

Demotivating Factors Affecting EFL Learning of Iranian Seminary Students

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Abstract

In the present study, an attempt has been made to determine the demotives affecting EFL learning of Iranian Islamic seminary students and also to distinguish the motivated and demotivated EFL learners in terms of their EFL learning as the major focus of this study. Fifty Iranian EFL seminary students were investigated using two validated questionnaires. First a modified version of The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery Questionnaire (AMTB) originally developed by Gardner (2004) was used to determine the degree of learners' motivation. Second a modified version of Warrington's (2005) questionnaire was administered to determine the demotivating factors from the students' point of view. Then, the IOPT (Interchange Objective Placement Test) was administered to measure the general proficiency of the subjects under study. The comparison of the IOPT score means of the two groups revealed a significant difference in the results of IOPT of students with higher scores in the AMTB and those with lower scores. That is, the more motivated the students were, the higher their IOPT scores were. Furthermore, factors such as the improper method of English teaching, frequency of classes in a week, problems in understanding listening materials and lack of use of English in students' real life were found to be the essential demotivating factors among Iranian seminary students. Having known the barriers of learning, the teachers and Islamic Propagation Office materials developers can organize their activities so that they would lead to better understanding of the lessons and improvement of teaching programs.

Keywords: Motivation, Demotivation, Demotives, Iranian EFL seminary students

1. Introduction

It is strongly believed that motivation plays a critical role in academic learning in general and in specific it is true of the "sustained process of mastering an L2" (Dörnyei, 2005, p.616). Longman dictionary of contemporary English (2007) defines motivation as: "Eagerness and willingness to do something without needing to be told or force to do it." The term motivation is used constantly in everyday and professional contexts but defining motivation precisely is a demanding task due to its complex and multifaceted nature (Dörnyei, 2001). Motivation with respect to language learning poses even a more challenging dilemma because compared to other school subjects, learning a language presents a unique situation due to its role and nature (Dörnyei 1994). Thus far most of the motivation research has focused on well-adjusted students who are successful in school, however; successful students differ from their less-successful peers in many ways. Dörnyei (2005, p.143) defines demotivation as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action" These negative external factors include items such as the class environment, teaching situations, methods, teacher's behavior and etc.

It is worth to explain that seminary students are those religious students studying theology in theology schools. Because of personal interest or being interested to learn English to propagate Islam, the students included in the research study English in Islamic propagation office which is the center for extra school studies of seminary students. Not all of these students seem sufficiently interested in pursuing L2 learning, therefore, an effort has been made in this study to identify the demotives negatively influencing their EFL learning.

2. Review of Literature

Over the last twenty years, research on motivation for foreign language learning has evolved considerably from focusing on describing what composes student motivation to a detailed and elaborated list of suggestions that help teachers initiate, and further promote student motivation. However, because of the novelty of the term *demotivation* not much research has been conducted on the subject. To put it another way, despite the probable importance of demotivation in learning in general, and L2 and FL learning in particular, to date few studies have focused on student demotivation. This section deals with the previous studies on motivation and demotivation.

Falouta, Elwoodband and Hood (2009) conducted a study on 900 university EFL learners to investigate demotivating factors in learning EFL in Japan, and the relationship between past demotivating experiences and present proficiencies. In their study, demotivating factors were grouped into three categories: external conditions of the learning environment, internal conditions of the learner, and reactive behaviors to demotivating experiences. Internal and reactive factors were shown to correlate with long-term EFL learning outcomes.

Trang and Baldauf (2007) did an investigation on demotivation involving Vietnamese students from a university of economics, with three main foci: (i) the reasons (i.e. the demotives) underlying demotivation, (ii) the degree of influence of different motives and (iii) student's experiences in overcoming demotivation.

