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# English Learning across Rural and Semi-Urban Schools in Kyrgyzstan: Motivation, Speaking-Related Challenges, and Educational Support

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**ABSTRACT:**
English is increasingly associated with educational mobility, employment, and access to international communication, yet secondary-school learners do not encounter the same opportunities to study and use it across different local settings. Empirical evidence from Central Asia remains limited, especially for comparisons involving rural and semi-urban learners. This exploratory comparative study examined English-learning motivation, speaking-related challenges, study habits, digital exposure, and perceived educational support

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among secondary-school students in the Naryn region of Kyrgyzstan. The final dataset comprised 181 responses from two cohorts: 96 students in a rural Kyrgyz-medium context and 85 students in a semi-urban Russian-medium context, with valid response numbers varying by item. Data were collected using an author-designed 17-item core questionnaire with one conditional follow-up item and analysed through frequencies, percentages, chi-square tests, Cramer's V, Mann-Whitney U tests for ordinal items, and thematic categorisation of open-ended responses. Both cohorts attached considerable importance to English, although daily practice was limited. Statistically significant group differences were identified in home support, willingness to join English clubs, time spent on English, interest ratings, and several reported learning difficulties. Semi-urban learners reported greater use of video-based and informal resources, whereas rural learners showed particularly strong interest in English and readiness to join structured clubs. The findings suggest that differences in opportunity, support, and exposure may be as important as motivation itself when interpreting rural and semi-urban EFL experiences.

**Keywords:** English language learning, learner motivation, speaking-related challenges, educational support, rural education, Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT:** The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly accessible because they consist of student survey responses.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English language learning has become increasingly important for secondary-school students in Kyrgyzstan because it is associated with access to higher education, academic mobility, digital communication, employment opportunities, and international interaction. For many learners, English therefore represents more than a school subject: it is connected with imagined educational and professional futures. At the same time, the conditions under which students can learn and practise English are uneven. Differences between rural and semi-urban educational settings may affect access to learning materials, qualified support, digital resources, exposure to spoken English, extracurricular activities, and opportunities for communicative practice.

This contextual inequality does not necessarily imply an equivalent difference in learners' willingness to study English. A student may be highly motivated but have few opportunities to use the language beyond formal lessons. Conversely, wider access to digital media and informal English may expose learners to more complex linguistic demands and make them more aware of gaps in grammar, listening, or speaking. For that reason, a comparison of rural and semi-urban learners should not reduce the issue to a simple contrast between 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged' students. It is more useful to examine how motivation, emotional reactions, available support, study habits, and opportunities for language exposure coexist within each context.

International research supports such a multidimensional view of foreign language learning. Motivation has long been recognised as central to sustained engagement [Dörnyei, 1994], while more recent studies demonstrate that motivation interacts with enjoyment, anxiety, boredom, teacher support, and perceived competence [Dewaele et al., 2023; Dong et al., 2022; Zhang, 2022]. Foreign language classroom anxiety, originally conceptualised in relation to communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, remains particularly relevant for oral interaction [Horwitz et al., 1986]. In school settings, students may value English highly while simultaneously hesitating to speak, fearing mistakes, or avoiding public performance.

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Rural educational research further indicates that such experiences are shaped by the wider learning environment. Yu et al. [2023] showed that anxiety among rural junior-high learners was associated with personal, home, teacher, school, and broader social factors. Research on digital learning also suggests that online spaces can widen access to linguistic resources and new forms of participation, although access itself does not guarantee regular or purposeful use [Liu & Darvin, 2024]. These observations are important for Kyrgyzstan, where geographical location, language of instruction, family resources, and availability of supplementary English activities may shape students' practical opportunities to turn interest into sustained learning.

Despite the growth of international literature on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) motivation, emotions, digital exposure, and teacher support, evidence from Central Asia remains comparatively limited. The present study responds to that gap through an exploratory comparison of two groups of secondary-school students from the Naryn region of Kyrgyzstan. Rather than treating motivation or anxiety as isolated psychological traits, the study examines a set of observable learning experiences: reasons for learning English, interest ratings, daily practice, learning difficulties, support from home and school, reactions to mistakes, preferred activities, and willingness to participate in additional English clubs or courses.

The study is deliberately exploratory. The questionnaire was author-designed rather than a validated psychometric scale, the sample was selected by convenience, and several items differed in the number of valid responses. Accordingly, the study does not claim to measure a stable latent construct of foreign language anxiety or to represent all secondary-school learners in Kyrgyzstan. Instead, it provides a context-sensitive description of how students in two contrasting educational settings report their motivation, speaking-related difficulties, emotional reactions, and access to support.

