction

The informationalization of social life and the globalization of the economy makes the importance of English increasingly prominent. As one of the most important information carriers, English has become the most widely used language in the world. In many basic education strategies, many countries regard English education as an important component of a citizen's quality education and put it in a prominent position. As China becomes internationalized gradually, the use of English is also becoming more and more widespread, as English is used in many places in our daily life. Therefore, English has become the focus of this study. Nowadays many Chinese parents send their children to study abroad actively to improve their children's English. According to statistics, in 2016, the total number of Chinese students studying abroad was 544,500, an increase of 149,900 from the previous year, as the increase rate is 36.26%. At present, Chinese students account for the largest proportion of international students in the world. Although studying in an overseas country, there are still a lot of Chinese students who do not want to speak English, or their oral English is not particularly good. It is a common scene that Chinese students are not as active as the exchange students from other countries in class. They always sit here, listen quietly and nod their head. Many Chinese students can not participate in the discussion in the classroom: they can read, understand but cannot express themselves. They also do not like to talk with foreign friends, just always chat with Chinese companions to speak Chinese. And they do not like to talk in the classroom and less actively involved in the class group discussions. So how to improve and encourage Chinese students to speak English has become an urgent problem that needs attention. This research will be in-depth, targeted to understand the reason why Chinese college students do not want to speak English, After we know the reasons we can adjust the teaching methods, etc., and encourage and train Chinese students to speak English.

### 1.1 The spoken English learning

Speaking is an activity that allows one to express opinions and communicate with others. For learners, speaking is the medium through which they meet, understand, practice and learn new languages. Verbal skills are not only an aspect of learning a language, but also a primary source of language learning for young learners (Hosni, 2014). As foreign language learners, they face many difficulties no matter how much they know about this language. Like Al-Sibai (2004) said, the use of English as a second language for oral communication is one of the most common but complex activities because we live at a time where the ability to speak English is regarded as a very important skill in work abilities. In the field of second language learning, spoken language is generally recognized as the hardest for students to master and improve, primarily because of the complexity of spoken language production, which is more susceptible to the most complex and changeable person's heart than written expression, it is an ongoing activity and it involves many influencing factors such as the speaker, the hearer, the environment and time limit. On the one hand, in order to express your thoughts better, you need to adjust your language constantly so that you can understand each other better. On the other hand, the time spoken by oral speakers can be very limited, it is unlike writing that can be modified at any time. The speaking is immediate.

### 1.2 The important of learning motivation

Learning motivation refers to learners' willingness to participate in a learning program, which will influence the direction and focus of the decision-making process (Noe, Wilk, Mullen, & Wanek 1997). Motivation points to a specific goal. Motivation determines the specific goals that people seek, thus it can affect people's choice. Motivation also leads to more effort and energy, as it could determine whether students will pursue the task (even if difficult) with enthusiasm. Cole et al. (2004) said motivation can promote the beginning and persistence of activities. If a student likes to do one thing, he will try to squeeze it out even if he has not had enough free time. The learning ability and motivation are often regarded as key predictors for learning effectiveness so learning motivation is the key factor to promote learning. There are two kinds of learning motivation, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is rewards, recognition, etc. And intrinsic motivation is that students in order to meet their own interests and hobbies or curiosity to recognize the personal employment ability to learn. Driven by intrinsic motivation, students have a strong desire to learn, gaining achievement and happiness from their studies, like in this research, the main purpose of Chinese students to learn English is that in order to cope with the examination and they want to achieve a good result. Some professors who teach Chinese students are saying like this "Almost all Chinese students know English, but few students use English". When they go abroad to study, they have to speak English in class. But in daily life, their motivation for speaking English after class is not so strong. Chinese student are often attracted to Chinese groups, as they like to stay with Chinese friends instead of other country's friend and they also do not like to participate in party activities. There are many Chinese friends around them and they can play together, while speaking Chinese every day. So the time using English is less.