Kebrawi (2006) studied demotivation of Arab learners of English. Participants in the study were 294 Arab learners of English in Israel in years 9 and 10 (15 and 16 years old). The demotivating factors that students referred to and that were related to teachers were classified into two main groups: teachers' style, i.e. the way they taught and presented the material to students, and personality traits, i.e. the way they behaved with students. Furthermore other factors such as textbooks and evaluation system were identified by learners as demotivating.

Lantolf and Genung (2002) conducted a case study of a graduate student learning Chinese as a foreign language in a summer intensive course. They found that the learner became demotivated because of the teacher's authoritative use of power.

Dorniyei (2001) conducted a research on 50 secondary school pupils in Budapest who were studying either English or German as their second language. The data were collected through structured interview. He identified the teacher, lack of self confidence, negative attitudes toward L2, compulsory nature of L2 study, interference of other languages, negative attitudes towards L2 community, attitudes of group members, course book and inadequate school facilities as nine demotivating factors.

Oxford (1998) took into account the time factor. She recognized that some of demotivating factors include: the teacher, the textbook, negative classroom activities, defective equipment, and inappropriate tasks.

Takako (2005) studied the influence of teacher on learner motivation in an L2 classroom. The purpose of this paper is to survey existing research on teacher influence on learner motivation in an L2 language classroom. The findings showed that teachers have considerable influence on learner motivation and that several general implications exist pertinent to classroom practice.

Kiss and Nikolov (2005) explored the relationship between the aptitude scores of 419 Hungarian primary-school children on English proficiency tests and a designated measure of their motivation. The results showed that the variable of language aptitude was responsible for over 20% of the variation in English language performance, while motivation was also significant as it explained about 8% of the variation.

Vázquez, Paulina, Guzmán and Rodríguez (2010) conducted a small scale investigation into Mexican university students' language learning motivation. The participating students in this research identified teacher-specific motivational components and group-specific motivational components as the two most influential factors from their learning context in determining their L2 learning motivation levels.

A review of the existing literature on demotivation suggests further research on the field. As can be seen, although some of the previously mentioned studies explored the demotivating factors and tried to distinguish them in different contexts. No study was done in Iranian context regarding demotivation. Along with these studies, in the current research an attempt was made to investigate the term demotivation among Iranian seminary students and also to see the influence of demotivation on EFL learning of Iranian seminary students.

3. Statement of the Problem

A number of studies including Gardner (1985), Domyel (2001), Csizer and Kormos (2008), and Vázquez, Paulina, Guzmán and Rodríguez (2010) have been conducted to determine whether the student's motivation has any significant impact on their learning or not. Despite the fact that such studies have been done on the effect of motivation on learning, the negative side of this term, namely, demotivation has been underestimated. The majority

of the studies in this field show that increased motivation has a positive effect on EFL learning; on the other hand studies on demotivation are not too many. It seems that more studies should be done to further illustrate it.

The review of the previous literature suggests that no study focusing on the identification of L2 learning demotives has been conducted in Iranian Islamic seminary schools. Therefore, the present study aimed at determining the impact of demotivation on EFL learning of Iranian seminary students. Moreover, this study intended to investigate the factors that serve as common barriers to learning from the students' points of view. This study also aimed to find out whether there is a meaningful relationship between the amount of motivation and the performance of Iranian Seminary EFL learners in IOPT tests.

3.1 Research Questions

The following questions were addressed in the current study:

1. What are the demotivating factors affecting EFL learning of Iranian Islamic seminary students?
2. Is there any meaningful difference between EFL achievement of the motivated and demotivated Islamic seminary students?

3.2 Research Hypotheses

Accordingly, based on the above questions the following hypothesis is formulated:

1. There is no significant difference between EFL achievement of the motivated and demotivated seminary students.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

The study was done on 50 Iranian EFL seminary students aged between 20 and 30, employing two questionnaires and an interview. The participants were all male students who came from different Islamic seminary schools located in the Province of Isfahan selected through simple random sampling from among Iranian Islamic seminary students who were studying English in Isfahan Propagation Office. Three teachers and the head of the foreign language department in Isfahan Islamic Propagation Office also participated in this study, answering some open-ended questions to add more insight to the investigated issue.

