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Demotivating Factors in Learning English: A Case of Students in Tra Vinh University, Vietnam

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Abstract:

The purposes of this study were to investigate the impact of internal and external factors on learners' demotivation in learning English and if gender affected learners' demotivating factors. The participants included 100 non-English majors at Tra Vinh university. The questionnaire was the only instrument focussing on internal and external factors. The study showed that internal factors had more impact on learners than external ones. For internal factors, learners were affected by the following items such as unclear study target, not being interested in English, their poor English and not achieving an ideal mark in tests. Concerning external factors, learners were influenced by inexperienced and not easy-going teachers, the overcrowded classrooms, and lack of using multimedia resources. Regarding gender, the finding indicated that there was no relationship between gender and learners' demotivating factors.

Keywords: Demotivation, external factors, internal factors, non-English majors, gender

1. Introduction

Acquiring a foreign language needs learners' motivation. Alizadeh (2016) claimed that if a learner orients his/her motivation in a foreign language acquisition, he/she will master the language successfully. Therefore, language learners, educators, and researchers affirm that motivation plays a significant role in learning a second or foreign language. Moreover, Dornyei (as cited in Ekiz & Kulmetov, 2016) emphasized on the impact of motivation which is considered as a major factor of learning a second language. It is widely accepted that the more motivated learners are, the more successful they will be at learning the second/foreign language. However, not all learners have a passion for learning a second or foreign language. Indeed, in some recent years, researchers have been interested in investigating why learners lose motivation in language learning and what measures can be done to tackle this issue (Ghadirzadeh, Hashtroudi, & Shokri, 2012, Akay, 2017, Çankaya, 2018, Khouya, 2018). Hu (2011, as cited in Han, Takkac-Tulgar & Aybirdi, 2019) confirmed that while motivational factors have a positive impact on language learning achievement, demotivating factors hinder the learning process. Thus, if students lose their motivation at the early stage of foreign language learning, they will suffer from long-term harmful effects such as lack of self-confidence, boredom, and constant failure in language learning achievement.

After many years of teaching English to non-English majors, we have found that their interest in learning English has been decreased gradually. The teaching program for all non-English majors at Tra Vinh University consists of 120 credits in which General English subjects account for 13 credits. Besides, they have to learn one or two Specialised English subjects (from 2-4 credits). Therefore, all English subjects occupy more than one-tenth of the total credits. However, the majority of non-English majors seem not to have a strong motivation in learning English. In the scope of this study, the researchers want to examine some common internal factors as well as external factors which demotivate their English learning. In addition, the study also aims to discover if there is a significant relationship between gender and demotivating factors. The findings will be useful to teachers and students who will recognize factors demotivating students in learning English. Since then, teachers can adjust their teaching methods in order to create a more exciting learning atmosphere. This also helps students to find out their own learning way.

This current study addresses the following issues:

- What common internal and external demotivating factors affect non-English majors in learning English?
- Is there a relation between gender and learners' internal and external demotivating factors in learning English?

1. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Background

2.1.1. Definition of Demotivation

According to Dornyei (2001, as cited in Li & Zhou, 2017), demotivation is the external force, which may make people reduce or lose a certain behavior tendency or the conduct of behavior.

Dornyei and Ushioda (2013, p. 139) defined demotivation as 'specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an ongoing action'.

However, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) believed that demotivation may need to be widened to include both internal factors (i.e. resulted from the learners themselves such as low self-confidence and attitude,) and external factors (i.e., resulted from outside factors such as teachers' attitude, and textbooks,).