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## 2. MAIN PART

### 2.1. Purpose of the paper

The aim of the study is to examine English-learning motivation, speaking-related challenges, study habits, digital exposure, and perceived educational support among secondary-school students in rural and semi-urban Kyrgyzstan, and to identify similarities and differences between the two cohorts. Four research questions guide the analysis: (1) What motivates secondary-school students in the two settings to learn English? (2) What emotional and practical challenges do students report while learning English? (3) What forms of support from teachers, peers, and family members are available to them? and (4) What statistically observable similarities and differences characterise the two cohorts' English-learning experiences? The following sections describe the methodology, situate the study within the theoretical and empirical literature, report the results, and discuss their implications for EFL teaching in under-resourced multilingual settings.

### 2.2. Research design

The study employed an exploratory comparative descriptive design combining quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative component compared response distributions across two cohorts, while the qualitative component summarised open-ended responses concerning learning difficulties and desired support. The design was selected because the available dataset consisted primarily of questionnaire responses rather than longitudinal observations, experimental measures, or validated scale scores. The purpose was therefore to identify patterns and group differences that could guide later, more controlled research rather than to establish causal relationships.

The analysis treated most questionnaire items as categorical variables. Where an item used an ordered 1-5 response format, a non-parametric comparison was used because such responses are ordinal and because the two groups were independent. Open-ended responses were not treated as a separate qualitative study; instead, they were reviewed to identify recurring categories that could clarify the descriptive quantitative patterns. This limited qualitative

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component is therefore best understood as thematic categorisation rather than a full interpretive analysis.

### 2.3. Participants and research context

The final dataset consisted of 181 secondary-school students from the Naryn region of Kyrgyzstan. The rural cohort included 96 responses from students studying in a Kyrgyz-medium rural context, whereas the semi-urban cohort included 85 responses from a Russian-medium semi-urban context. Participants represented grades 8-11 across the combined dataset. The number of valid responses varied by questionnaire item because some students skipped selected questions or provided incomplete responses.

The two cohorts differed not only in rurality but also in language of instruction. The design therefore does not permit the observed group differences to be attributed exclusively to rural versus semi-urban location. Language of instruction, school context, home support, and patterns of exposure to English may all contribute to the differences observed. This limitation is retained explicitly in the interpretation of the results.

Gender information was available for the rural cohort but was not collected for the semi-urban cohort. Consequently, gender was not used as a general between-group explanatory variable. One exploratory within-rural comparison concerning emotional responses to mistakes is reported separately and interpreted cautiously.

**Таблица 1. Группы участников исследования / Table 1. Participant groups in the study**

| Cohort | School context | Language of instruction | Available responses | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rural cohort | Rural school context | Kyrgyz-medium | n = 96 | Valid N varies by item; gender data available |

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| Cohort | School context | Language of instruction | Available responses | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Semi-urban cohort | Semi-urban school context | Russian-medium | n = 85 | Valid N varies by item; gender data not collected |
| Total | Naryn region, Kyrgyzstan | Kyrgyz- and Russian-medium contexts | N = 181 | Exploratory convenience sample |

### 2.4. Data collection instrument

Data were collected through an author-designed 17-item core questionnaire with one conditional follow-up item. The questionnaire addressed access to the internet and learning materials, availability of help at home, years of English study, perceived learning difficulties, daily practice, reasons for not practising regularly, purposes for learning English, willingness to join an English club or course, perceived peer interest, sources of support, emotional reactions to mistakes, preferred learning activities, daily time spent on English, and an open-ended question about support needs.

Two items asked students to rate interest on a five-point ordered scale. Other items were binary, categorical, or multiple-response items. Because several questions allowed students to select or mention more than one difficulty or purpose, percentages for those items represent response mentions rather than mutually exclusive categories. This distinction is important when comparing percentages across categories.

The same core instrument was used in both cohorts, with a Kyrgyz-language version used for the rural group and a Russian-language version used for the semi-urban group. The instrument was not a standardised psychometric scale, and formal piloting and translation validation were not conducted. Consequently, individual questionnaire responses concerning fear, mistakes, or speaking difficulty are described as speaking-related or emotional experiences rather than treated as a validated measure of foreign language anxiety.

