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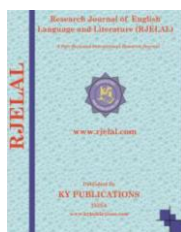
DEMOTIVATION IN EFL LEARNING: FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NGUYEN THI TUYEN^{*1}, NGUYEN THI THU HUONG² & DO CONG TRUONG³

^{1,2&3}Lecturers of English at Ho Chi Minh City University of Natural Resources and Environment,
Vietnam

*Email address: tuyennt@hcmunre.edu.vn

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ABSTRACT

While there has been a long history of the studies on motivation in language learning, demotivation is a relatively new issue which has recently received concern of researchers. Demotivating factors are the ones which undermine learners' interest in second language (L2) learning, and hence lead to undesired learning outcomes. The present study aimed at reviewing and discussing the factors that demotivated students in learning English and making some recommendations to help students become more motivated in English classrooms.

Keywords: demotivation, demotivating factors, English learning, EFL classrooms

1. Introduction

If motivation influences language learning in a positive way, demotivation, the "dark side" of motivation, has a negative effect on L2 learning (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011). Contrary to motivation which refers to positive forces that facilitate language learning process, demotivation concerns "various negative influences that cancel out existing motivation" (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011, p. 138). Falout, Elwood, and Hood (2009) indicate that demotivation can "negatively influence the learners' attitudes and behaviours, degrade classroom group dynamics and teacher's motivation, and result in long-term and widespread negative learning outcomes" (p. 403). In the same vein, Hu (2011) states that demotivating factors "impede learners' motivation", and therefore, "lead to unsuccessful mastery of language proficiency" (p. 88). Despite the importance of demotivation in language learning, this other side of motivation has been an under-researched area for quite a long time and has only recently become a topic of concern. Since demotivation is becoming a common phenomenon

in L2 learning, it should be taken into consideration not only by researchers but also by teachers whose learners are becoming demotivated in their daily classroom (Sakai and Kikuchi, 2009).

Since English has become more and more important in the modern society, it is a mandatory subject in most schools and universities all over the world. However, due to different reasons, many students fail to study English successfully and become demotivated in learning this important language. The purpose of this article is to review the findings in previous studies on demotivation, discuss various demotivating factors in English learning and propose some solutions to help students overcome their demotivation in English classrooms. The findings will help to raise teachers and students' awareness of demotivation and its negative influences on students' English learning so that they will seek appropriate ways to overcome the difficulties.

2. Demotivation in EFL learning

2.1 Definition of demotivation

If motivation is defined by many researchers (e.g. Gardner, 1985; Williams and Burden, 1997) as positive influences on action implementation, demotivation, on the contrary, concerns various negative influences that cancel out existing motivation (Dörnyei, 2001b). In the field of L2 learning motivation, the concept of demotivation is relatively new; therefore, not many definitions can be found for it. In order to give the definition for demotivation, Dörnyei (2001b) portrayed a demotivated learner by giving some hypothetical examples in which an L2 learner was caused demotivated. From the given hypothetical examples, Dörnyei (2001b) defines demotivation as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action" (p. 143).

However, in their study, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) mention several studies in which some researchers found some demotivating factors related to the learners themselves such as lack of self-confidence and negative attitude. Therefore, in Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) view, demotivation refers to both internal and external factors which reduce or diminish the motivation to study the L2.

2.2 Factors demotivating students in English learning

Previous studies on demotivation showed that there were four broad factors demotivating learners in learning English. These factors consisted of (1) learner-related factors, (2) teacher-related factors, (3) learning environment-related factors and (4) learning material-related factors.

2.2.1 Learner-related factors

Findings in previous studies showed that a lot of factors related to the learners themselves had a negative influence on their English learning. The study of Tran and Baldauf (2007) showed a variety of demotivating factors related to learners including students' negative attitude towards English (difficult pronunciation, large vocabulary, complicated grammar), students' experience of failure or lack of

