

Demotivating Factors Affecting EFL Learning of Saudi Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

Demotivation is a research area which has recently been the focus of many research works in language learning field. In Saudi context, there is lack of research that investigated demotivating factors affecting learning English among Saudi undergraduate students. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the factors affecting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning of Saudi undergraduate students. A questionnaire adopted from Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) was used to obtain the data. The questionnaire consists of 35 close-ended items on a 5-point Likert scale on six factors of demotivation: characteristics of classes, teacher's behavior, course contents and teaching materials, effects of low test scores, classroom environment, and lack of self-confidence and interest. The sample of this study involved 101 undergraduate students from three faculties studying at King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia; these faculties are: Languages and Translation, Sharia, and Humanities. Descriptive statistics and T-test were used to analyze the data collected in the present study. The findings reveal that characteristics of classes was the most demotivating factors affecting EFL learning of Saudi undergraduate students. The findings of this study provide pedagogical implications on the teaching and learning of English in Saudi Arabia.

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Keywords: Demotivation; EFL; Motivational factors; Undergraduate students.

INTRODUCTION

Learning English language is extremely important in the present days due to the fact that English has become the *lingua franca* in the entire world. The significance of English language cannot be diminished as it is the leading language in commerce, trading, media, and science and technology (Mannivanan, 2006). Also, English language plays a vital role in social prestige as it has a prominent role regarding this issue (Pennycook, 2007). Saudi students connect English language with success as most of the tests and job interviews are conducted in English language which makes this language important for career building in Saudi Arabia (Albalawi, 2016). The success of learning English relies heavily on developing positive attitude and motive towards English language learning. In this respect, many studies were conducted to investigate factors to improve the learning of English (Ali & Pathan, 2017; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2010; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). Motivation is considered as one of the leading factors in language learning and teaching, and it is one of the factors that determine the success of developing a second or foreign language (Koiso, 2003). It is widely acknowledged that motivated learners are more successful at learning a language whether it is a second or foreign language. Therefore, many research works have been conducted to investigate the relationship between motivation and language achievement (Ekiz & Kulmetov, 2016).

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In contrast, the term *demotivation* is considered as a relatively new term in the second and foreign language field. It lessens the motivation related to language learning either directly or indirectly (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2010). Demotivation hinders mastering a foreign language due to the negative effects it might bring. According to Falout, Elwood and Hood (2009), demotivation could negatively impact the learners' behaviors and attitudes towards learning a foreign language, which in turn, leads to negative learning outcomes. English language learners are gradually losing their motivation and becoming more demotivated as the number of demotivated learners is increasing (Dörnyei, 2001).

Demotivation can be considered as the passive counterpart of motivation. Demotivated learner is that person who lost the desire to learn for some reasons; these reasons might be attributed to various resources such as external ones (teacher's behavior, textbook content, and grammar-based teaching), or internal resources which include the demotivators themselves who start to diminish the motivation of learning English language (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). With reference to the background on motivation research, this study attempts to investigate the demotivating factors of Saudi undergraduate students. The rationale of conducting the present study is due to the fact that demotivating factors have not received that much of attention from previous research. Therefore, there is a need for more critical look at this point to investigate the demotivating resources among EFL learners in a context like Saudi Arabia. Understanding a grounded theory approach could help in presenting a framework for the demotivating factors influencing Saudi undergraduate students in their English language learning. It is also hoped that this framework can be useful in introducing effective solutions to the problems of demotivators.

QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study is sought to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the factors that demotivate Saudi undergraduate students at King Khalid University in learning English?
2. Which factors are the most affective demotivating factors among Saudi undergraduate students at King Khalid University in learning English?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences among students from different faculties in terms of demotivating factors in learning English?

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Motivation

The term motivation is frequently used across various fields. Motivation has many interpretations and may include notions such as interest, eagerness, will and wish. There is no consensus among researchers on the definition of motivation (Svobodova, 2015). Therefore, motivation has been viewed differently by the scholars concerned with this area. According to Dejnozka and Kapel (1991), motivation is defined as a psychological notion related to human behavior that views the preparedness to get a reward of doing some actions. Gardner (2006) defines motivation as a complicated concept with many psychological views. The cognitive school of second language acquisition views motivation as concept related to the learner's decision to learn. Keller (1983) points out that motivation is the alternatives learners make as to what efforts they advance toward or avert towards meeting their learning goals. The behaviorists consider motivation as the expectation of a reward (Brown, 2000). The constructivists emphasize learners' resolution and social contexts. In spite of the difference in viewing the notion of motivation, the different schools coincide that motivation is related to 'requirements' idea. The requirement fulfillment involves remuneration, needs alternatives, and interpreted in social context in most cases (Gardner, 2006). The learners' motivation might define the learners' success in learning a foreign language (Brown, 2000).

