
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Demotivation Factors in L2 Learning: A Case Study of Graduate Students

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the demotivation factors influencing graduate students studying English in Libya. The study specifically looks to discuss how the sex of the student may influence the English learning process. For this reason, the study applies a quantitative research framework to test how factors such as classroom environment, low test scores, grammar-based teaching, and teacher's behaviour, amongst others, may influence overall student motivation levels. To conclude, a questionnaire composed of 35 questions was shared with 49 participants registered for graduate studies at the Libyan academy, and they were asked questions relating to course content, teaching material, grammar-based teaching, teacher's behaviour, the atmosphere of the learning place, affinity, and confidence level of the students. After conducting a T-test to evaluate the data, the study found that grammar-based instruction was the most demotivating factor for students. It was also revealed that gender did not affect the learning parameters of second-language learners.

KEYWORDS

Demotivation factors, graduate students, Second language learning, grammar-based teaching.

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1. Introduction

Motivation research in second language acquisition has been a longstanding field of study with an evolved focus. Researchers and educators have sought to understand motivation and its related factors to enhance language learning outcomes. While much of the research has focused on increasing L2 learners' motivation, there has been a growing need to highlight why foreign language learners may lose interest in learning languages and what can be done to re-motivate them.

Demotivation has been given much focus in teaching and learning second languages (Muhenon, 2004, p. 35). It has been noticed that in a country like Libya. Students find increasing their English language ability challenging since they have less exposure to it. Previous studies have shown that the teacher's personality, classroom environment, teaching style, and teaching materials have contributed to the demotivation of second language learners (Gorham & Millette, 1997; Shiva & Zahra, 2011; Aydin, 2012; Hu, 2012; Kim et al., 2017; Badrkoohi, 2018).

2. Literature review

One of the earliest studies on the causes of demotivation in L2 learning was conducted by Oxford (1998, p. 12), who identified four major factors through a content analysis of "stimulated memory" essays written by 250 American students. These included the teacher-student relationship, the teacher's attitude towards the subject or material, conflicts between teaching and learning styles, and the nature of classroom activities. These findings suggest that the quality of the teacher-student relationship, the teacher's enthusiasm and interest, and the relevance and interest of classroom activities are all critical for maintaining motivation in L2 learners.

Krishnan and Pathan (2013, p. 129) examined demotivating factors experienced by Pakistani students using a questionnaire based on the five categories proposed by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009, p. 195). Their study identified six main demotivating causes, including the teaching style, components of learning materials, and limited learning facilities. This supports the findings of Sakai and Kikuchi's framework and highlights the importance of the teaching method, learning environment, and course content for maintaining motivation in L2 learners. Additionally, the study identified a new factor: negative feelings towards learning English, indicating that attitudes towards the language being learned can also contribute to demotivation.

As highlighted by Vaklifard et al. (2020, p. 8), the gender and learning level of the student can also be regarded as demotivation factors in language learning. The researchers examined 70 university students and identified five demotivating factors: the teacher, attitude towards English language learning, learning content material and facilities, unsuccessful learning experience, and the reception from the speaking community.

According to the study's findings, while teachers and learning attitudes were the two demotivating factors for male participants, the female participants were negatively impacted by their past unsuccessful learning experiences. These results highlight the importance of relationships between teachers and students, teachers' attitudes toward keeping students motivated, and the impact of failure and the learning environment on student motivation. Furthermore, the study also revealed that gender can be a significant factor in demotivation and should be considered when addressing demotivating factors in L2 learning.

2.1 Purpose of the present study

This study aims to investigate the elements that contribute to graduate students' demotivation when studying a second language (L2). It aims to pinpoint certain issues and components that harm students' motivation, with a particular emphasis on this particular group. To help educators and policymakers create more successful language education techniques, the research aims to further increase our knowledge of demotivation in second language acquisition. By filling this information gap, the study advances learner-centred teaching approaches and the area of second language learning.

1. What factors are the most demotivating for graduate students when learning English language as a second language?
2. How is gender a demotivating factor for Libyan graduate students in learning English as a foreign language?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were from the Academy of Graduate Studies. They were primarily Arabic native speakers with at least ten years of English language education and passed a beginner course level at the language centre. A total of 49 students, both (male and female) ranging in age from 20 to 40, were selected through purposeful sampling and given ethics approval by the head of the Academy of Graduate Students. The students were then asked to complete a questionnaire.

3.2 Instrument

The Japanese Learners' Demotivation to Study English questionnaire, created by Sakai and Kikuchi in 2009, was used to evaluate the demotivating factors of students in this study. This assessment has been widely used in other education research. It contains 35 questions divided into five categories: course content and teaching material, grammar-based teaching, teachers' behaviour, learning atmosphere, and low interest. Participants were asked to rate each question on a five-point scale, with one indicating "strongly disagree" and five indicating "strongly agree." This assessment aimed to identify any factors that may be negatively impacting the student's motivation to study English.

