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Predictors of Motivation for English Language Learning among University Students in Helmand Province, Afghanistan

Qudratullah Kaihan

Bost University, Department of BBA, Faculty of Economics, Helmand, Afghanistan

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- Extrinsic Motivation
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Abstract: Although English is taught in Afghan universities, the factors that motivate students in Helmand Province to learn it remain under-researched. This study examined how intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and English learning confidence shape overall motivation to learn English in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. A quantitative correlational design was used to collect data through a structured questionnaire from 324 male students across four universities (Helmand University, Bost University, Arakozia University, and Wadie Helmand University) using multi-stage stratified random sampling. Each construct was measured using five items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The study used descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, paired-sample t-test, and multiple regression. The results indicated high overall motivational levels (M = 4.39, SD = 0.63), and intrinsic motivation (M = 4.38, SD = 0.53) was significantly higher than extrinsic motivation (M = 3.95, SD = 0.83), t = 10.03, p <. 001. The correlational analysis revealed a significant positive correlation among all variables (p < .001), and English learning confidence had the strongest correlation with overall motivation (r = .623). The multiple regression analysis indicated that the three predictors explained 45.4% of the variance in overall motivation (R^2 =.454). The findings suggest that while both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are important, students in the target universities are highly influenced by internal factors. This study emphasizes the importance of psychological factors in sustaining motivation among university students in Helmand Province.

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INTRODUCTION

English is an important tool for academic, professional, and social activities internationally (Rao, 2019). English language is used globally and gives us access to academic knowledge and economic opportunities (Dang et al., 2021). Given the importance of English, university students must master the language not only for the classroom but also to access future careers (Mamadaminova & Khadjikhanova, 2021). Including English in the university

✉ Corresponding author E-mail: qudratkaihan@gmail.com

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curriculum does not guarantee full engagement and success; thus, it highlights the need to understand the crucial drivers of the English learning process.

Motivation is the first significant element of this process. It is the force that directs and maintains students' behavior toward the English language (Filgona et al., 2020). It is the main driving force that encourages a person to act and remain determined in that action (Oletić, 2014). The term motivation derives from motive, which refers to an internal need, desire, or preference that drives a person to act. According to Mamadaminova & Khadjikhanova (2021), motivation functions as an unseen force that directs behavior. Motivation plays a vital role and is regarded as one of the key factors influencing a language learner's success or failure.

A lack of motivation creates critical challenges for learners and makes effective learning much harder. Research has consistently shown the connection between motivation and language learning in various EFL environments (Lamb, 2017). As a result, educators must be informed of the importance of motivation and they must be able to identify and apply methods that help to increase learners' motivation. In second-language learning, motivation is an important factor in achievement.

Researchers commonly distinguish intrinsic from extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation arises from within: learners engage in an activity because they find it enjoyable or personally satisfying. Extrinsic motivation is driven by outside factors, such as meeting others' expectations or earning rewards (Kimly et al., 2024). Because they operate differently, educators who understand both are better positioned to support student success (Mamadaminova & Khadjikhanova, 2021).

Several empirical studies have examined the relative influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in English language learning across different educational contexts. Uddiniyah and Silfia (2019) conducted a descriptive quantitative survey among 11th-grade students at SMAN 8 Kota Jambi. They used a structured questionnaire consisting of 30 intrinsic and extrinsic items. Their study revealed that the preference for intrinsic motivation was higher (62%) compared to extrinsic motivation (38%). The study underlines that internal factors such as personal interest and inner satisfaction can form the primary force in learning English.

Likewise, Kimly et al. (2024) used a 27-item Likert instrument covering motivation, confidence, learning processes, benefits, attitudes, and self-regulation with 250 Cambodian university students, and reported that intrinsic motivation outweighed extrinsic motivation. Findings are not uniform, however. Oletić (2014) found low intrinsic motivation among Serbian secondary school and university students, who favored extrinsic motivation, and university students were no more intrinsically motivated than the secondary students.

Meanwhile, a review paper by Ng, C. F., and Ng, P. K. (2015) examined the roles of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The findings revealed that a teacher has an important role as a source of extrinsic motivation, saying that a teacher's involvement and instructional

methods influence a learner's motivation significantly. The review also found that motivation is also shaped by personal learner variables such as personality, attitudes, and learning styles.

Given its importance and fundamental role, English is included in Afghanistan's higher education system. However, the academic literature has yet to examine the motivational factors that influence students to learn English in Helmand Province. This matters because, without motivation, students often experience fatigue and insufficient engagement in language learning (Kimly et al., 2024). To address this gap, the present study examines the determinants of student motivation in English language learning among university students in Helmand Province. The findings will provide valuable academic insights to help teachers and education administrators strengthen student support and boost English language learning.

