



# Investigating Elementary & Intermediate Level Students' Perspectives towards Demotivating Factors In ESP Classes

Masoud Zoghi

Department of ELT, Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran

E-mail: m-zoghi@iau-ahar.ac.ir

Leila Masoomi Far (Corresponding author)

Department of ELT, Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran

E-mail: masoomifar\_leila@yahoo.com

Received: 06-03-2014

Accepted: 18-04-2014

Published: 01-09-2014

doi:10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.3n.5p.22

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.3n.5p.22>

## Abstract

In the present study, attempts were made to investigate and contrast the demotivating factors in English classes from the viewpoint of ESP students at different proficiency levels. To this end, 134 ESP students were chosen from Islamic Azad University, Karaj Branch. Based on the scores obtained from Oxford Placement Test, the sample was divided into two groups, i.e. the intermediate level of proficiency students ( $n=60$ ) and the elementary level of proficiency students ( $n=74$ ). The data required for the study were collected by means of a demotivating factors questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed using the Minitab statistical package version 16. Results revealed that there were no significant differences among the demotivating factors perceived across the groups. From the viewpoint of both groups, teachers' attitude and personality, their teaching methods, and the weakness of students in English vocabulary were among the highest frequency mentioned demotivating factors.

**Keywords:** ESP, demotivating factors, proficiency levels

## 1. Introduction

Motivation as one of the most challenging issues for language researchers has received a great attention. Different definitions for it have been proposed from various viewpoints. On a general note, motivation has come to be seen as the effort and energy that learners use in the process of learning (Dornyei, 2001). Motivation has also been viewed from cognitive perspectives. According to cognitive psychologists, as mentioned by Dornyei (2001), motivation is placed within the individual. He mainly recognizes three defining features for motivation, namely (a) the selection of a special action, (b) the persistence related to that action, and (c) the attempts made by individuals regarding that selected action. These features are believed to be in charge of (a) why human beings decide to accomplish a special action, (b) how much time they show willingness in carrying on that action, and (c) how hard those individuals try to keep on with that activity.

Other researchers who worked on the issue of motivation proposed some clarifying cycles for defining motivation. For example, Dweck (1999) presented the theory of positive and negative cycles for motivation. In this theory the positive cycle comprises the high degree of motivation which in turn would result in high degree of accomplishment and this would also lead to high degree of motivation. The negative cycle instead includes the low level of motivation resulting in low level of accomplishment and finally leading to low level of motivation again.

Regarding the matter of English learning or L2 learning, motivation is one of the most critical issues in L2 learning which can help students to pave the way for learning. It acts like a nuclear power for learners and gives them the extra and super power to face the difficulties existing in the path of learning another language. Without motivation, learners would suffer the lack of enough energy and willingness in pursuing and directing the correct process of learning. Dornyei and Otto (1998), described L2 motivation clearly as : “ the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized and acted out.” (p. 65).

In comparison with motivation, demotivation is relatively a newer issue in second language learning and we can't find so many definitions related to it. However, Dornyei (2001) has proposed some clarifying descriptions about this less known side of the second language learning motivation. According to Dornyei (2001), demotivation can be defined as the particular external forces which can potentially decrease or remove the motivational structure of learners' behavioral goals or ongoing doings. He also stated that unlike motivation, demotivation acts like a block or dam in the path of learning. It decreases the energy needed for L2 learning and hinders the process of learning. This negative part of motivation lessens the powers and attempts that should be used correctly in the L2 learning atmosphere.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

#### 1.1.1 ESP

Carter and Nunan (2001) believed that one of the most critical issues regarding the ESP classes is the matter of the course book. The course book and the materials covered in ESP classes are of high degree of significance because they are the only resource provided for students to learn English in the class. If the decision made about the quality and relatedness of the material presented in the ESP classes is not a correct one the result would be something which leads to dissatisfaction of both students and teachers. The key issue for selecting the materials covered in ESP classes is that they should be based on the results of needs analysis. One of the important problems of an ESP class is that what do learners need to do with the English presented and learned in the class? The main emphasis and focus in ESP courses is on the students and methods of increasing their willingness and capacity needed for learning process. Nunan (1999) declared that, the materials of the ESP courses should reflect and display the aims of the students for learning English. So, the best efforts should be made in ESP classes in order to respond to the needs of the learners and increase the motivation needed for pursuing this path. In this regard, every effort should be made to clarify the motivating and demotivating factors in learning English.