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### 2.5. Procedure and ethical considerations

Data were collected in classroom settings after permission had been obtained from the relevant school administration. Participation was voluntary, students were informed about the purpose of the research, responses were collected anonymously, and no identifying personal data were recorded. The dataset used for the present analysis therefore contains survey responses rather than names or other direct personal identifiers.

The available source records for this manuscript document school-level permission, voluntary participation, and anonymity. They do not document a separate institutional ethics-committee approval or a separate parental-consent procedure; accordingly, this manuscript does not claim that such procedures occurred. This point should be reviewed by the authors against any original school correspondence or consent documentation that may exist before submission, particularly because participants included secondary-school students.

### 2.6. Data analysis

Quantitative data were summarised using frequencies and percentages. Group comparisons for categorical variables were conducted with chi-square tests. Cramer's V was reported as an effect-size measure for chi-square comparisons where available. For the two ordinal 1-5 interest items, Mann-Whitney U tests were used to compare the two independent cohorts. Statistical significance was interpreted using the conventional $p < .05$ threshold, while effect sizes and the exploratory design were considered when discussing practical meaning.

Because valid response numbers varied by item, each analysis used the available responses for the relevant variable rather than forcing a common-case sample across all questionnaire items. The valid N is therefore reported alongside key comparisons. This approach preserves the available information but also means that percentages across different items should not be assumed to have identical denominators.

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Open-ended responses were reviewed and grouped into recurring content categories such as support, motivation, teacher explanation, speaking practice, grammar, pronunciation, resources, and statements that no additional support was needed. The qualitative categorisation was used to contextualise rather than statistically test the quantitative findings.

## 2.7. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.7.1. Motivation and future-oriented language learning

Motivation in second and foreign language learning has been studied from multiple theoretical perspectives, but a common assumption is that it influences learners' willingness to initiate, sustain, and invest effort in learning activities. Dörnyei [1994] emphasised that motivation is not a single fixed attribute; it reflects goals, expectations, classroom experiences, and the perceived value of learning. In secondary education, this is particularly relevant because students often learn English both for immediate school requirements and for imagined future opportunities.

The present study focuses on observable motivational indicators rather than attempting to estimate an underlying motivational trait. Students were asked why they needed English, how interested they were in learning it, whether they would join an additional club or course, and how much time they spent on the language. Taken together, these items provide a practical picture of the relationship between stated interest and actual learning behaviour. A central issue is whether strong interest is accompanied by regular opportunities to practise.

Contemporary research also shows that motivation is intertwined with emotional experience. Dong et al. [2022] reported relationships among expectancy-value motivation, foreign language classroom anxiety, enjoyment, and self-rated proficiency among high-school learners. Zhang [2022] similarly highlighted the role of L2 enjoyment in academic motivation and engagement. These findings suggest that high motivation does not protect students automatically from anxiety, boredom, or low confidence. Learners may want to

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become proficient while still avoiding situations in which their performance is exposed to evaluation.

Parrish et al. [2024] further demonstrated that motivation across the secondary-school years is responsive to teachers and curriculum policy, particularly where learners perceive relevance and autonomy. This has practical importance for the current context. If rural students express strong interest but limited daily practice, the instructional question is not simply how to 'increase motivation'. It is also how schools can provide structured opportunities through which existing motivation can be converted into sustained engagement.

### 2.7.2. Speaking-related challenges and emotional responses

Foreign language classroom anxiety has long been associated with communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation [Horwitz et al., 1986]. Speaking is often especially sensitive because oral production occurs in real time and can make mistakes immediately visible to teachers and peers. Alrabai [2014] showed that anxiety in EFL contexts is linked to a combination of learner, teacher, and classroom factors rather than to linguistic ability alone.

For rural learners, limited access to communicative practice may intensify uncertainty about oral performance. Hidayati [2018] reported low confidence and language anxiety among learners in rural settings where meaningful speaking opportunities were limited. Wu and Zhou [2020] likewise linked rural English-learning motivation and anxiety with contextual conditions. Yu et al. [2023] demonstrated that English-learning anxiety among rural junior-high learners was influenced by the home environment, teachers, school conditions, and broader social factors.

However, the current instrument does not contain a validated anxiety scale such as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. It therefore would be methodologically inappropriate to infer a continuous or diagnostic anxiety construct from the available responses. The study instead examines speaking difficulty, fear after making mistakes, negative mood, and related responses as indicators of students' self-reported emotional and communicative experiences.

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This narrower wording protects the interpretation from overstating what the questionnaire can measure.

