

A Qualitative Study of Demotivating Factors among Students Who Quit Their English classroom

Mohammad Juybar *

MA in TEFL, Islamic Azad University, Lamerd, Iran

Mohammad Rahimi

Department of Education, Islamic Azad University, Lamerd, Iran

Abstract

The present study sought to investigate the demotivating factors and how they affect the learning and make learners quit the class, as well as, creating the awareness to these factors among the learners to reduce demotivation and facilitate motivation. The participants included 10 male and female English learners have quit learning English after 3 or 4 terms in institutes of Bastak, Iran. To collect the qualitative data, interviews were conducted. Data saturation techniques used to gather information and the interviews conducted face to face and proposing ideas asked to be more elaborating on for more detailed information. The findings indicated that the teacher had an important role in learner motivation for the participants of this study. The second important demotivating factor was learning material. The third and the fourth demotivating factors were learner characteristics and institute environment. Furthermore, this study may offer some implications for language teaching and learning. Finally, research on demotivation could also be extended outside the institute, considering that language learning takes place elsewhere, too.

Keywords: Motivation, Demotivation, EFL Learner, Language institute

INTRODUCTION

According to Kuper (2001) demotivation is not just a reversal of motivation. Demotivation refers to more than just non-acting or unmotivated behavior. It can also refer to an engagement into wrong or contra productive directions. Dornyei (as cited by Tabatabaei & Molavi, 2012) also has defined demotivation as “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action.” These negative external forces include the teacher, the inadequate school facilities, the reduced self-confidence, the negative attitude towards the L2 and L2 community, the compulsory nature of L2, the attitude of group members and course book. Demotivation has been traditionally considered as low motivation or a third type of motivation rather than as a phenomenon in its own rights (Trang & Baldauf, 2007). However, Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012) state that demotivation is the lack of sufficient motivation to do a

specific goal; therefore, a demotivated person is one who lacks deliberate effort, readiness, willingness and excitement for achieving a target goal. Similarly, a demotivated learner is the one who was formerly motivated, but has lost his interest because of some factors. Aydin (2012) refers to demotivation as the lack of effort, need and desire. Falout (2005) believes that if motivation pushes learning for life, demotivation cuts learning short (Bahramy & Araghi, 2013).

Language learning is influenced directly or indirectly by numerous factors. One of the most major factors is motivation, over the past decades, researchers, as well as educators poured much ink in attempt to illustrate this key term which affects the learning process to a large extent. It is seen as the desire that directs ones' behavior. Moreover, researches on motivation show that a student with high motivation is likely to be a successful learner (Soureshjani & Riahipour, 2015). Currently, demotivation, which is considered as the other side of motivation, has been an interest point on many researches unlike in the past, when it was totally a neglected subject especially in the EFL field. Whereas motivation is the desire that guide learner to achieve his goal, demotivation is the lack and the loss of this desire due to some factors and therefore the learner is not able to achieve his learning goals or improve his skills (Afrough, Rahimi, & Zarafshan, 2014).

Motivation has a crucial role in the language learning, it has been a point of interest for a lot of researchers in the past decades. Unlike demotivation that has been neglected especially in EFL field. However, some researchers shifted the attention from motivation to demotivation and commence conducting researches, extensive studies and investigations on this novel subject. Yet, this phenomenon is still ambiguous and no quite clear identification is provided. Dornyei and Usioda (2011, p.139) defines it as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action". He argued that it concerns a range of negative influences that annul existing motivation. Likewise, we can also speak about demotives which are the opposite of motives. This later raises an action tendency while demotives drops it (Dornyei & Usioda, 2011).

Oxford (1998) stated that demotivation is a process that can be best understood by looking backward. Many students do not seem ever to have developed any interest in learning English, or if they have, they seem to have lost that interest for some reason. That is, they have become demotivated. In both cases, their achievement in English as a foreign language has been negatively affected (Trang & Baldauf, 2007). Researches on Demotivation in the area of L2 learning have been a point of interest of few researchers, mainly, Chambers (1993), Dornyei (1998), Sakai & Kikuchi (2009). Each study listed a number of factors affecting the learning process. Researches on demotivation in speaking have been explored by only two investigations made by Soureshjani & Riahipour (2012) and Afrough, Rahimi, & Zarafshan (2014). Each study listed a number of factors affecting the learning process and the skills.