2.1.2. Demotivating Factors in Learning English

Dornyei (2001) presented the following nine demotivating factors based on his studies about the possible factors of demotivation:

- Teachers' personalities, commitments, competence, teaching methods
- Inadequate school facilities (large class sizes, unsuitable level of classes or frequent change of teachers)
- Reduced self-confidence due to their experience of failure or lack of success
- Negative attitude toward the foreign language studied
- Compulsory nature of the foreign language study
- Interference of another foreign language that pupils are studying
- Negative attitude toward the community of the foreign language spoken
- Attitudes of group members
- Course books used in class

Oxford (1998) identified four types of demotivating factors:

- The teacher's personal relationship with the students;
- The teacher's attitude towards the course or the material;
- Style conflicts between teachers and students;
- The nature of the classroom activities.

Li and Zhou (2017) discovered two types of demotivating factors including:

- External factors: teaching material, teaching process and teaching content; teachers' teaching competence and attitude of teachers; the relationship between teachers and students; teaching facilities and teaching environment.
- Internal factors: lack of intrinsic interest, experience of failure, lack of confidence and unclear study goal.

Ghadirzadeh, Hashtroudi and Shokri (2012) discovered five factors demotivating students in learning English:

- Lack of perceived individual competence;
- Lack of intrinsic motivation;
- Inappropriate characteristics of teachers' teaching method and course contents;
- Inadequate university facilities and focus on difficult grammar.

2.2. Related studies

Li and Zhou (2017) did a study on '*A questionnaire-based study on Chinese University students' demotivation to learn English*'. This study aimed to examine the factors demotivating students in learning English among 367 participants from a non-key local university in China. The instrument of the study was the questionnaire including students' background and demotivating factors. The findings indicated that students were more influenced by external factors than internal ones in learning English. The results also emphasized that unclear study goal was a significant demotivator that hindered the students from learning English.

Cankaya (2018) conducted a study on '*Demotivation factors in foreign language learning*'. The aim of the study was to identify the most and the least demotivating factors in learning English for vocational students. The participants were 60 university students in Malkara Vocational School in Turkey. The questionnaire used in this study included two sections. Section one concerned students' biographical information and section two was about demotivating factors. The results indicated that the most influential demotivating factors were class characteristics including learners' being unsatisfied with the course contents and pace, focus on grammatical structures, university entrance exams, and memorization of the language. However, the least ones included teachers' factors consisting of teachers' attitude, teaching competence, language proficiency, personality and teaching styles.

Khouya (2018) carried out a study on '*Students demotivating factors in the EFL classroom: the case of Morocco*'. The study aimed to investigate the problem of demotivation in English language learning within the Moroccan context. The participants of the study were 201 EFL learners (84 males and 117 females) in six Moroccan secondary schools. The questionnaire employed in this study included four sections: students' perception for English language learning; English and demotivation; teachers of English and demotivation; learning environment and demotivation. The findings revealed that learning environment, especially crowded classrooms was the main demotivating factor in learning English. With regards to gender, there was no significant difference between male and female students in terms of the demotivating factors they faced.

In summary, the above previous studies focused on demotivating factors and the relationship between gender and those factors. However, there were no recommendations to deal with the demotivating factors. Therefore, our study also surveyed these two areas to fill in this gap by proposing some useful suggestions to better the significance of the study related to this field.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants of the study

The participants of the study were 100 students consisting of 67 females and 33 males at Tra Vinh university in five different majors such as Law, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Accounting, Finance and Banking.

3.2. Instruments

The research instrument employed to collect data for this study was the questionnaire which was adapted from Li and Zhou (2017). It covers two different categories.

For external factors, there are four groups of factors (19 items) including:

- Group 1: Teaching materials, teaching process and teaching content;
- Group 2: Teaching competence and attitudes of teachers;
- Group 3: The relationship between teachers and students;
- Group 4: Teaching facilities and teaching environment.

For internal factors, there are three groups of factors (11 items) consisting of:

- Group 5: Lack of intrinsic interest;
- Group 6: Experiences of failure and lack of confidence;
- Group 7: Unclear study goals.

All the statements were designed by using a five-point Likert-scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4) to strongly agree (5).

3.3. Procedures

The questionnaire was designed and delivered to 100 participants. The data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed by using the software SPSS version 25 (Statistic Package for the Social Sciences).

