

Demotivative Factors Affecting EFL Learning among Iranian Pre- University Student

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Abstract

Removing unnecessary barriers can have marked effect on motivation and attention to learning. Demotivative factors are integral factors which influence EFL learning process greatly. In the present essay an attempt is made to reveal the demotives affecting EFL learning in Iranian high schools. This survey was accomplished through a questionnaire among 100 Isfahani pre-university students. The results showed that most students are not satisfied with the way English is taught in junior high school and high schools.

Key words: Demotivation, Demotivative factors, Motivation, EFL learning.

Introduction

Motivation VS Demotivation

It is strongly believed that motivation plays a critical role in academic learning in general and in specific it is true of the " sustained process of mastering an L2" (Dornyei , 2005, p.616). The relationship between motivation and language proficiency has attracted researcher's attention. Motivation determines how and why people learn and how they perform. (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Besides motivation , demotivation has been the center of focus for the researchers in the field of EFL teaching and learning. Before going on to demotivation as the aim of this paper let's briefly go through motivation as the positive counterpart of demotivation. Needless to say the term motivation has been defined by different pictures in the field of language learning and teaching, here we just give a brief number of definitions . Saville-Troike (2006) claims that individual motivation is a factor that is used to explain why some L2 learners are more successful than others. The level of effort that learners expend at various stages in their L2 development depends on how motivated they are to learn. The more motivated students are, the easier

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they will learn a new language. Motivation is often one of the keys to the ultimate level of proficiency (ibid 85-86).

In the point of view of Gardner (1985) motivation in second language learning is seen as referring to the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity

According to the Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (2004) motivation is **1-** the reason or reasons behind one's action **2-**enthusiasm. If you are interested, you learn much more quickly and it might be more fun. Saville-Troike(2006) claims that the more motivated students are, the better they will learn a new language.

Furthermore, the factor motivation also includes the attitudes that the learners have towards the new language (Saville-Troike 2006). Saville-Troike (2006) informs us that individual motivation is a factor that is used to explain why some L2 learners are more successful than others. The level of effort that learners expend at various stages in their L2 development depends on how motivated they are to learn. The more motivated students are, the easier they will learn a new language (ibid 85-86). Studies have shown that motivation is crucial in the process of learning a second language. How well the learners develop and what kind of progress they make usually depend on their motivation, i.e. how motivated they are to learn a second language and how much time they are willing to spend on learning it.

Saville-Troike (2006) states that motivation is usually recognized as being of two types. One of them is integrative motivation, which is based on learner interest, i.e. to what extent the learner is interested in the country or the culture represented by the target language group. To be interested in learning an L2 and to have the desire to learn about, or associate with, the people who use the language you are learning could be an example of integrative motivation. The other motivation type is instrumental motivation, which is connected to the desire to learn a language to increase occupational or business opportunities, but also to get prestige or power. The potential power of motivation can be seen in some cases where even older learners may overcome the 'odds' of not acquiring native-like pronunciation, if it is important enough to sound native (ibid 87). Gardner & Lambert (1959,1972) as pioneers of the case in language learning highlight the same categorization and distinguished the same two types of motivation, named as 1- instrumental 2- integrative. According to these researchers Instrumental motivation is the

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desire to learn a language because it would fulfill certain goals such as getting a job , passing an exam or so on. Integrative motivation on the other hand is the desire to learn a language to be able to communicate with people from another culture- the desire to identify with and integrate into the target language culture.

Ellis (1997:76) claims that motivation is not something that a learner has, or does not have, but rather something that varies from one moment to the next, depending on the learning context or task. The above mentioned types of motivation should be seen as complementary to each other, rather than oppositional or distinct, since learners can be both instrumentally and integratively motivated at one and the same time (ibid 76). There are both negative and positive attitudes towards the L2 being learnt. The positive attitudes are typically connected to the speakers of the language in question and the culture represented by its speakers.

Such positive attitudes can be expected to enhance learning, since learners can be expected to want to be able to communicate with native speakers of the language they are learning. In other words, if students are interested in the countries where the languages are spoken, they may be more motivated to learn the language (Noels et al. 2003).

