



Research Article

Afghan EFL Learners’ Perceptions towards Factors Causing Demotivation in Learning English and Strategies to Make Them Motivated

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ABSTRACT

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Demotivation is a significant concern for foreign and second language researchers, as it has a direct impact on the academic success of students at various educational levels, including primary, high school, and university. This study aimed to explore the demotivation factors that affect English language learning among EFL students at Jawzjan University, as well as to identify strategies for re-motivating these learners. The study employed a qualitative approach, and an open-ended interview question conducted as collecting data. The findings revealed several demotivating factors that have a negative influence on learners, including a lack of information about the dominance of English language, insufficient support from teachers and family, economic challenges, an excessive focus on nonprofessional courses, the use of local languages in English classes, and a lack of opportunities to practice English outside the classroom. Based on the findings, the study suggests that English teachers should pay attention to their feedback, incorporate audio-visual materials into their teaching, and consider the students’ interests and proficiency levels when selecting teaching materials.

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1. Introduction

It is widely recognized that second language and foreign language learners should be the central focus in language teaching and learning. Currently, linguists, especially socio-psychologists and researchers, are conducting studies to explore the socio-psychological variables that significantly influence foreign and second language learning.

Even most of the influential linguists consider FL learning as a socio-psychological phenomena and ‘motivation’ as the key to the learning process. Researches have shown that learners with high motivation tend to perform better in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) compared to those with lower motivation.

For the last four decades motivation has been extensively investigated in second and foreign language as an influential factor (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011; Lee, Yu & Liu, 2017). Unluckily, its “gloomy site” has not been widely recognized (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011). Demotivation that has been specified by Dornyei and Ushioda (2011, p138) as the “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action” is commonly presumed that decrease or reduce the motivational source of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action”, is widely believed that lessen students’ growth by neutralizing the positive influence of motivation. (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009).

In the meantime, demotivation has lately involved researchers’ attention in the field of second and foreign language learning, they have been outlining the conception of demotivation from two angles. For some investigators, such as Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011, Sakai and Kikuchi, 2009, and Tuan. 2011, demotivation has been considered as a specific concept that is different from L2 and FL learning motivation. So, the focus of research on demotivation has not been on how L2 and FL motivation types, like intrinsic/extrinsic and instrumental/integrative, change, but on factors that make FL learners prevent learning the target language (Kim & Kim, 2013).

In conclusion, many studies have been conducted to explore demotivation factors in learning second and foreign languages. This article explores the factors which influence learning English negatively in Afghanistan contexts.

By understanding the demotivation factors clearly, teachers and learners can better cope with them and work towards achieving ideal results. The researchers hope that by conducting this study, they can address the demotivational factors faced by Afghan EFL students and contribute to their overall language learning experience. Th followings are research objectives of the study:

1. To identify the demotivating factors affecting English language learning among EFL students at Jawzjan University.

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2. To explore the motivating factors that positively influence English language learning among EFL students at Jawzjan University.
3. To identify effective strategies for re-motivating the demotivated EFL students at Jawzjan University.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The importance of motivation

Motivation is often described as the driving force that moves our world forward, as noted by (Gearcia Cerdan, 2017). In the context of education, motivation plays a vital role and is considered a necessary element for quality learning. It is one of the key factors that significantly impact both teachers and learners, ultimately influencing the success of the teaching and learning processes (Filgona, Sakiyo, Gwany & Okoronka, 2020). Motivation is particularly important when individuals face challenges in various settings, such as schools, factories, and educational centers. It serves as the fuel that propels learners towards their goals. Without sufficient motivation, learners may struggle to achieve their objectives, potentially hindering the learning process.

2.2 Related Studies

Demotivating factors can vary from person to person and from one educational context to another. Each classroom is composed of learners with diverse characteristics such as age, beliefs, gender, academic performance, and socio-economic status, and these diversities can impact the factors that demotivate language learning. Researchers have focused on understanding these differences, leading to numerous studies exploring the negative influences on language learning.

Bekleyen (2011) conducted an investigation to identify the factors that demotivate Turkish university students learning English as a foreign language. The study revealed that insufficient use of technology, inadequate textbooks, ineffective teaching approaches, and negative teacher behavior were major demotivating factors for learners in the context of learning English as a foreign language.

Similarly, Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012) examined the negative factors affecting language learners' speaking abilities from both students' and teachers' perspectives. The results from student questionnaires highlighted three affective factors that hindered speaking proficiency: the teacher, teaching equipment, and classroom environment.