The recognition of demotivating factors in ESP classes would help both teachers and learners improve the process of learning and pave the way for both groups. For clarifying all these factors the teachers should consider the needs of students in learning atmosphere. Although most of the teachers put emphasis on recognizing the needs of learners but in many situations in fact they rarely consult with the students of the class. One of the reasons for this fact is that in many learning situations learners are not given the opportunity to have a voice in stating and declaring their needs (Carter and Nunan, 2001). According to Blackmore (1996), there are situations in which expecting the students to take part actively in making decisions about the materials presented in the class and other learning activities is considered to be inappropriate. But by the appearance of changes in learning theories and especially the active roles given to the learners in negotiating with teachers about learning activities and all the factors that have a critical role in improving the learning process, investigating the motivating and demotivating factors would be of great importance to both teachers and students. At first sight it seems that the heterogeneity of the ESP classes in proficiency level is one of the most important factors for the demotivation of the students. The reason for this perception may be that teachers think they can't keep the balance between the needs of these two groups of proficiency level and moving toward satisfying each group of learners would somehow affect the other group and demotivate them. The researcher thinks that the difference in proficiency levels may result in different needs which in turn influences the learning context and may lead to a demotivating atmosphere for learners.

#### 1.1.2 Demotivation

Generally, demotivation can be defined as the negative factors that decrease the level of motivation in learners (Dornyei, 2001). These negative forces or factors influence on the speed and trend of learning and in fact act as a kind of hinder in the process of learning. As the name of demotivation suggests the demotivated student is the student who was motivated before but due to some reasons he or she has lost his or her motivation. But according to Dornyei (2001), it does not mean that all the positive effects and forces which were among the building blocks of the motivation have been removed. In fact some of those positive forces have been changed or removed.

However, in motivational psychology there is another concept which is somehow related to the concept of demotivation, but it is not exactly the same. Deci and Ryan (1985) defined amotivation as the disappearance of motivation, which resulted from the incompetence feeling of the learners when they confront an activity. Vallerand (1997) recognized four sources for amotivation namely:

- Learners believe that they lack the merit and ability to accomplish a special activity,
- Learners think that the strategies of learning are ineffective,
- Learners come to the conclusion that the effort and the energy needed for the intended result is too much
- Learners start feeling that their attempts are not responding and enough regarding the special task to be accomplished.

Of course, these are only some of the factors related to the amotivation of learners and there are many other factors that can be investigated from different points of view and aspects. For instance, Gorham and Christophel (1992) investigated demotivating factors and made a list of these factors according to their frequency mentioned by the learners. Some of these factors were dissatisfaction of learners related to their marks and homework, the unpreparedness of the teacher, the students' dislike of the topics presented in the class, the disorganization of the materials covered in the class, and the improper characteristics of the teacher.

According to Dornyei (2001), the importance of the demotivating factors in English language learning contexts and also in L2 learning situations are mostly because of the fact that in the domain of L2 learning we

can observe most learning failures in comparison with other aspects of education and almost everyone has once experienced such failures in the context of learning at least one language. So, regarding the high amount of the failures in this domain of education, the researchers are encouraged to investigate the main causes of this lack of success and one of the significant causes of this failure has proved to be the demotivating factors surrounding L2 learners.