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Findings

4.1.1. The Reliability of the Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.656	30

Table 1: Reliability Statistics of the Questionnaire

A group of 100 students completed the questionnaires. All the data collected from the questionnaires were computed to check the frequency and the internal reliability coefficient. The results showed that the questionnaire used in this research was acceptably reliable with significant Cronbach Alpha's coefficient of .66 for 30 statements in total.

4.1.2. The Impact of External Factors on Students' Demotivation in Learning English

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
External Mean	100	2.26	4.16	3.06	.42

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Overall Mean Scores of External Factors

The data in Table 2 revealed the overall mean of external factors with average level ($M=3.06$, $SD=0.42$). There were 19 items related to external factors, but only six out of them constituted higher mean scores than the others. The descriptive statistics of these items were indicated in Table 3 below.

External Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Some teachers are inexperienced in teaching.	3.81	.85
Multimedia resources are seldom used in our class.	3.69	.93
The overcrowded classroom made me less interested in learning.	3.64	1.04
Teachers are not easy going.	3.56	.94
It's boring to test students only by exams.	3.49	1.18
It's boring to only listen to teachers in class.	3.46	1.29

Table 3. The Impact of Common External Factors on Students' Demotivation in Learning English

As can be seen from Table 3, six out of the 19 items related to external factors were found to have higher mean scores. In particular, the participants affirmed that they were not motivated to learn English well because some teachers were inexperienced in teaching with the highest mean score ($M=3.81$, $SD=0.85$). This can be explained that new teachers do not sometimes have appropriate teaching methods to motivate students with different levels in learning English

effectively. Also, some inexperienced teachers do not know how to emphasize key points of their lesson, which causes students to have difficulties in mastering the knowledge. Moreover, they also thought that multimedia resources were seldom used in their classes ($M=3.69$, $SD=0.93$). Clearly, some teachers do not recognize the important role of multimedia resources in teaching and learning. As a result, students feel bored to engage in the class activities. The next two demotivating factors were that the overcrowded classroom made them less interested in learning and teachers were not easy-going with ($M=3.64$, $SD=1.04$) for the former and ($M=3.56$, $SD=0.94$) for the latter. It is true that the majority of non-English majors' classes are often crowded with over 30 students, so it is hard for teachers to control the class as well as pay attention to each individual. In addition, overcrowding limits teachers-students and students-students' interactions. Moreover, if teachers are unfriendly, students are also afraid of asking questions or expressing opinions. The last two factors: 'It's boring to test students only by exams.' and 'It's boring to only listen to teachers in class.' accounted for ($M=3.49$ and $M=3.46$) respectively. The former factor can be explained that students need various forms of assessment in stead of exams only. If they are not assessed in class, they may not put their effort into the tasks. The latter factor indicates that students will lose their motivation if they have few opportunities to discuss or present their ideas in class.

4.1.3. The Impact of Internal Factors on Students' Demotivation in Learning English

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Internal Mean	100	3.27	5.00	3.91	.37

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Overall Mean Score of Internal Factors

The data in Table 4 demonstrated the overall mean of internal factors with rather high level ($M=3.91$, $SD=0.37$). There were 11 items of internal factors, but only four out of them constituted higher mean scores than the others. The descriptive statistics of these items were presented in Table 5 below.

Internal Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am not motivated to learn English well because of unclear study target.	4.41	.73
I'm not interested in English.	4.22	.86
My poor English made me demotivated to learn it.	4.02	.84
I can't achieve an ideal mark in tests.	3.97	.74

Table 5: The Impact of Common Internal Factors on Students' Demotivation in Learning English

In Table 5, four out of the 11 items related to internal factors occupied higher mean scores. The participants believed that they would be most demotivated in learning English due to unclear study target ($M=4.41$, $SD=0.73$). This will make students not concentrate on their learning and affect their academic performances. The second factor mentioned 'they were not interested in English' ($M=4.22$, $SD=0.86$). Some students who do not like learning English feel extremely hard to acquire this language. They seem to be fed up with activities in class. The last two factors were 'my poor English made me demotivated to learn English' and 'I can't achieve an ideal mark in tests' ($M= 4.02$ and $M= 3.97$) respectively. There is no doubt that students will feel disappointed since they are not good at English. As a result, this prevents them from mastering the lessons and achieving good marks in tests and exams.