Negative attitudes, on the other hand, can impede language learning, since you usually get those attitudes when you are not interested or have difficulties with the teacher (Ellis1994)

Good & Brophy (1994) stated that you may lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. There is no need to say that high motivation can compensate for considerable deficiencies in language aptitude and without motivation even people with remarkable abilities cannot achieve long-term goals.

In addition to motivation the topic of this article challenges the term motivated learners to be explored; a motivated learner is one who is eager and willing to invest effort in learning activities and to progress.

Naiman et. al (1978) points out that a motivated learner is characterized as follows:

1. ego involved
2. goal orientated
3. tolerant of ambiguity
4. highly aspirated
5. positive task orientated
6. perseverant

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Having discussed the term motivation we'll go on with the negative counterpart that is demotivation.

So far this essential term which is as effective as motivation has been underestimated in the EFL and ESL teaching programs indeed such factors as lack of interest among Iranian EFL learners , rate of absentees in English classes in Iranian high schools stimulated us to work on the demotivative factors among Iranian EFL learners.

Demotives are the negative counterparts of motives, as the motives enhance the tendency to do activity, demotives decline the possibility of its occurrence. Overcoming the obstacles of learning is the first step to be taken in the process of learning. The barriers with which the students usually encounter are of different kinds including physical, social, cultural, and economical and so on. In treating this problem, before any action to be taken, we have to recognize the source of barriers.

Some common demotives in learning English and the reason behind them are as follows:

1. Irregularities in English such as the irregularities in pronunciation and so on.
2. Lack of efficient and effective instruction on the side of teachers.
3. Lack of interest among students caused by late starting of FL learning.
4. Lack of progress and improvement on the side of students.
5. Prior negative experiences in the process of learning English such as unacceptable grades in English tests.
6. Lack of situations to communicate via English in daily life.
7. Teacher's misbehavior such as hypercriticism and shouting at students when they don't show progress instead of repeating explanations.
8. Large class size and the high number of students in a class
9. Conflicts with peers and classmates.
10. Lack of belief in student's ability.
11. Negative attitudes toward L2.
12. Compulsory nature of L2.
13. Using old-fashioned and out-dated teaching materials and techniques.

Generally speaking a demotivated learner is someone who was once motivated but has lost his/her interest in learning for some reasons.

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Review of literature

Several studies have been conducted on the subject; here just a brief glimpse is taken to the volume of literature that exists about demotivation.

Gary Chambers (1993) conducted a survey through a questionnaire among 191 students and seven teachers in Leeds, U.K. to find the main features of demotivated students. He found that a demotivated student is one who:

1. Makes no effort to learn or do homework.
2. Doesn't believe in his or her own ability.
3. Has no interest to learn and believes that learning another language is of no use.
4. Doesn't cooperate with other students.

Rebecca Oxford (1998) carried out a study among 250 American students in which the subjects were required to answer two questions subjectively.

1. Describe a situation in which you experienced a conflict with a teacher.
2. Talk about a classroom in which you felt uncomfortable.

In her study Oxford distinguished four reasons for demotivation:

1. The teacher's relationship with the students including lack of caring and favoritism.
2. Style conflicts between teachers and students.
3. Factors such as repetitiveness and irrelevance.
4. Lack of enthusiasm on the part of teachers.

Emma Ushioda (1998) found that negative aspects of learning context such as particular teaching methods and learning tasks and course book pressures cause demotivation among students.

Zoltan Dorniey (1998b) conducted a survey which was different from that of Ushioda and Oxford in that , Dorniey focused on those learners who had been identified as demotivated and identified the following demotivating factors;

1. Negative attitudes toward L2.
2. Compulsory nature of L2 study.
3. Course book.
4. Inadequate school facilities such as frequent change of teacher.

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Nikolov (2001) conducted a study on unsuccessful language learners and came to the conclusion that unsuccessful learners attributed language learning success to controllable unstable factors such as persistence and hard work, rather than to uncontrollable factors such as aptitude and orientation.

Methodology

Participants

The survey was done on 100 Iranian pre- university students, through the form of a questionnaire. The group of participants included 50 male and 50 female pre university students at Isfahan high schools , their major being , Natural sciences (Oloom –e-tajrobi), Humanities (Oloom-e- Ensani), and mathematics(Riazi).

