

Factors Demotivating ESP Classrooms at the Preparatory School of Sciences and Techniques, Tlemcen, Algeria

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Abstract

The present research tries to provide a clear idea about factors affecting student's motivation in the teaching of English in ESP institutions and universities. This study took place at the Preparatory School of Sciences and Techniques, Tlemcen, Algeria. The aim of this research is to highlight the nature of 'demotivation' and identify the causes of this lack of interest to the English module. The data are collected from the students of the first-year under the form of questionnaires and classroom observation. Two steps are followed during this research; the first one is to gather information from a sample unit composed of twenty students and the second one is to analyse the results collected. The findings indicate that despite the importance of the English language, there are many students who remain demotivated to learn it mainly because of their low level and the syllabus which remain for them inappropriate.

Key words: Demotivation, ESP, the English language

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1. Introduction

Motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language learning. The original impetus in second/foreign motivation research comes from the social psychology since learning the language of another community simply cannot be separated from the learners' social dispositions towards the speech community in question. The present paper intends to consider the failure in learning English as a foreign language at ESP schools. Therefore, the aim of this research is to understand the demotivating factors that those students encounter during the learning of the English language. Theories of motivation generally seek to explain why and how students are not motivated to learn English and which reasons make students lose their motivation. Indeed, teachers are interested in finding-out what they can do to overcome weaknesses in students' motivation. More specifically, teachers are eager to find ways of increasing students' engagements in learning activities since students' active participation in class helps a lot in learning efficiently and makes teaching more pleasant in the classroom.

2. Historical Background

Language is a medium of communication and a means of expression that is why today learning a foreign language especially the English language becomes a basic necessity of every student who is ambitious. The reasons of learning the English language are various and as English is the most spoken official language in the world and has official status even in nations where it is not the primary spoken language. English is indisputably the primary language in the world and it is important to learn it. Despite its importance, the English language remains and is still in perpetual competition with the French language in Algeria.

After the Algerian revolution in 1962, our society is still marked by the French colonization, Algerian people are affected by the French culture and the French language is mixed with our language and dialects. "Language is a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value, speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language, they view their language as a symbol of their social identity... thus we can say that language symbolizes cultural reality". (Kramsch, 2000:3)

It is clear that language is not only a means by which people express their ways of thinking, it is more than this, language is a symbol of culture and of a personal identity that is why the English language in Algeria is considered as the second foreign language because of the French heritage which is rooted. Horne claims about language and culture;

Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world...language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. (F.Horne, 2003:15)

From this point of view, we can see that language and culture cannot be analysed in isolation because culture constitutes an integral part of language teaching. Language learning is an intercultural experience as far as it allows us to interact with other persons from different cultures. Algeria is aware of the importance English has in the world, that is why, the schools and universities are equipped with computers, books and magazines are more and more available in the libraries and at universities, internet exist in nearly each home and institution; an important number of people are learning English.

3. Factors demotivating ESP classrooms

In most ESP classrooms where the language in question is a required school subject, there is the problem of demotivation. However, the weakness of English language learners in general is attributed to various factors such as teaching methodology, learner's environment, and learner's attitudes towards the language. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to be aware of the possible factors that may affect students' motivation in order to be able to develop strategies to help them to learn English or another foreign language. Many researches has been conducted on language learning motivation but less on demotivating factors,

Dornyei perceived demotivation as; "If we think about demotivation, is not at all infrequent in language classes and the number of demotivated L2 learners is relatively high." (Dornyei, 141:2001)

As demotivation is considered to be a frequent phenomenon related to the teacher's interaction with students, in ESP studies, in particular, the interest in demotivation has been aroused by different reasons. The L2 domain is most often characterised by learning failure, in the sense that merely everyone has failed in the study of at least one foreign language. So, language learning failure could be related to demotivation which may play a crucial role in the learning process, and there are many factors that affect learning such as the teacher personality, negative attitudes towards the L2 or the foreign language, negative attitudes also towards the target community and the materials used as the coursebook. The list of factors is various and endless, this is why it is important to understand the reasons which make a motivated student becomes demotivated as described by Dornyei; "A demotivated learner is someone who was once motivated but has loss his/her commitment for some reason." (Dornyei, 2001:142)

The table below shows some demotivating factors identified by Dornyei ,generally most studies concerning the field of motivation and demotivation are concentrated especially on the personality of the teacher, teaching methods, learning context in addition to the learner's attitudes toward the L2 or foreign language which play an important role in students' motivation or demotivation.