The distinction is also useful theoretically. Feeling fear after a mistake, reporting speaking as difficult, and avoiding practice may be related, but they are not identical experiences. A student can report speaking as difficult without describing strong fear, and another can be highly interested in English while feeling uncomfortable when errors are noticed. Examining these patterns descriptively can therefore identify areas where a more precise future study using validated instruments would be useful.

### 2.7.3. Educational support, classroom practices, and digital exposure

Educational support can operate through several channels: teachers, peers, family members, extracurricular opportunities, and access to learning resources. Zhao and Yang [2022] found that perceived teacher support was associated with academic engagement in foreign-language learning, with enjoyment and boredom functioning as mediating factors. Li and Han [2024] similarly highlighted the importance of teacher support for engagement and learning anxiety in online foreign-language learning. These studies underline that language learning is socially organised rather than solely dependent on individual effort.

Classroom practice is especially important when learners have few opportunities to use English outside school. Communicative activities, pair work, games, audio-visual materials, and low-pressure speaking tasks can create occasions for repeated language use and may increase confidence. Zarei et al. [2024] discuss strategies EFL teachers use to respond to classroom anxiety, while Soriano and Co [2022] emphasise the lived experience of language anxiety and the value of supportive classroom interaction. The present study therefore considers both perceived support and preferred learning activities.

Digital exposure introduces another layer of opportunity. Liu and Darvin [2024] show how rural learners can use online 'digital wilds' to access linguistic resources and claim the right to speak beyond conventional classroom boundaries. Yet internet access should not be equated with meaningful digital

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learning. A student may have connectivity but use little English-language content, or may have access to videos without guidance on how to turn viewing into productive language practice. The present comparison distinguishes basic internet access from reported use of video-based English practice.

This distinction is particularly relevant because the two cohorts reported similarly high internet access but different patterns of digital use. Such a finding would indicate that infrastructure alone does not explain differences in language exposure. School expectations, language environment, digital habits, perceived usefulness, and the availability of guided activities may also shape whether access becomes learning opportunity. The current dataset cannot test these mechanisms directly, but it can identify where the reported patterns diverge.

### 2.7.4. Rural and semi-urban comparison as a contextual lens

Comparing rural and semi-urban cohorts offers a useful contextual lens, but it also requires interpretive caution. The groups in this study differ in location and language of instruction, and the available dataset does not contain a comprehensive socioeconomic profile. Therefore, 'rural' and 'semi-urban' should be understood as descriptions of the sampled educational contexts rather than as independent causal variables.

The value of the comparison lies in identifying combinations of experiences. If rural students report high interest and high willingness to join clubs but less video-based practice, this can be interpreted as a mismatch between motivation and opportunity. If semi-urban learners report broader associations of English with work, travel, and games while also reporting more grammar, speaking, or listening difficulties, wider exposure may coexist with greater awareness of linguistic demands. Such interpretations remain hypotheses grounded in observed patterns, not causal conclusions.

This contextual approach is consistent with the study's exploratory purpose. Rather than ranking one cohort as stronger or weaker, the analysis asks what kinds of support each group appears to need. The practical goal is to identify how schools can build on existing learner interest through structured

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speaking practice, teacher guidance, peer collaboration, and purposeful digital exposure.

A further reason for retaining this contextual perspective is that the same observable behaviour can have different meanings in different learning environments. Limited daily practice, for example, may reflect low personal priority, but it may also reflect lack of time, lack of structured tasks, limited access to appropriate materials, or uncertainty about how to practise independently. Likewise, frequent use of digital media may increase exposure to authentic English without necessarily producing balanced development in grammar, listening, or speaking. The questionnaire cannot separate these mechanisms, but it does show why simple counts of access or practice should be interpreted alongside learners' stated purposes, support, and emotional responses.

For the same reason, the study does not assume that rurality itself is a deficit. The rural cohort showed several indicators of strong engagement, especially interest ratings and willingness to participate in additional learning. These findings support an asset-oriented reading of the data: students already possess motivational resources that schools can build on. The educational challenge is therefore to connect existing interest with regular, feasible opportunities for practice rather than to treat motivation as absent. This interpretation remains consistent with the exploratory design because it is based on the observed combination of responses rather than on an unmeasured causal mechanism.

## 2.8. FINDINGS

### 2.8.1. Access, practice, and support

Internet access was high in both cohorts. Ninety-four of 96 rural respondents (97.9%) and 78 of 85 semi-urban respondents (91.8%) reported access to the internet. The difference was not statistically significant, $\chi^2$ (1) = 2.43, p = .119. Access to books or English-learning materials at home was also similar: 52 of 86 valid rural responses (60.5%) and 52 of 85 semi-urban responses (61.2%) reported such materials, with no significant group difference.

