

A Study on Demotivating Factors among Chinese EFL Students

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Abstract: The study aims to investigate the demotivating factors of Chinese university learners who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). All 706 students majoring in English participated in the study which the paper examines. Using quantitative data analysis, eight demotivational factors were identified: (1) Teacher-related factors; (2) Facilities; (3) The experience of personal failure; (4) Pressure; (5) Lack of interest in language learning; (6) Course arrangements; (7) Class characteristics; and (8) Teaching methods. The results reveal that teacher-related factors are the most influential external factor and personal failure the most important internal factor. By understanding the factors that demotivate EFL learners in China, teachers can seek to improve their teaching in relation to EFL, and be better enabled to avoid important demotivating factors.

1. Introduction

Motivation is regarded as a critical factor in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). Motivation not only boosts students' learning enthusiasm but also helps sustain the learning process. Scholars note that motivation has two both positive and negative aspects. Demotivation is the negative aspect. Dörnyei defines demotivation as "external forces that reduce or diminish the motivation basis of behavior, intention, or an ongoing action" (Dörnyei, 2001a)

Researchers have found that less motivated students find it difficult to achieve success in their L2 learning (Dörnyei, 1994, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). As a result, many scholars now examine what causes demotivation and what can be done about it.

Previous studies in this area of research report that demotivating factors can be classified into six categories, related to: teaching, experience of failure, class characteristics, class environment, class materials and how interested a learner is (Sakai and Kikuchi, 2009). To date, an increasing number of scholars have studied the effects of differing factors in different contexts. (Kim, 2014b; Alavinia & Sehat, 2012; Kikuchi, 2013). Previous research shows that external factors, notably teachers, are crucial in explaining the factors that lead to a decline in learners' motivation. (Arai, 2004; Gorham & Christophel, 1992;). Overall, however, there is a lack of comprehensive research on demotivating factors influencing EFL students.

Studies examining which demotivating factors are unique to specific contexts are key research subjects. Many studies in China focus on undergraduate students taking an English major in key universities. But there are no examinations of the decline of English learning motivation in ordinary universities in southwest China. Consequently, this paper seeks to enrich the existing research. It

reports on an empirical study on the decline of English learning motivation in universities in southwest China.

2. Literature Review

Early research on demotivation centered on the relationship between teachers' incapacities and the effects on students' learning experiences (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997). Zhang (2007) has studied demotivating factors in several countries, including: China, Germany, Japan and the United States. He found that teacher-related factors are often negative motivational influences. Dörnyei (2001) defines demotivation as 'specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action'. Early research in this area focused on external causes (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Tsuchiya, 2004a). Kikuchi pointed out that it has not been empirically proven that all the demotivating factors are external. As a result, Kikuchi (2011) modified Dörnyei's (2001) definition as follows: demotivation refers to 'specific internal and external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action'. This appears to confirm that both internal and external factors are critical in relation to demotivation.

In EFL contexts, Dörnyei (1998) examined the demotivation of 50 self-identified Hungarian demotivated students of English or German. He identified nine varieties of demotivating factor. Subsequently, researchers began to study demotivation from a number of aspects.

Chambers (1993) researched into nine students and seven teachers in four middle schools in the UK. He found that teachers and students hold different opinions on the causes of decrease in language learning motivation. Teachers consider students' own internal factors to be main factors leading to demotivation, while learners blame external factors such as the quality of teaching. Oxford (1998), who has presented significant theories in the field of motivational strategy, identifies four main demotivating factors: the relationship between teacher and students, the teacher's attitude, classroom interactions, and conflicts of style. In addition, a study conducted by Ushioda (1998) examined 20 French learners in Ireland that found that students attribute their demotivating experience to teacher-related factors.

Most European scholars focus on the demotivation of middle school students through qualitative research. Many Asian scholars concentrate on the demotivation of non-English major university students via quantitative research.

3. Methodology

This study aims to explore the most influential demotivating factors among Chinese university students and the differences between English and non-English major students. The study is designed to answer the following research questions:

What are the main demotivating factors for Chinese EFL English-major university students?

In order to answer the study question, 709 English major students from Chongqing College of Humanities, Science & Technology were recruited.

