

## A Quantitative Analysis of Demotivating Factors for Iranian Intermediate High School EFL Learners

Bahar Rajabi

Department of Foreign Languages, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran  
Corresponding Author Email: baharrajabi.1988@yahoo.com

Sayed Mirhossein Hosseini Pozveh

Department of Foreign Languages, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran  
Email: Mirhossein2002@gmail.com

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### Abstract

Being proficient in the second language is believed to be crucial for having better chances in future. Thus, parents want their children to have good command of English. One of the factors that affect acquiring second language is being motivated. So far, many scholar have worked on motivation. How ever, the other part of motivation, which has not been so popular yet, is demotivation. Recently, scholar have been working on factors influence L2 learners and demotivate them. Knowing these factor are vital for having better outcomes in teaching a second language. In the present study, 40 participants took part, half of them attended English classes in the institute, while the others did not take part in those extra classes. A questionnaire containing 18 5-point Likert type questions was given to participants. The questions were about the demotivating factors. The findings showed that class characteristics and class material are the most demotivating factors for the ones who attended classes in institute, while for the other group teacher and class characteristics were the most influential demotivating factors. The findings are beneficial for the teachers, policy makers, and material developers.

**Keywords:** Motivation, demotivation, demotivation factors.

### 1. Introduction

Being proficient in second language is crucial for getting a good job. Thus, parents want their children to learn English and accordingly, teachers, material developers, and policy makers are eager to know what factors make a learner motivated or demotivated in learning a second language. Therefore, motivation and demotivation have become very interesting topics for researchers and teachers, since motivation is one of the vital factors in developing a second or foreign language (Dornyei & Otto, 1998). Hence, lately, this topic has been very attention getting for the researchers and teachers.

More ever, motivation is very important in a classroom as it is very co-regulated, as a motivated learner is capable of spreading the positive feeling and energy in the whole class, while a demotivated learner is highly able to affect the class members in the opposite way. While a motivated learner is of a great help in maintaining a positive impression in the class members, the demotivated student can influence the other students, and this will decrease the efficiency of the lesson and in addition, obscure the purpose of the lesson. (Dornyei & Murphey, 2003)

So far, the importance of the demotivation and motivation has somehow been cleared. Motivation in Longman dictionary (2007) is defined as "Eagerness and willingness to do something without needing to be told or forced to do it." This may be a good definition in general, however, for the language learning because of its nature and role, motivation is distinct (Dornyei, 1994). If one wants to know how demotivation has been defined by the scholars, Dornyei is the first one. Dornyei in 2001(a) defined demotivation as "specific forces that reduce or diminish the motivation basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action" (p. 143). In the other definition by Trang and Baldauf (2007), demotivation is described as "having negative impact on students, and preventing them from gaining expected learning outcomes" (p.100). However, many researchers believed that being demotivated is not solely related to external factors, and there are internal factors as well. Some have named lack of self confidence and negative attitudes as some internal factors (e.g., Arai, 2004; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kojima, 2004; Tsuchiya, 2004a, 2004b, 2006a, 2006b). Even Dornyei (2001a) recorded diminished self-confidence and negative attitude toward acquisition of the second language as the demotivating factors.

Accordingly, the thorough definition of the demotivation should cover both internal and external demotivators which lower the motivation to study.

Taking a look at the demotivators, we can divide them as internal and external. Internal factors are the ones that are only related to the learner such as reduced self confidence, attitudes of class members, etc. Besides, external demotivators are factors which are not only related to the person itself, rather they are resulting from outside, for example, teacher, book, and learning environment.

However, the demotivators may be classified differently. Scholars have studied different demotivators in different levels. Demotivation factors for Kiuchi and Sakai (2009) were divided into five groups: a) content book, b) the method of teaching, c) inadequate teaching facilities, d) lack of intrinsic motivation, e) scoring method of the tests.

In addition, when a learner is demotivated, not only does the learner lose track of the lesson, but also he or she may suffer from self blame in future which requires remotivation for learning second language. (Falout and Falout, 2005; Falout and Maruyama, 2004; Ushioda, 1998, 2001).

## 2. Literature Review

Due to novelty of the term demotivation, not much research has been conducted about this topic, and mainly, scholars have been interested in motivation and the ways for the teacher to initiate and promote learners motivation. Thus, present part deals with studies on motivation and demotivation.

Vazquez, Paulina, Guzman and Rodriguez (2010) research was conducted on Mexican university students and the motivators they had. According to their findings, components related to teacher and the group were the most effective ones.

Another study conducted by Falouta, Elwoodband, and Hood (2009), was about demotivating factors in studying a second language and the effect of past demotivating factors on the present proficiency. In the mentioned study, the factors were divided into three groups, external conditions of the learning environment, internal condition of the learner, and the reactive behaviors to demotivating experiences. Finally, the results showed that, the internal and behavioral reactions were influential in the future learning outcome.