Soureshjani & Riahipour (2012, p. 50) state that: "It is axiomatic that motivation and demotivation as well as speaking are among the most important issues in the process of language learning. Therefore, considering them and conducting researches about the relationship between them could help language teachers and students to be more

efficient in process of language learning and teaching. To put it more clearly, by taking into account these factors, language teachers can become aware of the factors which may encourage language learners to speak and also the factors which may hinder their speaking activities”

Demotivation

Traditionally, motivation has been understood and studied as a multifaceted construct consisting of various influences with a positive effect. Motivational factors or motives have been considered as kind of inducements with the effect of energizing ongoing action (Dornyei, 2001). However, there is another aspect to motivation that has been left with little attention. Just as there are influences that have a positive effect on motivation, there are also those that have a detrimental effect on motivation. These influences are called demotivating influences. The notion of demotivation is relatively new and has not been fully adopted yet in the field of L2 research. However, Dornyei (2001) has attempted to provide a definition for it. Accordingly, demotivation concerns specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action. Thus, demotivation could be regarded as the negative counterpart of motivation. Similarly, demotives could be regarded as the negative counterparts of motives. Furthermore, a demotivated learner is someone who has lost his or her interest for some reason. The loss of interest can derive from various sources of demotivation. For instance, a teacher who cannot control the class or a boring textbook can act as a demotive for a learner.

However, the notion of demotivation cannot be related to every reluctant learner. Dornyei (2001) has distinguished at least three negative factors that cannot be referred to as demotives. Firstly, there are powerful distractions, e.g. watching television instead of doing one’s homework. These cannot be regarded as demotives because they do not carry negative value. Hence, instead of reducing motivation they distract a learner by presenting a more attractive alternative. Secondly, gradual loss of interest cannot be regarded as a demotive because demotives are specific factors or incidents that reduce motivation on a single event. Thirdly, there are circumstances when a learner recognizes the inconvenience or high costs of pursuing the goal. This means, for example, that a learner realizes that classes take place too late in the evening or that the studying is too time-consuming. The reason why this cannot be referred to as demotivation is that it involves internal processes of deliberation and no external inducements are present. The situation would be different if someone else convinced the learner that the costs for pursuing the goal are too high. Then, this other person could be regarded as an external factor demotivating the learner. Dornyei (2001) pointed out that demotivation does not mean that a learner has lost his or her motivation completely. On the contrary, the positive influences that originally made up the motivational basis of behavior can still be there. For instance, a learner may still be highly motivated to learn English, it being an important world language, even if his or her teacher were, say, incompetent or malevolent. When a learner has lost his or her motivation completely that refers to amotivation. The difference between these two related concepts is that when an amotivated learner is someone who has found the general outcome expectations to be

unrealistic for some reason, a demotivated learner is someone whose motivation has decreased due to some external factor. However, in the course of time, demotivation can develop into amotivation, that is a series of demotivating experiences can lead to a total loss of motivation, i.e. amotivation. Take, for example, a learner whose English teacher continually humiliates him or her on purpose. It is possible that due to these continuous demotivating experiences, this learner gradually loses interest in the language.

However, if the demotives cease to exist for reason, the level of motivation can return to normal. For instance, the learner described above could regain his or her interest in English if the bullying teacher were replaced with someone else. Demotivation has been traditionally considered as low motivation or a third type of motivation rather than as a phenomenon in its own rights (Trang & Baldauf, 2007). However, Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012) state that demotivation is the lack of sufficient motivation to do a specific goal; therefore, a demotivated person is one who lacks deliberate effort, readiness, willingness and excitement for achieving a target goal. Similarly, a demotivated learner is the one who was formerly motivated but has lost his interest because of some factors. Aydin (2012) refers to demotivation as the lack of effort, need and desire. Falout (2005) believes that if motivation pushes learning for life, demotivation cuts learning short (Cited in Bahramy & Araghi, 2013).

According to Dornyei and Ushioda, (2011, p. 139) defined demotivation is the dark side of motivation; it is the “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action”. Some researchers, such Sakai and Kikuchi (2009), disagree with the definition of Dornyei and Ushioda; they state that his definition “may need to be expanded to cover both internal (i.e. resulted from the students themselves e.g. low self-confidence, attitude, etc.) and external (i.e. resulted from the outside e.g. teachers’ attitude, textbook, etc.) factors” (p. 58). Trang and Baldauf (2007) declare that demotivation has a “negative impact on students, preventing them from gaining expected learning outcomes” (p. 100).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to study the demotivating factors and how they affect the learning and make learners quit the class, as well as, creating the awareness to these factors among the learners to reduce demotivation and facilitate motivation.

