



RESEARCH PAPER

**Demotivating Factors in the Foreign Language Learning: An
Analysis of the Past Studies**

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ABSTRACT

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Language learners' demotivation is one of the key reasons for their failure or poor progress in learning a foreign language. The study aimed to identify the key demotivating factors in learning the language. Findings of the 44 published studies in the past years were analyzed. The results reveal that teaching methodologies, attitude and behaviour of the teachers with the students, their competency and class activities/task assigned to the learners are the most demotivating factors. The other factors like teaching material, students' negative attitude towards the language, lack of self-confidence, classroom environment, peer pressure, school facilities, nature of the subject, evaluation criteria, limited exposure to the language, difficulties in learning vocabulary and grammar, student-teacher relationship and lack of self-study have also been reported as the demotivating factors in a foreign language learning. By employing the latest language teaching methodologies, devising the interesting course content and classroom activities according to the level of the students and practical usage, encouraging the learners and making them realize the importance of the language may help in avoiding demotivation of the learners.

Introduction

Demotivation is the "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 143). It is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that hinders (Al-Khairi, 2013) and influences the learning process (Falout&Falout, 2004; Dörnyei&Ushioda, 2013; Krishna & Pathan, 2013; Dörnyei, 2014) resulting in an unsuccessful proficiency (Hu, 2011) or the failure of language learning (Vidak&Sindik 2018). Demotivation can affect the behaviour and attitude of the learner negatively as well (Falout, Elwood & Hood, 2009).

The elements which cause discouragement of students in learning the English language or exterminate their willingness (Dörnyei, 2001) are known as demotivation factors. The factors related to the students, e.g. lack of confidence or negative attitudes of students about the language, etc. are called internal or intrinsic factors (Sahragard, Rahman; Alimorad 2013; Al-Khairy, 2013) and the factors related to the teachers and learning environment, e.g. teaching methodology, classroom environment and syllabus, etc. are called external or extrinsic factors (Trang & Baldauf 2007; Al-Khairy, 2013). Demotivation factors are not constant and vary from context to context (Dörnyei, 2001; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kim, 2015) and learner to learner (Khouya, 2018).

In the past couple of decades, researchers across the globe have investigated, identified and reported various demotivation factors involved in the English language learning process (Akay, 2017). Though demotivation factors vary from culture to culture and context to context (Dörnyei, 2001; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kim, 2015) yet some of the factors identified by the past studies may be called universal. The objective of the study is to identify the factors reported by these studies which contribute to demotivating foreign language learners.

Material and Methods

During a previous couple of decades, many researchers have investigated the demotivate factors among foreign language learners. The objective of the study was to analyze the findings of the previous studies to know the key factors that demotivate the learners in learning the target language. The sample for the study consists of the 44 pieces of research published in the previous years in different countries. The detail of the studies is given in Table 1

Table 1
Selected Articles, the year and country of their publication

Sr. No	Researcher	Year of Publication	Country
1	Gorham & Cristophel	1992	US
2	Chamber	1993	UK
3	Ushioda	1998	Ireland
4	Oxford	1998	US
5	Djigunovic	1998	Russia
6	Dörnyei	2001	UK
7	Chang & Cho	2003	Taiwan
8	Muhonen	2004	Finland
9	Tsuchiya	2004	Japan
10	Falout & Maruyama	2004	Japan
11	Falout & Falout	2004	Japan
12	Arai	2004	Japan
13	Hasegawa	2004	Japan
14	Keblawi	2006	US
15	Trang & Baldauf	2007	Vietnam

16	Hamada &Kito	2008	Japan
17	Kim	2009	S. Korea
18	Kikuchi	2009	Japan
19	Sakai & Kikuchi	2009	Japan
20	Haque	2009	Bangladesh
21	Hirvonen	2010	Finland
22	Hamada	2011	Japan
23	Ahmad, et al	2011	Pakistan
24	Khan	2011	KSA
25	Pinzón	2011	Spain
26	Bekleyen	2011	Turkey
27	Jung	2011	S Korea
28	Meshkat&Hassani	2012	Iran
29	Al-Khairy	2013	KSA
30	Sahragard&Alimorad	2013	Iran
31	Yadav &BaniAta	2013	KSA
32	Ali & Pathan	2017	Pakistan
33	Tanaka	2017	Japan
34	Quadir	2017	Bangladesh
35	Akay	2017	Turkey
36	Çankaya	2018	Turkey
37	Zhang & Ding	2018	China
38	Haryanto, at el	2018	Indonesia
38	Vidak&Sindik	2018	Croatia
39	Khouya	2018	S Korea
40	Adara, et al	2019	Indonesia
41	Clare, et al	2019	US
42	Abaunza, et al	2020	Colombia
43	Vakilifard, et al	2020	Iran
44	Liu, et al	2020	China