Materials

A questionnaire was devised in order to determine the demotivative factors from the point of view of language learners. It was based on the principle of measuring the essential factors affecting learner demotivation .The questionnaire included 22 items 15 out of which were designed by Stuart D. Warrington (2005) and the rest was designed by the researchers according to the situation existing in Iranian high schools. The items designed by Warrington and Stuart were applied to a Japanese context so it was necessary for those items included in this questionnaire to be validated , so that some items were modified and adopted to Iranian culture. Taking this step, the researchers had the questionnaire to be checked by some Iranian English teachers teaching at Iranian high schools. Then this questionnaire was translated by the researchers to Persian. A copy of the questionnaire is available in the Appendix 1 at the end of this article.

Procedures

At the beginning in order to devise the questionnaire , the researchers attended in several high schools and orally interviewed with some students in person about demotives of learning English, then they consulted with some English professors who teach at universities and also some teachers who practically are engaged in English teaching at high schools , so that some items were excluded from the devised questionnaire and some other items were included in the list .Then The researchers attended two pre- university high schools in Isfahan named

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as Raziye for females and Adl for males since the subjects were both males and females ,before going on, the students were asked about the reason or reasons why they don't learn English as well as other courses and even sometimes they are afraid of English and also English teachers. The designed questionnaire then was given to the subjects while they were in English class and the students were supposed to select 7 out of 22 items which best represent the reasons why they feel uneasy with English don't learn English as easily as other courses and usually have problems learning it .After 10 minutes the questionnaires were recollected. Among 100 questionnaires (2) were not filled carefully so they were extracted from the list.

Data analysis

The whole number of questionnaires which were distributed were returned but two of them. The results gained from the survey were summarized in the following table. Table 1 shows the results in number and percentage, it indicates that for example 30% of participants have selected item number 1 as the demotivation for not learning English.

In this table N stands for the number of subjects who have selected an item and P stands for percentage of subjects.

Table 1: The numbers gained from the questionnaires

	N	P		N	P
Item No 1	30	30%	Item No 12	21	21%
Item No2	70	70%	Item No13	15	15%
Item No3	20	20%	Item No14	17	17%
Item No4	22	22%	Item No15	3	3%
Item No5	32	32%	Item No16	21	21%
Item No6	31	31%	Item No17	16	16%
Item No7	17	17%	Item No18	7	7%
Item No8	25	25%	Item No19	0	0%
Item No9	28	28%	Item No20	18	18%
Item No10	24	24%	Item No21	18	18%
Item No11	9	9%	Item No22	20	20%

Results and discussion

As can be seen some items enjoy higher percentages than others, meaning that these items are more likely to be the barriers of learning English in an Iranian context. The seven top items derived from the questionnaires are as follow:

1. **Item No. 2:** Because the way English was taught in junior high and high school was not appropriate =70%
2. **Item No.5:** Because English is not used in my daily life =32%
3. **Item No.6:** Because learning English is difficult and hence stressful=31%
4. **Item No.9:** Because I haven't spoken to native speakers of English.=28%
5. **Item No.8:** Because of the compulsory nature of learning English=25%
6. **Item No.10:** Because I'm not accustomed to culture and habits of English.=24%
7. **Item No.16:** Because the oral skills are not focused. =21%

Derived from the above one can conclude that considering the limitations most Iranian students are not satisfied with the way English is taught at high schools .part of this turns back to the teachers. It seems that teachers at elementary levels must be more skillful to motivate students in the field.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to find out the barriers of learning English among Iranian high schools. The gained results suggested that some of the reasons why Iranian students especially at the level of high school are weak and reluctant to learn English are as follows:

- ❖ Seemingly inappropriate methods of teaching.
- ❖ Lack of use of English as a mean of communication on the side of students.
- ❖ Difficulties inherent to learning English which are due to the irregularities of this language.
- ❖ The compulsory nature of learning English in high school.