There are different ways to distinguish motivation sources and its components. The sources of motivation are divided into two sources (i.e. intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation). Intrinsic motivation includes all possible internal factors and signals such as psychological and biological conditions,

and emotional factors. Biological and psychological factors are connected to our needs that lead to gain valuable system in the individual's life (Deckers, 2010). Myers (2010) states that intrinsic motivation encompasses engaging in a behavior because it is personally rewarding; the individual is internally motivated to certain activities for their own sakes rather than getting some external rewards. For example, solving a word puzzle because we find its challenge fun and exciting, or learning English because we like this language and want to know more about the speakers of this language (Myers, 2010). Extrinsic motivation is that kind of motivation occurs when the individual intends to get personal sake, earn a reward, or avoid punishment (Poltnik & Kouyoumdjian, 2011). Examples of extrinsic motivation might include studying to get a good mark, or learning English to earn a good job.

Previous research works have made a clear difference between two types of motivation (i.e. integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Gardner and Lambert (1972) defines integrative motivation as learning the language with the intention to participate and involve with the culture and speakers of that language. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, is viewed as learning a language for purposes related to job or other external motives. These two types of motivation can affect and control the learning procedures and outcomes (Cook, 2000). Ellis (1994) points out that integrative motivation occurs when learners intend to join or be a member of certain community or culture. According to Ellis (1994), instrumental motivation arises when learners expect some benefits from learning that particular language. Ellis (1994) asserts that the best type of motivation is the integrative motivation. He attributed his preference to integrative motivation to its competent and well-organization. He also affirmed that learners with no instrumental or integrative motivation would encounter problems and difficulties to obtain the language knowledge they intend to learn (Cook, 2000).

3.2 Demotivation

Previous research works focused to the positive part of motivation in learning a second or foreign language. However, learners might negatively be influenced during the learning process of a language. These negative factors are called 'demotivating factors' which have not received much attention until the past few years (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2010). According to Dörnyei (1998), demotivation is defined as exterior forces that reduce or minimize the motivational base of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action. Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) disagree with the definition of Dörnyei and Ushioda; they said that his view of motivation "may need to be widened to include both internal (i.e. resulted from the learners themselves such as low self-confidence and attitude,) and external (i.e. resulted from outside factors such as teachers' attitude, and textbooks,) factors" (p.58). Learners with lack of motivation show less interest in L2 culture or community, have no strong pertinence with the teachers and classmates (Ekiz & Kulmetov, 2016). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2010) claim that the factors that lead to losing learning interest are called "demotives" which are the negative counterparts of motives, and whereas motives raise behavior intention, demotives reduces it. However, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2010) argued that not all negative factors are 'demotives' and listed three negative influences that cannot be included with 'demotives':

1. Appealing action that avail mental distress.
2. The progressive absence of desire to learn.
3. The abrupt recognition that the efforts of achieving a goal are too high.

Prior research works on 'demotivation' in second language L2 field have been of interest of few researchers (Afrough, Rahimi, & Zaravshan 2014; Krishnan & Pathan, 2013; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Tabatabaei & Molavi, 2012). Sakai & Kikuchi (2009) seeks to investigate the demotivating factors affecting Japanese learners. A questionnaire consisted of 35 items was administered to four Japanese senior high schools. The questionnaire items were based upon the factors of previous studies such as factors related to teachers, classroom characteristics, experience of failure, classroom environment, class materials. The findings of this study revealed six demotivating factors of learning English: grammar-based teaching, teacher's behavior, course contents and teaching materials, effects of low test scores, classroom environment, and lack of self-confidence and interest. The findings showed that learning contents and materials as the major demotivating factors among Japanese learners.

Tabatabaei and Molavi (2012) conducted a study to determine the demotives affecting EFL learning of Iranian Islamic seminary students. For this purpose, 50 Iranian EFL seminary students were selected to participate in this study. An amended version of Warrington's (2005) questionnaire was used to investigate learning demotives among students. The findings disclosed that factors such as improper method of English teaching, frequency of classes in a week, problems in understanding listening materials, and lack of English use in students' real life were found to be the main demotivating factors among Iranian seminary students. Krishnan and Pathan (2013) investigated the demotivating factors among L2 Pakistani undergraduates at the University of Balochistan, Quetta. A mixed methods were employed to achieve the main purpose of this study. The quantitative data was collected from 116 undergraduates using a questionnaire adopted from Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) that contains 35 close-ended items on a 5-point Likert scale. The qualitative data was obtained from an open-ended question on students' demotivating experiences in learning English in the same questionnaire. The findings of this study showed that all six factors mentioned in Sakai and Kikuchi's questionnaire were cited by the students with teaching method, lack of facilities and course content being the most cited factors. In addition, the qualitative data revealed a new factor – negative attitude of society towards English language - which is considered as a contribution to the body of literature.

