Factorizing demotivation, finding motivation: A constructive approach to quality enhancement

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Abstract

Motivation comes before demotivation in teaching learning process. The present paper goes the other way round to first factorize the reasons of demotivation which limit the students’ performance and then finding motivation through best practices. Demotivation has not been extensively researched and discussed due to its negative orientation, though it plays an important role in the language learning process. The paper explores the issue of motivation-demotivation continuum so as to find remedy to demotivating factors. It investigates Saudi students’ perspective of demotivating factors through the use of open-ended questionnaire and follow-up interviews. These findings provide useful information and implications for teaching professionals. Many demotivating factors were identified and if controlled will eventually result in Quality enhancement.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of ALSC 2012

Keywords: Quality enhancement; teaching-learning; motivation; demotivation

1. Introduction

The current research paper is an outcome of our experience in teaching English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabian Universities. There have been several complaints made about the weakness in English of undergraduates in Saudi Universities who join the universities as English language learners. The problems are manifold; we cannot discuss all of them here, henceforth, in this paper, our focus will be on the demotivating factors affecting Saudi students’ motivation for learning English. Dornyei (2001:143) first broadly states that demotivation “concerns various negative influences that cancel out existing motivation,” but excludes affect as a stimulus by narrowing his definition to “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action”.

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The purpose of the present study is to explore the issue of motivation-demotivation continuum so as to find remedy to demotivating factors. It investigates Saudi students’ perspective of demotivating factors through the use of open-ended questionnaire and follow-up interviews. These findings provide useful information and implications for teaching professionals. Many demotivating factors were identified and if controlled will eventually result in quality enhancement.

2. Literature Review

Over the past decade, demotivation has been researched mostly in the area of instructional communication, for example, demotivators in lectures on communication at North American universities [1-2] and demotivators in university lectures in four different countries, China, Germany, Japan, and the USA [3].

Oxford [4] carried out an investigation on 250 American students about their learning experiences. During the investigation, students were expected to comment on a variety of topics such as to “describe a situation in which you experienced conflict with a teacher” and “talk about a classroom in which you felt uncomfortable.” Four types of demotivation factors were discovered: (a) the teacher’s personal relationship with the students, (b) the teacher’s attitude towards the course or the material, (c) style conflicts between teachers and students, (d) and the nature of the classroom activities. Many demotivators such as the teacher’s lack of caring or favoritism, the teacher’s lack of enthusiasm and sloppy management towards the course or the material, the conflicts about the degree of closure or seriousness of the class, and the amount of irrelevance and repetitiveness were found.

In the field of language teaching, Rudnai’s [5] and Dörnyei’s [6] studies were among the early attempts to investigate demotivation. In her investigation of why demotivated learners lost their motivation to study English, Rudnai [5] conducted interviews with 15 students. Following Dörnyei’s motivation model [7], she prepared interview guides covering demotivation at the language level, the learner level, and the learning situation level to find out if and why her participants had lost interest in English. Rudnai concluded that the most important elements her participants lacked concerned the learner’s proficiency levels and learning situation levels.

Dörnyei [3] utilized structured 10–30 min interviews with fifty secondary school students in Budapest, Hungary. The students were identified as being demotivated by their teachers or peers. The following nine demotivating factors were extracted and presented: (a) teachers’ personalities, commitments, competence, teaching methods, (b) inadequate school facilities, (c) reduced self-confidence due to their experience of failure or lack of success, (d) negative attitude toward the foreign language studied, (e) compulsory nature of the foreign language study, (f) interference of another foreign language that pupils are studying, (g) negative attitude toward the community in which English is spoken, (h) attitudes of group members, and (i) course books used in class. The first category, related to teachers, was observed most frequently, accounting for 40% of the reports.

Muhonen [8] explored demotivational factors that discouraged pupils from learning the English language. 91 ninth-graders studying English at Finnish comprehensive school were asked to complete a task. The pupils were simply asked to tell in their own words about issues at school that they felt had had a negative influence on their motivation to learn English. The demotivating factors that emerged from the answers were as follows: the teacher, learning material, learner characteristics, school environment, and learner’s attitude towards the English language. Regarding gender, the comparison of demotivating factors among the males and the females revealed only slight differences.