### 1.3 Psychological factors, like anxiety

"Foreign language anxiety is a complex and common phenomenon as regards "the feeling of tension and apprehension have something to do with second language contexts, including speaking and listening." (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) also defined the feeling of tension and anxiety associated with foreign language levels, which include speaking and listening. The findings of Horwitz's (2001) study revealed students with lower levels of anxiety have better English performance than the students with higher levels of anxiety. What's more, the research of Saito and Samimy (1996) showed foreign language anxiety can have a negative impact on learners' learning process. This is the truth, you are scared to speak because of fear, then your level of English is certainly stagnant. You do not practice it, so you cannot improve it? This becomes a vicious circle. Because the language learning needs to dare to speak more. In the process of exchange, you could correct mistakes and learn new things. And once you have more contact with foreigners, you will also feel not nervous gradually. The studies revealed that anxiety

exists in almost every aspect when learning a second language. Anxiety is also associated with understanding and speaking a target language. There are many researchers about students' foreign language speaking anxiety. For example, Price (1991) found out the learners were anxious if they make mistakes in their pronunciation. Thanks to this, speaking in front of their peers is a anxiety activity for them. A teacher who is teaches in a Canadian university says that Chinese students have weak English speaking initiative because of some psychological factors, like anxiety. Many of her Chinese students in the beginning are holding a positive attitude of their foreign friends, and will continue to remind themselves to use English to chat with them. However, due a variety of grammar, expression and other errors, students will be in self-denial and others denial, as they are afraid of making mistakes and therefore losing face in front of others, so they choose to close their mouth, holding the attitude of "do not say never wrong", they do not speak English on their own initiative just because of fear of anxiety. It is a common phenomenon. Like in the researcher's class, Chinese classmates always keep quiet and listen to other foreign students to answer the question, and they have few times to express their ideas or ask some questions. What is more, one of the researcher's friend said that her American students are very good at expressing their own ideas, the whole class is listening to them to keep asking questions and discuss. And she cannot get a word in edgewise, only busy in listening to what they say, and finally she came up with some ideas but the class was over as the bell rang. She felt particularly stupid, even the words of others do not know how to answer. This is a common phenomenon happening in some discussion classes in international classes. And when we do some group work and recommend 2 students to do the presentation, they always refuse to do this assignment and give it to their foreign companions. Even if they have to do the presentation in public with our group members, they also speak little and their voice is weak because they have anxiety due to their English skills.

#### 1.4 Accent and English communication

Accents is a barrier when speaking English. Chinese students do not want to speak English because they think they have accents when they speak English, and they think it is "broken English", as it is called Chinese English. They are afraid people cannot understand their meaning, so they don't get that much practical real world exposure even if there were a chance. There was an interview (Timmis, 2002) to ask the students why they want to speak English as a standard native person, and most of them express that when you chat in English, it's better if you can speak using standard English. "If I speak like a native speaker, then my friends can understand what I am talking about clearly then continue to talk with me. For myself, it also has a better self-image in terms of using English." The preference for native speakers seems to be linked to English proficiency. The data shows that native speakers of English can not only show his high English level, but also express his confidence. For example, one participant said that if he didn't have a strong accent, he would feel good in English, which would increase his confidence in speaking. But in recent years, instead of emphasizing the need to approximate a native-speaker variety of English, some scholars suggest that in achieving international intelligibility, it should accept all kinds of native-speaker accent for English communication (Jenkins, 2007; Levis, 2005; Walker, 2010) because it is hard to change one's accent. People begin to learn their first language from birth, the accent is so ingrained that it is not easy to change. They advocate with Chinese English, they suggested that English is a natural result in English. With the rapid development of English in China, every Chinese student now has a certain English foundation. And as more and more foreigners work in China, they can also slowly understand Chinese English. In the future, it may be an inevitable result, and may actually bring strength to Chinese learners. Therefore, the Chinese student should not afraid to speak English with our own accent, just make others understand your meaning is great. And so long as we can open our mouth to speak English with the native speaker, we have already made progress in English. As John (1996) once defined that an English accent is roughly divided into three categories, the detail can be searched in the literature review. 1) English-speaking countries or regions of the population will form a native English accent: such as the North American accent, the English accent, the Welsh accent, the Australian accent, the New Zealand accent; 2) Countries that use English as their official language: Singapore accent, Hong Kong accent, Malaysian accent and South African accent. 3) Countries that use English as their second language also have different English accents: our Chinese accent (Chinglish), Japanese accent, and Russian accent. As Christiane Amanpour and Cat

Deeley, they both have English accents, but they still serve as moderators in the United States for many years.