4.2 Instruments

The following instruments were employed in this study:

4.2.1 Attitude/Motivation Test Battery

In order to distinguish between motivated and demotivated students under study, Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) questionnaire (Gardner, 2004) was employed. The original questionnaire includes 116 items (showing how some students feel about EFL learning) out of which 70 items were chosen and the rest were deleted because some items were too lengthy and some culture-bound. The items of the questionnaire were translated into Persian in order to prevent any L2 misunderstanding; then they were checked by two Persian language teachers and a translation instructor in order to make sure that the items retained their essential meaning and that the translated version was easily understood. To ascertain the reliability of the items, a pilot study was conducted with 30 Islamic seminary students who were not supposed to take part in the main experiment. In order to obtain a cut-off point to distinguish the motivated students from the demotivated ones, the mean score of the pilot study was computed and the score of 203 was obtained and was set as the cut-off point.

4.2.2 Modified Version of Stuart D. Warrington's Questionnaire

In order to identify the demotivating factors, the modified version of Warrington's (2005) questionnaire was applied. This 22 - item questionnaire was originally applied in a Japanese context; therefore, some items included in this questionnaire had to be modified and adapted to the Iranian culture.

In addition to this questionnaire, a semi-structured interview was held with the participants to deepen the results gained through the questionnaires. To collect more data for better distinguishing the demotivating factors, three teachers and the head of the foreign language department in Islamic Propagation Office participated in this study, and an interview was conducted with them.

4.2.3 The IOPT (Interchange Objective Placement Test)

In order to identify the English knowledge of the participants, a general English proficiency test (Interchange Placement Test– Interchange Placement and Evaluation Package, Third Edition- 2005) was applied. This test was composed of 3 sections including the listening section (20 questions), the reading section (20 questions) and the language use section (30 questions). All the items were multiple-choice questions.

4.3 Procedures

The current study employed a hybrid method design which included both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Such a method integrates both approaches to provide a much more detailed and comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under investigation. In this study the qualitative data were gathered through an interview and two questionnaires to boost understanding and interpretation of the results.

In the first stage 50 participants from among Iranian Islamic seminary students in Isfahan, Iran were selected through simple random sampling. Then the researcher distributed the questionnaire about demotivating factors in which the learners were asked to choose the reason or reasons they might not learn English as efficiently as their other courses and determine the demotivating factors faced by the English language learners from their own point of view. It was based on the principle of measuring the essential factors affecting learner demotivation. This questionnaire was a modified version of that of Warrington (2005) and included 22 items. The items of the questionnaire were translated into Persian in order to prevent any L2 misunderstanding and that the items are easily understood. The participants were given the questionnaire while they attended the English class (in a 20 minute time allocated), and they were supposed to select from among the 22 items 5 items which best represented the reasons they felt uneasy with English and did not learn it as easily as their other courses.

In the next stage, the modified version of Gardner's Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) questionnaire was applied to understand which students were motivated and which ones were not. This questionnaire which included 70 Likert items described how some students felt about EFL learning. Then the students were interviewed to find out if they could present any other demotivating factor besides those included in the questionnaires and if they had any other opinion which might enhance the results obtained from the questionnaires.

After identifying the students' opinions and attitudes, three English teachers— who were selected according to their long-time experiences— and the head of the foreign language department were interviewed to elicit their opinions about the demotivating factors affecting the English learning of Iranian Seminary students.

Finally a general English proficiency test, namely, Interchange Objective Placement Test (IOPT) was administered to check the students' English proficiency. This test, which comprised three sections, took 50 minutes to complete— 15 minutes for listening, 20 minutes for reading, and 15 minutes for language use.