3.3 Procedure

After obtaining ethical approval, the participants were informed that their participation in the study would not affect their academic performance and that their personal information would be kept confidential. They were asked to complete a questionnaire including personal information and reassured that their privacy would be protected. Participants were allowed to withdraw at any time and informed of the study's findings. They could ask any questions or raise concerns before proceeding with the study.

3.4 Data Analysis

The demotivation factors among L2 (second language) learners were analyzed through a questionnaire using SPSS. A quantitative approach was employed using descriptive statistics to identify the most common demotivating factors among graduate students, and a T-test was employed to investigate any variations in demotivation based on gender. The analysis provided valuable insight into the demotivating factors and whether gender plays a role in demotivation. The researcher has chosen the quantitative research methodology of sharing questionnaires as it helps to eliminate errors owing to generalization and allows the research participant to fill in the issues or questions related to them. Similarly, the T-test was applied to check whether the sex of the student influences demotivation factors in English learning.

4. Results

In the sample of N = 49, 53.1% were male and 46.1% were female. Results from Table 1 indicate that various factors, including grammar-based instruction, the classroom setting, poor test results, teacher behaviour, course content and materials, lack of self-confidence, and loss of interest, can contribute to a demotivating experience when learning English. The most significant demotivating factors were found to be teaching methods focused on grammar, course content and materials, and the classroom environment.

Table 1
Ranking of demotivation factors

Rank	Factors of demotivation	M	SD
1 st	Grammar-based teaching	3.4	.586
2 nd	Course content and teaching material	3.3	.659
3 rd		3.1	.806
4 th	Classroom Environment	2.9	.892
5 th	Low test scores	2.8	.747
6 th	Lack of self-confidence and interest Teachers' behaviour	2.5	.917

According to the table, grammar-based teaching received a mean score of 3.4. The course content and teaching material received a mean score of 3.3, while the classroom environment was ranked 3.1. Low test scores and a lack of self-confidence and interest received mean scores of 2.9 and 2.8, respectively. The lowest mean score, 2.5, was given to teachers' behaviour. As mentioned by Gardner (1985), the psychology of the student is an important aspect to consider when discussing language learning. For this reason, there may be cases where student's lack of self-confidence may create an impediment to their language learning and growth. This discussion on student motivation and self-confidence is like those of Deci and Ryan (1985, p. 125) in their self-determination theory, highlighting that there are cases where students do not feel passionate enough towards learning or when they have lower autonomy; therefore, this affects student's self-confidence level, and it makes learning process difficult.

According to Bakar, Sulaiman, and Rafaai (2010, p. 75), in addition to student's self-confidence, the behaviour of the teacher may also stimulate how learning is conducted. Therefore, although the teacher's behaviour may not be as essential as self-motivation in this study, it is to be noted that student's language learning motivation may also be influenced by the teacher's behaviour.

Table 2
The mean scores of males and females regarding demotivating factors

Factors of demotivation	Gender	M	SD
Grammar-based teaching	Male	3.43	.680
	Female	3.44	.471
Course content and teaching material	Male	3.39	.697
	Female	3.30	.624
Classroom Environment	Male	3.0	.808
	Female	3.2	.726
Low test scores	Male	3.0	.808
	Female	2.8	.978
Lack of self-confidence and interest	Male	2.8	.604
	Female	2.9	.890
Teachers' behaviour	Male	2.6	.983
	Female	2.4	.850

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for the demotivation factors across genders. Through the data analysis, it was found that grammar-based teaching had the highest mean scores for both genders (male = 3.43; female = 3.44). On the other

hand, course content and teaching materials are the second factor causing demotivation for graduated students since they have mean scores of ($M = 3.3$) for both genders. Finally, according to the responses of the participants to the questionnaire, the classroom environment appears to be the third factor contributing to the motivation of the participants. Male participants have higher mean scores ($M = 3.2$), whereas female participants have a mean score ($M = 3.0$).

Table 2 above shows the various submissions provided by research participants to different factors of demotivation. As can be highlighted in the table, it shows teachers' behaviour, classroom environment, and low-test scores are some of the main factors that influence overall learning behaviour, mostly for males. For females, low test scores and lack of self-confidence are some of the main factors that affect their overall motivation to learn. Therefore, this table is important to understand the factors to consider when analysing student performance depending on gender.

According to Gardner (1985), internal and external factors exert strong influences on student learning and motivation. According to this study, why sex may not be viewed as a strong concern in influencing sex-based language motivation, the factors tested in Table 2 show that under various demotivating factors, the ability to learn languages may differ according to sex.

Table 3: Group Statistics

Group Statistics					
	SEX	N	MMean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TOTAL	MALE	26	3.1048	.59005	.11572
	FEMALE	23	3.0073	.67502	.14075

Table 3 above shows the distribution of participants according to sex.