This study aims to examine the comparative influence of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and English learning confidence on overall English learning motivation among university students in Helmand Province. The specific objectives of the study are:

- To identify the levels of intrinsic motivation (IM), extrinsic motivation (EM), English learning confidence (ELC), and overall English learning motivation (OM) among university students in Helmand Province.
- To examine the relationship between intrinsic motivation (IM), extrinsic motivation (EM), English learning confidence (ELC), and overall English learning motivation (OM).
- To determine the predictive power of intrinsic motivation (IM), extrinsic motivation (EM), and English learning confidence (ELC) on the overall English learning motivation (OM) of university students.

In line with the objective, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the levels of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, English learning confidence, and overall motivation to learn English among university students in Helmand Province?
2. Is there a significant relationship between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, English learning confidence, and overall motivation to learn English?
3. To what extent do intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and English learning confidence predict the overall motivation to learn English among university students in Helmand Province?

RESEARCH METHOD

The study used a quantitative design, specifically a descriptive correlational approach. This design suits well for the methodical description of the predictors (Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, English Learning Confidence) and the dependent variable (Overall

Motivation to Learn English). Additionally, the design allows the study of relationships and the predictive effect between variables without making changes (Creswell, 2014).

Research Location and Population

This study was conducted at four universities (Helmand University, Bost University, Arakozia University, & Wadie Helmand University) in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. The target population included all the students enrolled in the universities in the 2025 academic year. Selecting multiple universities provides a more representative sample and strengthens the conclusions within the provincial framework.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A multi-stage stratified random sampling method was used to select a typical sample from the four universities in Helmand Province. This method was appropriate because the study population was geographically and institutionally distributed across four universities, making simple random sampling insufficient to ensure proportional representation. Stratified sampling increases representativeness and reduces sampling bias in a heterogeneous population (Creswell, 2014). First, the universities were treated as primary strata, and an equal number of students was allocated to each university to enable easy comparison. Next, within each university, the sample was stratified by faculty to ensure proportional representation of all academic fields of study. Finally, researchers selected students from these faculty-level strata using simple random sampling.

Research Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a structured 26-item Likert scale questionnaire. It was adapted from previously validated motivational scales used in English language learning studies, such as Kimly et al. (2024), and modified to suit the Afghan university context. To ensure content validity, two professors from the Faculty of Economics at Helmand University reviewed the questionnaire, and before the main data collection, a pilot study with 30 university students was conducted to assess reliability and content validity. The pilot results indicated acceptable internal consistency, and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. The questionnaire consisted of five main sections: Demographic Information (6 items), Intrinsic Motivation (5 items), Extrinsic Motivation (5 items), English Learning Confidence (5 items), and Overall Motivation to Learn English (5 items). The Likert scale options were: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Neutral (N), 4 = Agree (A), and 5 = Strongly Agree (SA).

Data Collection

For the main data collection, the researcher delivered 100 printed questionnaires to each of the four university administrations, for a total of 400 questionnaires. The university administrations then distributed the questionnaires to students during regular class sessions. To ensure clarity and comprehension, the questionnaire was translated into Pashto, the local language of the participants. Before the main study, the instrument was pilot-tested with 30

students who were not included in the final sample. This pilot test was conducted to assess the clarity, reliability, and comprehension of the items. Participants were provided with clear information about the study's purpose, assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and informed that their participation was voluntary. All four universities were given one week to complete the questionnaires, after which the administrators compiled and returned them to the researcher. Upon receipt, all questionnaires were manually screened for completeness. After screening, 324 valid questionnaires were retained, yielding a response rate of 81%.

Data Analysis

The 324 valid questionnaires were coded and analyzed using SPSS v.27. Normality was assessed by calculating skewness and kurtosis for all variables. The results indicated that the data were normally distributed and suitable for parametric statistical tests. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and to determine the levels of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, English learning confidence, and overall motivation. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated to assess each scale's internal consistency and reliability. All scales demonstrated acceptable to excellent reliability, with coefficients ranging from .720 to .886. A paired-samples t-test was used to compare mean intrinsic and extrinsic motivation scores to determine whether a statistically significant difference existed between them. Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the direction and strength of the relationships among intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, English learning confidence, and overall motivation. Multiple regression was performed to determine the predictive power of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and English learning confidence on overall motivation. Specifically, the analysis examined how much variance in the dependent variable (overall motivation) was explained by the three independent variables (Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, English Learning Confidence).