success (failure in understanding lessons due to lost background knowledge, failure in making adequate progress, getting low marks, being left behind classmates, failure in communicating in English), and students' self-esteem (fear of losing face, feeling insulted, being afraid of not being able to satisfy parents' expectation). The results in Krishnan and Pathan's (2009) study indicated that lack of self-confidence and interest, fear of making mistakes, shyness and low test scores were among the factors causing students' demotivation in learning English. In Kaivanpanah and Ghasemi's (2011) study, the results showed that factors such as students' negative attitude towards English speaking community (learners' negative attitude towards the country, people, and culture of the target language), negative attitude towards English language learning (the purpose of English learning was to pass examinations or to enter universities rather than to communicate with second language community), experience of failure (students' low or disappointing scores in examinations; inability to memorize expressions and vocabulary) demotivated students in learning English. The findings in Jung's (2011) study revealed that the difficulty of English, lack of will to study, lack of awareness of the importance of English and low test scores were found to be demotivating for the students. The study of Hu (2011) showed that lack of sufficient vocabulary (low word bank) and language-specific anxiety (bad grammar translation, poor listening comprehension) were among important reasons for student demotivation in language learning. The study of Jomairi (2011) found that learners' lack of motivation and self-confidence, lack of goals for language learning, experience of failure (low test scores in examinations) and feeling inferior to classmates caused demotivation among students. Luu (2011) also carried out an investigation into demotivation in English learning and his study showed a variety of demotivating factors related to learners including learners' negative attitude towards the difficulty of English (difficult pronunciation, large vocabulary, and complicated grammar), lack of self-confidence or anxiety (fear of making mistakes, losing face with friends) and experience of failure or lack of success

(unsatisfactory results, being left behind classmates). The study of Nguyen (2013) also revealed that students were strongly demotivated by a number of learner-related factors such as negative attitude towards the difficulty of English language, lost basic knowledge, lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes in front of friends and teachers, and shyness and nervousness when answering questions in the classroom. The results in the study of Hemmatizad et al. (2015) indicated that lack of intrinsic motivation was a source of de-motivation in the students' English learning experiences. The compulsory nature of English (learning the language to pass examinations rather than to interact with the second language community), student's loss of purpose to study English, and lack of interest in English contributed to students' negative attitude towards English learning.

To sum up, findings in previous studies showed that a variety of learner-related factors such as learners' negative attitude towards English language and English speaking community, learners' lack of motivation or purpose to learn English, learners' loss of background knowledge and low English proficiency (lack of vocabulary and skills), lack of self-confidence and experience of failure or lack of success considerably contributed to students' demotivation in English learning.

2.2.2 Teacher-related factors

Teacher-related factors were found in many studies to be one of the most prominent factors that demotivated students in learning English. In Dörnyei's (1998) study, the results showed that factors directly related to teachers such as teachers' personality, teachers' competence, teachers' teaching method and teaching style, and teachers' relationship with students were the largest categories causing students' demotivation. The findings in Tran and Baldauf's (2007) study also revealed that teachers were found to be the largest source of students' demotivation. Factors such as teaching method (uncreative, boring ways of conveying knowledge, too fast teaching speed, ineffective distribution of the use of L1 and L2, repeated lessons from class to class), teachers' behaviors (lack of care and enthusiasm, insulting

students, being strict and inflexible, showing favoritism), teachers' competence (bad pronunciation, low credibility), and teachers' grading and assessment (tests outside lessons, no corrective feedback) were among the most demotivating factors for the students. In Kikuchi's (2009) study, the findings showed that there were various teacher-related factors demotivating students in English learning consisting of teachers' behavior in the classroom (one-way teaching, unclear English pronunciation, fast teaching pace, not responding to questions well, too quiet voice, etc.) and grammar translation method (the class was entirely about translating, no chances to speak English, etc.). This was in line with the results in Falout, Elwood and Hood's (2009) study in which teachers' grammar-translation method posed the largest threat to the students' motivation. The study of Kaivanpanah and Ghasemi (2011) found that teachers' teaching methods and techniques, teachers' behaviors and teachers' ways of evaluating students' performance were among the sources of student demotivation in English classrooms. In Luu's (2011) study, the results also showed that teacher-related factors accounted for a leading proportion among the factors causing students' demotivation. Factors such as giving tests outside lessons, lack of a variety of activities, teachers' poor skills, teachers' useless shared knowledge, and teachers' apathy from students were among the causes leading to students' loss of interest in English learning. In Jomairi's (2011) study, teachers were the first source of demotivation in students' language learning experiences. This referred to the teachers' ways of teaching, teachers' ways of evaluating students' performance and teachers' ways of behaving with students. The study of Krishnan and Pathan (2013) showed that teachers' grammar-based teaching was the most salient demotivating factor. The students were demotivated due to teachers' over-emphasis on grammar, examination-oriented lessons and lack of opportunities to communicate in English language in the classroom. The study of Bahramy and Araghi (2013) found that teacher-related factors emerged as the most demotivating ones for the students. Teachers' inactivity, teachers' incompetence, teachers' strict behavior, teachers' negative attitude

towards low-proficiency students, and teachers' lack of concern for students' comprehension were among the factors which demotivated students in their English learning. The results in Al-Khairy (2013) revealed that teacher-centered classes and teachers' lack of modern teaching aids, lack of interactive activities in English classes made them lose their interest in learning the target language.