Kikuchi and Sakai [9] explored possible demotivating factors in high school English classes. 112 participants were asked to complete the questionnaire on the Internet. Using a principal axis factor analysis, they extracted five factors: (a) course books, (b) inadequate school facilities, (c) test scores, (d) noncommunicative methods, and (e) teachers’ competence and teaching styles. The results showed a
statistically significant difference among the five factors. They concluded that their participants considered the factor concerning inadequate school facilities to be less demotivating than the other four factors.

Rahman et al. [10] investigated motivating and de-motivating factors in learners and their impact on their achievement. The subject under focus was English (English as second language). The sample of study consisted of 100 students of higher secondary school. It was found that majority of students were motivated to learn English. The results of the study revealed a significant correlation between the motivation and academic achievement of the students. The study further revealed that there are significant gender differences in the motivational factors. However, the study did not find any significant gender differences in case of demotivational factors for learning English language.

3. Research Questions

Demotivating factors can be divided into internal factors (i.e. reduced self-confidence, attitudes of group members, etc.) and external factors (i.e. textbooks related issues, teachers’ personalities, etc.) The sources of internal factors are student themselves that lead to the negative outcome of learning process.

External factors are those resulting from the outside, the teachers, books, learning environment, etc. Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) believe that “Dornyei limited the original definition of demotivation to only external factors (i.e. demotivators) which reduce or diminish the motivation to study English” (p.58). The current study attempts to answer the following questions:

- What are the prominent demotivating factors in Saudi context?
- Shall we continue blowing the trumpet of students’ weakness or after recognizing the demotivation factors work on reducing the learner’s anxiety and demotivation?

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants
The participants of this research were 100 (Males) Bachelor degree students of English major in Al-Jouf University in Saudi Arabia.

4.2 Instruments
A demotivation questionnaire consisting of 30 open-ended questions belonging to ten different categories were asked, followed up by interviews. The data was collected in participants’ first language. Extensive interviews helped to get the apt responses for data collection. Considering the number of items, 30 minute was allocated for the students to answer the questionnaire.

4.3 Data Analysis
The results of both processes provide rich data to base our conclusions about the learners’ demotivation factors. The survey results were tabulated and interview scripts were analysed to find the percentages and frequencies of demotivating factors.

5. Results

Questions asked in the questionnaire followed up by an Interview are as follows:
1. Does the attitude of teacher demotivate you?
2. How important is it to have a friendly teacher?
3. How important is it to have a knowledgeable and experienced teacher?
4. You find the textbook difficult?
5. You think it is difficult for you to learn English?
6. You think your English wasn’t good until the end of high school?
7. You feel shy as no one in your class speaks English?
8. You feel classes focus on passing the University exam?
9. You feel English that is learnt is not practical?
10. Your friends see no scope studying this subject?
11. Your friends think that it is only a pass course?
12. It is more important for you to make friends than to get good grades?
13. You feel that there is lack of interaction between teacher and student?
14. You feel teachers’ teaching style is inappropriate?
15. You feel that the teacher is unable to convince you?
16. You find yourself completely lost how to prepare for lessons?
17. You cannot imbibe the whole information?
18. You feel that the material is too lengthy and inappropriate?
19. Technologies such as Internet, LCD, OHP are not used properly?
20. Lack of library makes you feel frustrated?
21. You feel conversational practice must be done using Audio-Visual aids?
22. You are made to work a lot and this system encourages memorization not integration?
23. The assignments given are too grammar centered?
24. We complete our assignments to make good grades in exam?
25. Reading English books or magazines
26. Watching English movies or TV News
27. Speaking in English with friends
28. My purpose is only to pass the course?
29. I have many problems to consider other than studies?
30. Even if I get good grades, it won’t help me much?

Table 2. Results of the interview for Factor 1.

| Teacher          | Q.1: Does the attitude of teacher demotivates you? | Q.2: How important is it to have a friendly teacher? | Q.3: How important is it to have a knowledgeable and experienced teacher? |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                  | *                                                | ****                                             | ****                                                                |

Note:
**** response from > 90% of respondents.
*** response from > 75% of respondents.
** response from > 50% of respondents.
* response from > 25% of respondents.

For the first factor, Teacher, three questions were asked and majority of the students liked teachers’ attitude except some students who had problem with teachers teaching style and behavior.

Table 3. Results of the interview for Factor 2:

| Course content | Q.1: You find the textbook difficult? | Q.2: You think it is difficult | Q.3: You think your English wasn’t good until the end of |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
for you to learn English? high school?

|        | **** | ** | **** |
|--------|------|----|------|

Note:
**** response from > 90% of respondents.
*** response from > 75% of respondents.
** response from > 50% of respondents.
* response from > 25% of respondents.