FINDINGS

The demographic analysis was based on the 324 valid questionnaires returned from the 400 questionnaires distributed to university students across four universities in Helmand Province. The data showed that the respondents were all male (100%). Most of them were between the ages of 18 and 25 years (75.9%), followed by 26-30 years (15.4%). From the selected population (Helmand University, Bost University, Arakozia University & Wadie Helmand University), most of the students (29.9%) were from Helmand University, followed by (26.2%) from Arakozia University. Most of the respondents were from the Faculty of Medicine (31.8%), followed by Education (16.7%) and Law & Political Science (16%). Most respondents (37.3%) were sophomores, and most (44.8%) had less than one year of English study.

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 324)*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	324	100%
Age Group	18 – 25	246	75.9%
	26 – 30	50	15.4%
	31 – 35	20	6.2%
	36 – 40	8	2.5%
University Name	Helmand Univesity	97	29.9%
	Bost University	58	17.9%
	Arakozia University	85	26.2%
	Wadie Helmand University	84	25.9%
Faculty	Economics	46	14.2%
	Engineering	13	4.0%
	Computer Science	19	5.9%
	Medicine	103	31.8%
	Education	54	16.7%
	Law & Political Science	52	16.0%
	Sharia	18	5.6%
	Agriculture	14	4.3%
	DVM	5	1.5%
Year of Study	Freshman	76	23.5%
	Sophomore	121	37.3%
	Junior	68	21.0%
	Senior	59	18.2%
How long have you been studying English?	Less than 1 year	145	44.8%
	1- 3 years	115	35.5%
	4 - 6 years	36	11.1%
	More than 6 years	28	8.6%

Note. DVM = Doctor of Veterinary Medicine

Normality

The data normality was checked by calculating the skewness and kurtosis of all the variables of the study. According to the presentation, intrinsic motivation (skewness = -1.344, kurtosis = 3.509), extrinsic motivation (skewness = -0.923, kurtosis = 0.625), English learning confidence (skewness = -1.445, kurtosis = 4.170), and overall motivation (skewness = -1.729, kurtosis = 4.122) had a skewness and kurtosis that fell within the acceptable range of ±2 for skewness and ±7 for kurtosis (Kim, 2013). Therefore, the data can be considered approximately normally distributed.

Table 2. *Skewness and Kurtosis Values*

Variable	Skewness	SE	Kurtosis	SE
Intrinsic Motivation (IM)	-1.344	.135	3.509	.270
Extrinsic Motivation (EM)	-.923	.135	.625	.270
English Learning Confidence (ELC)	-1.445	.135	4.170	.270
Overall Motivation (OM)	-1.729	.135	4.122	.270

Note. SE = Standard Error.

Descriptive Statistics (Levels of Motivation)

Descriptive data showed a high level of Overall Motivation (OM) to study English (M = 4.393, SD = 0.629). The greatest motivational element was Intrinsic Motivation (M = 4.38, SD = 0.528), followed by Extrinsic Motivation (M = 3.952, SD = 0.834) and English Learning Confidence (M = 4.377, SD = 0.554). These findings show that Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Confidence are the main elements influencing student motivation, while both internal and external motivation also play a role.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics*

	Intrinsic Motivation (IM)	**Extrinsic Motivation (EM)**	**English Learning Confidence (ELC)**	**Overall Motivation (OM)**
Valid	324	324	324	324
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	4.380	3.952	4.377	4.393
Std. Deviation	0.528	0.834	0.554	0.629

Reliability of the Questionnaire

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to test the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The findings showed acceptable to good reliability across all constructs: Intrinsic Motivation (.720), Extrinsic Motivation (.808), English Learning Confidence (.763), and overall motivation (.832). The overall measure, comprising 20 items, had a high reliability coefficient (.886), indicating that the questionnaire items are reliable and consistently measure the latent variables.

Table 4. *Reliability Coefficients*

Scale	**Items**	**Cronbach's Alpha**
Intrinsic Motivation (IM)	5	.720
Extrinsic Motivation (EM)	5	.808
English Learning Confidence (ELC)	5	.763
Overall Motivation (OM)	5	.832
Total	20	.886

Correlation

Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine relationships among all variables. Intrinsic motivation was moderately related to Extrinsic Motivation (r = .438) and English Learning Confidence (r = .428). Extrinsic motivation was also positively correlated with English learning confidence (r = .419). The strongest correlation with English Learning Confidence was with Overall Motivation (r = .623), followed by Intrinsic Motivation (r = .484) and Extrinsic Motivation (r = .408). These findings indicate that high intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and trust in learning English, are linked to high overall motivation.