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A statistically significant difference was found in the availability of a person at home who could help with English, $\chi^2$ (2, N = 171) = 12.12, p = .002, Cramer's V = .27. Six of 86 rural respondents (7.0%) answered 'yes', 40 (46.5%) answered 'sometimes', and 40 (46.5%) answered 'no'. In the semi-urban group, 16 of 85 students (18.8%) answered 'yes', 20 (23.5%) answered 'sometimes', and 49 (57.6%) answered 'no'. The distributions therefore differed, although neither group can be characterised as having universally strong home-based English support.

Daily English practice was limited in both cohorts. Ten of 87 rural respondents (11.5%) and 18 of 85 semi-urban respondents (21.2%) reported practising English every day; the difference was not statistically significant, $\chi^2$ (1, N = 172) = 2.29, p = .130. In contrast, the distribution of time spent on English differed significantly between groups, $\chi^2$ (2, N = 153) = 8.71, p = .013, Cramer's V = .24. Semi-urban students were more concentrated at the two ends of the reported time distribution, whereas rural students were more concentrated in the 10-30-minute category.

Willingness to join an interesting English club or course was high in both cohorts but significantly higher among rural students. Eighty-one of 87 rural respondents (93.1%) said that they would participate, compared with 65 of 85 semi-urban respondents (76.5%), $\chi^2$ (1, N = 172) = 8.02, p = .005, Cramer's V = .22.

**Таблица 2. Доступ, практика и поддержка по группам / Table 2. Access, practice, and support by cohort**

| Variable | Rural cohort | Semi-urban cohort | Statistical test | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Internet access | 94/96 yes (97.9%) | 78/85 yes (91.8%) | $\chi^2$ (1) = 2.43, p=.119 | No significant difference |
| Materials/books at home | 52/86 yes (60.5%) | 52/85 yes (61.2%) | $\chi^2$ (1) = 0.00, p=1.000 | No difference |

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| Variable | Rural cohort | Semi-urban cohort | Statistical test | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Home support for English | 6 yes; 40 sometimes; 40 no | 16 yes; 20 sometimes; 49 no | $\chi^2$ (2) = 12.12, p=.002 | Significant difference |
| Daily English practice | 10/87 yes (11.5%) | 18/85 yes (21.2%) | $\chi^2$ (1) = 2.29, p=.130 | No significant difference |
| Would join club/course | 81/87 yes (93.1%) | 65/85 yes (76.5%) | $\chi^2$ (1) = 8.02, p=.005 | Significant difference |
| Daily time spent on English | <10 min: 35/68; 10-30: 28/68; 30+: 5/68 | <10 min: 52/85; 10-30: 18/85; 30+: 15/85 | $\chi^2$ (2) = 8.71, p=.013 | Significant difference |

### 2.8.2. Motivation and interest

Students in both cohorts generally valued English, but the rural cohort reported higher scores on the two ordinal interest items. On the item measuring level of interest in English, the rural cohort had a mean score of 4.03 (valid n = 75), whereas the semi-urban cohort had a mean score of 3.35 (n = 85). The Mann-Whitney U comparison was statistically significant, U = 4258.50, p < .001.

On the item asking how interesting it was to study English, the rural cohort again reported a higher mean score (M = 4.46, valid n = 81) than the semi-urban cohort (M = 3.71, n = 85), U = 4859.50, p < .001. Because these are ordinal self-report items, the means are descriptive summaries and the Mann-Whitney U test provides the main group comparison. Together with the club-participation item, the results indicate strong stated interest among rural respondents despite lower reported use of some informal English-learning resources.

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### 2.8.3. Reported learning difficulties

Vocabulary difficulties were reported by 37 of 89 valid rural responses (41.6%) and 30 of 85 semi-urban responses (35.3%), with no significant group difference ($p = .487$). Grammar, speaking, and listening difficulties were reported more frequently in the semi-urban cohort. Grammar was mentioned by 41 semi-urban respondents (48.2%) and 23 rural respondents (25.8%), $\chi^2$ (1, N = 174) = 8.43, $p = .004$. Speaking was mentioned by 36 semi-urban respondents (42.4%) and 19 rural respondents (21.3%), $\chi^2$ (1, N = 174) = 7.92, $p = .005$. Listening was mentioned by 35 semi-urban respondents (41.2%) and eight rural respondents (9.0%), $\chi^2$ (1, N = 174) = 22.53, $p < .001$.

