



Sources of demotivation in both EFL and ESL Language learners

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 6 July 2014;

Received in revised form:

21 November 2014;

Accepted: 2 December 2014;

Keywords

Learning,
Demotivation,
Significant.

ABSTRACT

Motivation plays an integral role in any kind of learning in general and consequently language learning in particular. Demotivation, the other side of motivation (Dornyei, 2001a), is regarded as a very significant factor in language learning. As Dornyei (2001b) postulates in second language learning, demotivation has a central role and more studies are required to be undertaken in this regard (p. 5). However, there is a dearth of research in demotivation in both EFL and ESL contexts. They are categorized into three major fields: Causes related to a) instructors, b) learning/teaching context, and c) learners.

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Introduction

As thousands of language learners across the globe are attending various kinds of language instruction programs, learning English language is gaining popularity increasingly. At the beginning, most of them are full of willingness and motivation to learn. However, after some time they face a dilemma: what they actually achieve is very different from what they expect. Gradually, as they continue, they lose their initial willingness and motivation, i.e. they get 'demotivated'. When asked for the reasons, they unanimously state that they could not achieve the assumed goals and get disappointed through the learning process and the only reason which drives them ahead is probably to get a degree or certificate.

The purpose of this study is a) to review the findings of research projects which aim at describing the sources and causes of demotivation and b) to explain them from the perspective of socio-cultural theory toward language learning. For so doing, after reviewing some major theoretical research on demotivation, findings of empirical research on the causes of demotivation are reported. In the discussion section of the paper, the attempt is made to explain and justify those findings within the framework of socio-cultural theory, more specifically within the frameworks of mediation theory, the zone of proximal development concept, and activity theory.

Literature review

Theoretical research on de/motivation

According to Dornyei (2001a), demotivation is the flip side of motivation. So, any attempt to study demotivation requires understanding the concept motivation. Motivation is a multifaceted concept and it is difficult to find a straightforward definition for it. Here, a few mostly referred definitions will be provided.

Dornyei and Skehan (2003) explains motivation in three sub-parts as follows:

(i) the choice of a particular action, (ii) the persistence with it, and (iii) the effort expended on it. In broad terms, motivation is responsible for *why* people decide to do something, *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity, and *how hard* they are going to pursue it" (p. 614).

Williams and Burden (1997, cited by Schaefer) define motivation as a condition in which someone is both cognitively and emotionally encouraged so that they can make decision consciously and also this encouragement engenders a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical endeavor so that it fulfills a series of objectives in advance (p.43). In their definition, 'making decision to act' plays a crucial role, because the reasons for doing something are not enough to accomplish an activity. An individual may have enough reasons but not come to a decision or 'choice' to act. For this reason, Williams and Burden have distinguished three stages for motivation which are shown in Figure 1.

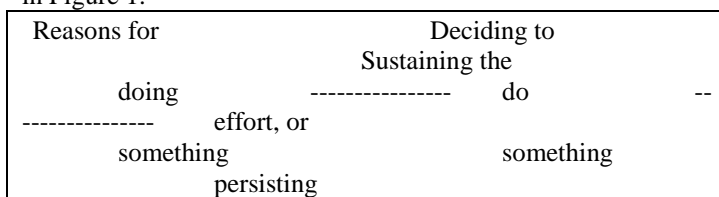


Figure 1: A three-stage model of motivation (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 121)

According to them not only the stages interact with each other, but also the social context of the learner influences each and all of the stages. Williams and Burden show this interaction in their own model of motivation in the following way (Figure 2):

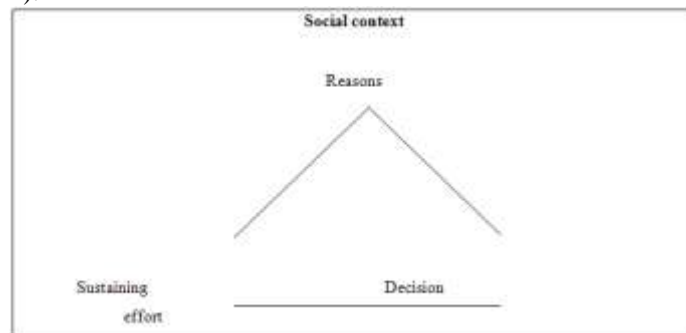


Figure 2: An interactive model of motivation (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 122)

Motivation from the perspective of different theories

Psychologically speaking, motivation has experienced quite a few numbers of elucidations and this concept and various

scholars have employed it in different ways. The following perspectives are vivid examples in this regard.