Table 5. *Pearson Correlation Matrix*

Correlations				
Variables	Intrinsic Motivation (IM)	Extrinsic Motivation (EM)	English Learning Confidence (ELC)	Overall Motivation (OM)
Intrinsic Motivation (IM)	1.000			
Extrinsic Motivation (EM)	.438**	1.000		
English Learning Confidence (ELC)	.428**	.419**	1.000	
Overall Motivation (OM)	.484**	.408**	.623**	1.000

Note. **p < .001.

Regression

The predictive power of Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and English Learning Confidence was examined using a multiple regression. The model showed a high correlation (R = .674) and explained 45.4% of the variance in the dependent variable (R^2 = .454). The adjusted R^2 value (.449) confirms the model's stability. Therefore, the three predictors significantly affect students' overall motivation in English learning.

Table 6. *Multiple Regression Analysis*

Model Summary				
Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SE
1	.674a	.454	.449	.46691

Note. Predictors: Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, English Learning Confidence. SE = Standard Error of the Estimate.

ANOVA

The ANOVA results confirmed that the regression model was statistically significant (F = 88.720, p = .000), indicating that intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and English learning confidence significantly influence overall motivation. The low p-value indicates that the model fits the data well and that the predictors meaningfully explain variation in students' overall motivation to learn English.

Table 7. *Analysis of Variance for Regression Model*

ANOVA						
	Model	SS	df	MS	F	P
1	Regression	58.024	3	19.341	88.720	< .001
	Residual	69.761	320	.218		
	Total	127.785	323			

Note. SS = Sum of Squares; MS = Mean Square.

Paired t-test

The paired-samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference between intrinsic motivation (M = 4.38) and extrinsic motivation (M = 3.95). The t-value of 10.032 (p = .000) shows that intrinsic motivation is significantly more important for students than extrinsic motivation. This finding indicates that internal elements, such as personal interest, have more control than external elements in influencing students to learn English.

Table 8. *Paired Samples t-test Comparing Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation*

Variable	M	SD	T	df	P
Intrinsic Motivation (IM)	4.3802	0.53	10.032	323	< .001
Extrinsic Motivation (EM)	3.9525	0.83			

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

DISCUSSION

This study examined what motivates university-level English learning among a sample of 324 male students at four universities in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. The results indicated that university students have a high overall motivation to learn English (M = 4.39; SD = 0.63). Among the three predictor variables, intrinsic motivation was the most widespread predictor of students' motivation to learn English (M = 4.38; SD = 0.53). Students also reported high confidence in their ability to learn English (M = 4.38; SD = 0.55). However, students reported lower motivation for learning English (M = 3.95; SD = 0.83). A paired-samples t test confirmed a significant difference between students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (t = 10.03; p < .001).

Correlational analysis showed that all variables are positively correlated. Most notably, English learning confidence has the strongest relationship with overall motivation (r = .623); followed by intrinsic motivation (r = .484) and then extrinsic motivation (r = .408). Additionally, a multiple regression analysis found that the three predictor variables together accounted for approximately 45.4% of the total variability in students' overall motivation (R2 = .454; F = 88.72; p < .001). When evaluating which predictor variable contributes the most to students' motivation for learning English, results indicate that students who have confidence in their ability to learn English contribute the most (β= .467; p < .001), followed by those whose motivation comes from an internal desire to learn English (β= .214; p < .001) and lastly by those whose motivation comes from external factors such as grades or rewards (β= .164; p = .002).

These findings indicate that students in Helmand Province are primarily motivated by internal factors rather than external ones. In a region with few alternatives and opportunities, learning English can give students a chance to experience success and feel part of the larger world. This study's finding that English learning confidence is the strongest indicator of overall motivation is especially important, since it suggests students will not be motivated by grades or future job expectations until they feel confident in their ability to learn English. This finding aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which identifies competence as one of the three fundamental psychological needs.

These findings also align with prior research on motivational patterns among students in educational contexts similar to those in the current study. For example, Uddiniyah and Silfia (2019) indicated that high school students from Indonesia preferred intrinsic motivation (62%) over extrinsic motivation (38%). Additionally, Kimly et al. (2024) found that university students in Cambodia had higher levels of intrinsic motivation than extrinsic motivation.

Taken together, these findings suggest that in many Asian educational contexts, internal factors related to personal interest and satisfaction often have a greater impact on English language learners' motivation than external factors, such as grades or future job requirements.