The study involves the division and categorization of the intrinsic and extrinsic demotivating factors reported by the above 44 studies. During the analysis, it was observed that different studies had named the similar or related factors differently, for example, Kim (2009) used the term “Course Content”, Aai (2004) used “Teaching Material”, Muhoneen (2004) mentioned this factor with the name of “Textbook”, etc. Similarly, the terms “Lack of interest”, “Lack of belief”, “Lack of determination”, “Lack of confidence” and “Lack of missing goals” have been used by different researchers for mentioning the same intrinsic demotivation factor. The reported factors were grouped under the broader categories.

Results and Discussion

The results of the 44 studies have reported 32 factors that demotivate the foreign language learners, however, the number of the factors mentioned by different studies vary (see table 2).

Table 2
Demotivation Factors in Foreign Language Learning
Factors

Sr. No.	Demotivation Factors	Names of the studies reported the factors	No. of the studies
1	Course content/teaching Material/ Textbooks/ syllabus	Kim, 2009; Sahragard&Alimorad, 2013; Çankaya, 2018;/ Arai, 2004; Hamada &Kito, 2008; Kikuchi, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Haque, 2009; Hamada, 2011; Al-Khairi, 2013; Quadir, 2017; /Gorham &Cristophel, 1992; Djigunovic', 1998; Muhonen, 2004; Falout&Falout, 2004; Hirvonen, 2010; Meshkat&Hassani, 2012; Ali & Pathan, 2017; Akay, 2017; Vidak&Sindik, 2018;Vakilifard, et al., 2020/ Trang, at el, 2007	22
2	Lack of interest/ belief/ determination/ confidence/missing goals	Gorham &Cristophel, 1992; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Sahragard&Alimorad, 2013; Akay, 2017; Abaunza, et al., 2020/ Chamber, 1993; Chang & Cho, 2013; Muhonen, 2004; Falout&Maruyama, 2004; Hamada &Kito, 2008; Hamada, 2011;Liu, et al., 2020; Zhang & Ding, 2018	13
3	Classroom/learning environment	Oxford, 1998; Chang & Cho, 2003; Arai, 2004; Muhonen, 2004; Tsuchiya, 2004; Hamada &Kito, 2008; Haque, 2009; Hirvonen, 2010; Bekleyen, 2011; Akay, 2017; Çankaya, 2018; Khouya, 2018;Abaunza, et al., 2020	13
4	Inappropriate teaching Methods/methodology	Ushioda, 1998; Djigunovic', 1998; D rnyei, 2001; Chang & Cho, 2003; Muhonen , 2004; Tsuchiya, 2004; Arai , 2004; Trang &Baldauf, 2007; Hamada &Kito , 2008; Khan, 2011; Pinzón , 2011; Vidak&Sindik, 2018	12
5	Teacher attitude/behavior	Oxford, 1988; Falout&Maruyama, 2004; Arai, 2004; Trang &Baldauf, 2007; Kikuchi, 2009; Pinzón, 2011; Al-Khairi, 2013; Akay, 2017; Clare, et al., 2019; Liu, et al., 2020; Vakilifard, et al., 2020	11
6	Difficulties/improper tasks/ activities	Djigunovic', 1998; Ushioda, 1998; Oxford, 2004; Chang & Cho, 2003; Falout&Falout, 2004; Arai, 2004; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Haque, 2009; Yadav &BaniAta, 2013;	11