Behavioristic approach to motivation

"Behaviorist psychologists tried to explain motivation in terms of how animals behaved in order to meet their basic biological needs, how this behavior was reinforced when those needs were met, and how this reinforcement spread to other events and activities that occurred at the same time" (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 112). They accounted human motivation to learn "in terms of what biological needs were being met during the early learning years and what kind of reward or reinforcement was provided for early attempts to learn" (ibid, p. 112). McDonough (1999), categorizing theories of motivation into mechanistic and cognitive, believes that "the early mechanistic theories centered around the notion of need reduction: learning with the purpose of gaining benefits that reduced a need" (p. 221). So, in Behaviorism the emphasis was on "the nature and scheduling of reward systems as the most effective way of motivating the desired behavior. Thus, a behaviorist would tend to consider motivation largely in terms of external forces, i.e. what specific conditions give rise to what kind of behavior and how the consequences of that behavior affect whether it is more or less likely to happen again" (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 113).

Cognitive approach to motivation

As Williams & Burden, (1997) suggest in cognitive approach to motivation, "the emphasis is placed upon ways in which individuals make sense of their learning experiences and are seen as being motivated primarily by their conscious thoughts and feelings," (p. 112).

From a cognitive perspective, the factor that is of central importance is that of *choice*; that is, people have choice over the way in which they behave and, therefore, have control over their actions (ibid, 119). More clearly, in cognitive framework, "motivation is concerned with such issues as why people decide to act in certain ways and what factors influence the choices they make. It also involves decisions as to the amount of effort people are prepared to expend in attempting to achieve their goals" (ibid, p.119). Compared with the behaviorist approach, a cognitive view of motivation focuses on "individual's making decisions about their own actions as opposed to being at the mercy of external forces over which they have no control" (ibid, p 119).

A problem with cognitive approach to motivation is that it fails to take account for the influence of affective factors, the emotions, or of social and contextual influences (Williams & Burden, 1997, p.119). These are the factors which have been taken into account in constructivist approach.

Social constructivist approach to motivation

Williams and Burden (1997) make a distinction between constructivist and social constructivist approaches to learning.

"They consider the former to belong within a cognitive framework, while the latter takes, as well as cognitive factors, the social and interactional influences into consideration. A constructivist view of motivation centers around the premise that each individual is motivated differently. People will make their own sense of the various external influences that surround them in ways that are personal to them, and they will act on their internal disposition and use their personal attributes in unique ways. Therefore, what motivates one person to learn a foreign language and keeps that person going until he or she has achieved a level of proficiency with which he or she is satisfied will differ from individual to individual. However, an

individual's motivation is also subject to social and contextual influences. These will include the whole culture and context and the social situation, as well as significant other people and the individual's interactions with these people" (p. 120)

Social constructivist (socio-cultural) approach to motivation seems more appealing than the other competing theories because it takes those factors into account which are pertinent to language learning. As Cohen and Dornyei (2002) postulate, students at schools are more enthusiastic about learning second languages compared to other school subjects. The main reason could be the fact that a second language helps them to contact other people around the world and exchange culture, knowledge, and areas of interests. As a result, culture and language are inseparable elements. Accordingly, L2 motivation, as they believe, will always have a strong socio cultural component (p. 172).

Williams and Burden (1997) argue that EFL encompasses something beyond acquiring a skill, a set of regulations, and structures; instead, it includes self-perception change, experiencing novel behaviors socially and culturally. Therefore, it has a knock-off effect on the learners in terms of their social behaviors and norms (p. 115). Weiner (1994), in classifying the types of motivation, names the "motivational influences that stem from the socio cultural environment rather than from the individual" as 'social motivation' (cited in Dornyei, 2001b, p. 45).

Demotivation

Unlike motivation, demotivation has not been the major concentration of most studies. However, since demotivation is the flip side of motivation (Dornyei, 2001a) lots of issues can be inferred from demotivation research. For example, demotivation may entail external forces which have negative influences on the learner's willingness to learn a language. Demotivation may even cause learners to completely lose their tendency toward making any effort to study the language (Dornyei, 2001a). Research on demotivation attempts to study those factors which have negative effect on motivation. In Dornyei's words, motivation research typically conceptualizes a 'motive' as a kind of 'inducement', that is, as a positive force whose strength ranges on a continuum from zero to strong. However, scanty attention has been paid to motivational influences that have a detrimental rather than positive impact on motivation, that is, which instead of energizing action, 'de-energize' it (2001b, p. 50).

Dornyei makes a distinction between 'demotivated' and 'amotivated' learners. Demotivated learners are those who had motivation once but due to negative external factors they have lost their motivation. On the other hand, amotivated learners do not have any motivation to language learning at all in the first place. Chambers (1993) lists the following examples of behaviors for the demotivated learner:

"Poor concentration; lack of belief in own capabilities; no effort made to learn; 'what's the use' syndrome; negative or nil response to praise; lethargy; lack of cooperation; disruptive behavior; distracts other pupils; throws things; shouts out; produces little or no homework; fails to bring materials to lessons; claims to have lost materials" (p. 3).