To sum up, in most studies on students' demotivation in learning English, teacher-related factors were found to be one of the most demotivating factors for the students. The common categories related to teachers were teachers' teaching method, teachers' incompetence, and teachers' personalities and behaviors and teachers' grading and assessment.

2.2.3 Learning environment-related factors

Apart from the factors related to teachers and learners, learning environment-related factors also contributed considerably to the students' demotivation in learning an L2. They study of Tran and Baldauf (2007) showed that there were a variety of learning environment-related factors demotivating students including classroom atmosphere (which was claimed to be quiet, boring, and often stressful), unfavorable learning conditions (crowded groups, insufficient teaching and learning facilities, unequal levels of proficiency between students, and lack of extra-curricular activities), unfavorable and limited class time, and lack of opportunities to contact to foreigners inside and outside the classroom. The study of Meshkat and Hassani (2012) indicated that insufficient school facilities emerged as a strong source of students' demotivation. The results revealed that lack of school facilities and insufficient use of the facilities by the teachers highly discouraged students in English classes. The study of Krishnan and Pathan (2013) revealed that learning environment was the second most demotivating factor for the students. Reasons mentioned by the students were that there was a lack of school facilities such as computer equipment, audio and video materials, and Internet access. Moreover, overcrowded classrooms were also reported as a demotivating factor for the students. The study of Nguyen (2013) also found

learning conditions as demotivating. The students were disappointed by uninteresting English classes, lack of teaching and learning equipment, too large class size, and noisy and inattentive classmates. In Al-Khairy's (2013) study, the large number of students in English classes discouraged the students since they didn't have chances to join in interactive activities. The results in the study of Hemmatizad et al. (2015) indicated that inadequate school and university facilities were the main sources of demotivation for the learners. Factors such as computer equipment, visual and audio materials (CDs, tapes, videos and DVDs), Internet were supposed to be inadequate and contributed to the demotivation in language learning.

In conclusion, the students' loss of interest in learning English was also affected by a lot of learning environment-related factors. Factors such as insufficient school facilities, lack of chances to use English inside and outside the classroom, boring or stressful classroom atmosphere, large number of students in the classroom, etc. discouraged students in English learning.

2.2.4 Learning material-related factors

Studies showed that learning material-related factors were also found to be demotivating for the students. The study of Kikuchi (2009) found that a variety of factors related to textbooks such as uninteresting contents of the texts, out of date topics, too long and difficult texts, difficult textbooks/reference books, etc. contributed considerably to students' demotivation in the English classroom. Moreover, in the study of Tran and Baldauf (2007), the students also perceived textbooks as demotivating. The students mentioned that the textbooks were boring and unequal with students' level of proficiency. The study of Sakai & Kikuchi (2009) revealed that learning contents and materials (lessons focusing on grammar, textbooks including long or difficult passages) were perceived as strongly demotivating for the learners. The study of Meshkat and Hassani (2012) revealed that students were demotivated by the learning contents and materials that focused on grammar and long reading passages. In Bahramy and Araghi's (2013) study, the findings revealed that a number of factors

related to the coursebooks such as dull and boring texts and subjects which were not related to daily life subjects, too much grammar, and not following a steady, step by step schedule were identified as the second most demotivating factor for students in learning English. In the study of Hemmatizad et al. (2015), learning contents and materials were the second source of students' demotivation. Uninteresting textbooks, old topics of English passages, and difficulty in interpreting English sentences were considered as demotivating elements in L2 learning.

It can be concluded that many learning material-related factors such as grammar-based contents, difficult and uninteresting textbooks, textbooks unequal to students' proficiency made students lose their interest in English learning.

3. Discussion and recommendations

Learner-related factors

To begin with, students in previous studies demonstrated a *negative attitude towards English language* and perceived it as a difficult language to master because of its complicated grammar, difficult pronunciation, a lot of vocabulary, etc. According to Luu (2011), when students have to face a huge volume of difficult grammar and vocabulary, they often demonstrate the widespread anxiety. Moreover, the more linguistic knowledge is increasing, the more worried and anxious they become, and this eventually leads to their demotivation. This finding suggested that it is the teachers' responsibility to make learning easier and reduce anxiety among students.