METHOD

This research is to present the major demotivating factors affecting the learning, following the interview as a qualitative method to gather the information from learners. Qualitative interviewing therefore tends to be seen as involving the construction or reconstruction of knowledge more than the excavation of it (Mason, 2002). Interviews are one of the most commonly recognized forms of qualitative research method. Perhaps for this reason, it is not uncommon for a researcher to assume that their study involve qualitative interviews, without spending time working out why it should, what they expect to get out of these methods, and whether any other methods might be more appropriate or provide a useful complement. Choosing interview suggests that people’s

knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality which your research questions are designed to explore. Perhaps most importantly, you will be interested in their perceptions. This might, for example, constitute a 'humanistic' approach (Plummer, 2001) or you may be interested in the constitution of language, or in discursive constructions of the social or the self (Wetherell et al., 2001).

Participant

Ten English learners from different institutes in Bastak who are above 20 years old and have quit learning English after 3 or 4 terms selected based on availability and interviewed to share their ideas about the existing negative factors which have influenced their learning in the institutes. The participants were both males and females with different levels of education, who all have graduated from school.

Instruments

In order to obtain measurable data with which the results of the current study could be statically analyzed, the following instruments were utilized:

Semi-structured interview chosen as the most appropriate model for the conduction of the interviews in the present study. In this context, the interviewees were free to share what come in to their minds related to questions during the interview and the interviewer had the chance to ask additional questions according to the answers of the interviewees.

The interview included 5 general questions which concerned demotivation strategies. In case interviewees had difficulty in understanding questions, they explained in Persian. There was no time limitation for the interviews and no pressure on the learners. By choosing qualitative interviewing, the researcher is likely to conceptualize himself as active and reflexive in the process of data generation, and seek to examine this rather than aspiring to be a neutral data collector.

Procedure

Data saturation techniques used to gather information and the interviews conducted face to face and proposing ideas asked to be more elaborating on for more detailed information. Before starting the interview, the interviewees provided with a short explanation of the key terms and aims of the present study. Interviewees given assurance that the recorded files kept confidential and they recorded only for subsequent analyses. Then, all the recordings transformed into textual forms and those in Persian translated into English. To codify the data, the method proposed by Crabtree and Miller (1999) employed. The method called 'template organizing style' begins with a template of codes. So, the code template defined for the present study included demotivating factors. During the pre-code phase, the transcripts read and re-read several times and the primary categorization of the relevant excerpts into the defining codes done. This resulted in the development of tentative categories. To do that, each code highlighted with a specific color.

The current study has employed a qualitative method design which includes interview. Such a method integrates qualitative approach to provide a much more detailed based on verbal information and comprehensive picture of the issue under investigation.

Data collection

The data in this study were collected in two phases. In the first part, semi-structured interviews were conducted to get the rich understanding of the students' experiences and feelings concerning the demotivating factors in language learning. In the second part, based on Ary et al., (2010), the recorded interviews were transcribed and decoded. So, different categories were generated. Then, the categories were brought together in the form of a model of the demotivating factors influencing students.

In the interview part, the researcher was going to process the data manually instead of using a software program to identify, manipulate and code data. Interviews were analyzed based on coding. That researcher recorded voices, listened to them, transcribed, organized and finally give them some codes. Highlighters were used and copies of interview transcripts divided into different categories and sorted in broad themes. The analysis began by identifying demotivating factors from the data, which were then categorized, or divided into themes. After the themes had been established, they were applied to the remainder of the data. Due to this procedure the themes were adjusted and refined. After this, the same procedure was repeated several times. The purpose of this phase was to verify the findings by assuring that the same demotivating factors and themes emerge from the data again.

In summary, the qualitative analysis in this study began by recording all the demotivating factors that emerged from the data, gathering as detailed and descriptive information about them as possible. Then all the demotivating factors were examined thematically by tracing commonalities and underlying patterns across them. The most logical way to do this was to divide the factors into themes according to where these factors originated from or by the bigger entities they were a part of. Once the themes had been established, the analysis was repeated many times in order to verify the discovered themes.

RESULTS

- *Which demotivating factors are the most important to be well known among the EFL learners?*

Four themes of demotivating factors emerged from the data: teacher, learning material, learner characteristics and institute environment. The total number of the demotivating factors was gained by counting all the factors belonging to the same theme regardless of the importance they had been given. The teacher was the source of demotivation that turned out to be the most frequent.