Table 1. Main Demotivating Factors Identified by (Dornyei 1998:152,153).

Demotivating factors	Examples
1-The teacher (personality, commitment, competence, teaching method)	-The teacher shouted all the time. -The teacher always had his favourite and he concentrated on them.
2-Inadequate school facilities (group is too big or not the right level, frequent change of teachers)	-It was really off-putting that in 10 years we had 11 teachers, they kept changing... every body tried out a new method.
3-Reduced self –confidence (experience of failure, or lack of success)	At first, I was confident in learning English and I worked very hard but I got always C or D during the four years.

4-Negative attitude towards the L2	When I studied German, I worked very hard but I realised that I didn't like the whole structure of the German language.
5-Compulsory nature of L2 study	In secondary school, we had to choose one foreign language, I didn't really want to choose German I want French but German was the second useful language
6-Interference of another foreign language being studied	German is similar to English in many ways, and this really irritates me because I keep saying German words instead of English.
7-Negative attitude towards L2 community	The American culture we get is not very attractive to me
8-Attitudes of group members	I always felt embarrassed in class because my English wasn't very good and neither was my pronunciation, I always felt that the others were laughing at me.
9-coursebook	We used I think the worst coursebook in the world, I have seen several coursebook and this is one of the worst.

4. Methodology

Our research work attempts to examine the factors demotivating the first-year students at the Preparatory school of sciences and techniques, Tlemcen to learn English. It is important to mention that this School has just been introduced in Algeria in 2010; it is a new system introduced in Tlemcen in order to teach students the basis of Scientific and Technical modules as physics, mathematics and many other modules, therefore, English is introduced because of its importance over the world; unfortunately, many students failed in learning the English language. This article discusses some of demotivating factors concerning the English module. This study tries to answer the following research questions:

- 1- Are first- year LMD students motivated to learn the English language?
- 2- How students' motivation is affected?
- 3- What can be done to improve their motivation?

As a teacher of English at the preparatory school of Tlemcen, I have remarked students' demotivation in studying English; therefore I decided to make an investigation in this field by administrating a questionnaire to the students in order to collect necessary data.

4.1. Teaching English at the Preparatory School

The research study took place in Tlemcen; since this kind of institutions exist only in four Wilaya among them Algiers, Oran, Annaba and Tlemcen and in each wilaya has only one preparatory school. The teaching of the English language at preparatory school is not an easy task; the teacher should take into consideration many factors that may influence student's learning of the English module; therefore, students at the preparatory school are somehow uninterested to learn English, despite its importance in the world as well as in Algeria as mentioned by Backer; English has become firmly established as the international language of the present time. (Baker, 2003:2)

The teacher is always in perpetual struggle with his students to teach English. As mentioned above, the Preparatory School is equipped with labs for the teaching of second and foreign language as English and French, in addition; the teacher has a modern audio-visual material as to display videos or pictures, each student has his/her proper computer to do activities with their teacher. Also, the students can look for scientific words and most importantly they are taught how to write a scientific report or article.

4.2. Participants

Concerning students, we have selected thirty participants from the first-year level because the problem of 'Demotivation' is accentuated. Students' age is from eighteen to twenty. The questionnaire was addressed to twenty students during the English session otherwise; the students wouldn't give back the questionnaire. The questions were formulated in English but the students were free to answer either in English, French or Arabic, the most important is to obtain their answers, their most important objectives are the scientific modules; however, few of them show interest in learning the English language. Even with the most motivating methods, the students do not any effort to participate in the class. Therefore the teacher's role at the preparatory school is central and difficult, it involves providing a positive learning environment and also facilitating learning by adopting a motivating methods. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of teaching in this case is trying different ways to motivate the students but with a few positive results.

4.3. Instruments

The data collection instruments used in this survey is a questionnaire administered to the students in order to collect necessary information for the needs of the research work; however, during the investigation; a questionnaire is not sufficient to get some important information as participants level in English or some lacks in grammar. Therefore; the investigator decided to add a classroom observation method to the survey and thus to complete the research work.

5. Findings and Results

Our present research is particularly significant because it raises a crucial point in learning English and without it learning may be a hard task or impossible, this point is motivation. The purpose of our study is to collect significant data, the information gathered will be studied and analysed to determine the demotivating factors present at the preparatory school of sciences and techniques encountered by the first-year students.

Question N°1: Which of the following reasons make you learn English?