The results of Factor 2 shows that the Course Content in Saudi Universities highly discourage the students. It does not go with the previous knowledge of the student about the subject. The results make it clear that the English used in textbooks, is too hard for the student and hence a strong demotivator.

Table 4. Results of the interview for Factor 3:

**Classroom Environment**

| Q.1: You feel shy as no one in your class speaks English? | Q.2: You feel classes focus on passing the University exam? | Q.3: You feel English that is learnt is not practical? |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **                                                    | ***                                                     | **                                              |

Note:
**** response from > 90% of respondents.
*** response from > 75% of respondents.
** response from > 50% of respondents.
* response from > 25% of respondents.

The results of this section are of great interest in that the interviewees’ comments reflect the lack of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. This raises the question of how we should define these learner and how we should treat them.

Table 5. Results of the interview for Factor 4:

**Peer Influences**

| Q.1: Your friends see no scope studying this subject? | Q.2: Your friends think that it is only a pass course? | Q.3: It is more important for you to make friends than to get good grades? |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| *                                                    | ***                                                  | *                                                                      |

Note:
**** response from > 90% of respondents.
*** response from > 75% of respondents.
** response from > 50% of respondents.
* response from > 25% of respondents.

The results of Factor 4 reveal sharp contradiction in the results at individual level and the peer influence. Most of the students understand the need and scope of the subject but when it comes to cumulative result, they reflect effect of high peer influence.

Table 6. Results of the interview for Factor 5:

**Teacher-Student Rapport**
**Table 7. Results of the interview for Factor 6:**

| Q.1: You find yourself completely lost how to prepare for lessons? | Q.2: You cannot imbibe the whole information? | Q.3: You feel that the material is too lengthy and inappropriate? |
|---|---|---|
| **** | *** | **** |

Note:
**** response from > 90% of respondents.
*** response from > 75% of respondents.
** response from > 50% of respondents.
* response from > 25% of respondents.

The results of Factor 6 makes it clear, that the English used in textbooks is difficult and students express their incapability to imbibe the information. The long passages demotivates them and they find themselves lost in the way.

**Table 8. Results of the interview for Factor 7:**

| Q.1: Technologies such as Internet, LCD, OHP are not used properly? | Q.2: Lack of library makes you feel frustrated? | Q.3: You feel conversational practice must be done using Audio-Visual aids? |
|---|---|---|
| *** | ** | **** |

Note:
**** response from > 90% of respondents.
*** response from > 75% of respondents.
** response from > 50% of respondents.
* response from > 25% of respondents.

For this factor, most of the students expressed the need of use of technology in classroom.

**Table 9. Results of the interview for Factor 8:**

| Q.1: You are made to work a lot and this system encourages memorization not integration? | Q.2: The assignments given are too grammar centered? | Q.3: We complete our assignments to make good grades in exam? |
|---|---|---|
| ** | * | *** |

Note:
**** response from > 90% of respondents.
*** response from > 75% of respondents.
** response from > 50% of respondents.
* response from > 25% of respondents.

There are mixed results for this factor.
The results show that the students complete their assignment to get good grades rather than learning it for life time.

Table 10. Results of the interview for Factor 9:

| Preferred Use of English | Q.1: Reading English books or magazines | Q.2: Watching English movies or TV News | Q.3: Speaking in English with friends |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| *                        | **                                     | *                                      |

Note:  
**** response from > 90% of respondents.  
*** response from > 75% of respondents.  
** response from > 50% of respondents.  
* response from > 25% of respondents.

The results of Factor 9 are of great setback to EFL teacher wherein majority of the students answered negatively about their reading habits.

Table 11: Results of the interview for Factor 10:

| Individual's Belief | Q.1: My purpose is only to pass the course? | Q.2: I have many problems to consider other than studies? | Q.3: Even if I get good grades, it won't help me much? |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| ****                | ****                                     | ****                                                     | ****                                                   |

Note:  
**** response from > 90% of respondents.  
*** response from > 75% of respondents.  
** response from > 50% of respondents.  
* response from > 25% of respondents.

The results of Factor 10 are again depressing for teachers as students give more preference to social problems and family commitments to studies.