In a study by Meshkat and Hassani (2012), the focus was on understanding why students feel demotivated in language classrooms. The findings revealed that demotivation stems from various sources, including the learning context and materials, teachers' competence and teaching styles, insufficient school facilities, lack of intrinsic motivation, and the weight given to test scores.

These related studies provide insights into the demotivating factors that affect English language learning. They highlight the importance of addressing these factors in order to create a more conducive and motivating learning environment for language learners.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive research design to determine the demotivating factors of students in learning the English language. The participants were selected from different classes in the English Department. The researcher employed an open-ended questionnaire consisting of three sections: motivating

factors, demotivating factors, and solutions for re-motivating demotivated learners.

3.2 Sampling

The study employed a purposive sampling method to select the subjects. Purposive sampling method is commonly used in qualitative research to select participants based on their potential to provide the researcher with the necessary information to answer research questions (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). In this study, eighteen students were selected using the purposive sampling method. The table 1 illustrates demographic information of interviewees.

Table 1: Participants class distribution and age Group

Class	No of Participants	Age Group
4 th class	5	22-25
3 rd class	4	17-21
2 nd class	4	17-21
1 st class	5	17-21
Total	18	

According to the data presented in Table 1, a total of 18 interviewees participated in the study. Among them, 5 interviewees were from the 4th class, 4 interviewees were from the 3rd class, 4 interviewees were from the 2nd class, and 5 interviewees were from the 1st class.

In terms of age groups, all of the participants from the 4th class fell into the 22-25 age group, while the rest of the participants were in the 17-21 age group. It is important to note that all of the participants in the study were male and had different years of studying experience.

4. Findings

4.1 Findings on first question: *What other things demotivate you in learning English except the factors which are mentioned in the survey questionnaire?*

The first question asked participants to identify factors that demotivated them. The goal of this question was to understand the interviewees' perceptions of other demotivating factors. Based on their responses, there were varying views among the interviewees. The findings can be categorized into several parts.

Four participants mentioned economic challenges as a demotivating factor. They explained that financial constraints prevented them from dedicating sufficient time to study outside of class and covering study expenses. For instance, participant (FCP2) stated:

I cannot study systematically due to economic problems that I face with.

Another one (FOCP1) stated:

Decreasing employment facilities after the last political changes in the country demotivated me to study English.

Furthermore, (FOCP2) believed that:

Learning English idioms, expressions and slangs which are mostly used by native speakers makes me confused and demotivated. Also, native speakers of English mostly use abbreviations; understanding abbreviations is also a challenging and confusing part of learning English.

Also, participant (FCP3) expressed his idea

Low prestigious of teachers in the society due to the poor life condition and low required score of education faculty in university national entrance exam.

To sum up the rest of the participants' demotivating factors were mainly related to the teachers and curriculum such as: lack of family and teachers support, negative teachers' feedback, comparing students with each other and excessive of nonprofessional courses in the curriculum.

The above stated perceptions of the participants revealed different demotivation factors for learning English in Afghan EFL learners.

4.2 Findings n second question: *With regard to what you have heard from friends around you, can you mention any other factors having some negative effects on their learning?*

As the result of conducted studies showed the demotivating factors differ from one person to another and from one context to another. Also conducting research is a new phenomenon in Afghan society. Although identity of participants is kept secret again sometimes the subjects of studies do not express the reality. The aim of researcher for asking this question is to infer their opinion about the question indirectly. The participants' perceptions in this question also differ and can be classified into the following categories such as: cultural differences of English speaking nations with Afghans, economic problems, utilizing local languages in the classroom and lack of opportunities to use English out of the classroom. For example, participant (**FOCP1**) stated:

Cultural and structural differences between English language and English-speaking nations with Afghan cultures and languages and lack of sufficient information about the dominance and prestigious of English language in international level makes the learners to be demotivated in studying English.

Another participant (**TCP1**) expressed his idea about:

Utilizing local languages during English courses by teachers and students, and code switching especially with teachers in intermediate and advanced level classes are the main demotivating factors for learning English.

Moreover, participant (**SCP3**) believes that

Lack of studying English background, facing with challenges for learning English in intermediate and advanced level and having a bias for learning English as the language of non-Muslim nations are the main factors of demotivating for learning English for some students.

4.3 Findings on third question: *What are the factors causing motivation in your studies especially in English courses?*

The aim of this question was to discover the interviewees' perceptions about the factors which lead them to be motivated in learning English. Their perceptions regarding motivating factors are categorized into 5 elements including recognizing the dominance of English language as the language of higher education, business, employment requirement, having experienced and high qualified teachers, teachers and parents' encouragement, series of standard and up to date textbooks and having specific goal for learning; motivate them to study English.

