



Factors Causing ESL Students' Demotivation to Learn English



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Abstract: *Despite the importance of English language proficiency in Pakistan, many learners struggle to develop a positive attitude towards English language learning. Thereby, this qualitative research study aims to analyze the factors causing ESL (English as a Second Language) college students' demotivation to learn English. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with sixteen students from different colleges in Karachi. The study found that difficult course content, non-interactive teaching styles, using English as the medium of instruction, and teachers' attitudes were the major sources of demotivation among the participants. This study emphasizes the importance of motivation in English language learning among ESL students. These findings have implications for ESL teachers in designing effective interactive language instructions that can help students improve their motivation to learn English.*

Key Words: ESL Learners; Demotivation Factors; Qualitative Study; Course Content; Teachers' Attitudes; the Medium of Instruction

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Introduction

English language learning has become increasingly significant in today's globalized world. The spread of English as the lingua franca has made it essential for individuals to acquire proficiency in the language to communicate and succeed in various domains such as academia, business, and technology. The importance of English can be attributed to its widespread use in international communication and the

globalization of education and the economy. English has become the leading language of science and technology (Akram et al., [2021](#)). The language is used in the majority of international scientific journals, conferences, and seminars. English is also the primary language for communication in the fields of engineering, medicine, and IT. Consequently, proficiency in English has become an essential requirement for individuals seeking to excel in these fields (Tan & Bensal, [2022](#)).

Therefore, the significance of English language learning cannot be overstated. English proficiency has become a key determinant of success in various domains, both in national and international contexts. In light of the growing importance of English, many countries have made efforts to promote English language learning in their education systems. Additionally, English language proficiency tests such as TOEFL and IELTS have become a requirement for admission to universities and job opportunities in English-speaking countries (Read, 2015). The association between English language proficiency and success in Pakistan can be attributed to the country's colonial past. English was introduced to Pakistan during British rule, and it has since then remained a language of power and prestige. Those who can speak English fluently are often perceived as more educated and successful, making it an essential requirement for higher education and job opportunities (Eckes & Althaus, 2020).

However, despite the importance of English language proficiency in Pakistan, many learners struggle to develop a positive attitude towards English language learning (Farooq et al., 2020). This is because learning English can be challenging, especially for learners whose first language is not English. Additionally, there is a lack of resources and opportunities for English language learning in many parts of the country (Akram et al., 2020). Motivation is a crucial factor in language learning, and numerous researchers have investigated the various factors that influence motivation to improve the learning of the target language (Hussain et al., 2020). However, while much attention has been given to understanding the factors that lead to motivation, there has been a lack of research on the dark side of motivation: demotivation.

Demotivation is a phenomenon where learners lose their motivation to learn a language due to various reasons. It is a

complex issue that can have a negative impact on learners' language learning progress and can lead to a decrease in their overall language proficiency (Dörnyei, 2014). Some of the factors that contribute to demotivation include the quality of instruction, learners' perceptions of the relevance of the language to their needs and interests, anxiety, and learners' previous experiences with language learning.

The lack of research on demotivation is a significant concern as it limits our understanding of the factors that contribute to learners' decreased motivation to learn the target language. Furthermore, a lack of awareness of demotivation can lead to inadequate support for learners who are experiencing this phenomenon, which can ultimately lead to a decreased interest in language learning and a lack of progress in language proficiency.

To address this issue, more research is needed to understand the factors that contribute to demotivation in language learning. This research thereby aims to explore the factors causing demotivation among ESL learners to learn English. The findings of this study can help educators and policymakers develop strategies and interventions to prevent demotivation among ESL learners and promote a positive learning environment. Additionally, language educators can provide support and guidance to ESL learners who are experiencing demotivation, such as providing additional resources, adapting instructional strategies to meet learners' needs, and building learners' confidence and self-esteem.