		Çankaya, 2018; Khouya, 2018	
7	Teacher competence/qualities / expertise	Gorham & Cristophel, 1992; D rnyei, 2001; Hamada & Kito, 2008; Kim, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Adara, et al., 2019; Abaunza, et al., 2019	9
8	Teaching style	Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Hamada & Kito, 2008; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Kim, 2009; Pinzón, 2011; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Adara, et al, 2019; Abaunza, et al., 2020	9
9	Learner negative attitude	D rnyei, 2001; Muhonen, 2004; Tsuchiya, 2004; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Hirvonen, 2010; Quadir, 2017; Zhang & Ding, 2018; Clare, et al., 2019; Vakilifard, et al., 2020	9
10	Lack of/ inadequate School facilities/opportunities	D rnyei, 2001; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Khan, 2011; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Quadir, 2017; Haryanto, at el., 2018; Adara, et al., 2019; Liu, et al, 2020	8
11	Evaluation/grades/scores/result/test	Keblawi, 2006; Trang & Baldauf, 2007/ Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Jung, 2011/ Gorham & Cristophel, 1992/ Kikuchi, 2009; Hamada, 2011; Khouya, 2018	8
12	Nature of subject/ focus/ perception/ characteristics	Khouya, 2018; D rnyei, 2001; Tsuchiya, 2004; Hamada, 2011/ Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; / Vidak & Sindik, 2018; Kim, 2009/ Jung, 2011	8
13	Peer negative attitude/pressure/ influence	D rnyei, 2001; Tsuchiya, 2004; Keblawi, 2006; Pinzón, 2011; Al-Khairi, 2013; Tanaka, 2017; / Haryanto, at el., 2018	7
14	Lack of pre-knowledge/limited exposure/under privilege	Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Vidak & Sindik, 2018; / Quadir, 2017; Khan, 2009/ Haryanto, at el, 2018	5
15	Vocabulary	Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Falout & Falout, 2004; Kikuchi, 2009; Yadav & Bani Ata, 2013; Tanaka, 2017	5
16	Learning difficulties	Djigunovic', 1998; Ahmad, et al., 2011; Chang & Cho, 2013; Yadav & Bani Ata, 2013; Abaunza, et al, 2020	5
17	Teacher personality	Gorham & Cristophel, 1992, D rnyei, 2001; Arai, 2004	3
18	Lack of self-study/ efficiency	Khan, 2009; Gorham & Cristophel, 1992	2
19	Student-teacher conflict/student-teacher relationship	Oxford, 1988, Chang & Cho, 2003	2
20-22	Fear of punishment, anxiety, threat to self-worth	Chang & Cho, 2003	1
23	Simultaneous learning of many languages	Hirvonen, 2010	1
24-25	Negative interference, an attitude of the community	D rnyei, 2001	1
26-28	Social status, improper guidance, family pressure	Khan, 2011	1
29	Overemphasis on	Meshkat & Hassani, 2012	1

	grammar		
30	Culture	Al-Khairiy, 2013	1
31	Workload	Yadav &BaniAta, 2013	1
32	Private tutors	Quadir, 2017	1

Teaching Material

Table 2 shows that 22 out of the 44 studies consider the teaching material including textbooks and course contents as one of the highest demotivation factors for foreign language learners. The studies have found that the material used for teaching the language is inappropriate or uninteresting. They have found that either the material used to teach the language is boring, uninteresting or its level is inappropriate for the learners which result in the demotivation of the learners.

The Teacher

Table 2 reveals that the majority of the studies have found that teacher and his/her related factors contribute highest in the demotivation of the foreign language learners.

Table 3

Teacher related to demotivation factors

Sr. No.	Demotivation factors	No. of studies
1	Inappropriate teaching Methods/methodology	12
2	Teacher attitude/behavior	11
3	Difficulties/improper tasks/ activities	11
4	Teacher competence/qualities/ expertise	9
5	Teaching style	9
6	Teacher personality	3

Table 3 shows that 6 demotivation factors related to the teachers have been mentioned by most of the studies. Out of these factors, the teaching methodology and style of the teacher are the most demotivating ones in foreign language learning.

Inappropriate Teaching Methodology and style

The studies show that the teaching methodology and style used by the language instructors are the highest factors of demotivation in learning the target language. The results indicate that the teaching methods used by the instructors are inappropriate and old. Eighteen of the 44 studies show that the teaching techniques, methods or style employed by the language teachers not only fail in enabling the students to comprehend the language but also result in their demotivation.

Attitude/behaviour of the Teacher

An analysis of the studies reveals that the attitude and behaviour of language teachers contribute considerable roles in the demotivation of the learners. Eleven out

of the 44 studies have found its negative effects on the motivation of the learners. According to the results, when teachers use harsh words or their behaviour with the learners is non-cooperative or non-encouraging, it results in their demotivation. This means that the attitude and behaviour of the teachers affect the learners directly.

Difficult/improper tasks/ activities

According to the findings, 11 out of the 44 studies have reported that difficult and improper tasks or activities cause demotivation in the language learners. They consider that the tasks assigned by the teachers are either difficult or improper according to the level of the learners. A failure in accomplishing the assigned tasks demotivates the learners in learning the language.

The incompetence of the Teacher

Table 3 also reveals that 9 out of the 44 studies consider incompetency or inexperience of the language teachers as a demotivation factor for the learners. According to them, it is the seventh largest demotivation factor that contributes to demotivating the learners.