Considering the importance mentioned above, Dornyei (1998) accomplished a study on 50 secondary school students and recognized about 9 significant demotivating factors as follows:

- The characteristics of the teacher
- Lack of enough facilities in the classes
- Decreased level of self-confidence due to the previous failures
- Negative attitudes regarding L2 learning
- The nature of learning a second language which is in most situations not optional
- The interference of other languages
- Bad attitude of learners regarding the community of second language
- The behaviors of the other students
- The course book and materials

All these factors play a role in decreasing the energy and attempt of the learners in their special ways and the result would be a demotivating educational atmosphere which both influences the learners and teachers. The researchers believe that when teachers feel that they are facing a demotivated class they would also lose their own motivation and energy for better handling the class and they also don't try their best for directing and managing the learning process. So, demotivation in educational atmosphere acts like a two-sided sword which affects both learners and teachers and as a result the learning process would encounter a failure.

### *1.2 Research Questions*

Considering the discussion mentioned in the above paragraphs, the purpose of the study was to investigate the demotivating factors in English classes from the viewpoints of the ESP students. To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following questions were raised:

**RQ# 1** What are the most important demotivating factors in English classes from the viewpoint of ESP students?

**RQ#2** Is there a significant difference in the demotivating factors perceived by elementary-level and intermediate-level ESP students?

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Participants*

A total of 134 ESP students of Islamic Azad University, Karaj Branch served as the participants of this study. This sample was selected through the cluster random sampling. The participants were both male and female, and they were between 22 to 30 years old. Their fields of study were psychology and science. After selecting the sample, they were asked to answer an Oxford Placement Test in order to be divided into two groups of intermediate level ( $n= 60$ ) and elementary level ( $n= 74$ ) in English proficiency. Then they were asked to complete a demotivating factors questionnaire.

### *2.2 Instrumentation*

The data needed for this study was collected through a 12-item questionnaire about demotivating factors in learning English. The questionnaire was based on the demotivating factors questionnaire of Dornyei (1998), but the researcher made some modifications to it in order to be appropriate for the educational context under investigation. The proficiency level of the students was determined through an Oxford Placement Test. The original test of Oxford Placement Test has two sections namely Listening and Grammar Test. However, because of the presence of some limitations and problems related to the administration of the complete form of the test, only the Grammar part of the Test was selected in order to be given to the participants. On the basis of the defined band scores, students who received a score between 60 and 74 were classified as intermediate students and those who got the scores between 52 and 59 were considered elementary level students.

The demotivating factors questionnaire was provided in English because it was found to be easy to comprehend in a pilot study made for calculating the reliability of the questionnaire and it was provided in the form of 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. The 5-point Likert scale is (1) completely disagree, (2) disagree, (3) sometimes true of me, (4) agree and (5) completely agree. In order to determine the index of reliability for this questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for it. The obtained index was 0.77.

### *2.3 Design*

This study drew on the descriptive research design. The descriptive design was regarded appropriate since, as Adams and Schvaneveldt (1985) states, it is a kind of research in which the main goal is to show an accurate profile of persons, events, or objects and according to Best and Kahn (2006), descriptive research is especially appropriate for behavioral sciences. The approach used for data collection was the survey approach. The main feature of survey is collecting the data from a sample or specific population by means of questionnaires or interview. In this approach the researchers did not manipulate independent variables or apply control conditions to the subjects under study.

### *2.4 Procedure*

When the sampling was over, the ESP students were asked to sit for the Oxford Placement Test. The data collected from this test was calculated in order to classify the ESP learners into two groups of intermediate level and elementary level students. After administering the Oxford Placement Test, the students were given the demotivating factors questionnaire which was a 12-item questionnaire in the form of Likert scale. Descriptive Statistics were run to determine the mean scores of each group on demotivating factors.

The data collected were analyzed using the Minitab statistical package version 16. The mean scores of each of demotivating factors were calculated for each group. Then the means of each group for each of the demotivating factors were compared with each other and a t-test was run in order to clarify whether there was a difference between the means of intermediate proficiency level learners and elementary proficiency level learners in demotivating factors questionnaire.