Literature Review

Demotivation is a phenomenon in language learning that refers to external forces that reduce or impair the motivation of learners (Dörnyei, 2014). It is the opposite of motivation and can have a negative impact

on learners' language learning progress. Demotivation can be caused by a variety of factors, including the quality of instruction, learners' perceptions of the relevance of the language to their needs and interests, anxiety, and learners' previous experiences with language learning.

Demotivation can have several negative impacts on language learning. One of the most common manifestations of demotivation is decreased interest in language learning (Getie, 2020). Learners may lose their enthusiasm for the language and become less motivated to learn. They may find the learning process boring or tedious, and may not see the value in continuing to learn.

Another way in which demotivation can manifest is through decreased participation in classroom activities. Learners may become less engaged in classroom activities and discussions, which can have a negative impact on their learning progress (Wang & Guan, 2020). They may also become less likely to ask questions or seek clarification, which can lead to gaps in their understanding of the language.

Demotivation can also lead to decreased confidence in language proficiency. Learners may begin to doubt their ability to learn the language or may feel that they are not making progress as quickly as they would like. This can be particularly discouraging for learners who are already struggling with the language and may lead to anxiety (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019).

Ultimately, demotivation can lead to a lack of progress in language proficiency, and learners may give up on learning the language altogether. This can be a significant setback for learners, particularly if they need the language for academic or professional purposes (Jiao et al., 2022).

It is important for educators and policymakers to recognize the negative impact of demotivation on language

learning, and to develop strategies and interventions to prevent it. Creating a positive learning environment, adapting instructional strategies to make the language more relevant and meaningful to learners, and providing learners with the necessary support and resources are all important steps in preventing demotivation and promoting a positive and effective language learning experience.

Understanding the causes and effects of demotivation is crucial in language learning. One approach to preventing demotivation is to create a positive learning environment that promotes intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This can be achieved by making learning activities relevant and interesting to learners, promoting learner autonomy, providing clear feedback, and building learners' confidence and self-esteem. Another approach to preventing demotivation is to identify and address the specific factors that contribute to it. For example, if learners are demotivated due to anxiety, strategies such as relaxation techniques or cognitive-behavioural therapy can be implemented. If learners perceive the language as irrelevant to their needs, educators can adapt instructional strategies to make the language more relevant and meaningful to learners.

Research Questions

The study aims to address the following research question:

- What are the factors that lead to demotivation among college students in Karachi while learning English?

Research Methodology

Instrument

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method. This approach was chosen because it allowed the researchers to gather rich and

detailed information about the participants' experiences, attitudes, and perspectives related to the research topic (Magaldi&Berler, 2020). During the interviews, participants were asked a set of questions related to their experiences and perceptions of the topic under investigation. The questions were open-ended, which allowed participants to provide detailed responses and share their unique perspectives. The researchers also had the flexibility to ask follow-up questions or explore particular responses in more depth.

Trustworthiness of the Instrument

To ensure the trustworthiness of semi-structured interviews, two experts were selected based on their expertise in the English teaching field and their familiarity with the research topic. They were provided with the research design, interview protocol, and the transcripts of the interviews, along with any relevant background information. They were asked to evaluate the study based on several criteria, including the clarity of the research questions, the appropriateness of the interview protocol, the quality of the data collected, the rigour of the analysis, and the credibility of the findings.

Sampling

The study followed a theoretical sampling approach, to select the participants of the study. In qualitative research, theoretical sampling is a common method used to select participants for a study. Theoretical sampling involves selecting participants based on their potential to provide the researcher with the information needed to answer research questions and develop theoretical concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In the context of this study, sixteen students were selected by employing the theoretical sampling method approach.

Data Analysis

To begin the analysis, the researcher

transcribed the interviews and reviewed them to identify key themes and concepts. Next, the researcher organized the themes into broader categories to create a coding framework (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This framework was used to guide the analysis of subsequent interviews and ensure consistency in the analysis process.