## 2. Objectives

1. To find the reason why many Chinese students not want to speak English
2. To explore the main obstacles when Chinese students speak English

## 3. Materials and Methods

The research designs is an involve questionnaire. The questionnaire subjects in this study are made up of 151 Chinese students, the selection of samples has a certain degree of generality and representation. They study at Rangsit university and other foreign universities, such as Chiang Mai University, and Australia Royal Melbourne University. Most of them are about 20 years old. The number of boys and girls are similar. They are studying in different programs in different universities for at least one year. They study different majors, such as international business, communication arts, etc. They are the researcher's friends who are willing to help and cooperate. There are 19 questions in this questionnaire, including the methods for learning English, the reasons for being unwilling to speak English, and other basic issues. All of them were filled out using web-based questionnaires so that authors can get statistics directly.

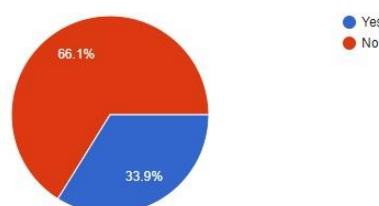
## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 the Chinese teacher style of class taught from childhood.

From the question "For your spoken language class in China, what is the most accurate expression?" The most common answer is "The teacher say and the students just listen", 55% of the students chose this answer. The data revealed that many students pay attention to listen carefully as long as possible, but are given little chances to respond, which resulted in the Chinese students fostering a habit that make them to not like to speak and do not like to exchange their ideas compared to foreign students. This also can be proved by the question "Do you like to speak in class or participate in the class discussion actively?", 66.1% of the students chose "no". It can be seen most of them do not like to speak in the classroom. This ratio can illustrate that the previous habits are common among Chinese students and this habit has been inhibited by an early age learning in the classroom in China. They are taught that if they have any problem, they can ask the teacher after class. And from the question "What's your English strength?" According to the data, the reading is the first choice. 41.7% students chose this answer. This result again reflects many of the English teaching in China give importance to English reading teaching, as teachers generally focus on the analysis and explanation of the text, and then practice the text. Students are more concerned about the understanding of the article, ignore how to fully use this language. Therefore, we can always see that Chinese students can understand the difficult article, but it is still difficult to speak English. So many Chinese students do not like to speak English because they are not good at it. In China, many teachers fail to grasp the scale of speaking in the classroom. They give most opportunities to talk by themselves, and they pay little attention to exchange conversations in English with students, and do not give importance to communication with students. Even teachers give students some opportunities for dialogue practice, as most of them are only provided examples of dialogues on a certain scene and given a list some commonly used sentence patterns, followed by repeated mechanical training dialogues.

Do you like to speak in class or participate in the class discussion actively? (你喜欢在课上发言或是积极参与讨论吗)

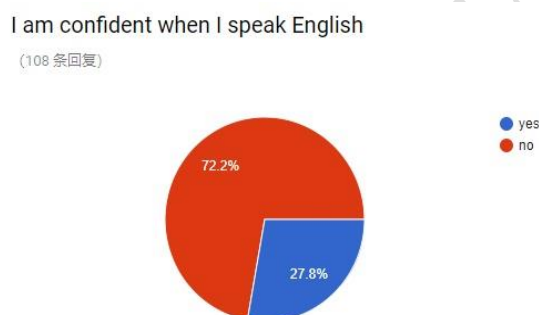
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**Figure 1** the result of questionnaire “do you like to speak in class actively”

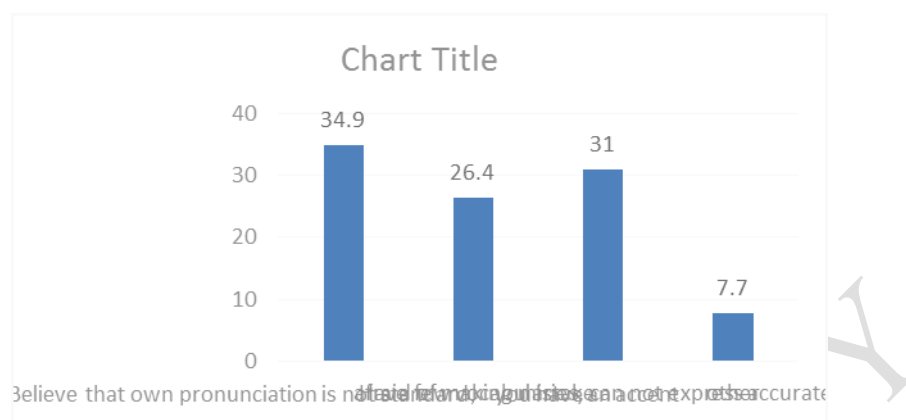
#### 4.2 The impact of psychological factors