Table 2. Students' motivation to learn English

POSSIBILITIES	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Studying English can be important because it may allow me meet other people from different countries	05	15.62%
To know the English civilization and culture	03	9.37%
To get a good job in the future	07	21.87%
May be useful sometime in the future	04	12.5%
Help me in my career or studies	10	31.25%
Travel to other countries	01	3.12%
I like the English language	01	3.12%
Other reasons	01	3.12%
Total	32	100%

English is considered as a universal language, it means that it is used everywhere such as companies, universities and societies, students are aware of its importance in their studies or career, therefore, 31.25% respond that they learn English for their studies behind 21.87% who think that it can be useful for getting a job in the future. However, 15.62% of the students want to learn it in order to meet other people from different countries and 12.5% think that English may be useful someday in the future followed by 3.12% who need it for travelling and, 3.12% who learn English for the simple reason because they like it and finally 3.12% for other unknown reasons.

Question N°2: Do you think that the module of English is necessary for the first-year students at the Preparatory School?

Table 3. The utility of English for the First- year students at the Preparatory School.

Possibilities	Number	Percentage
Yes	30	93.75%
No	02	6.25%
Total	32	100%

The answers are evident since 93.75% of the students agree on the utility of English for the first-year students, however, 6.25% do not agree.

Question N°3: Which of the following reasons demotivate you when studying English

Table 4. The frequency distribution and percentages of the demotivating factors facing students when learning English.

Possibilities	Number	Percentage
The syllabus	04	12.5%
The methods used	02	6.25%
Vocabulary is very large to remember	03	18.75%
English structures are complicated	06	18.75%
Difficulties to understand the English language	07	21.87%
My environment doesn't encourage me to learn English	06	9.37%
Social and religious reasons affect my learning of English	01	3.12%
Other reasons	03	9.37%
Total	32	100%

As referred in the table above, the demotivating factors mentioned by the students when learning English varies between the difficulties to understand the English language by 21.87%, English complicated structures and the vocabulary is large to remember by 18.75%. Moreover, some aspects of syllabus and methods used are still considered demotivating with a percentage of 12.5% and 6.25% respectively. Demotivating factors related to other reasons are mentioned by 9.37% as well as my environment doesn't encourage me to learn English 3.12% feel demotivated because of social and religious reasons. Comparing between these factors, the most demotivating factor is the students' difficulty to understand the English language.

Question N°4: Lack of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary affects our motivation to learn English?

Table 5. Deficiencies in grammar and vocabulary affect the learning of English.

Possibilities	Number	Percentage
Agree	24	75%
Disagree	08	25%
Total	32	100%

To see if the students' lack of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary affects their motivation, they were asked to give their opinion concerning the above statement. The results reveal that the majority of the students agree that it is in fact a handicap to learn English with 75% and 25% disagree with this statement.

6. Data Analysis

As mentioned in the last tables, the questionnaire gives the students the opportunity to express their point of view especially their disagreement about their lacks in the teaching of English. Being aware of the importance English has in the world and the need to use it in their studies and research. The students' expectations are not very fastidious. Thus, it is not evident for the teacher of English to improve their language proficiency because first; the English module is taught only one hour and a half in the week, also the teacher cannot remedy all the deficiencies but can motivate his/her students by using some different approaches, also the inadequate or not specific syllabus concerning the English module increases their demotivation, in addition to students' weaknesses in grammar and vocabulary and many of them don't like speak English because they don't know how to formulate correct sentences. It is important to mention that the Preparatory School is equipped with two laboratories of languages which may facilitate learning for those students Also; there is a defining syllabus but not adequate according to students' lacks.

The teacher in question has to take into consideration the students' level before applying the syllabus; his primary concern in preparing the lecture and in carrying out class activities is to maximize the amount of learning that takes place, to involve the greatest number of students. Once the objectives have been determined, the teacher selects appropriate lesson activities in order to attain these aims, therefore to hold the interest of most students, it is necessary to provide a large number of varied activities. The teacher can select interesting drills or texts; he can introduce games, proverbs or dialogues. Such activity can provide extra-language practice and be a great deal of fun, thus, the students learn much more with fun than when the course is following the classical way of learning each time.

For some students demotivation had a very strong impact that destroyed their interest in learning English whereas for others it decreases their interest in learning English. In all cases, it is evident that demotivation has a negative impact on students' learning. It can be seen that demotivation is a significant language problem that needs to be taken into account, it is important to mention that teachers have to face many problems such as the student uninteresting towards the English module or their low level in other words students' poor language proficiency; it means that students display a great lack in learning the English language mainly due to grammar and vocabulary.