For example, participant (**SCPI**) stated:

Recognizing global prestige of English language as the language of higher education, business, politics and technology, also employment opportunities for the people who knows English in the future moreover having a specific aim for learning English can be main motivating factors for learning English.

Another participant (**SCP2**) explained that:

As my point of view, three things motivate us for learning English including: family encouragement, success of English Dept. graduates in working good positions in national and international organizations and making good money, and the last one is having high qualified and commitment lecturers in English Dept. motivate us for learning English.

Moreover, another participant (**TCP3**) expressed his opinion about

By seeing perfect and successful English graduates from our department, and having a standard different English courses textbooks and high qualified teachers; I become motivated in my studies.

To sum up there are not much more differences in factors which motivate the learners for studying English.

4.4 Finally, forth question is about the solutions to motivate the students. The aim of this question was to find out the ways to motivate the demotivated students in learning English. This part can be classified into explaining the dominance of English in different fields of our lives and consider the interest of the learners in selecting teaching materials, encouraging the learners by their teachers and parents, providing audio-visuals learning tools for learners and lessening nonprofessional courses in the curriculum. For example: one of the participants (**FOCP1**) said:

Explaining the importance and dominance of English language for the students and determining the students' interest in selecting the teaching materials and focusing more on authentic materials.

Furthermore, another learner (**FOCP2**) believed that

Encouraging the learners by their teachers and parents, explaining the significance and dominance of English language in world level and employment opportunities for the people who knows English; could be a good strategy to motivate students for learning English.

Another participant (**SCP2**) expressed his opinion like this:

Providing tools, facilities and opportunities for the students to study and be involved with individuals who knows English outside of the classroom like opening language lab in Dept. with extra learning classes beside of textbook in curriculum, can be solutions for keeping students motivated.

In the same vein participant (**TCP4**) expressed:

Explain the importance and dominance of English for the students and according to the English dept. curriculum the students have to study some more university inclusive courses, those courses should be taught in English as well. Also, spreading English speaking culture inside and outside of the classes and making speaking English compulsory to the students of English dept. To finalize learners, have many other strategies to motivate the learners to study English including: focusing more on authentic materials for selecting teaching textbooks.

The perceptions of the rest of the participants can be concluded as follow; establishing a friendly relationship with learners, government should give more importance to education faculty graduates, applying students-centered method in the class, keeping the students busy inside and outside of the class by giving much more assignments, providing language lab for English Dept. students and establishing an association with English speaking people through internet and etc.

In conclusion, if the demotivation factors determine clearly, it helps the teachers and learners to cope with and assist them to achieve ideal results.

5. Discussion

Based on the data collected from the open-ended interview questions, it is evident that motivation plays a crucial role in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning process. The findings of the study are organized into four sections: demotivating factors, factors that demotivate other EFL learners, motivating factors, and solutions for motivating demotivated students in learning English.

As a result, the findings of first question, shows that most of the findings of the study is not similar with other studies findings in different parts of the world. The major demotivating factors is lack of information about the dominance and importance of English language, lack of family support, lack of specific aim. Economic challenges were also identified as a significant demotivating factor, which aligns with previous research by Sahragard and Ansaripour (2014). Other demotivating factors were related to teachers and the curriculum, including negative feedback, comparison among students, and an excessive focus on nonprofessional courses. These findings are consistent with studies conducted by (Xiao, 2012; Al-Khairy, 2013; Ghonsooly et al., 2017; Adara, 2018; Sinha & Bagarukayo, 2019; Fathi et al., 2019). However, it is noteworthy that the economic problem was considered the most important factor in contrast to previous studies, which highlighted experiences with failure, lack of intrinsic motivation, and negative attitudes towards foreign language learning (Ghadirzadeh et al., 2012; Vakilifard et al., 2020, Zhang et al., 2020).

By evaluating the findings of the study, it can be inferred that in some cases these students feel themselves guilty for demotivation because learning was generally supposed as their own accountability, as advocated by many participants in this study.

Furthermore, participants reported on the demotivating factors affecting their friends' English learning. Economic problems were identified as a significant challenge, which is in line with Sahragard and Ansaripour's (2014) study on demotivating factors among Iranian MA students. Another demotivating factor mentioned was the use of local languages in primary English classes and a lack of opportunities to practice English outside the classroom. This finding contrasts with Rahman's (2005) study. Cultural differences were also identified as a demotivating factor, which aligns with Aydin's (2012) study on demotivating factors among Turkish learners.