For the question “Do you feel nervous or anxious when you speak English”, according to the data, there are 54% percentage students who chose “yes”. For the question “I am confident when I speak English”, the data shows that there are 72.2% students who chose “No”. This is a large percentage, from it we can see that psychological factors can be a key factor for them. And there are 37.7% of the students who are afraid of making mistakes and psychological factors to answer the question of “why you do not want to speak English?” From these three questions, which indicate the possibility that psychological factors such as being nervous is one of the main reasons that prevent Chinese students from speaking English voluntarily. They are afraid of being laughed at, they don’t want to lose face in public. It is a feeling of fear when they need to express themselves in a foreign language or in a second language, as this feeling would affect the expression of language learners. As the survey shows that the feeling of nervousness makes Chinese students are reluctant to speak English in public. As many psychologists have confirmed that language learning and emotional factors complement each other, negative emotional factors such as fear, nervousness will affect the learning effect, and positive emotions such as self-confidence help to improve learning outcomes. However, according to the survey, not so many people feel confident in speaking English. If they are not confident in their English, then they won’t speak it.

**Figure 2** the result of questionnaire “Do you feel confident when you speak English ”

#### 4.3 The effect of accent factor

From the question “Do you think it is important to have standard English accent?” 60.9% students think it was important. The data revealed that if they do not have a standard accent, they will be less willing to speak English. For the question “which one is the reason why you do not want to speak English?”, the percentage of choosing the answer of “Believe that own pronunciation is not standard, you have an accent” is 34.9%. According to this data, it can be ensured that an accent is also one of the reasons why Chinese students don’t like to speak English. The participants’ attitudes towards accents are positive. Generally speaking, the Anglo-American countries is unlike China, as they do not have an official standard English so there is no fixed standard for their accent. As long as the English expression is correct and the pronunciation is clear and it is not easy to misunderstood, as people should be bold to express, and exchange ideas. This is a unique culture and national identity do not need to care about what others say. Chinese students have some accents because when a lot of Chinese students learn English, they try to associate new words with similar sounds in Chinese words. This does make them remember the words easier, but also suspect that the students remember a slightly warped version of the word instead of the original.



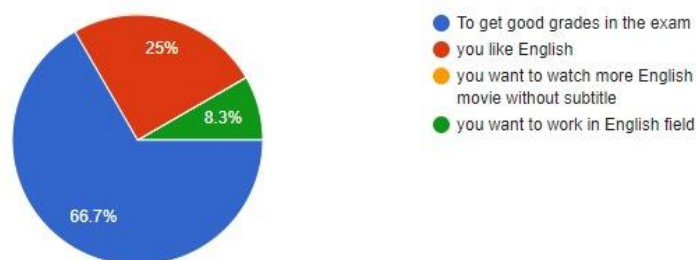
**Figure 3** the result of questionnaire “which one is the reason why you do not want to speak English?”