Findings

After transcribing the interviews conducted with ESL learners, several factors were identified as potential sources of demotivation to learn English. These factors are presented in the following section:

Difficult Textbooks

Difficulty in understanding textbooks was reported by many ESL learners as a major factor that demotivates them from learning. These learners expressed frustration with textbooks that were too complex or contained too much technical language. They felt overwhelmed and found it difficult to keep up with the course material. This led to a sense of discouragement and a belief that they were not capable of learning the language.

A Student Mentioned

Our textbooks are so much difficult. Those words are not used in speaking in our daily routine. Due to this I often find it hard to memorize and translate the lessons.

Some learners also reported that textbooks were not engaging enough. They felt that the materials were outdated and did not reflect their interests and needs. This made it difficult for them to stay motivated and engaged in the learning process. They also reported a lack of interest in reading and understanding the lessons due to their complexity, which contributed to their demotivation in the class. A student mentioned:

I feel so bored in the English lectures. The

lessons seem like topics of history, which I do not feel interesting to read or understand.

Course Contents

In the interviews conducted with ESL learners, a common theme emerged that the irrelevant course contents were a major source of demotivation. Some learners reported that the content did not seem relevant to their personal or academic interests, leading to a lack of motivation to engage with the material. Others mentioned that the content was too difficult, which made them feel discouraged and demotivated. As mentioned by a student:

I do not find course content relevant to our daily lives. Due to this, I find it difficult to understand.

Teaching Style

The non-interactive teaching style was reported as a major source of demotivation by many ESL learners in the study. They mentioned that some teachers simply lecture without engaging students in discussions, activities, or interactive exercises. These students felt that they were not actively participating in the learning process and were not able to fully comprehend the material. This led to a lack of interest and motivation in learning the language. They expressed a desire for more interactive teaching styles, such as group discussions, pair work, and role-play activities, which they believed would make learning more engaging and enjoyable. According to a student:

A teacher comes, reads the lesson, translates it, and leaves. He doesn't explain, or communicate with us properly, it makes us feel so frustrated.

Besides, using English in teaching was reported as a major source of demotivation by many ESL learners in the study. These learners mentioned that some teachers tend to use English as the primary language of instruction without providing any

explanations or translations into their native language. As a result, they found it difficult to follow the lecture and understand the course materials. They felt demotivated to learn when they could not understand what was being taught in class. These students expressed a need for more explanation and translation in their native language, especially for complex or technical terms, to aid their comprehension and help them to participate actively in the learning process. They believed that this would help to boost their motivation and engagement in the language learning process.

Teachers' Attitudes

According to the findings of the study, many ESL learners reported that their teachers' attitudes were a major issue that made them feel demotivated to learn English. The participants stated that some teachers had negative attitudes towards students who made mistakes, which made them feel embarrassed and discouraged to participate in class activities. Other participants mentioned that some teachers were not approachable or available for questions and feedback, which created a feeling of disinterest and detachment towards the learning process. One of the students mentioned:

Our English teacher is very strict, we can not ask any questions from him during the lecture. This makes me feel depressed.

Moreover, the participants reported that some teachers had unrealistic expectations and were not supportive of helping students improve their language skills. They felt that the teachers did not understand the struggles and challenges they faced as ESL learners and did not provide adequate support to help them overcome these difficulties. This lack of support further contributed to their demotivation to learn English. According to one student:

Our teacher expects us to do assignments

on daily basis, but we feel so uncomfortable and do not find time to complete the tasks on regular basis. Due to this, I do not want to attend the class.

Discussion

Motivation is a key factor in language learning, and it plays a crucial role in encouraging students to learn English. Motivated learners are more likely to be successful in their language-learning endeavours, and are more likely to persevere through difficulties and setbacks, take risks in using the language, and engage in more independent learning outside of the classroom. The current study highlights that despite the importance of motivation in language learning, there are several factors that can lead to demotivation among ESL learners.

One major factor that emerged was difficulty in understanding textbooks for ESL learners which demotivates them from learning English. Suherman and Mandarani (2021) also reported a similar finding, where students struggled to understand the content of English textbooks, leading to a decrease in motivation to learn the language. Based on this finding, it is suggested that teachers should consider using more accessible and engaging textbooks that are appropriate for the level of ESL learners. They can also provide additional materials such as audio or video recordings, online resources and applications (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023), or simplified versions of the textbook material to help students better understand the content.