Implications of the study

Since this survey is done among pre-university students and to some extent reveals the shortcoming of EFL teaching programs in Iran from the point of view of students, it can be an starting point to remove the

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barriers of teaching English in this country .The results of this study are worthwhile for the people who are in charge of the ministry of education in order to facilitate the language learning process. It help teachers note some points while teaching , for instance a teacher had better ask some questions of him/herself before embarking on teaching. The list can include items such as:

- ❖ What things puzzle my learner?
- ❖ What issues concern the learners?
- ❖ What problems they wish I could help the students?

A good teacher or facilitator should listen to his/her students with empathy and provide them with the support that they so greatly need. It is worth noting that the barriers cause problems for the teachers as well as the students. As the results of this study suggest, the objections point to teachers of the course (English) in high schools so these are some suggestions to enhance the teaching and learning process:

- ❖ Make instructions simple and understandable.
- ❖ Provide enough teaching to compensate for the previous shortcomings.
- ❖ Teach with a slow pace.(the pace of students).
- ❖ Students at lower levels need more attention and more motivation so the teachers should help them in any way possible.

Zoltan Dorneyei and kata Csizer's ten important strategies in motivating L2 learners can function as reference in practice of teaching. (1998:203-229)

1. Set a personal example with your own behavior.
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in classroom.
3. Present the task properly.
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners.
5. Increase the learner's linguistic self confidence.
6. Make the language class interesting.
7. Promote learner autonomy.
8. Personalize the learning process.
9. Increase the learner's goal orientedness.
10. Familiarize learners with the target language culture.

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Appendix A:

Translation of questionnaire:

Dear student choose 7 of the 22 statements that you feel best represent the reasons you feel (or felt) passive or demotivated about studying English as a foreign language. Please enter the number of each statement in the boxes below.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
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I feel/felt passive –demotivated about studying English.

1. Because I was taught only English grammar and reading during previous years.
2. Because the way English was taught in junior high school and high school wasn't proper.
3. Because I have no confidence to learn it.
4. Because it is not interesting to me.
5. Because I have no use of it in my life.
6. Because it is difficult and therefore stressful.
7. Because it is not fun and enjoyable to me.
8. Because it is compulsory that I study it.
9. Because I have never spoken to someone who speaks English.
10. Because I'm not used to English speaking people and their culture & customs.
11. Because I have no plan to go abroad or work with English speaking people.
12. Because here is Iran and I only speak Persian.
13. Because I have never seen any improvement in my English language ability since the onset of my English language studies.
14. Because there are more important things for me to study.
15. Because I rather study another language.
16. Because there is no focus on oral skills (speaking & listening).
17. Because there is a great gap between the books which are taught at high school.
18. Because I don't know the objectives of this course at high school.
19. Because it is possible for me to pass the course through some other ways rather than final exam (regulations help me).
20. Because the books are not accompanied with an audio program.
21. Because the goal is to pass the course and not to learn English.

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22. Because the teacher speaks Persian in class and not English.

Appendix A -1

Passivity / De-Motivation Inventory (PDM Inventory)

I feel / felt **passive** about studying English...

I feel / felt **de-motivated** about studying English...

(A). because I was taught only English grammar and reading before university.

(B). because I did not like the way it was taught in junior high school and high school.

(C). because I have no confidence to learn it.

(D). because it is not meaningful and interesting to me.

(E). because I have no use for it in my life.

(F). because it is difficult and therefore stressful & impossible to learn.

(G). because it is not fun and enjoyable to learn.

(H). because it is compulsory (i.e. mandatory) that I study it.

(I). because I have never spoken to someone who speaks English.

(J). because I'm not used to English speaking people and their culture & customs.

(K). because I have no plan to go abroad and / or to work with English speaking people.

(L). because this is Japan. I'm Japanese and I only speak Japanese.

(M). because I have never seen any improvement in my English language ability since the onset of my English language studies (Ex: since junior high school).

(N). because there are more important things for me to study.

(O). because I rather study another language.

Choose **5** of the **15** statements above that you feel best represent **the reasons** you feel (or felt) passive or de-motivated about studying English as a Foreign Language.

Please enter the letter of each statement in the boxes below.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
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Stuart D. Warrington, Asia University 2005