### 3. Results

After data were collected and the scores of the ESP learners were calculated for Oxford Placement Test, the students were classified into two groups of intermediate proficiency level learners versus elementary proficiency level learners. From 134 participants 60 of them were categorized as intermediate proficiency level learners and 74 of them were classified as elementary proficiency level learners.

Then, the mean for each of the demotivating factors was calculated for each group. The mean score ( $M$ ) of 3.5 or higher for each factor means High,  $M = 2.5 - 3.4$  indicates Medium, and  $M = 2.4$  or lower denotes Low.

Table 1. Mean scores calculated for demotivating factors in elementary level learners

Item No.	Mean	St Deviation	Frequency
1.	3.486	1.426	Medium
2.	3.986	1.287	High
3.	3.932	1.209	High
4.	2.932	1.296	Medium
5.	3.081	1.362	Medium
6.	3.081	1.168	Medium
7.	3.041	1.232	Medium
8.	3.108	1.309	Medium
9.	3.122	1.334	Medium
10.	3.311	1.170	Medium
11.	3.635	1.117	High
12.	4.000	1.020	High

As Table 1 shows, elementary proficiency level learners view items 2,3,11, and 12 as the highest demotivating factors. It means that from elementary proficiency level students' point of view the teacher's attitude and personality, the teaching method, different proficiency levels of students and the weakness of students in English vocabulary play significant roles as demotivating factors in ESP classes and the other factors are medium in frequency.

Table 2. Mean scores calculated for demotivating factors in Intermediate level learners

Item No.	Mean	St Deviation	Frequency
1.	3.417	1.381	Medium
2.	4.067	1.300	High
3.	4.067	1.233	High
4.	2.933	1.287	Medium
5.	3.167	1.210	Medium
6.	3.133	1.186	Medium
7.	3.250	1.422	Medium
8.	3.450	1.320	Medium
9.	2.850	1.376	Medium
10.	3.083	1.279	Medium
11.	3.483	1.295	Medium
12.	3.800	1.273	High

Considering the information presented in the table 2, the highest mentioned demotivating factors by intermediate proficiency level learners are mainly items 2, 3, and 12. This group of learners also mentioned the attitude and personality of the teacher, the teaching method, and the weakness of students in English vocabulary board. The only difference of two groups considering the demotivating factors was in item 11. The elementary proficiency level learners obtained high frequency mean score in this item but from the view point of the intermediate proficiency level students different proficiency levels was not among the most important demotivating factors in ESP classes.

After obtaining the mean scores of both groups of learners for each of the demotivating factors, a t-test was carried out in order to determine the equality between the means of the two groups. The results are presented below.

Table 3. Results of independent t-test

	N	Mean	St Dev.	SE Mean	95% CI for mean difference	T-Test of mean difference
Intermediate level	74	3.392	0.408	0.118		
Elementary level	60	3.393	0.401	0.116	(-0.1208; 0.1183)	0 (vs. not = 0): T-Value =
Difference	12	-0.0012	0.1881	0.05430		.02 P-Value = 0.982

As it is shown in Table 3, there are no significant differences between the means scores obtained from the viewpoints of the intermediate proficiency level students and elementary proficiency level students. The t-value calculated was reported -0.02 and the p-value about 0.982.

#### 4. Discussion

The obtained results from the present study indicated that there were no significant differences between the demotivating factors mentioned by ESP students (intermediate proficiency level and elementary proficiency level). The means calculated showed that both groups of students viewed the attitude and personality of teachers, the teaching method, and the low range of English vocabulary of students play significant roles as the demotivating factors in English classes of ESP students. The demotivating factors indicated in this study were in line with factors identified by a research done by Oxford (1998). Oxford (1998) carried out research on teacher's role in changing a learning atmosphere into a demotivating situation. The research was done through the analysis of the written works of 250 students which were about their learning experiences. The findings showed that the personal relationship of the teacher with the learners, the attitude of the teacher, the style differences between teachers and students, and the type of class activities all acted as the demotivating factors in the educational context.