Table 4: Summary of Analysis of T-test on differences in terms of gender regarding the demotivating factors for Libyan graduate students in learning English as a foreign language

	Group	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig
Gender	Male	26	3.10	0.59			
	Female	23	3.01	0.68	0.539	47	0.320

The result of the analysis of differences in terms of gender regarding the demotivating factors for Libyan graduate students in learning English as a foreign language indicated that the null hypothesis was accepted, given the fact that the probability level (p -value = 0.320) was greater than 0.05 level of significance at 47 degrees of freedom. This implies that there is no significant difference in terms of gender regarding the demotivating factors for Libyan graduate students in learning English as a foreign language.

The study is contrary to the findings of Slater, Lujan and DiCarlo (2007, p. 337), who find that females show better learning abilities than males owing to sensory modality preferences. Additionally, Huang (2023, p. 544) mentioned that girls in the classroom generally show higher interest in learning foreign languages when compared to men. Therefore, these findings are contrary to the results that were tested in this service.

5. Discussion

The study's findings suggest that regardless of the sex of the student, demotivating factors to English language learning should be considered when learning the English language. According to the study, factors such as the course content, grammar-based learning, teaching material, the classroom environment, the effects of low test scores, and a lack of self-confidence are some of the main obstacles hindering student English learning possibilities in Libya. The study also finds that the teacher's behaviour appears to be the least demotivating.

The position of grammar-based learning as a strong limiting factor to English language learning is similar to the findings of Krishan and Pathan (2013, p. 27), who highlighted that the most significant demotivator for Pakistani students was grammar-based learning. Additionally, Ali & Pathan (2017, p. 85) in their study, notes that the grammar-based teaching method is the fourth most influential demotivating factor among Pakistani students.

During this research, it was noted that course content and teaching materials were other demotivating factors for learning. Specifically, participants reported feeling demotivated by a need for more use of technology, such as audio-visual devices and computers, in their language classes. Additionally, students reported that their course content and materials needed to be more engaging and felt outdated and uninspiring. These findings align with Boonchuayrod and Getkham's (2019, p. 5) research, which found that course content and materials were a leading source of demotivation among undergraduate students learning English. Overall, the quality and relevance of course content and teaching materials can significantly impact student motivation in language learning.

The *classroom environment* was a significant demotivating factor for graduate students in the study. Participants reported that the lack of internet access and the high number of students in the class made it difficult for them to engage in the learning process fully. Additionally, the lessons' pace was noted as inappropriate for the students, which further contributed to their demotivation in learning the English language. These findings align with previous research in the field, which has also identified the classroom environment as a critical determinant of student motivation and engagement in language learning. The study by Dornyei (1998, p. 123) and Sakai and Kikuchi (2009, p. 198) both found that inadequate classroom facilities can demotivate secondary and junior high school students to learn a second language in Budapest and Japan, respectively.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that grammar-based teaching, course content and teaching materials, the classroom environment, low test scores, and a lack of self-confidence were significant sources of demotivation for graduate students learning English. On the other hand, the teacher's behaviour was found to be the least demotivating factor.

To address these issues, it is recommended that teaching approaches be more communicative and less prescriptive and that technology be integrated into language classes to make them more engaging. Additionally, course content and materials should be updated and made more relevant to students. Furthermore, the classroom environment should be optimized to provide internet access and reduce class size, and the pace of lessons should be adjusted to be more appropriate for students. Overall, these solutions aim to improve the learning experience and increase motivation among graduate students learning English.

The study also found, using the T-test, that gender does not influence language learning amongst the participants; however, learning conditions and self-confidence in learning a new language are some of the major influencers of language learning.

The study, particularly focused on demotivation variables in L2 learning among 49 graduate students, has certain limitations that may affect the generalizability of its findings. The sample size and diversity are restricted, which may not reflect the whole spectrum of L2 learning experiences. This constraint may have an impact on the results' generalizability. Second, while useful, the study's focus on quantitative methodologies may have neglected more complex and subjective experiences that qualitative approaches may have revealed. Furthermore, the study's geographical focus on Libya may restrict its application to other cultural and educational situations, raising concerns about the universality of its findings. The study additionally examined gender as a variable but found no significant gender variations in demotivation, an area that might be further investigated. Finally, while the research acknowledged the need for more engaging learning materials, it did not detail how different types of materials or technology tools affect motivation. Following the study's findings, various suggestions for further research might be made. Future research might benefit from a bigger and more diverse sample size, including people of different ages, cultural backgrounds, and learning contexts, to improve the generalizability of their findings. Incorporating qualitative approaches, such as interviews or case studies, may give more in-depth insights into individuals' experiences and perceptions of demotivation in language acquisition. Furthermore, comparing studies in other geographical and cultural situations will help better understand how cultural circumstances impact language learning motivation. There is also a need for more study on the intricacies of gender dynamics in language learning, including how gender influences learning experiences and motivation. Another promising area of research is the effect of various technology tools and new educational materials in reducing demotivation. Finally, longitudinal studies that track learners over time may provide insight into the emergence of demotivation factors and how they are treated during the language acquisition process.

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