6. Discussion

Although the results of this study indicate that the teacher is not the most demotivating factor for learning English in the Saudi Universities, both qualitative and quantitative results show that considerable number of students still view teacher as a demotivator. The demotivating factors that students referred to and that were related to teachers could be classified into two main groups: teachers’ style, i.e. the way they taught and presented the material to students (rare use of technology and Arabic), and personality traits, i.e. the way they behaved with students. Generally, both variables (teacher’s personality and style) can play a negative role if received negatively by students.

In classes where students referred to their teachers as demotivators, they often agreed on the same aspects of their teachers’ personality or style that they perceived negatively. For example, most interviewed students referred to teacher-related demotivating factors and complained, particularly, about their teacher’s nervousness, inability to control the class and about the use of harsh words. It is worth mentioning that the demotivating elements which students attributed to teachers refer to the current and previous teachers.
As the teacher is the key of the teaching and learning process, his/her personality has great impact on the learners’ like or dislike for learning the related subject. Krashen (1987:32) states that “the effective language teacher is someone who can provide input and help make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation”.

In most Saudi Universities, English classes tend to be teacher-centered. It is observed that the teaching in Saudi remains very traditional with teacher-centred classes where memorization is emphasized. The teacher-centered atmosphere makes the students who can’t keep up with classes behave poorly, pay less attention and talk to each other’s and so on. In such an atmosphere the teacher considers the side talks among the students during the lesson a challenge or indifference.

Concerning correcting the students’ mistakes, teachers need to have students understand that they can learn through mistakes. Harmer (1999:100) claimed that “when second language learners make errors, they are demonstrating part of the natural process of language learning.” Additionally, Doyon (2000) shows that explicit error correction tends to make students feel they are criticized, and instead teachers should correct errors in indirect ways. For instance, if a student says, “I watch TV yesterday”, instead of pointing out the mistake, a teacher can say a correct sentence, ‘you watched TV yesterday’, in a non-threatening way. It should be realized that in a motivating and supportive classroom students feel comfortable taking risks and participating positively in the class activities because they know that they will not be criticized or embarrassed if they make mistakes.

As we live in the age of science and technology, it is unsurprising to find out that students like some technological devices (TV, video, computer and so on) to be utilized in their learning. This study revealed that 35% of the respondents feel demotivated toward learning English because their teachers rarely use technology in presenting the English lessons. Many different types of technology can be used to support and enhance learning. Everything from video content, laptop and projectors to language labs have been used in classrooms. Marshall (2002) found strong evidence that educational technology complements what a great teacher does naturally, extends his reach and broadens students experience beyond the classroom. With ever – spending content and technology choices, form video to multimedia to the internet, Marshall suggest that there’s an unprecedented need to understand the recipe the success, with involve the learner, the teacher, the content, and the environment in which technologies used.

The English teachers in Saudi Universities have to realize the basic role which technology can play in motivating the learners and reaching the teaching and learning process. The use of technology in classes will cause positive change in the educational process. The use of technology tends to foster collaboration among students, which in term may have a positive effect on student achievement (Tinzmann, 1998). Language learners can know learn through writing e - mail and conducting all line research (Wang, 2005). It is believe that Saudi students are a need of learning how to utilize some technological devices in their learning because they realize that they would benefit from technology in their higher studies and it is indispensible in their future practical life. Therefore, it can be said that the use of technology in classes co relates with students needs and goals; consequently the rare use of it makes the learners feel demotivated.

Chambers(1993) claim that there are various de motivating elements that can work differently with different students under different circumstances. Similar experiences that different students undergo can have different effects on them. Thiscliffe could be observe clearly where the teacher’s rare use of Arabic in English classes is viewed as motivating and demotivating at the same time in eyes of different students. Those who referred to the rare use of Arabic as a demotivating factor might aim to achieve short terms goals(passing the test) where as other students, in the same classes, referred to it as a demotivating factor since they wanted to communicate fluently and achieve real language acquisition.

Demotivation also resulted from the perceived difficulties of some subject related aspects gives consideration to intrinsic motivation and its role in the learning process. The survey and the interviews indicate that most students find it difficult to learn large number of new lexical items which should be memorized to enable them to read and write fluently and consequently to pass English tests. Although the students realize the importance of vocabulary when learning English, most of them learn vocabulary passively, as in the Saudi context, memorizing long list of words with meanings in the native language without any real context practice shoulders heavy burden on the learners and affects their motivation for learning the language. Most of the Saudi students view the study of grammar as tedious and there are frequent outcries about the difficulty of structures among the students. It is also noticed that Saudi
students dislike writing paragraphs and compositions because of fear of committing spelling mistakes which inevitably bring demotivation for learning English. Among the various reasons, Saudi students lack the habit of reading English newspaper, magazines and speaking in English to their friends which negatively impact their motivation of learning English.