Next, *negative attitude towards English speaking community* was also a problem causing students' demotivation. According to Gardner (1985), language learners' attitude towards the target culture and its people has a considerable influence on their learning achievement. A learner cannot learn a language effectively if he or she has a negative attitude towards the country, people, and culture of the target language. Therefore, in the teaching process, teachers can foster students' motivation to learn by familiarizing learners with the L2 culture and L2-related values in order to increase

their positive attitude towards the target language speaking community (Cheng and Dörnyei, 2007).

Besides, students claimed that they were demotivated due to *loss of background knowledge*. Tran and Baldauf (2007) explain that a large number of students fail to make adequate progress in their previous classes often find themselves with gaps in their knowledge, feel incapable of dealing with current lessons, thus become demotivated. Therefore, there should be programs of remedial assistance to help weaker students overcome their demotivation by helping them develop the skills needed to continue with more advanced work (Tran and Baldauf, 2007). What is more, *low English proficiency* was among the causes for students' demotivation in the English classroom. The students with insufficient vocabulary and poor language skills were demotivated since they are could not deal with excessive workload and were gradually left behind. Zhang (2006) adds that low-proficiency students have difficulty in understanding what the teacher says in class and thus are unable to response to the teacher's questions. In Liu's (2005) study about students' reticence among Chinese students, both teachers and students expressed that students with low English proficiency tended to remain silent and passive in the classroom because of their inability to express their opinions in English.

Also, many students lacked *motivation or purpose to learn English*. This finding indicated that lots of students failed to realize the necessity of English in the modern society and they did not have specific goals for learning English. For many students, English is a compulsory subject and the purpose of English learning is to pass examinations or to enter universities rather than to communicate with the second language community. In order to create students' motivation, teachers should make students aware of the importance of English in the modern society. Make them understand that people who are able to speak English will have more opportunities than the ones who are not. If they study English well, they are be able to communicate with foreigners, travel to other countries without language barriers, get a better job and further their education.

In addition, *anxiety and lack of self-confidence* were among the main reasons causing students' demotivation. It is a fact that many students are afraid of being laughed at or being foolish in front of their classmates when they say something wrong in English. Dörnyei (2001a) stresses that in a language class, this fear is so strong in some students that they are practically determined to stay silent rather than risk committing a grammatical error. Therefore, in order to motivate students, it is important to create a safe and supportive classroom where the students feel comfortable taking risks because they know that they will not be embarrassed or criticized if they make a mistake (Dörnyei, 2001a).

The finding also revealed that *experience of failure or lack of success (low marks in English exams)* really mattered in students' demotivation as this disempowered students in their language learning. Test scores are considered a kind of academic achievement and learners with higher achievements tend to show greater motivation and more positive attitude towards acquiring a foreign language. In contrast, low achievements made students disappointed and demotivated in the learning process. According to Dörnyei (2001a), teachers can deal with this problem by showing students what can be learned from the failure and how it can be avoided in the future. Moreover, they can also offer various improvement options for learners to help them improve their scores.

Teacher-related factors

Previous studies showed that a large number of students were demotivated due to *teachers' teaching method*. Although the communicative teaching approach has been promoted in many countries, most L2 teachers still tend to stick to the traditional way of teaching, which mainly focuses on grammar rules. It should be noticed that the nature of a grammar-translation approach does not generally allow students any chance to engage in genuine communication in the target language. This is perceived by many students as demotivating. According to Kikuchi (2009), such an approach should be used very carefully and teachers should consider interacting with students

in the target language so that the lessons do not become one-way.

Moreover, students also had problem with their *teachers' incompetence (e.g. teachers' poor pronunciation and speaking skills, knowledge with low credibility)*. According to Pintrich and Schunk (1996), competence of a teacher would not necessarily cause motivation but students might take a competent teacher more seriously than the one who performs poorly. Modeling is one of the roles of the teachers in the classroom; therefore, when the teachers mispronounce something themselves, the students may do the same. Moreover, when the students, especially students with good English proficiency, recognize teachers' poor or wrong pronunciation, they may feel disappointed or doubtful of the teachers' ability. In order to avoid this situation, teachers should try to improve their pronunciation as well as consider using visual aids such as tapes, CDs, DVDs, and video clips to support their teaching process, especially when they teach listening, speaking, and pronunciation.