The third section focuses on the motivating factors for learners to study English. The findings indicate that recognizing the dominance of English as an international language and its importance for employment in NGOs, as well as having specific goals, serve as motivating factors. This finding is consistent with Farooq et al.'s (2020) study conducted in Pakistan. Another salient motivating factor for Afghan EFL learners is having experience and high qualified teachers. As Murad et al., (2021) believes that teachers should be encouraged to have a positive attitude towards teaching English. They should try to create a positive learning environment that raises motivation and engagement. It is reverse of Waqasia Naem (2023) findings that one of the salient demotivation factors for learning English is teachers. Lastly, up-to-date textbooks and the success of department graduates in securing good positions with high salaries were identified as motivators. This finding contrasts with the demotivating role of textbooks highlighted by Waqasia Naem (2023). As it is inferred

from subjects' statements. They are happy with their teachers and English courses textbooks.

The final section explores the participants' suggestions for motivating demotivated learners. It was found that explaining the importance and dominance of the English language, which in line with findings of (Farooq et al. 2020). From participants responses it is concluded that they do not know the importance of English language. Another key demotivating factor for learner is the teachers and parents' encouragement. The findings are consistent with previous research as Esra & Sevilen (2021) believes "it is important for English teachers to incorporate more interactive and participatory activities in their teaching methods to make learning more engaging and interesting for their students". Learners with great motivation to learn English as a foreign language become effective language learners and finally acquire foreign language proficiency. Another motivating tool for learners is selecting teaching materials and activities based on the real needs and interest of the learners. It is similar with the suggestions of Hawraz Qader Hama (2022) as he suggests that "Foreign language, classroom materials should be chosen in a way that reflects the students' needs, interests and real-world issues." From the findings of this study inferred those English teachers in designing teaching-learning contexts that are interesting and can boost student's confidence in using English as a foreign language. It is also beneficial to policymakers and curriculum developers so that necessary policies may be implemented to improve learning centers facilities, teaching strategies, and learning content and context.

The last suggestions of the students for motivating the students are decreasing nonprofessional subjects. In literature review of this point the researcher couldn't find any study. It may be the first study in English language and literature Dept. that learners complain about the excessive of nonprofessional courses. From my professional experience in credit system the number of basic subjects should be 60% of curriculum.

Table 2. Students' perspective on the major sources of their demotivation and solutions for re-motivating the demotivated students

Sources of demotivation factors	Factors motivate the students	Solutions
1. Economic problems	1. Understanding dominance of English language	1. Explain the dominance of English language in international level
2. Lack of employment facilities in the future	2. Experienced and high qualified teachers	2. Motivating students with parents and teachers
3. Lack of information about the dominance of English language in international level	3. Standard and up to date teaching textbooks	3. Providing audio-visual tools, spreading English speaking culture in department and classes
4. Lack of aim for learning	4. Having specific goals for learning	4. Establishing a link between native speakers of English with students, whether face to face or through social sites
5. Lack of family and teachers' support	5. Teachers and family encouragement	5. Decreasing nonprofessional courses in the curriculum
6. Learning English is difficult		
7. Excessive of nonprofessional subjects in the curriculum		
8. Negative feedbacks of teachers		
9. Comparing students with each other		
10. Main focus is on academic English		

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of this study revealed that students in the English Language and Literature Department at Jawzjan University face several demotivating factors in their English language learning journey. These factors include a lack of information about the importance of English, a lack of support from teachers and family, economic problems, an excessive focus on nonprofessional courses, the use of local languages in English classes, a lack of opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, and minority of the participants stated some demotivating factors related to the teachers including negative feedback of teachers, comparing students with each other.

On the other hand, the study also identified motivating factors that can help re-motivate the demotivated learners. These factors include explaining the global importance of English, having highly qualified and experienced teachers, setting specific goals for learning English, using standardized and relevant textbooks, and providing encouragement from both teachers and family members.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made. English teachers should consider providing meaningful feedback to students, incorporating audio-visuals materials into their teaching methods, and selecting teaching materials that align with students' interests and proficiency levels. Besides teachers should give information about the dominance of English language in international level. Parents can also play a vital role by encouraging and supporting their children in their English language learning journey. The last recommendation goes to the policy makers and curriculum designers to reduce nonprofessional courses in English Dept. curriculum. Finally, the researcher suggests that university administrators provide facilities for EFL students to have contact with native speakers whether face to face or through social sites.

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