4.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered through the questionnaires and the interviews were tabulated for the ease of application. To accept or reject the stated hypothesis, the collected data were analyzed by independent sample t-tests to find the difference in the performances of the students in the two groups. All the statistical procedures were conducted by SPSS software version 16. Moreover, the data were analyzed qualitatively and the answers were considered with scrutiny to find out the real demotivating reason prevailing among the Islamic Seminary students studying English in the Isfahan Propagation Office.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Results

5.1.1 Investigating the First Research Question

As it was mentioned in the previous section, the modified version of the questionnaire devised by Warrington (2005) was used to gather the data on demotivating factors and to find out the factors that negatively affected students' motivation. Some items of this questionnaire were modified and some new items were added to make it compatible with the context of Iranian students. Table 1 indicates the results of this questionnaire (see appendix 1).

As it is shown in Table 1 (appendix 1), some items are determined to be the main demotivating factors from the students' point of view. The first five more frequently mentioned factors are as follows:

Item number 18: Because the frequency of classes is high in a week. (54%)

Item number 14: Because there are more important subjects for me to study. (52%)

Item number 5: Because English is not used in my daily life. (50%)

Item number 3: Because I don't have enough self confidence. (48%)

Item number 8: Because of the difficulties in understanding what I listen in English. (42%)

In addition to administering the demotivation questionnaire, to assess the demotivating factor from students' eyes, a semi-structured interview was held by three English teachers and the head of foreign language department in Isfahan Islamic Propagation Office.

Seminary students stated the following items as demotivating:

1. No focusing on or mentioning the results of the missions performed by seminary students who had been sent to foreign countries for the purpose of propagation.
2. No continuous and practical elaboration by Seminary school professors and Islamic Propagation Office about the necessity of learning English as a foreign language.
3. Boredom and tiredness caused by theological lessons taught in Seminary schools.
4. Shortage of time for studying.
5. Too much engagement of students at school and extra school classes.
6. Teacher's behavior toward students (teacher's focus on good students)
7. Not providing enough encouragement on the side of Seminary schools and Islamic Propagation Office.
8. Laziness of the Seminary students.
9. The teaching methodology which doesn't focus on grammar.
10. Difficulty of speaking in front of others and also not taking the classes seriously.
11. Length of the course
12. Crowdedness of the classes.
13. Lack of enough motivation.
14. Not paying enough attention to the selection and screening processes of students in the English course.

Moreover, three teachers teaching at Islamic Propagation Office as well as the head in charge of the foreign language department at the time of conducting the study were interviewed about the causes of demotivation among students. They found the following items as demotivating:

1. Most of the students who enter seminary school have the purpose of improvement in the field of missionary practices and their future viewpoint is that they are going to be the instructors of seminary school. So learning language has no place in this respect.
2. The teaching materials and the books used to teach English are developed by the people from the west and they are based on the prevailing culture there; therefore, such themes are not pleasant for most of the seminary students who don't even listen to music.
3. There is no correspondence between Arabic, being the language of missionary, and English. This fact is a demotivating factor on the side of students.
4. In other fields of study rather than Islamic theology taught in seminary schools, the sources and references are in English; therefore, the students of those fields are basically motivated to learn English for the purpose of continuing their special course. But the sources of the subjects taught in seminary schools are in Arabic and this will not necessitate learning English, although there are lots of sources of missionary and theological subjects in English including some Islamic encyclopedias. Most Islamic seminary students are not well aware of this fact; hence, they do not pay attention to learning English. These students consider such materials and such sources to have anti-religious entity, so they do not embark on studying them.
5. Seminary students have to study for 10 years, 5 hours each day to get the equivalent degree of M.A. Taking this into account; seminary students are not comparable with other students. Moreover, seminary students get married earlier than others so they have to work hard to handle their life and this will leave no extra time to study English.
6. Generally speaking, the students at seminary schools teach the subjects they learn after almost a short time, but regarding English this trend is different and they have almost no chance to teach English in a very short time (except for few very talented students). This may lead to the lack of motivation in the process of learning language.
7. There are some pictures and some songs in the teaching material of English which, according to Islamic thought, are prohibited; this can act as another hindrance to learning English.
8. The tuition dedicated to seminary students is not enough to make a living, the students have to work in other places to be able to provide money for their life, and therefore they do not have enough time to study English.
9. English has no use in their daily life, so there is no motivation to learn English.
10. Learning another language in general, and English in particular, takes much time and the length of English course can lead to loss of motivation.