4.1.4. The Impact of External and Internal Factors in Comparison

	Factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mean	external factors	100	3.06	.42
	internal factors	100	3.91	.37

Table 6: Group Statistics of External and Internal Factors

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Mean	Equal variances assumed	4.804	.030	-15.313	198	.000	-.84775	.05536	-.95692	-.73858
	Equal variances not assumed			-15.313	194.734	.000	-.84775	.05536	-.95694	-.73857

Table 7: Independent Samples Test

The data in Table 6 revealed that the overall mean score for external factors was ($M=3.06$, $SD= 0.42$) while the overall mean score for internal factors was ($M= 3.91$, $SD= 0.37$). Then, an independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the effect of external and internal demotivating factors on non-English majors in learning English. The finding in table 4.7 proved that there was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores for external factors ($M=3.06$, $SD= 0.42$) and internal factors ($M=3.91$, $SD=0.37$); $t(198) = -15.3$, $p=0.000$. These results showed that internal factors had more impacts than external factors on students' demotivation in learning English.

4.1.5. The Relationship between Gender and Demotivating Factors

4.1.5.1. Gender and External Factors

		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
External Mean	2.26	0	1	1
	2.32	1	0	1
	2.37	1	0	1
	2.42	1	0	1
	2.47	3	2	5
	2.53	2	0	2
	2.58	5	1	6
	2.63	2	2	4
	2.68	1	1	2
	2.74	2	2	4
	2.79	2	0	2
	2.84	2	7	9
	2.89	4	1	5
	2.95	3	0	3
	3.00	2	1	3
	3.05	2	0	2
	3.11	3	2	5
	3.16	1	1	2
	3.21	2	2	4
	3.26	8	0	8
	3.32	3	1	4
	3.37	2	0	2
	3.42	2	0	2
	3.47	3	2	5
	3.53	3	3	6
	3.58	0	1	1
	3.63	2	1	3
	3.68	1	0	1
	3.74	1	1	2
	3.84	2	0	2
	4.00	1	0	1
	4.16	0	1	1
Total		67	33	100

Table 8: External Mean * Gender Crosstabulation

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.735 ^a	31	0.382
Likelihood Ratio	41.292	31	0.102
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.032	1	0.859
N of Valid Cases	100		

a. 62 cells (96.9%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .33.

Table 9: Chi-Square Tests

The data in table 4.8 presented the crosstabulation of gender and external means. A chi-square test of independence presented in table 4.9 was performed to examine the relation between gender and external demotivating factors. The result showed that no relation was found between gender and external demotivating factors, $X^2 (31, N = 100) = 32.74, p = 0.38$.

4.1.5.2. Gender and Internal Factors

		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Internal Mean	3.27	1	0	1
	3.36	4	0	4
	3.45	4	3	7
	3.55	4	0	4
	3.64	6	4	10
	3.73	9	6	15
	3.82	5	6	11
	3.91	9	2	11
	4	6	4	10
	4.09	7	0	7
	4.18	1	0	1
	4.27	2	2	4
	4.36	1	1	2
	4.45	3	0	3
	4.55	1	4	5
	4.64	1	0	1
	4.73	2	0	2
	4.91	0	1	1
	5	1	0	1
Total		67	33	100

Table 10: Internal Mean * Gender Crosstabulation

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.116 ^a	18	0.151
Likelihood Ratio	31.253	18	0.027
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.3	1	0.584
N of Valid Cases	100		

a. 33 cells (86.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .33.