Furthermore, Ushioda (1998) conducted a study in order to identify the demotivating items in L2 learning situation. She found that special teaching methods and learning activities were among the most significant factors causing demotivation in L2 learning contexts.

Kikuchi (2009) in another study interviewed 42 university students to speak about their English learning classes in order to reveal the demotivating factors in English classes. The results showed that five factors were among the most demotivating factors in English classes. They were mainly the behaviors of the teachers, the use of grammar translation method, the entrance examinations of the universities, the emphasis on the memorization, and the course books and materials presented in the class.

#### 5. Conclusion

The results of this study presented some of the most important demotivating factors in ESP classes from the viewpoint of the learners. It also showed that the demotivating factors mentioned by intermediate proficiency level students did not have significant differences from the factors mentioned by elementary proficiency level students.

Considering the negative influences of the demotivating factors on the learning context, it is better for the teachers and students to identify these demotivating factors in learning atmosphere together and try to come over these factors in order to enjoy a better educational context in which both teachers and learners try to do their best for obtaining better results in the learning process and removing the negative influences they have on the motivation and energy needed for learning a second language. By removing the demotivating factors and decreasing the negative effects from the educational process, everybody could enjoy an energetic and pleasurable educational environment in which both teachers and students care about the results of the learning process and try to use everything which is useful for this process.

The teachers should also help their students in order to recognize these demotivating factors. This will in turn, motivate the learners to participate in learning activities more willingly and eagerly.

## References

- Adams, G. R. and Schvaneveldt, J. D. 1985. *Understanding research methods*. New York: Longman.
- Best, J. W. and Kahn, J. V. 2006. *Research in Education*. Pearson Education Inc.
- Blackmore, J., 1996. *Learning styles*. Retrieved July 22, 2012, from <http://www.cyg.net/~jblackmo/diglib/>
- Carter, R. and Nunan, D. 2001. *Teaching English to speakers of other languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deci, E. L. and Ryan, R. M. 1985. *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- Dornyei, Z. 1998. *Demotivation in foreign language learning*. Paper presented at the TESOL 98 Congress, Seattle, WA March.
- Dornyei, Z. 2001. *Teaching and Researching Motivation*. Harlow: Longman
- Dornyei, Z. and Otto, I. 1998. *Motivation in action: A process model of L2 motivation*. Working Papers in Applied Linguistics. Thames Valley University, London.
- Dweck, C. S. 1999. *Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.
- Freud, S. 1966. *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton.
- Gorham, J. and Christophel, D. M. 1992. Students' perception of teacher behaviors as motivating and demotivating factors in college classes. *Communication Quarterly* 40: 239-52.
- Kikuchi, K. 2009. Listening to our learners' voices: What demotivates Japanese high school students? *Language Teaching Research* 13(4): 435-71.
- Oxford, R. L. 1998. *Demotivation in Foreign Language Learning*. Paper presented at the TESOL 98 Congress, Seattle, WA, March.
- Ushioda, E. 1998. Effective motivational thinking: A cognitive theoretical approach to the study of language learning motivation. In Soler, E.A. and Espurz, V. C. (eds), *Current Issues in English Language Methodology*.
- Vallerand, R.J. 1997. Towards a hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In Zanna, M.P. (ed), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. Vol, 29. San Diego, CA: Academic Press: 271-360.
- Nunan, D., 1999. *Second language teaching and learning*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

## Appendix A

Item No.	Demotivating factors	Completely disagree	Disagree	Sometimes true	Agree	Completely agree
1.	Teacher's knowledge					
2.	Teacher's attitude and personality					
3.	Teaching method					
4.	Simplicity of the course book					
5.	Complexity of the course book					
6.	The emphasis of book on comprehension and translation					
7.	The attitudes of other students					
8.	Decreased self-confidence due to last semesters failures					
9.	Large number of students in the class					
10.	Negative attitude of learners about L2					
11.	Different proficiency levels of students					
12.	Weakness of students in English vocabulary knowledge					