The next study to investigate is the one by Trang and Baldauf (2007), which was conducted on the Vietnamese university students based on these foci: the reason, the degree, and the students' experience in overcoming the demotivators. They concluded that making learners informed about the effect and importance of ability to use English were crucial in overcoming demotivation.

Zhang's study (2007), which was conducted in the USA, reported that students found the teacher's incompetence the most demotivating factor. She explained teacher's incompetence as "confusing or boring lectures, unfair testing, and information overload" (p. 211)

An interesting study by Keblawi (2005) was conducted in Israel on the Arab young English learners (15-16 years old). The most influential demotivators were teacher-related. The teacher-related factors were teacher's style and personality. Less effective demotivators were teaching material and scoring system.

Based on the finding by Takako (2005), teachers have ample effect on the learners' motivation and demotivation.

Kojima (2004) conducted a study on 2198 high school students. His study included an open-ended questionnaire and an interview. According to his conclusion, learners' level problem was the most demotivating, followed by language level problem and learning situation problem. Similarly, Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) conducted a study similar to the one by Kojima, including an open-ended questionnaire administered to 47 students and an interview with five students. They reported that participants found books, scores, non-communicative method, and teacher's competence and style more effecting than inadequate school facilities on demotivation.

While many of the studies have been done quantitatively, Hasegawa (2004) conducted a qualitative study interviewing the students of 125 junior high school and 98 senior high school students about the demotivating factors, and whether they were demotivated or not. The finding exerted inappropriate teacher behavior as the most effective demotivator. However, her findings are notable since she openly asked about the demotivating factors.

Falout and Maruyama (2004) conducted a study on 64 college learners of English, who were about to enter university. They divided the participants to higher- proficiency and lower-proficiency groups. Findings, which were gathered by a questionnaire, showed that for both groups, self-confidence was the most important demotivating factor. In addition, they found that for the lower-proficiency group having a negative attitude toward English learning begins earlier than the same attitudes for the higher-proficiency learners.

Findings of Lantolf and Genung (2002) showed that the students who were learning Chinese found the teacher's behavior demotivating when he or she used the power authoritatively.

Besides, Dornyei (2001b) conducted a study but instead of using a questionnaire, he interviewed the students who were taking English or German as their second language. He named nine demotivating factors as: teacher, self confidence, attitude toward language, compulsory nature of L2 learning, interferences between languages, attitude toward native speakers, attitude of group members, course book and school facilities.

Interestingly, Oxford (1996) added another factor to the ones that have been mentioned so far, she recognized teacher, book, equipment and also task and activities as demotivators.

The other issue in demotivation is maladaptive self-regulatory strategies which, based on Arai (2005), these strategies are demotivating for less successful learners. These behaviors linger the demotivated state for the learners (Falout & Falout, 2005)

## 2.1 Objectives

Researchers did the study to have better and clearer understanding of the most demotivating factors for students, who attend English classes in institutes and who do not. Findings can be beneficial for teachers and policy makers prepare the best situation for students, so that students can be more motivated and less demotivated.

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Participants

In the present study, 40 participants took part. The sample included high school students (14-18). The participants' proficiency level in English was intermediate. In order to make sure that we have homogeneous sample, the researchers asked students from different high school rather than just one. Half of the participants were being chosen from Tehran and the others were from Esfahan.

Since the aim of the study was to check the difference among those students who take part in English institutes and those who do not, the sample comprised similar number of each type of students.

### 3.2 Procedure

Firstly, in order to make sure that the sample was homogenous and all the participants were in the same level, they were given the Oxford Placement Test (OPT; Allan, 2004).

Secondly, researchers made use of a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions which were about the six factors; they were about a) teacher; b) class characteristics; c) failure experience; d) class material; e) lack of interest; and f) class environment. The participants were asked to select one of five alternatives: 1) Not true; 2) Mostly not true; 3) Not either True or Untrue; 4) To some extent true; and 5) True.

In order to prevent any misunderstanding in the question and accordingly in the collected data, the questions were all in Persian (students' native language). The instruction wanted the students to choose the proper alternative according to their personal attitudes on how the factor was impressive on their demotivation.

It is worth mentioning that, for having reliable results, the sample was gathered from the high school in which English teachers used similar method in their classes, such as, the same extra book for homework, and the similar method for teaching the new material.

### 3.3 Material

The materials used in the present study were OPT and the questionnaire that consisted of 18 five-point Likert type questions about demotivation. According to the finding by scholars, the researchers prepared the questionnaire based on the following factors: 1) Teachers; 2) Characteristics of classes; 3) Experiences of failure; 4) Class environment; 5) Class materials; and 6) Lack of interest.