These categories were based on multiple-response mentions. The percentages therefore indicate how frequently a difficulty was selected or mentioned within each cohort; they should not be summed to 100% and should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive diagnostic categories.

**Таблица 3. Учебные трудности по группам / Table 3. Learning difficulties by cohort**

| Learning difficulty | Rural cohort | Semi-urban cohort | p value | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vocabulary | 37/89 (41.6%) | 30/85 (35.3%) | .487 | No significant difference |
| Grammar | 23/89 (25.8%) | 41/85 (48.2%) | .004 | Higher in semi-urban cohort |
| Speaking | 19/89 (21.3%) | 36/85 (42.4%) | .005 | Higher in semi-urban cohort |
| Listening | 8/89 (9.0%) | 35/85 (41.2%) | < .001 | Higher in semi-urban cohort |

### 2.8.4. Purposes for learning English

The two cohorts shared similar educational motivations. Study-related purposes were mentioned by 46 of 86 rural respondents (53.5%) and 48 of 85 semi-urban respondents (56.5%), with no significant difference. Semi-urban

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students, however, more frequently connected English with work, travel, and games. Work was mentioned by 41 semi-urban respondents (48.2%) compared with 23 rural respondents (26.7%), p = .006. Travel was mentioned by 60 semi-urban respondents (70.6%) compared with 30 rural respondents (34.9%), p < .001. Games were mentioned by 10 semi-urban respondents (11.8%) compared with two rural respondents (2.3%), p = .034.

The pattern indicates that education was an important reason for learning English in both settings, while the semi-urban cohort reported a broader set of practical and leisure-related associations. The data do not show why these associations differ, but they provide evidence that the perceived uses of English extend beyond formal schooling more frequently in the semi-urban group.

### 2.8.5. Digital exposure

Reported video-based English practice differed substantially between cohorts. Twenty-six of 85 semi-urban students (30.6%) reported watching videos as a form of English practice, compared with five of 87 rural respondents (5.7%), $\chi^2$ (1, N = 172) = 17.05, p < .001, Cramer's V = .31. This contrast occurred despite high reported internet access in both groups.

When audio/video was considered as a preferred classroom activity rather than as actual reported practice, the difference was much smaller and not statistically significant: 21 of 84 rural respondents (25.0%) and 26 of 85 semi-urban respondents (30.6%) selected or mentioned audio/video-based learning, p = .523. The contrast between similar preference and different reported use is one of the clearest indicators that access, interest, and actual learning practice are distinct dimensions.

### 2.8.6. Emotional responses to mistakes

Students in both cohorts reported a range of emotional reactions after making mistakes in English. In the rural cohort, 44 of 86 respondents (51.2%) reported feeling normal, 20 (23.3%) reported fear, 14 (16.3%) reported a bad mood, and eight (9.3%) said that mistakes felt funny. In the semi-urban cohort, 54 of 85 students (63.5%) gave responses coded as normal or neutral, seven

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(8.2%) reported fear, 17 (20.0%) reported a bad mood, and seven (8.2%) reported laughter or amusement.

The overall comparison approached but did not reach the conventional threshold for statistical significance, $\chi^2$ (3, N = 171) = 7.63, p = .054. The group difference should therefore not be described as statistically established. The descriptive pattern is retained because emotional reactions to mistakes are relevant to understanding students' speaking-related experiences.

Within the rural cohort, where gender data were available, an exploratory chi-square comparison indicated a difference in responses, $\chi^2$ (3, N = 86) = 9.02, p = .029. Girls appeared more likely to report fear after mistakes, whereas boys more frequently reported laughter or a bad mood. Expected cell counts were small, gender data were unavailable for the semi-urban cohort, and the result should therefore be regarded as preliminary rather than generalisable.

### 2.8.7. Support needs from open-ended responses

Open-ended responses indicated demand for more support, clearer explanations, additional courses or clubs, speaking practice, and more motivating classroom conditions. In the rural cohort, responses were frequently grouped around support, motivation, good teachers, speaking practice, grammar, and the desire to restart learning from basic material. In the semi-urban cohort, many students left the open-ended item blank; those who responded mentioned grammar, pronunciation, understanding texts, speaking practice, courses, clear explanations, and motivation.

Because the open-ended item was brief and not answered by all students, these categories should not be treated as a complete qualitative account of learner needs. They nevertheless reinforce a consistent descriptive theme in the questionnaire: students often expressed interest in English while also requesting more structured opportunities to practise, receive explanation, and build confidence.