Table 1. Profile of participants

| Grade | Gender | | Total |
|-----------|--------|------|-------|
| | Female | Male | |
| Freshman | 216 | 36 | 252 |
| Sophomore | 179 | 23 | 202 |
| Junior | 201 | 11 | 212 |
| Senior | 39 | 4 | 43 |
| Total | 635 | 74 | 709 |

Table 1 Shows the Participants' Profiles. the Table Indicates That the Total Number of Female Participants is Nearly Nine Times Greater Than Male Participants.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Pilot Survey

The data analysis of this research was undertaken using the statistical software SPSS 22. At the pilot testing stage, there were two parts in the questionnaire. Two hundred and sixty one students were selected for the pilot survey. The first part of the demotivation questionnaire focused on grades and gender. In part 2, a few modifications were made to suit the Chinese context. Thirty-eight variables were chosen after modification. Following exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with SPSS analysis software, the results show that seven factors were extracted. Their Eigen value was between 1.080 and 12.729, and the Eigen value was >1 . Total variance explained 66.268% of the results. The Cronbach's alpha of the pilot questionnaire was 0.942, indicating that the instrument was reliable. All items had a mixture of salient structure coefficients (a factor loading >0.40) and non-salient structure coefficients (a factor loading <0.40).

4.2 Formal Investigation Result

The formal questionnaire was modified following the pilot testing results, and distributed by the researcher to 709 students. After explaining to all students how to complete the questionnaire, all 709 completed questionnaires were returned 30 minutes later. The effective rate of response of the questionnaire was 100%. The results were as follows:

Table 2 Kmo and Bartlett Test

| KMO and Bartlett test | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| | KMO | 0.928 |
| Bartlett test | Approx. Chi-Square | 11203.956 |
| | df | 703 |
| | Sig. | 0.000 |

Confirmatory factor analyses were presented to answer the study question. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the formal questionnaire was 0.918 and the result indicated that KMO was 0.928, which means the results were suitable for factor analysis.

Table 3 Eigen Value And Variance Contribution

| Total Variance Explained | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Factor | Eigen values | | | % of variance(Unrotated) | | | % of variance(Rotated) | | |
| | Eigen | % of Variance | Cum. % of Variance | Eigen | % of Variance | Cum. % of Variance | Eigen | % of Variance | Cum. % of Variance |
| 1 | 9.992 | 27.754 | 27.754 | 9.992 | 27.754 | 27.754 | 4.414 | 12.262 | 12.262 |
| 2 | 3.756 | 10.433 | 38.188 | 3.756 | 10.433 | 38.188 | 4.162 | 11.562 | 23.824 |
| 3 | 1.929 | 5.359 | 43.546 | 1.929 | 5.359 | 43.546 | 4.124 | 11.455 | 35.279 |
| 4 | 1.505 | 4.181 | 47.728 | 1.505 | 4.181 | 47.728 | 2.211 | 6.143 | 41.421 |
| 5 | 1.261 | 3.503 | 51.23 | 1.261 | 3.503 | 51.23 | 1.839 | 5.109 | 46.53 |
| 6 | 1.134 | 3.15 | 54.38 | 1.134 | 3.15 | 54.38 | 1.794 | 4.984 | 51.514 |
| 7 | 1.108 | 3.077 | 57.457 | 1.108 | 3.077 | 57.457 | 1.67 | 4.638 | 56.152 |
| 8 | 1.026 | 2.849 | 60.307 | 1.026 | 2.849 | 60.307 | 1.496 | 4.154 | 60.307 |

4.3 Extracted Factors

Factor analysis was performed to simplify the factor structure and eight factors were extracted. The Eigen value and variance contribution of the data are shown in table 3, and these eight factors explain 60% of the data.

Table 4. Factor analysis of demotivation

| No. | Item | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 | F6 | F7 | F8 |
|-----|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 11. | Teachers'English pronunciation was poor. | 0.554 | | | | | | | |
| 12. | Teachers ridiculed students'mistakes. | 0.560 | | | | | | | |
| 13. | Teachers made one-way explanations too often. | 0.639 | | | | | | | |
| 14. | Teachers'explanations were not easy to understand | 0.671 | | | | | | | |
| 15. | Teachers shouted or became angry. | 0.646 | | | | | | | |
| 38. | The teacher has little interest in teaching | 0.468 | | | | | | | |
| 21. | Computer equipment was not used. | | 0.786 | | | | | | |
| 22. | Visual materials (such as videos and DVDs) were not used. | | 0.779 | | | | | | |
| 23. | The internet was not used. | | 0.791 | | | | | | |
| 24. | Audio materials (such as CDs and tapes) were not used. | | 0.807 | | | | | | |
| 7. | I had difficulty memorizing words and phrases. | | | 0.682 | | | | | |
| 8. | I got low scores on tests (such as midterm and final examinations). | | | 0.74 | | | | | |
| 9. | I was unsure of how to self-study for English lessons. | | | 0.785 | | | | | |
| 36. | I am not confident when I speak English | | | | 0.643 | | | | |
| 27. | I did not like my classmates. | | | | 0.652 | | | | |
| 28. | My friends did not like English. | | | | 0.682 | | | | |
| 29. | I was often compared with my friends. | | | | 0.646 | | | | |
| 31. | I lost the purpose of studying English. | | | | | 0.649 | | | |
| 32. | I lost my interest in English. | | | | | 0.703 | | | |
| 33. | I don't think I will use English in the future. | | | | | 0.706 | | | |
| 2. | Most of the lessons were focused on translation. | | | | | | 0.712 | | |
| 3. | Most of the lessons were focused on grammar. | | | | | | 0.761 | | |
| 4. | Most of the lessons were entrance examination oriented. | | | | | | 0.644 | | |
| 5. | I was expected to use (or speak and write) grammatically correct English. | | | | | | | 0.684 | |
| 30. | English was a compulsory subject. | | | | | | | 0.638 | |
| 6. | I was forced to memorize sentences in the textbooks too often. | | | | | | | | 0.726 |