11. Most of the students expect to be sent to other countries for the purpose of propagation, and since this is not possible for all the students, it leads to the lack of motivation.
12. Screening of seminary students to English classes is incorrect.
13. There is lack of motivation that should be presented to seminary students volunteer to study English by professors and scholars at Seminary school. Fortunately, this trend is changing positively.
14. Seminary students' familiarity and background of English is weak and insufficient.

5.1.2 Answering the Second Research Question

The other part of the current study investigated the impact of demotivation on EFL learning of Iranian Seminary students. This section comprised two stages; first, the students who were demotivated were to be distinguished from those who were not. To this end, the AMTB was run, and then the students were given the IOPT to see if there was a significant difference between the performances of the students in the two groups, namely, the group with high scores in the AMTB ($n=28$) and those with low scores in the AMTB ($n=22$). Tables 3 and 4 (appendix 1) report the scores of the participants in AMTB and IOPT and Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for the IOPT scores.

Table 4 (appendix 1) clearly indicates that the means of the two groups are different. In order to find out whether or not this difference is statistically significant, a t-test was employed. Table 5 (appendix 1) shows the results of this t-test.

By looking at Table 5 (appendix 1), one can clearly see that the amount of $t_{observed}$ ($t_{observed} = .7454$) is statistically significant at the probability level of $p = .000$. In other words, it can be claimed that the highly demotivated participants did more poorly on the proficiency test than less demotivated participants. Therefore, the null hypothesis of the study which stated that "there is no significant difference between EFL achievement of the motivated and demotivated Seminary students" can safely be rejected. In other words, it can be said that motivation and demotivation are determining factors in EFL proficiency achievement.

5.2 Discussion

According to this study the major demotivating factors which lead to frustration and undesired outcome among Iranian EFL seminary students were the frequency of English classes during week, other important subjects to be studied, the shortage of time and lack of English usage in students' daily lives, and the desire to be sent to other countries to propagate Islam. The results of the present study are in line with the study conducted by Joseph Falou (2004), James Elwood and Michael Hood (2009), in which they found that demotivating factors were grouped into three categories: external conditions of the learning environment, internal conditions of the learner, and reactive behaviors to demotivating experiences.

Some participants also believed that teachers focus primarily on those students who are more competent and less successful students are underestimated. Some students have problem speaking before others in another language. Keblawi (2006) studied demotivation among Arab learners of English. He found (a.) demotivating factors related to the learning and (b.) demotivating factors related to the subject. The DF that students referred to and that were related to teachers were classified into two main groups: teachers' style, i.e. the way they taught and presented the material to students, and personality traits, i.e. the way they behaved with students. This result can be compared with the outcome of this thesis about the subject because some of the participants claimed that teachers' teaching style (focusing on good students) can be a demotivating factor.

The last point to be mentioned is that seminary students considered lack of self confidence as one of the most influential demotivating factors in learning EFL. It is in line with the study done by Keblawi (2003) which showed that Lack of self confidence derived from failure and lack of success is a factor that contributes to the demotivation on EFL learning.

6. Conclusion

What we can glean from all the above is that demotivation is a salient phenomenon that should concern every classroom practitioner. It goes without saying that it is a complex issue and the present analysis has not done much about it. There are so many factors that affect student motivation, not the least of which is the role of the teacher.

Demotivation is a frequent and common phenomenon in L2 learning. The results of previous studies have not only discovered some of the true nature of demotivation but also pointed out some effective strategies of reducing demotivation.