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## 2.9. DISCUSSION

The study sought to describe how two cohorts of secondary-school learners in the Naryn region experienced English learning in relation to motivation, speaking-related challenges, study habits, digital exposure, and educational support. The clearest overall finding is that strong interest in English coexisted with limited regular practice. This was especially visible in the rural cohort, where interest ratings and willingness to join an English club were high, yet reported video-based practice was comparatively rare. The pattern supports a distinction between motivation as expressed value or willingness and the concrete opportunities through which that motivation can be enacted.

The rural group cannot therefore be characterised as less motivated simply because it reported fewer informal or digital learning activities. On the contrary, rural students scored higher on the two interest items and were more willing to join a structured club or course. A plausible interpretation is that these learners may have substantial demand for English-learning opportunities that is not fully met by existing practice structures. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that rural learners' language-learning experiences are shaped by home, school, teacher, and social conditions [Yu et al., 2023], as well as with work demonstrating that access to digital spaces can create additional opportunities for linguistic participation [Liu & Darvin, 2024]. The present study cannot establish that limited opportunity caused the observed pattern, but the juxtaposition of high interest and low reported practice is educationally meaningful.

Home support produced another differentiated pattern. Semi-urban students were more likely to report a person at home who could help them with English, while rural students more often selected 'sometimes'. At the same time, the semi-urban group also had a high proportion reporting no such support. The result therefore points to variation in the distribution of support rather than a simple conclusion that one group is uniformly better supported. For schools, this matters because home assistance cannot be assumed in either setting. Teacher-supported practice, peer learning, and extracurricular clubs may provide more equitable opportunities when family support is inconsistent.

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The results for learning difficulties require particularly careful interpretation. Semi-urban learners reported grammar, speaking, and listening difficulties more frequently than rural learners. It would be inappropriate to conclude that the semi-urban group objectively had lower proficiency because the study did not administer a common language-proficiency test. One possible explanation is that wider exposure to spoken and informal English made semi-urban learners more aware of gaps in their own performance. Another is that the cohorts differed in instructional practices, language of instruction, expectations, or other unmeasured characteristics. The data support the existence of different self-reported difficulty profiles, but not a causal explanation for those profiles.

The digital findings are similarly nuanced. Internet access was high in both groups and did not differ significantly, yet actual reported video-based English practice was much more common in the semi-urban cohort. This suggests that connectivity alone does not equal educational use. The difference between having access to the internet, preferring audio-visual learning, and actually using video for English practice illustrates why 'digital inequality' should not be reduced to infrastructure. Guidance, habits, language environment, and the availability of suitable content may influence whether digital access becomes sustained language-learning exposure.

The study's findings also resonate with research on emotional dimensions of EFL learning. International studies have shown that motivation, enjoyment, anxiety, boredom, and teacher support are interconnected [Dewaele et al., 2023; Dong et al., 2022; Li & Han, 2024; Zhao & Yang, 2022]. In the current data, emotional reactions to mistakes varied, but the overall rural/semi-urban comparison did not reach conventional statistical significance. This is important because it prevents overstatement. The manuscript therefore does not claim that one cohort had higher 'foreign language anxiety' than the other. Instead, it shows that fear, negative mood, neutrality, and amusement were all present and that a more precise future study should use validated measures if anxiety is to be examined as a psychological construct.

The exploratory gender finding within the rural cohort deserves similar restraint. Although the chi-square comparison reached statistical significance,

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expected cell counts were small and comparable gender data were unavailable for the semi-urban group. The finding may justify a future hypothesis about gendered responses to mistakes, but it is not strong enough to support a general conclusion about girls and boys in Kyrgyzstan. A follow-up study would need balanced gender data, validated emotional measures, and a larger sample across multiple schools.

Students' purposes for learning English add another dimension to the comparison. Educational motives were common in both groups, suggesting that English is strongly connected with schooling and future study. Semi-urban students more frequently associated English with work, travel, and games. This broader range of reported purposes may reflect different exposure to international media, mobility expectations, or peer cultures, but the current data cannot distinguish among these explanations. What can be stated is that the social meaning of English appeared somewhat broader in the semi-urban cohort.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results support interventions that increase opportunities rather than merely exhorting students to be more motivated. Rural learners' very high willingness to join clubs suggests that low-cost extracurricular provision could respond to an existing demand. Structured English clubs, guided peer practice, and teacher-facilitated speaking activities could provide repeated opportunities for oral use in environments where informal exposure is limited. Digital resources may also be valuable, but the data suggest that schools should focus on guided use rather than assume that internet access alone produces learning.