For instance, the majority of the first-year students are not able to write even a simple sentence or to remember the vocabulary of the English language. According to the present paper, it can be seen that the participants are not motivated to learn the English language and those for many reasons. It means that their motivation is affected by their weaknesses in grammar and vocabulary. From the questionnaire and classroom observation, we have taken into consideration some students' points of view. Here are some expectations;

- ✓ Propose lectures appropriate to students' needs.
- ✓ Determine an appropriate syllabus of English for the ESP students.
- ✓ Induce the learners to practice English at class and outside class.
- ✓ Vary the activities according to the students' deficiencies in order to improve the language.
- ✓ Use labs as often as possible to stimulate students' learning.
- ✓ Introducing games during the lectures arouse students' motivation and interest.
- ✓ Creating an enjoyable environment when teaching.
- ✓

7. Lack of Motivation: Causes

Motivation is seen as a source of attention (Baily, 1998:64) because once the subject is interesting for the student, he will devote all his/her energy and time to learn whereas a demotivated learner on the other hand, had loose all the interest in learning a given language. Therefore, the student will be present at the lecture but without contributing to the learning situation as asserts by Corria: Unfortunately, many students dislike learning English, and although they attended lessons, they are not interested in speaking properly. They only want to pass the compulsory exams. (Corria, 1999:17)

After the identification of the problems encountered when teaching the English module at the preparatory school, it is necessary to find some solutions in order to improve the teaching situation. The causes of the students' lack of motivation may be summarized as follows:

1- Difficulties to understand the English language is seen as the first obstacle in the eyes of the learner's .many students show difficulties to speak or write in English. Thus is mainly due to their low level in this language.

2-Learners' poor language proficiency, as far as grammar and vocabulary are concerned are among the principal causes of their demotivation; their poor performance of that language decreases motivation and affect their desire to learn.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, it is important to stress that motivation is an important variable in second or foreign language success. It should be noted that making learners recognise a real need to accomplish learning goals and providing them with motivation to learn is one of the best steps we can take into consideration to facilitate learning success. Inspired from the work and experience of many psycholinguists on 'demotivation', it exists many ways to motivate the students since the concept of motivation may be the most important key in the learning of foreign languages. It can be seen that students are motivated to learn English but their motivation is affected by several parameters such as the inadequate syllabus to students' needs also students' lacks in grammar and vocabulary or the students' attitudes. Therefore, many solutions exist to help teachers who encountered this problem of 'demotivation' in the future by improving the learning conditions for the teachers and the students in providing them with an appropriate syllabus for ESP, also to make teaching materials available for an enjoyable learning. Moreover, the teacher plays an essential role in enhancing students' motivation by using the adequate methods depending on students' deficiencies. Despite the importance of demotivation in learning in general and ESP in particular to date, few studies have focused on student demotivation. Thus, future researches are needed to shed more light on demotivation from different perspectives.

About the Author:

Nouzha Yasmina Soulimane-Benhabib is a teacher of English at the Preparatory school of Sciences and Techniques at Tlemcen, Algeria. Her current major research topic includes the teaching of English in ESP classrooms and also motivation of those students to learn English. She has participated at some international conferences in Finland and Scotland. She has published an article on motivation at Abou Bakr Belkaid University of Tlemcen review. She is also preparing a doctorate thesis in TEFL and applied linguistics where she is dealing with autonomous learning and motivation.

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Appendix

Students' questionnaire:

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect necessary data about the student' comments and it contains five items.

1. Which of the following reasons make you learn English?
 - a- Studying English can be important because it may allow me meet other people from different countries
 - b- To know the English civilization and culture
 - c- To get a good job in the future
 - d- May be useful sometime in the future
 - e- Help me in my career or studies
 - f- Travel to other countries
 - g- I like the English language
 - h- Other reasons
- 1- Do you think that the module of English is necessary for the first-year students at the Preparatory School?
- 2- Which of the following reasons demotivate you when studying English?
 - a- The syllabus
 - b- The method used
 - c- Vocabulary is very large to remember
 - d- English structures are complicated
 - e- Difficulties to understand the English language
 - f- My environment doesn't encourage me to learn English
 - g- Social and religious reasons affect my learning of English
 - h- Other reasons
- 4- Lack of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary affects our motivation to learn English?
 - a- Agree
 - b- Disagree
- 5- What can be done to improve your motivation to learn English?