### 3.4 Data analysis

In the beginning to test the variables normality of the study, the Kolmogorov-Smirnova and Shapiro-Wilk were used. To analyze the data, t-tests were used in calculating the data of different variables. These differences were based on the different variables of the study (teacher, experience of failure, class material, class environments and lack of interest)

which were also calculated and analyzed. In order to statistically analyze the equality of the mean test scores of the variables, the Mann-Whitney nonparametric test was used.

For the present study questionnaire was used, since this way of gathering data is accurate and time-saving. Besides, students had more trust to the questionnaire since they were sure that their identity was being kept Confidential.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

Before the statistical implementation, the status of each of the variables are analyzed descriptively. In this respect, table one illustrates statistical descriptive information such as the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum score in each group for each item. The mean score for teacher in the group of students who attended English class in institute (group one) was 9.45, whereas the same item for the students who did not attend English class in institute (group two) was 12.30. Additionally, the sum of mean score of the items was 62 in group one and 59.5 in group two.

**Table 1:** Simple descriptive statistics for six variables studied in two groups

		Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	
Group	students who attended	Teacher	9.45	1.43	7.00	11.00
		Class characteristics	12.25	.91	10.00	14.00
		Experience of failure	8.65	2.18	3.00	13.00
		Class material	12.05	1.67	8.00	14.00
		Class environment	10.15	2.30	7.00	14.00
		Lack of interest	9.45	2.04	6.00	13.00
		Sum	62.00	5.05	52.00	73.00
	students who did not attended	Teacher	12.30	1.26	9.00	15.00
		Class characteristics	11.95	1.54	9.00	15.00
		Experience of failure	9.35	2.21	6.00	14.00
		Class material	8.85	2.39	5.00	13.00
		Class environment	9.00	2.66	4.00	13.00
		Lack of interest	8.05	2.61	3.00	15.00
	sum	59.50	6.24	47.00	73.00	

### 4.2 Statistics analysis

The groups in this section are compared based on six items and also based on the total score of participants. Before analyzing, it is necessary to determine the normality of each variable. Table two shows the results of the normality test of these seven variables. According to the results of the table, only class characteristics and class material are lacking normality. Therefore, nonparametric test were used on these two variables.

**Table 2:** Normality Test

	Kolmogorov -Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Teacher	.128	40	.097	.954	40	.104
Class characteristics	.218	40	.000	.935	40	.023
Experience of failure	.100	40	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.972	40	.429
Class material	.224	40	.000	.912	40	.004
Class environment	.117	40	.181	.965	40	.248
Lack of interest	.109	40	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.977	40	.591
Sum	.111	40	.200 <sup>*</sup>	.972	40	.422

In table 3 independent t-tests were used to test the equality of means of five variables (Teacher, Experience of failure, Class environment, Lack of interest, and Sum). In the case of teacher, given the assumption of equality of variances about this variable, according to Levene has been established ( $p$ -value = 0.247), the result related to the row of equal

variance will be used. According to t-statistics and p-value<0.001, the assumption of the equality of mean score related to teacher was at five per cent level significance. This means that there is a difference between the mean score of teacher in both groups. Also according to the mean difference of the two groups (-2.850), it can be concluded that the results related to the teacher in the group two, on average was 2.850 more than the students of group one. Among other variables no significant difference was noticed.

**Table 3:** Equality of means of five variables

		Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	p-val	t	df	p-val	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Teacher	Equal variances	1.38	.247	6.68	38	.000	-2.850	.42658	-3.71357	-1.98643
	Not Equal variances			6.68	37.4	.000	-2.850	.42658	-3.71403	-1.98597
Experience of failure	Equal variances	.15	.696	1.00	38	.320	-.700	.69415	-2.10523	.70523
	Not Equal variances			1.00	37.9	.320	-.700	.69415	-2.10524	.70524
Class Environment	Equal variances	.24	.625	1.46	38	.151	1.150	.78564	-.44045	2.74045
	Not Equal variances			1.46	37.2	.152	1.150	.78564	-.44152	2.74152
Lack of interest	Equal variances	.19	.658	1.89	38	.066	1.400	.73967	-.09737	2.89737
	Not Equal variances			1.89	35.9	.066	1.400	.73967	-.10022	2.90022
Sum	Equal variances	1.45	.235	1.39	38	.172	2.500	1.79546	-1.13472	6.13472
	Not Equal variances			1.39	36.3	.172	2.500	1.79546	-1.13998	6.13998

Table four deals with equality of the mean test scores of the two variables of Class characteristics and Class material with the use of Mann-Whitney nonparametric test. According to the p-value obtained, the mean score of class characteristics had no significance difference in both groups. Concludingly, the mean score for class material had a significant difference of five percent.