The personality of the Teacher

The teacher's personality is another demotivation factor mentioned by three of the studies.

Lack of Self-confidence

According to the results (table 2), 13 out of the 44 studies indicate that sometimes the learners lack some essential characteristics for learning the language. These characteristics contribute to demotivating the learners. The studies have found that language learners either lack confidence or belief in their capabilities or their lack of interest or determination does not allow them to learn the language which results in their demotivation. Some students start learning a foreign language without any specific goal. Due to the absence of learning objectives, they do not show seriousness in their studies and earn poor grades, and resultantly are demotivated.

Classroom/Learning Environment

Findings of the 13 studies suggest that the classroom environment is another important demotivation factor in learning a foreign language. A positive and healthy classroom environment affects the learners positively whereas, negative and unhealthy causes demotivation.

The negative attitude of the learner towards the language

The results of the 9 studies indicate that the learners' negative attitude towards the language is another factor that demotivates them in learning the foreign language. There may be many reasons behind this negative attitude, however, they all result in the demotivation of the learner.

Inadequate School facilities

Table 3 shows that 8 out of the 44 studies have found that limited and inadequate school facilities result in the demotivation of the learners. Similar to the classroom environment, an improper and unsporting school atmosphere with limited facilities negatively affect the motivation of the language learners.

Evaluation/Grading Criteria

According to 8 of the studies, evaluation criteria or grading system contribute as a demotivation factor. Sometimes, students are unable to give satisfactory answers to the asked questions or fail to understand the demand of the questions and get low scores or poor grades which disheartens them and resultantly demotivate them.

Nature of the Subject

In some institutions, foreign language is taught as a compulsory subject and students have to opt for it unwillingly. At other times, some students do not succeed in comprehending the structure or grammar of the language or get poor grades in their tests or exams. Sometimes, compulsory nature or their poor performance in the subject negatively affect the minds of the learners and hence are demotivated. According to the results, 8 out of the 44 studies have found this factor as demotivating.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure or their negative attitude is another demotivation factor. The results show that 7 out of the 44 studies have concluded that foreign language learners are demotivated because of their peers. Sometimes, the learners are either afraid of the fun made by their peers on their poor performance or are psychologically depressed due to the good learning capabilities of their fellows and hence are demotivated.

Limited Exposure to the Language

Lack of limited background knowledge or exposure to the language has been mentioned as a demotivation factor by 5 out of the 44 studies. According to the studies, this under-privilege condition psychologically disturbs some students and they fail to comprehend the new language and ultimately are demotivated.

Vocabulary and Learning Difficulties

As mentioned in the previous lines, sometimes students fail to learn spellings and vocabulary, comprehend the grammar of the language, articles, prepositions, conjunction, forms of verbs, sentence arrangement, narration, comprehension, etc. due to their limited learning capabilities or their perception of the language as a difficult one. This difficulty also results in their demotivation. Five of the studies have mentioned "vocabulary" as a separate problem for the learners whereas the other five have grouped these problems under the name "learning difficulties" as demotivation factors in foreign language learning.

Lack of Self-study

It is said that practice is required for perfection. Some students lack self-motivation. They always depend on others for their studies. They cannot exert to learn the things themselves and as result show poor performance. According to the two of the researches, this inefficacy results in demotivation of the learners.

Teacher-student Relationship

The findings of the two studies show that the teacher-student relationship is another demotivating factor in foreign language learners.

Miscellaneous

There are some other 13 demotivating factors mentioned by the 8 studies. These factors are negative transfer, an attitude of the community, fear of punishment, anxiety, a threat to self-worth, simultaneous learning of many languages, social status and improper guidance, family pressure, overemphasis on the grammar, culture, workload and private tutors.

Conclusion

The study aimed to find the most common demotivation factors in learning foreign language as reported by the past studies. According to the findings, factors related to the language teacher, i.e., his/her teaching methodologies, style, attitude and behaviour with the students, competency and class activities/task assigned are the most demotivating factors. The other key demotivation factors reported by the studies are teaching material, students' negative attitude, lack of self-confidence, classroom environment, peer pressure, school facilities, nature of the subject, evaluation criteria, limited exposure to the language, difficulties in learning vocabulary and grammar, student-teacher relationship and lack of self-study. Keeping the findings in view, it is recommended that language teachers should employ the latest language teaching methodologies and techniques. The classroom activities should be devised according to the level of the students. The material and course contents used for teaching the language should be interesting and practical in

nature. Adequate school facilities may lessen the demotivation. The demotivation factors related to the language learner's psyches may be addressed by encouraging and realizing the importance of the language.

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