7. Conclusion

Concerning the demotivating factors effecting students' motivation, the study shows that subject-related difficulties such as vocabulary load, spelling, listening and structure difficulties are the most demotivating factors. Thus, the educational policy makers should make some changes by reducing the load of vocabulary which should be memorized for the sake of tests and providing more attractive and motivating listening texts. It is believed that students' negative beliefs about aspects of the language might be changed by improving the traditional teaching methods and the content of the text books. Experience tells us that some English textbooks fail to capture the students' interest due to the heavy emphasis on vocabulary and grammar. Instead, the topics should create great deal of class interaction and help to motivate students to develop their language skills. One of the most important pedagogical implication derived from the findings is the teacher's role (personality & methods) in shaping the learner's motivation and attitudes toward learning L2. When the learner comes to the classroom with low intrinsic motivation, he could be motivated extrinsically by the motivational teacher's choice of approaches and personal styles. Finocchario (1981) states that..." Motivation is the feeling nurtured primarily by the classroom teacher in the learning situation. The moment of truth – the enhancement of motivation – occurs when the teacher closes the classroom door, greets his students with a warm welcoming smile and proceeds to interact with various individuals by making comments or asking questions which indicate personal concerns." Depending directly on the findings of this study and realizing the crucial role of teachers in reducing the learners' anxiety and demotivation, the researchers likes to present some recommendations which might be beneficial to those who are responsible for the educational process in the Saudi Universities:

- Teachers should create some class activities which meet the students' needs and learning goals instead of concentrating solely on memorizing vocabulary and grammatical rules. If the students are trained and accustomed to guess the meaning from the context instead of memorizing all the new lexical items, learning vocabulary will be easier and more motivating because the "look and remember" way of vocabulary learning seems to be not very effective for learners of the English language.
- It should be borne in mind that students have to be taught in a meaningful way to master the language skills, be able to communicate fluently and use English in real world situations. Knowles (1998) believes that adults are motivated by acquiring knowledge that solves real world problems in their lives or gives them internal satisfaction.
- Teachers should explain their language teaching approach to their students. For instance, students should realize that student-centered activities such as pair work or group activities designed to create an interactive learning environment. In other words, motivation levels drop when students are unsure about why they should perform certain language skills.
- It is recommended that the foreign language teacher should adopt the role of a facilitator rather than an authority figure in the classroom to increase students' motivation (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). At he same time, teachers have to bear in their minds that the maximum use of a target language facilitates its acquisition and balancing the use of L1 and L2 according to the students' level and abilities will motivate students to learn English.
- It should be realize that integration of culture and language could function as a positive attitude and further motivation to study a foreign language (Gardner, 1985). This can be done easily by utilizing authentic material and arranging some students' visits to English speaking countries. At the same time, teachers should develop students' cross cultural awareness systematically rather
than simply adopting the socio-cultural awareness systematically rather than simply adopting the socio-cultural components to satisfy students’ integrative orientations (Dornyei, 1994).

- The Ministry of Higher Education should give more freedom to the teachers in selecting approaches and strategies which suit their learners' levels and abilities particularly in the heterogeneous classes.
- In order to utilize technology effectively in teaching English, schools should be equipped with adequate numbers of technological devices (language labs, computer sets...etc). Additionally, teachers should be trained intensively on utilizing technology in teaching English. It should be noted that teachers cannot be expected to learn how to use educational technology in their teaching after a one-time workshop. Teachers need in-depth, sustained assistance not only in the use of the technology but in their efforts to integrate technology into the curriculum (Kanaya & Light, 2005). The time spent ensuring that teachers are using technology to enrich their students' learning experiences is an important piece in determining the value of technology to their students.

It is worth mentioning that in light of this study results, Dornyei’s definition of demotivation as “external demotivating elements” (2001: 143) could be expanded to include aspects of the language which perceived difficult to be mastered by the learners in addition to the external factors. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that there are some limitations to this study. Firstly, the limited number of participants from one University might not enhance the generalizability of the findings. Also, since this study was conducted on the students of one of the Saudi Universities whose motivational needs might be different from other. Altogether, the study helps to investigate the key demotivation factors among the students.

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