Table 11: Chi-Square Tests

The data in Table 10 revealed the crosstabulation of gender and internal means. A chi-square test of independence presented in Table 11 was run to check the relation between gender and internal demotivating factors. The result showed that gender does not affect internal demotivating factors, $X^2 (18, N = 100) = 24.12, p = 0.15$.

4.3. Discussion

From the findings above, it was concluded that internal factors had more impact than external factors on students' demotivation in learning English. By comparison, the two previous studies conducted by Trang and Baldauf (2007) and Li and Zhou (2017) revealed that external factors were more influential than internal ones on the participants to learn English.

With regard to external factors, it was evident that the six items including: some teachers were inexperienced in teaching, teachers were not easy-going, the overcrowded classroom made them less interested in learning, and multimedia resources were seldom used in their classes, it was boring to test only by exams, and it was boring to listen to teachers only had the most influential on learners' demotivation in learning English. Similarly, Ghadirzadeh, Hashtroudi and Shokri

(2012) explored that inappropriate characteristics of teachers' teaching methods and course contents and inadequate university facilities demotivated learners in learning English significantly. However, the participants in their study did not have problems with the forms of test and listening to the teachers in class.

In terms of internal factors, four out of the eleven items accounted for higher mean scores such as unclear study target, not being interested in English, their poor English, and not achieving an ideal mark in tests. In contrast, Ghadirzadeh, Hashtroudi and Shokri (2012) investigated that lack of perceived individual competence and lack of intrinsic motivation influenced learners' demotivation most.

Concerning the effect of gender, the data showed that there was no relationship between gender and the demotivating factors. This result was in accordance with that of Khouya (2018), who discovered that there was no significant difference between males and females in terms of the number of demotivating factors that they encountered. In contrast, Genc and Aydin (2017) concluded that male students were more demotivated than female students in learning English. On the other hand, the study conducted by Akay (2017) proved that female students were more demotivated than their counterparts because female students were more timid and afraid of making mistakes.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The findings indicated that internal factors had more impact on learners than external factors. In particular, regarding internal factors, learners were affected by the following items such as unclear study target, not being interested in English, their poor English, and not achieving ideal marks in tests and exams. Concerning external factors, learners were influenced by inexperienced and not easy-going teachers, the overcrowded classroom, and lack of using multimedia resources. Regarding gender, the finding indicated that there was no relationship between gender and learners' demotivating factors.

The results will be useful to teachers and students who will find out factors demotivating students in learning English. Thanks to this, teachers can change their ways of teaching to make their lessons more interesting. This also helps students to find out their suitable learning strategies to improve their English.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the researchers propose some recommendations for students, teachers and schools.

For students, there are some possible suggested solutions for them to enhance their motivation in learning English.

- Unclear study goals: they should discuss with their English teachers and advisors to explain the roles of English for their future career or tertiary education.
- Being not interested in English: they should learn English through various learning sources such as library books, magazines, TV programs, English learning websites, English speaking clubs.
- Poor English: they should discuss with their English teachers and advisors to find out their appropriate learning strategies and learning materials.
- Not achieving ideal marks in tests: they should go to class regularly, pay attention to their lectures, and revise their lessons carefully before tests. Moreover, they can study in groups with students who have positive attitudes towards learning English to improve their learning achievements.

For teachers, they should observe teaching from their colleagues to gain more teaching experience as well as knowledge. They also need to attend training workshops organized in other schools to update innovative teaching methods. In addition to this, they should create a friendly atmosphere to get students involved in their lessons. Moreover, they should consult their students about appropriate learning strategies and authentic materials to facilitate their language learning. Finally, teachers should carry out research papers to investigate their students' difficulties or demotivation in learning English so that they can find ways to tackle the issues above.

For schools, it is vital that schools should pay attention to the size of the classroom to make sure the teaching and learning quality. Besides, classrooms should be provided with enough facilities to foster learners' language acquisition more effectively.

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