#### 4.4 The impact of speaking motivation

For the question “what’s your purpose to learn English?”, 66.7% students chose the answer of “for getting good grades”. The percentages means many Chinese students learn English not because they like it, as they are always forced to learn English by some external factors, such as getting a good exam result and finding a good job. In real life, they do not have a strong motivation to speak English. This can also be proved by the question “You won’t prefer to speak English inside or outside class unless you have to.” Most people (70.7%) also choose “YES”, which indicated that as long as they do not need to speak English, they won’t speak English on their own. For the question “What factors restrict you from improving your English spoken ability?”, there are 36.4% who chose the answer of “not have strong motivation”. This result, reflects again that the reason that students do not speak English is related to motivation. English is originally a practical language tool, but under the exam-oriented education system, English gradually transformed to an examination subject. In addition to the ineffectiveness of English education, students’ interest in learning English will be hampered severely. There is another reason for the weak motivation, it is the Chinese language environment. From the question, “In your foreign university, are there many Chinese people?” Most of the answers were “yes” which was 68.3% as it can be seen from the data that there are so many Chinese students studying abroad nowadays. Many of them like staying together and speaking Chinese. This gives them a stress-free environment, and they can still communicate in Chinese without any problem. Generally speaking, Chinese students will find students from China to be friends because they have the same hometown feelings and can communicate with each other easily. This also can be proven by the question “Do you usually play or chat with Chinese friends or foreign friends? From the data, there are 78% of students who chose the answer of “Chinese student”. This result reflects again that the lack of necessity for Chinese students to speak English. And a previous article survey said that many Chinese students’ roommate are Chinese too. They think that building a strong friendship with their roommate can reduce their pressure from learning and life. Chinese and Chinese are more likely to become close friends. When they first came to a foreign country, as the differences in culture and living habits, they could not find proper ways to interact with foreigners. Besides, there are some problems in a language exchange, so they are more inclined to communicate with the Chinese. Although they are abroad, they usually have few contacts with foreign friends. The interaction is limited in the class and there is not much cross-culture exchange in life. When they don’t have many foreign friends, they have less chance to communicate in English, so they do not often speak English.

### what's your purpose to learn English

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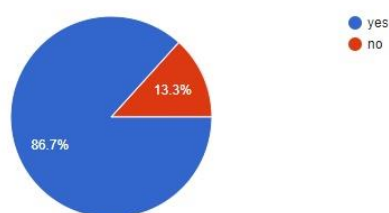
**Figure 4** the result of questionnaire "what is your purpose to learn English?"

#### 4.5 The difference of culture

The question about "when you speak to foreigners, you feel nothing to say and realize that's difficult to find the common topic with them because I know little about their culture and lives?" the data from the questionnaire shows that 42% students who agree with this opinion indicate the culture would influence the willingness for communication. For the question "it will make you feel at ease to chat with foreign people if you feel familiar with their cultures and life", and there are 86.7% of the students choose the answer of "yes", as the data from this question appears clearly of the importance of culture. When they communicate with native speakers since they have been familiar with the native speaker's life and culture. From these two questions, it could be concluded that the lack of cultural understanding has a negative effect on Chinese students communicating with English speaking people.

It will makes you feel at ease to chat with foreign people if you feel familiar with their cultures and life.当你和外国人聊天时，如果你了解他们的文化你会觉得更轻松

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**Figure 5** the result of the questionnaire "It will make you feel at ease to chat with foreign people if you feel familiar with their culture and life"

## 5. Conclusion

This study has investigated the factors that would affect why many Chinese student don't like to speak English. The author adopted the research method of the questionnaire and counted the results of the 151 students' selection. The statistics were transformed into charts for comprehensive analysis. According to the analysis of the data from questionnaire, the finding shows that there are mainly 5 factors including Chinese teacher's style of class, psychological mindset, accent, speaking motivation and culture. In the future, teachers can change their teaching methods gradually, giving more time and opportunity to students to express and discuss and increase the usefulness of the content of the dialogue, not adhere to the stereotyped scene dialogue rigidly. Students should also try to overcome their nervousness, speak more and practice, don't worry about making mistakes. Grasping the opportunity to have more communication with foreign friends so that they can improve their spoken English. We don't have to worry too much about our

own pronunciation because in fact, each country in the world will have its own accent characteristics. Language stands for culture, behind an accent is a distinctive region and culture. Therefore, being able to actively speak English is where we should improve. Regarding learning motivation, according to the survey results, most Chinese students learn English for dealing with exams or for good results, so they should be guided to establish an interesting learning goal. In addition, Chinese students should change their psychology of making friends with Chinese students and communicate more with foreigners so that they can have the opportunity to speak English. With the ability to speak, they will be more willing to speak English to a certain degree. It is hoped that through this research Chinese students are helped and find their own reasons, and then improve their English level effectively, then they can speak English fluently and confidently and willing to speak English.

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