**Table 4:** Test equality of means of two groups

	Class characteristics	Class material
Mann-Whitney U	173.500	60.000
Wilcoxon W	383.500	270.000
Z	-.746	-3.832
P-value	.456	.000

## 5. Discussion

In the present study, 40 high school learners were asked to complete a questionnaire on the demotivating factors. The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions divided to 6 factors. The first factor was teacher, which referred to inadequate or incomprehensive explanation, being in a bad mood or shouting too much, not keeping a proper pace in teaching. According to the results, teacher is more effective for the second group than for the first group. The difference is obvious between two groups. This noticeable contrast is very crucial for the second group, as a negative behavior of teacher can demotivate the students. In addition, based on the table one, teacher is the most demotivating factor for the second group. However, for the first group this factor is not as effective.

Second factor in the questionnaire was Class characteristics that referred to the limited allocated time for speaking English, memorizing most of the texts, and lesson being too much focused on grammar or translation. Noticeably, this factor is the first effective for the first group and the second major factor for the second group. Concludingly, characteristics of the class is very powerful and influential. This importance makes this responsibility for the teachers and policy makers to prepare the best timing and plan for the classes, so that the class can motivate the students rather than demotivate them.

Next factor in the questionnaire is Experience of failure. According to the questions below this issue, it is about

having difficulties in memorizing the words, not getting expected scores, and being compared to pupils. Visibly, this factor is the least effective for the students of the first group, however, this is not same for the other group. Thus, these problems are demotivating for the students who do not attend English class in institutes.

Class material is the fourth item on the list and the questions for this factor are about the topics of the texts, complex sentences, and vague answers to the questions. The mentioned issue is the most demotivating factor for the first group and relatively high for the second group. Since most of the high school students are forced to attend the English classes in institute, they get to know the new books with interesting topics about sport, art, etc. Accordingly, they expect their schoolbooks to be in the same level of attractiveness and practicality.

The fifth factor is Class environment, referring to not being interested in English and not making use of internet and auditory facilities. The mean score is relatively high for both of the groups, while for the first group, environment of the class is more demotivating than for the second group.

The last factor on the list is Lack of interest. Lack of interest refers to compulsory nature of English in school. Luckily, with the vast use of technology, the necessity of knowing English is crystal clear and the mean score for this factor the least for the second group and very low for the first group.

As confronted with improper teacher personality or pedagogy, class characteristics, and teaching materials, students are prone to demotivation. Due to compulsory nature of English in academic systems, demotivated students are in permanent battle with English in their academic lives. This issue seems more crucial as the age that students are to start English in becoming less (Mext,2008; Nunan, 2003; Otani et al., 2004)

The findings of the present paper is in line with Falout et al., (2008) in which they believed that the opinion of most teachers and parents, that grammar-translation method will enable students to have better outcome in university entrance exam, will diminish the interest which has been caught in elementary school. Thus, all attention in high school is devoted to translation and drills.

In tune with the finding of Falout et al. (2009), teachers are capable of making students interested in English by avoiding demotivating behaviors such as mono-methodic teaching. In addition, they are able to limit demotivation by souring students' self-esteem.

Regarding the importance of class characteristics, the finding are in line with findings of many scholars whom think even demotivated students are looking for fun environment and communication with their classmates and teachers through English. Besides even demotivated students have positive attitude toward native speakers of English (Falout and Maruyama, 2004; Miyata et al., 2004; Potee., 2002). Accordingly, learners want to learn useful abilities for communication rather than just getting the passing score for exams (Murphey, 2002; Falout et al., 2008). The findings of the mentioned studies are in line with the finding of the present paper.

According to Sakai and Kikuchi (2009), teachers should try their best to find a way to motivate students who do not have a goal for being an English speaker or who do not understand the purpose of learning English. The findings of these studies are in tune.

### 5.1 *Implications of the Study*

The results of this study can contribute to a better understanding of demotivating factors and their effect on L2 learners. The results will be useful for L2 teachers to prepare the most suitable teaching methods for the learners. The results have practical implications for materials developers to redesign the curriculum to make it more motivating for learners.

### 5.2 *Limitations of the study*

Like other studies, for sure this one was not without limitations. The first limitation was the institute which participants went to, and the level they were studying there. The second limitation was that some of the students, who did not attend English classes in institutes, did not attend classes there in the time of school year. Thus, this fact can be used as a specific variable. Next, the number of questions on the questionnaire was not sufficient for each factor, and it would have been more reliable to have more examples on the questionnaire for each demotivator. In addition, the researchers tried to have similar teaching methods for the teachers in the school, but data would have been more trustable if the teachers were being taught to have the one specific method for teaching.

### 5.3 Suggestions for further research

Firstly, it will be interesting if the researchers take the gender of the participants into account. Secondly, this study can be repeated for other proficiency levels or for other age groups. Thirdly, reconducting the present study for the other cities will result in interesting conclusions. However, since demotivation is absolutely a new topic, there are many innovation ideas for further research.

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