Besides, *teachers' personalities and behaviors (lack of care and enthusiasm)* also functioned as a source causing students' demotivation in English classrooms. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) stress that teachers' behavior is a powerful tool of motivation in the classroom which influences the students' engagement in the classroom. Students will be motivated to learn if the teachers show that they care about their students' personal issues or challenges that they face in the classroom or even outside. Moreover, enthusiasm is another factor that can impact learners' motivation. Dörnyei (2001a) suggests that in order to motivate students, teachers must demonstrate their own enthusiasm for the contents of the lessons and share it with the students. The students must feel that the teachers really care about what they are doing and take their learning very seriously.

In addition, *teachers' grading and assessment (tests outside lessons)* was a problem resulting in students' demotivation. Students felt demotivated because the tests were not based on what they had learned in their lessons. Ur (1996)

emphasizes that tests have motivating power because when students know that they are going to be tested on specific material, they will normally be motivated to study it carefully. This is a useful incentive in pushing students to learn. Therefore, the test contents should be paid attention when teachers compile tests for the students.

Learning environment-related factors

Firstly, students perceived *insufficient teaching and learning facilities* as one of the most demotivating factors. Obviously, the lack of equipment for teaching and learning such as computers, projectors, audio and video materials, loudspeakers, etc. has a considerable influence on the quality of teaching because this may prevent teachers from creating different activities for the students to participate in, especially activities using visual aids. Therefore, this problem should be taken into consideration by the administrators of schools or universities.

Secondly, *lack of opportunities to practise English* was also a factor of demotivation. It is a fact that many students spend most of their time learning in an examination-oriented classroom, particularly during the years at secondary and high schools. In addition, in many schools, speaking skills is not included in the test contents; therefore, teaching communicative skills remains a neglected component in many English classrooms regardless of the fact that most learners learn English with the purpose of being able to communicate in it. This leads to students' loss of motivation. One way to overcome this problem is that teachers should increase the amount of students' speaking time, or the number of meaningful activities with practical use of English such as personal or group presentations, pair or group discussions, etc. in order to give students as many chances to speak English as possible.

Thirdly, *classroom atmosphere* was another factor causing demotivation in learning English. According to MacIntyre (1999) a tense classroom climate can cause language learning anxiety, which is a one of the most important factors undermining students' learning effectiveness and motivation. Moreover, boring classroom atmosphere due to lack

of exciting activities might also make students tired and sleepy. In addition, noisy and inattentive classmates also cause distraction and negatively affect the students who are interested in learning. The finding indicated that teachers should take this problem into consideration and try to create the most relaxing and interesting classroom atmosphere for the students.

Last but not least, *too large class size* was also a factor contributing to students' demotivation. In reality, for English learning, the more crowded the class is, the less chances the students have to speak or participate in the classroom activities. Lack of involvement in the activities may result in their demotivation in the learning process. Chambers (1993) emphasizes that students in a crowded classroom do not receive equal opportunities to get teachers' proper feedback and hence they become demotivated to sustain their interest in English language learning. Therefore, adjusting the number of students in a class for better learning is a problem that administrators should consider.

Learning material-related factors

The findings showed that *uninteresting and irrelevant textbooks* were admitted by students to cause their demotivation in learning an L2. According to Dörnyei (2001b), one of the most demotivating factors for learners is when they have to learn something that they cannot see the point because it has no relevance to their lives. Furthermore, topics which are seen interesting for curriculum designers might not be seen attractive by the students (Brophy, 2004). In order to make students interested in learning, Dörnyei (2001a) suggests that teachers should find out what your students' goals are and what topics they want to learn about, and then build these into the curriculum as much as possible.

Moreover, *textbooks that are unequal with students' levels of proficiency* also caused demotivation among students. In fact, too easy or too difficult textbooks cause students' demotivation. In other words, when choosing textbooks, curriculum planners should pay attention to the contents of the textbooks, which should be suitable for the students, especially for their age, interest,

and levels of proficiency. The tasks in the textbook should be designed suitably, being able to develop different skills of the students. According to Littlejohn (2008), classroom tasks which are matched to learners' ability level are especially important. When the tasks are not interesting or out of students' reach, students might easily get bored and did not want to give any effort. Hence, to motivate students to learn these tasks more effectively, teachers have to design or change the textbook tasks so that they are more relevant to the students' English proficiency levels (Luu, 2012).

Conclusion

The article reviewed previous studies on demotivation and summarized four groups of factors that demotivated students in English learning including learner-related factors, teacher-related factors, learning environment-related factors and learning material-related factors. It is hoped that the findings will help to raise teachers and students' awareness of demotivation so that they will seek suitable ways to help students become motivated in English classrooms.

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