The Teacher was mentioned many times. Learning material turned out to be the second. The frequency of learner characteristics, mentioned by learners was close to the frequency of institute environment, whereas, a learner's attitude towards the English language, mentioned came last measured by frequency.

The order of importance of the demotivating factors was gained by adding together all the demotivating factors with the same emphasis, i.e. adding together all the factors mentioned first, the factors mentioned second, etc.

More specifically, the teacher was the primary source of demotivation. Second, learning material was the main source of demotivation. Learner characteristics turned out to be the third source of demotivation. The next theme, institute environment, had been given emphasis other learners.

Conclusions

The findings indicated that, clearly, the teacher had an important role in learner motivation. The teacher was a source of demotivation for over a half of the learners and the most influential demotivating factor for almost half of them. Finding the teacher's strong influence on learner demotivation made in this study is consistent with the findings of the previous studies on demotivation (e.g. Chambers 1993, Dornyei 1998b, Oxford 1998). The demotivating aspects of the teacher were related to his or her teaching methods, lack of competence and personality. Taylor (1962) and Hargreaves (1972) ended up with similar categories in their studies on learners' views of their teachers. The categories used in their studies were teaching, personality and discipline, the latter of which fell under competence in this study. When asked about what was demotivating about the teacher, the learners had different views of it. In fact, in the case of teaching methods, it turned out that one learner's liking was another learner's disliking or demotivation: some felt the teacher progressed too slow and others too fast, some longed for more project work and others found them demotivating. The most powerful demotivating factors were the textbook and the exercise book. In general, they were considered boring, childish and filled with exercises that were either too easy or too difficult. Chambers (1993) came to the same conclusion that learning material was a powerful demotivating factor along with the teacher. Course book was also found in Dornyei's (1998) list of demotivating factors, although it did not come until the ninth. Learner's characteristics were the third source of demotivation. As many as learners found demotivation within themselves and some of them found this to be the main reason for demotivation, basically, demotivation had three origins: poor English skills that resulting in workload getting overwhelming, good English skill feeling there is no challenge and bad experiences like failing an exam. Similar results have been reported by Dornyei (1998), who included reduced self-confidence as a demotivating factor. Institute environment was the fourth source of demotivation. It was reported by learners, of which considered it the most influential one. Institute environment included aspects, such as, scheduling of classes, dissatisfaction with the classroom and teacher change. Factors related to school environment have also emerged in the previous studies: institutional policies and attitudes.

Implications of the Study

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings of this study may offer some implications for language teaching and learning. To begin with, these findings can be beneficial for

language learning curriculum designers to present tasks that enrich both the language of the students and their motivation to apply on learning of language.

Administrators of the institutions should provide teachers with seminars and workshops about foreign language demotivation in order to have success in education. Teachers can learn useful ideas from workshops in which the study reports give evidence about existence of motivation in foreign language class.

If administrators of the institutions, teachers and learners work together to find ways to improve motivation then learning and teaching will be enjoyable. As the consequence, learners may change their attitudes towards language learning and become more confident learners.

Suggestions for further research

The subsequent recommendations are presented hoping that other researchers would find them interesting enough to pursue in the future.

Once again it has to be emphasized that this study has only served as an exploratory and directional example of the various topics that can be included in research on demotivation. Since demotivation is still a relatively new area of L2 research there are plenty of issues that need further investigation. In fact, demotivation itself requires further investigations because the demotivating factors discovered so far can hardly be regarded as universal, considering their contextual nature and hence, further explorations on the variety of factors are needed. A good way to do this would be to use more than one type of method, for instance, to start with a questionnaire or some type of writing task and then complement it with an interview. Further investigations are also needed for the two aspects of demotivation: demotivation in relation to gender and achievement. Both of them need to be examined by using larger samples and statistical methods in order to gain reliable findings. Furthermore, the differences in sources of demotivation between sexes could be studied more thoroughly, focusing on whether the factors are found demotivating for different reasons by male and female learners.

The findings made in this study on possible a motivation also would be interesting to study how many negative forces it takes to lose interest in learning completely and at which point demotivation develops into a motivation. Finally, research on demotivation could also be extended outside the institute, considering that language learning takes place elsewhere, too. In fact, learning takes place in various contexts. Therefore, it could be studied if these real-life events have a demotivating effect on learning and if so, in what way.

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