An important question which arises here is, "what makes motivated language learners demotivated?" In other words, which negative factors decrease the extent and level of learners' motivation? The core concept in William and Burden's model of motivation is 'decision to act'. Decision making, based on their arguments, is influenced by internal and external factors:

"The extent to which such factors interact with each other and the relative importance that individuals attribute to them will affect the level and extent of learners' motivation to complete a task or maintain an activity"(p. 137).

External factors, too, affect the learner's decision to act as the internal factors do:

"The particular culture of a country or region will influence what happens within that country's education system, and this in turn will have an effect on schools, teachers, parents and others."(p. 139).

William and Burden (1997, pp. 139-140) classify the internal and external factors affecting motivation as follows:

A. Internal factors

1. intrinsic interest of activity
2. perceived value of activity
3. sense of agency
4. mastery
5. self-concept
6. attitudes
7. other affective states
8. developmental age and stage
9. gender

B. External factors

1. significant others
2. the nature of interaction with significant others
3. the learning environment
4. the broader context

Empirical research on demotivation

Empirical research on demotivation is not as ample as that is done on motivation. However, a summary of related research projects will be provided in this section. Gorham and Christophel (1992) conducted a research to find an answer to the question: 'What factors were perceived as demotives by college students taking introductory communication classes?' They asked the participants to answer an open-ended question. The question was: 'What things decrease your motivation to try hard to your best in that class?' Subjects' answers to the question revealed three main categories of demotives: 1) context demotives (factors likely to be regarded as antecedent to the teacher's influences), 2) structure/format demotives (factors over which the teacher is likely to have some degree of influence, if not complete control), and 3) teacher behaviors (factors likely to be perceived as under the teacher's direct control). Gorham and Christophel came to the result that teacher-related factors accounted for 79% of all responses.

Chambers (1993) tried to gather the students' and teachers' perspectives on demotivating factors through questionnaires. Teachers perceived the causes of demotivation to be related to psychological, attitudinal, social, historical, and geographical reasons. However, they explicitly excluded themselves. The students' perceived reasons for demotivation, on the other hand, were teachers' behaviors and class size. Gorham and Millette (1997), in a similar study, tried to compare the teachers' perspectives with those of students. They used an open-ended question and asked the teachers to answer the following question: 'What do you perceive decreases students' motivation to try to do their best in this class and to achieve your instructional goals?' They compared teachers' perceptions of what affects students' motivation with those of students reported in previous research. Results showed that teachers and students agreed on a set of central factors that are relevant to demotivation. Nevertheless, teachers were more likely to attribute students' demotivation to performance-related factors

such as students' lack of success on graded work, the students' lack of prerequisite skills or knowledge and the students' heavy workload. Students attributed more of their demotivation to the teachers' behavior, especially poor presentational skills, lack of enthusiasm on the part of the instructor, and to the instructor's overall choice and organization of course materials.

Ushioda (1998), asking the participants to identify what they found to be demotivating in their L2-related learning experiences, found that the demotives were related to negative aspects of the institutionalized learning context such as particular teaching methods and learning tasks. Dornyei (1998), addressing the issue that being able to name demotivating factors does not provide any insights on the possible effects that demotives may have on different students, hypothesized that only demotivated students, or those who have experienced demotivation, can indicate the actual reasons that resulted in their loss of interest in language learning. So, he selected participants who had been demotivated previously. His findings were consistent with the results of previous researches in that the largest category of demotives directly concerned the teacher. Oxford (1998) asked students to write a stimulated recall essay in order to make them recall their learning experiences over a period of five years. The findings drawn from the content analysis of the students' essays revealed four broad sources of demotivation, i.e. the teachers' personal relationship with the students, the teachers' attitude towards the course or the material, style conflicts between teachers and students, and the nature of the classroom activities. Keblawi (2005) asked 294 Arab adolescents learning English as a foreign language in Israel and 10 Arab English teachers to express their opinions on the sources of demotivation by answering an open-ended question and participating in a semi-structured interview. He found that in the participants' view, teachers' style and their personality, students' negative experiences with previous teachers, classmates' behaviors, textbooks and the evaluation system, negative opinions of students about their teacher, and learners' difficulties with grammar and vocabulary can demotivate them.

Tran and Baldauf Jr. (2007) investigated demotivation in English language learning using Vietnam as a case study. 100 Vietnamese second-year EFL students, not English majors, participated in their project. They used stimulated recall tasks for getting retrospective data from participants and constant comparison approach for analyzing data. Their findings revealed that demotivation was a significant problem for students. The largest source of demotives was related to teachers although many students were demotivated because of inadequate background knowledge of English. A summary of empirical research findings on the sources of demotivation (demotives) is given in Table 1.