The study in hand aimed at finding the common factors that are perceived demotivating by Iranian EFL Seminary Students. The results of the study suggest that as with the other few studies in the field, factors like the high frequency of classes during a week, some more important subjects to be studied other than English, lack of English

usage in daily life, lack of enough self confidence among seminary students and finally difficulties in understanding what they listen to in English, could demotivate learners if they are perceived negatively. Through the data gathered, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was found that there are some demotivating factors that affect EFL learning. Also the results of the t. test which was run between the means of the reading scores of two groups offered that those students, whose AMTB score was higher, scored higher in proficiency test, too.

Skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness and English language teachers and policy makers should try to find out different strategies to motivate students to the greatest extent.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Table 1. The Frequency Distribution and Percentage of the Demotivating Factors for Students When Learning EFL (N=50)

Item Number	No. of students	Percent
1	10	20%
2	1	2%
3	24	48%
4	9	18%
5	25	50%
6	7	14%
7	7	14%
8	21	42%
9	12	24%
10	8	16%
11	8	16%
12	1	2%
13	10	20%
14	26	52%
15	14	28%
16	9	18%
17	16	32%
18	27	54%
19	9	18%
20	3	6%
21	9	18%
22	10	20%

Table 2. The AMTB and IOPT Scores of the Participants in the High Group

Student No.	AMTB score	IOPT score
1	243	42
2	206	34
3	243	30
4	225	30
5	224	34
6	211	44
7	222	24
8	229	38
9	219	42
10	227	42
11	222	36
12	214	40
13	209	48
14	219	48
15	213	48
16	207	50
17	214	48
18	211	34
19	213	34
20	226	34
21	229	38
22	233	42
23	235	48
24	206	48
25	214	42
26	217	50
27	219	53

Table 3. The AMTB and IOPT Scores of the Participants in the Low Group

Student No.	AMTB score	IOPT score
1	202	70
2	168	80
3	184	50
4	187	73
5	161	83
6	168	82
7	164	58
8	152	51
9	197	76
10	198	49
11	201	72
12	181	75
13	192	59
14	159	48
15	140	51
16	132	82
17	124	70
18	110	72
19	151	40
20	183	61
21	194	50
22	173	48

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for the IOPT

Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM
High	28	41.07	7.448	1.408
Low	22	63.64	13.665	2.913

Table 5. The Results of the t.test on the IOPT Means

t.observed	df	p	Mean Difference
.7454	48	.000	.22.56494

Appendix 2

(The modified Version of Passivity / De.Motivation Inventory (PDM Inventory)

Designed by: Stuart D. Warrington, Asia University, 2005

Translation of questionnaire: Dear student choose 5 of the 22 statements that you feel best represent the reasons you feel (or felt) passive or demotivated about studying English as a foreign language. Please enter the number of each statement in the boxes below.

A	B	C	D	E
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I feel/felt passive –demotivated about studying English.

1. Because only English grammar and reading are emphasized.

2. Because of social and religious reasons that make me hate English.
3. Because I have no confidence to learn it.
4. Because of my numerous spelling and grammatical errors.
5. Because I have no use of it in my life.
6. Because it is difficult and therefore stressful .
7. Because it is not fun and enjoyable to me.
8. Because of the difficulties in understanding what I listen in English.
9. Because I have never spoken to someone who speaks English.
10. Because I'm not used to English speaking people and their culture & customs.
11. Because I have no plan to go abroad or work with English speaking people.
12. Because learning English affects negatively my mother tongue.
13. Because I have never seen any improvement in my English language ability since the onset of my English language studies.
14. Because there are more important things for me to study.
15. Because the teacher of English speaks rapidly during the lesson.
16. Because there is no focus on oral skills (speaking & listening)
17. Because there is a great difference between what the teacher teaches and what is examined.
18. Because of the frequency of classes in a week (coming to class every day).
19. Because the number of lexical items which we should memorize is very long
20. Because the books are difficult and boring.
21. Because the teacher doesn't usually use the modern technological aids.
22. Because the teacher speaks Persian in class and not English.