The main findings of this study are as follows: English learning demotivation factors in this university are mainly reflected in eight aspects. The eight factors include two internal and six external factors. They reflect the influence of different levels on the negative motivation of foreign

language learning. In terms of the internal factors of demotivation, personal failure experience (factor 3) was the most demotivating factor, followed by factor 5: lack of interest in English learning.

Factor 3 received a high loading from questions 7, 8 and 9, namely “Personal Failure Experience”. The results show that students may lack confidence due to their family background, which reflects their lack of learning ability in English, as well as the experience of earlier failures in exams, leading to a vicious circle of unattainment. Additionally, among students in less developed areas, a frequent lack of learning strategies also affected their motivation. Overall, results verified Dörnyei’s (2001a) findings.

Factor 5 received a high loading from items 31-33. It is related to “Lack of interest in language learning”. In this study, most students come from rural areas, far away from cities, and have no clear goals in relation to learning English. In addition, many have no specific idea of their future use of English after graduation or of the opportunities it may bring. As a result, they lose interest in learning English, have no learning goals, and no specific plans for the future. This is consistent with the research results of Sakai and Kikuchi (2009).

In terms of external factors of demotivation, “Teacher-related” factors are the most influential (factor 1), including questions 11-1 and 38. As learning guides, teachers have a significant impact on their students. Results of the questionnaire indicate that teachers’ competence, behaviour, teaching method and style, and their relationship with their students, can all lead to negative motivation on the part of the latter. This result is consistent with earlier research results (Dörnyei, 2001a; Hasegawa, 2004; Ikeno, 2002; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Millette & Gorham, 2002; Oxford, 1998).

Factor 2 was entitled “Facilities”. It comprises items 21-24. It indicates that in the era of the information explosion, the application of modern information and multimedia technology in English classes has an important impact on students’ negative motivation in relation to English learning. Many scholars have pointed out that it is the most influential incentive of negative motivation (Chambers, 1993; Ushioda, 1998; Oxford, 1998; Dörnyei, 2001a; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009).

Factor 4 obtained a high loading from 4 items (27-29, 37). They were referred to as learning pressure and so Category 4 was named “Pressure”. The subjects in this survey are all English majors, and they all need to pass the College English test as a graduation requirement of an English major. This causes sometimes invisible peer pressure among students, indicating that peer pressure is an important factor leading to negative motivations in English learning. Moreover, similar findings were found among ELF learners in Japan (Falout and Maruyama, 2004). It also indicates that college students can be vulnerable to the influence of their external environment when they have immature cognition and poor self-regulation abilities.

The sixth factor includes items 2, 3, and 4. The results show that “Course arrangements” also has a significant impact on students’ motivation, which may be related to the fact that most Chinese undergraduate universities still focus on traditional grammar-translation teaching. Motivation decline may be attributed to a teacher-centered classroom and a non-communicative language teaching mode, which focusing only on vocabulary and grammar learning, can induce negative motivation (Dörnyei, 2001a; Ikeno, 2002).

Factor 7 comprises items 5 and 30. It is related to the “class characteristics.” It indicates that English as a compulsory subject can have a negative impact on students’ motivation. The link with their graduation certificate and degree certificate can lead to students’ passive learning of English, instead of active learning motivated by enthusiasm. In addition, teachers and parents collectively expect students to use grammar correctly, which can also lead to a decrease in students’ interest in learning.

Factor 8 that consists of question item 6, is related to the teacher's method. Students are often required to recite the text instead of learning the text as the basis of their understanding.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, according to the research results, this type of undergraduate college can reduce the impact of demotivation by improving the following aspects. 1. Increasing teachers' competence, including providing more positive feedback to students. 2. Choosing textbooks that are both interesting and suitable for students, in order to try to avoid a boring classroom atmosphere. 3. Providing a suitable classroom environment. 4. Enabling students to learn actively not passively. 5. Updating teaching methods and trying interactive teaching.

This study has sought to enrich existing research on reasons for students' demotivation when learning a foreign language in China. It also aims to provide a useful reference for English language teachers who seek to reduce or prevent the demotivation of their students in certain types of universities.

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