In contrast, Oletic (2014) reported that his sample of high school and university students from Serbia showed low intrinsic motivation but preferred extrinsic motivation. This difference emphasizes the importance of the context in which students live, work, and learn in determining which factors influence motivation. In some regions, English is viewed almost solely as a way to achieve economic success or social status, thus external motivators may be more influential. However, in other regions, where English is seen as a means of achieving personal fulfillment or establishing connections with people around the world, internal motivators may be more successful.

This study's finding that English learning confidence predicts student performance in learning English is consistent with Kimly et al. (2024), who also reported that confidence is an important motivational factor for learners. This study also supports Dörnyei's (2019) view of the importance of second-language learning experience, including learners' affective and psychological responses to the learning process. The moderate correlation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation aligns with Ng, C. F., & Ng, P. K. (2015), who argue that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are not mutually exclusive or opposing forces; rather, both can work together to enhance overall motivation.

The first research question examined levels of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, English learning confidence, and overall motivation to learn English among university students in Helmand Province. The findings indicate that students displayed very high overall motivation ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.63$). Similarly, students exhibited very high intrinsic motivation ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.53$), indicating that they are highly motivated internally by personal interest and self-satisfaction in learning English. The students also demonstrated similarly high levels of English learning confidence ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.55$), indicating a high degree of confidence in their ability to learn English successfully. Although the students demonstrated positive levels of extrinsic motivation ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.83$), it was significantly lower than the other three motivation measures. Therefore, based on the study's data, students appear to be influenced more by internal factors such as personal interest, self-satisfaction, and confidence in their ability to learn English successfully than by external factors such as grades, career expectations, and social recognition. Further support for this conclusion is provided by the results of the paired-sample t-test, which indicated that the level of intrinsic motivation was significantly higher than the level of extrinsic motivation ($t = 10.03$, $p < .001$), indicating that the internal factors influence the students more than the external factors.

The second research question found that all variables used in this study (intrinsic motivation (IM), extrinsic motivation (EM), English learning confidence (ELC), and overall motivation to learn English (OM)) were significantly related ($p < .001$). The results of the bivariate correlations between the four variables indicated that there were moderate

correlations between IM and EM (r = .438); IM and ELC (r = .428); EM and ELC (r = .419); and ELC and OM (r = .623); and that both IM (r = .484) and EM (r = .408) were moderately correlated with OM. This indicates that when students have high intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and English learning confidence, they will have high overall motivation to learn English, with English learning confidence being the largest factor.

In response to the third research question, which asked how much of the variance in overall motivation to learn English could be accounted for by intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and English learning confidence among university students in Helmand Province, the results of the regression model found that the three predictor variables collectively explained approximately 45.4 percent of the total variation in overall motivation (R^2 = .454; F = 88.72, p < .001). The three predictor variables in the regression equation showed that English learning confidence was the single largest unique predictor of overall motivation (β = .467; p < .001), followed by intrinsic motivation (β = .214; p < .001), and then by extrinsic motivation (β = .164; p = .002). This suggests that English learning confidence is the most influential of the three variables in predicting overall motivation to learn English. This means students who are confident in their ability to learn English will be motivated to learn English, regardless of their intrinsic or extrinsic motivation.

The study's findings provide considerable support for Ryan and Deci's (2017) Self-Determination Theory from an under-researched country, Afghanistan. High levels of intrinsic motivation and the significant role of confidence in this context illustrate that meeting the basic psychological need for competence is essential to developing self-determined motivation. Additionally, this research contributes to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), as the need for competence may be especially noticeable in conflict-affected areas, where confidence becomes a psychological resource that helps learners continue in difficult situations.

CONCLUSION

The current study measured the effect of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in English language learning among university students in Helmand Province. Using quantitative correlational methodology, data were collected from 324 participants who were sampled in four different universities. The results showed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations had a statistically significant influence on students' overall motivation to study English. Analyses also indicated that intrinsic motivation scores were significantly higher than extrinsic motivation scores, meaning participants were highly motivated by internal factors such as personal interest and self-satisfaction. All motivational variables showed significant positive correlations, supporting the assumption that motivation is a multidimensional construct shaped by psychological and environmental factors, with English Learning Confidence (ELC) as the strongest predictor of overall motivation. Based on these findings, motivation and confidence are essential requirements for effective English language teaching at the universities of Helmand Province.

Authors Contributions

The corresponding author, Qudratullah Kaihan, led the entire research process, including conceptualization, instrument design, data collection, statistical analysis, manuscript drafting, and final revisions.

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Conflict of Interest

The author reports no competing interests related to this work.

Data Availability Statement

Datasets generated during this research can be obtained by contacting the corresponding author, subject to reasonable requests.

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