A detailed analysis of the research findings, reported above, reveals that teachers and students do not agree on the sources of demotivation. Teachers attribute the sources to students and students attribute them to teachers. However, as Gorham and Christophel (1992) believe: "Motivation is perceived as a student-own state, while lack of motivation is perceived as a teacher- owned problem". Accordingly, teachers are more responsible for the demotivation of students and they should take measures to solve the problem.

An important point, which will be the basis of our discussion in the next section, is that sources of demotivation, according to the reported findings above, can be attributed to three major groups: 1) teachers, 2) immediate learning/teaching context, and 3) students. For detailed information see Table 2.

Table 1: Summary of research findings on the sources of demotivation

Study	Results
Gorham & Christophel (1992)	Three main categories of demotives: 1. context demotives 2. structure/format demotives 3. teacher behaviors
Chambers (1993)	1. Teachers perceived the causes of demotivation to be related to psychological, attitudinal, social, historical and geographical reasons, but excluded themselves. 2. Students perceived the causes of demotivation to be related to class size, teachers' behaviors, etc.
Gorham & Millett (1997)	1. Teachers were more likely to attribute student demotivation to performance-related factors on graded work, the students' lack of prerequisite skills or knowledge and the students' heavy workload. 2. Students attributed more of their demotivation to teacher behavior in particular poor presentational skills, lack of enthusiasm on the part of the instructors, and to the instructor's overall choice and organization of course materials.
Ushioda (1998)	Demotives were related to negative aspects of the institutionalized learning context such as particular teaching methods and learning tasks.
Dornyei (1998)	The largest category of demotives directly concerned the teacher.
Oxford (1998)	Four broad sources of demotivation: 1. the teacher's personal relationship with the students, 2. the teacher's attitude towards the course or the material, 3. style conflicts between teachers and students, and 4. the nature of the classroom activities.
Kebrawi (2005)	Teachers' style and their personality, students' negative experiences with previous teachers, classmates' behaviors, textbooks and evaluation system, students' negative opinions about their current teacher, and difficulties with grammar and vocabulary can make students demotivated.
Tran & Baldauf Jr. (2007)	1. The largest source of demotives was related to teachers. 2. Many students were demotivated because of inadequate background knowledge of English.

Table 2: Sources of demotivation

A. Teachers A1. Teachers' behaviors A2. Teachers' poor presentational skills A3. Teachers' lack of enthusiasm A4. Teachers' poor choice of classroom activities A5. Teachers' poor personal relationship with students A6. Teachers' negative attitudes towards the course or materials
B. Immediate learning/teaching context B1. Large class size B2. Weak organization of course materials B3. Inefficient learning tasks B4. Poor evaluation system
C. Students C1. Students' lack of prerequisite knowledge or skills C2. Students' heavy workload C3. Students' negative attitudes about language they are learning, its culture, and their teacher C4. Students' difficulties with the grammar and vocabulary of the language they are learning

Conclusion

Dornyei (2001b) in his article, 'New themes and approaches in second language motivation research' sees the 1990s as a *turning point* in second language motivation studies. He says that in the first three decades of L2 motivation research before the '90s, "the emerging body of research studies"- pioneered by social psychologists in Canada such as Gardner, Lambert, Clement, and their associates- "established motivation as a principal determinant of second language acquisition, comparable in its impact to another well-researched learner variable, language aptitude" (p. 43).

According to Dornyei (2001):

"During these first decades of research, motivation was primarily seen as a relatively stable learner trait that was, to a large extent, a function of (a) the learner's social perceptions of the L2 and its speakers (b) generalized attitudes towards the L2 learning situation, and (c) interethnic contact and the resulting degree of linguistic self-confidence" (p. 44).

Nonetheless, he states that during 1990s, "a number of cognitive and situation-specific variables" were added to the existing paradigm which led to a shift, by some, toward viewing "motivation as a more dynamic factor that is in a continuous process of evolution and change according to the various internal and external influences the learner is exposed to."

Lantolf and Genung (2002) challenged the idea that motivation is a stable force and is a predictor of learning outcomes. They claim that motivation is likely to be influenced by multiple phenomena. An individual's goals and motives, they say, are formed and reformed under specific historical material circumstances (p. 191). They also propose that:

"Communities and activities within them are rarely stable and smoothly functioning entities. They are characterized by shifting motives, goals, and rules of behavior and they normally entail struggle and conflict, including contestations of power, how it is developed and potentially challenged" (p. 193).

As can be observed from what Lantolf and Genung say, motivation, in socio-cultural theory, is more influenced by social, contextual, cultural, and historical characteristics of individuals than their internal and mental peculiarities. As Ehrman and Dornyei (1998) claim, effective learning and motivation are always socially embedded (p. 261).

As it was described in the previous section, sources of motivation, based on the findings of empirical studies, fall into three groups: sources related to teachers, to immediate learning/teaching context, and to learners.

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