The findings also support emotionally supportive classroom practices. Speaking tasks can be designed so that learners rehearse in pairs or small groups before public performance, receive corrective feedback without humiliation, and have repeated opportunities to try again. Such practices are compatible with research emphasising teacher immediacy, supportive interaction, and strategies for responding to classroom anxiety [Guo et al., 2022; Soriano & Co, 2022; Zarei et al., 2024]. The current study did not experimentally test these practices, so they are offered as pedagogical implications rather than demonstrated effects.

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More broadly, the results show why educational inequality in language learning should be examined through combinations of resources, support, exposure, and practice. Rural learners in this study were not characterised by low interest. Semi-urban learners were not free from barriers simply because they reported more digital exposure. Both groups displayed strengths and constraints, but the configuration of those strengths and constraints differed. This is a more useful basis for school-level planning than a deficit model that assumes rural students are inherently less engaged.

### 2.9.1. Limitations and directions for future research

Several limitations constrain the conclusions. First, the study used convenience sampling and was limited to one region of Kyrgyzstan; the results cannot be generalised to all secondary-school learners in the country. Second, valid response numbers varied by item, and the two datasets were not fully comparable in demographic information. Gender data were available only for the rural cohort. Third, rurality and language of instruction varied together, so observed differences cannot be attributed to location alone.

Fourth, the questionnaire was author-designed and was not a standardised psychometric instrument. Formal piloting and translation validation were not conducted. The study therefore cannot make strong claims about latent constructs such as foreign language anxiety, motivation, or willingness to communicate. Future research should use validated scales alongside context-specific questions and should document translation and adaptation procedures carefully.

Fifth, several items allowed multiple responses, meaning that percentages represent mentions rather than mutually exclusive categories. Sixth, the open-ended item produced uneven response depth and was used only for basic thematic categorisation. Future qualitative work should use interviews or focus groups to examine why learners interpret English, mistakes, teacher support, and digital opportunities in particular ways.

A stronger follow-up design would include multiple schools from different regions, comparable demographic variables, common proficiency indicators,

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and validated measures of foreign language anxiety, enjoyment, boredom, motivation, perceived teacher support, and willingness to communicate. Such a design could test whether digital exposure, family support, teacher encouragement, and practice frequency are associated with speaking confidence after accounting for background characteristics.

## 3. CONCLUSION

This exploratory study compared English-learning experiences among 181 secondary-school students in rural and semi-urban contexts in the Naryn region of Kyrgyzstan. Both cohorts attached substantial importance to English, but regular daily practice was limited. The groups differed in home support, willingness to join English clubs, time spent on English, interest ratings, digital video-based practice, and several self-reported learning difficulties.

The most notable finding is that rural learners reported particularly high interest and readiness to participate in additional English-learning opportunities despite less evidence of regular video-based practice. This pattern suggests that limited opportunity should not be mistaken for low motivation. Semi-urban learners, meanwhile, reported broader practical and informal purposes for English and greater video-based exposure, while also reporting grammar, speaking, and listening difficulties more frequently.

The study contributes context-specific evidence from a comparatively underrepresented Central Asian setting and points to practical priorities for schools: low-pressure speaking opportunities, structured English clubs, guided digital learning, clear teacher explanation, and emotionally supportive classroom interaction. Because the study is exploratory and based on an author-designed questionnaire, its findings should guide rather than settle future research. More rigorous multi-site studies using validated measures and comparable demographic data are needed to test the relationships suggested by these descriptive patterns.

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## APPENDIX. QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

1. School grade (8, 9, 10, or 11).
2. Do you have access to the internet at home?
3. Do you have English books, materials, or resources at home?
4. Is there someone at home who can help you with English?
5. How many years have you studied English?
6. What is the most difficult part of learning English?
7. Do you practice English every day? Conditional follow-up: If yes, how do you practice?
8. If you do not practice English every day, why not?
9. How interested are you in English? (1 = not interested; 5 = very interested).
10. Why do you need English?
11. Would you participate if an interesting English club or course opened?
12. Are your friends or acquaintances interested in English?
13. Who supports you in learning English?
14. How do you feel when you make a mistake in English?
15. How interesting is it for you to study English? (1 = not interesting; 5 = very interesting).
16. What activity do you like most when learning English?
17. How much time per day do you spend on English?
18. What support do you need in learning English? (open-ended item).

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