Another suggestion would be to use more interactive teaching methods to make the classes more engaging and interesting for the students. Teachers can use group activities, discussions, and other interactive techniques to promote engagement and participation (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022). This can help students feel more motivated

to learn English and stay engaged in the learning process.

Another major factor that emerged was irrelevant and uninteresting course contents that demotivates ESL learners from learning English. The finding that ESL learners are demotivated by irrelevant and uninteresting course content is consistent with previous research (Oeamoum&Sriwichai,2020).To address this issue, teachers can consider incorporating more engaging and relevant materials, such as current events or topics related to the learners' interests, into their lesson plans. They can also encourage active participation from learners by giving them opportunities to choose topics and activities that interest them.

Furthermore, teachers can collaborate with their students to co-create the course content, taking into consideration the learners' needs and interests. This approach can increase learner engagement and motivation, as well as enhance the relevance of the course content. Teachers can also use technology and multimedia resources, such as videos and online articles, to make the learning experience more interactive and stimulating.

In addition, the non-interactive teaching style was identified as another demotivating factor for ESL learners in the current study. This finding is consistent with previous research that suggests that interactive and student-centred teaching methods are more effective in motivating learners (Esra & Sevilen, 2021). Therefore, it is important for English teachers to incorporate more interactive and participatory activities in their teaching methods to make learning more engaging and interesting for their students. For instance, they can use group work, role-playing, and other interactive activities to make the classes more enjoyable and motivating for the students. Additionally, teachers can also involve the students in class discussions and debates to enhance their critical thinking skills and

language proficiency. By doing so, they can help create a positive learning environment that encourages students to actively participate in the learning process and stay motivated to learn English.

The findings of the study further indicate that using English as the medium of instruction by teachers can demotivate ESL learners from learning English. The findings by Getie(2020) also reveal that students perceive that their teachers do not consider their students' interests and often use English as the medium of instruction. It is, thereby, important for teachers to be aware of the language proficiency level of their students and adapt their teaching methods accordingly. Teachers can use a combination of English and the learners' first language to make sure that students can understand the concepts being taught. Using visual aids, such as pictures, diagrams, and videos, can also help in making the content more comprehensible and interesting for learners. Teachers can also encourage students to use English outside of the classroom, by assigning tasks that require the use of English, such as writing assignments or group discussions. This can help learners feel more comfortable and confident using the language, and hence, improve their motivation to learn English.

Furthermore, the negative attitude of teachers was identified as another demotivating factor for ESL learners that demotivates them from learning English. Some teachers may lack enthusiasm or passion for teaching English, leading to a lack of effort in making the classes engaging and interesting. This may result in a negative impact on the learners' motivation levels and ultimately lead to a lack of progress in their

language proficiency. To address this issue, teachers should be encouraged to have a positive attitude towards teaching English. They should strive to create a positive learning environment that fosters motivation and engagement (Murad et al., 2021). Teachers can do this by incorporating interactive teaching methods and activities that are relevant and interesting to the learners. Additionally, teachers should regularly provide feedback to learners, highlighting their progress and areas for improvement, which can help boost their motivation levels (Muliyah et al., 2020). By doing so, teachers can not only improve the motivation levels of their students but also create a more conducive learning environment that can enhance their language learning outcomes.

Conclusions

The study found that difficult course content, non-interactive teaching styles, using English as the medium of instruction, and teachers' attitudes were the major sources of demotivation among the participants. The findings suggest that learners need a supportive and positive learning environment to feel motivated to learn English. The study emphasizes the need for teachers to adopt teaching methods that foster interactive learning and increase students' engagement in the classroom. Teachers should also consider the difficulty level of course content and make efforts to provide support and guidance to learners. Moreover, teachers should be aware of their attitudes and behaviours towards the students and strive to create a positive and encouraging environment.

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