Afrough et al. (2014) conducted a study to determine the demotivating factors affecting Iranian students' motivation with regard to speaking skill. For this purpose, 312 high school students and 92 high school teachers of English were interviewed and then, the interviews were thematically analyzed. The instrument used in this study was interview questions developed after reviewing the literature related to this topic. The interviews showed emergence of some factors (i.e. negative attitude toward learning L2, teacher's inadequate competence and performance, lack of technological facilities in classroom, lack of adequate teaching materials, unfavorable classroom environment, and insufficient opportunities for speaking practice). Most recently, Ali and Pathan (2017) explored both demotivating and motivating factors among Pakistani university students. A questionnaire was administered to 150 freshman students at University of Balochistan, Quetta. The students were selected from three different disciplines: Pre-medical, Pre-engineering and Computer Science. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire adopted from Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) consisting of 35 close-ended items on six factors of demotivation: focus on teaching grammar, the behaviors of teachers, course materials, impact of low scores, classroom atmosphere, and lack of self-interest. The findings showed that course materials emerged as the most prominent demotivating factor found among Pakistani university students.

METHODOLOGY

The present study employed a descriptive research design where the framework proposed by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) was used to elicit the potential factors that cause demotivation among Saudi undergraduate students at King Khalid University.

4.1 The Sample

The sample of this study involved 101 students who were randomly selected from three different faculties: Faculty of Languages and Translation, Faculty of Sharia, and Faculty of Humanities (see table 1). All the participants were male students aged between 18-24. They have also studied English language in their previous schools for 12 years as a compulsory subject.

Table 1 shows that the sample of this study were 101 students from three faculties who were randomly selected to participate in answering the demotivating factors questionnaire. There were 36 students belong to the Faculty of Languages and Translation, 33 students belong to the Faculty of Sharia, and 32 students belong to the Faculty of Humanities.

Table 1. Distribution of the Sample of the Present Study

Faculty	Frequency	Percent
Languages and Translation	36	35.6
Sharia	33	32.7
Humanities	32	31.7
Total	101	100.0

4.2 Research Instrument

This study employed a questionnaire adopted from Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) as research instrument. The questionnaire consists of 35 items based on five-point Likert scale; the items belong to six main factors: class characteristics, behavior of teachers, content of the course and teaching materials, low scores effects, the environment of classroom, and lack of interest and self-confidence.

To check the reliability of research instrument, a pilot study was conducted with 30 students. The reliability analysis was checked by running SPSS version (16.0). Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was .901 which implies high reliability of the instrument of present study.

4.3 Procedures

The procedures for the present study lasted for about three weeks. The data were collected during the second semester of the academic year (2016-2017). For the survey purpose, a number of 188 questionnaires were administered to the students. The administration and collection of the questionnaire were completed by the researcher himself. The students received a brief explanation on the purpose and importance of the research. Furthermore, the researcher explained to the students that there are no wrong or right answers to the items given. The students were informed that their responses will remain confidential and will be used for research purpose only. The students were given an example on how to answer the items of the questionnaire asking them to ask for clarifications they might need. The students need around 20 minutes to fill in the questionnaire. Out of 188 distributed questionnaires, only 101 were considered valid for analysis procedures; the rest of the questionnaires were neglected due to incomplete answers or circling the same answer for each item.

4.4 Data Analysis

To analyze the data of present study, SPSS version (16.0) was used. Descriptive statistics was employed to identify the demotivating factors among Saudi EFL students. This includes means and standard deviation for each item. One-Way-ANOVA was used to examine any statistical significant difference between students from different colleges and the factors that demotivate them to learn English.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the present study. The findings were tabulated and presented due to the research questions of this study. The next section shows the findings related to the first research question.

5.1 Demotivating Factors

This section intends to provide answers to the first research question: *What are the factors that demotivate Saudi undergraduate students at King Khalid University in learning English?* Means and standard deviations were calculated to get answers for this research question (see Table 2).

Table 2. Demotivating Factors Affecting Learning English among the Students.

Factors	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Characteristics	2.33	5.00	3.53	.641
Environment	1.20	4.80	2.79	.736
Materials	2.00	4.60	3.45	.544
Teachers	1.00	4.50	2.59	.758
Scores	1.20	5.00	3.32	.783
Interest	1.00	5.00	2.67	.955

As illustrated in Table 2, Saudi undergraduate students reported some demotivating factors which hinder them to learn English language. Most of those factors were similar to the ones mentioned in Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) framework. These factors include characteristics of classes, teacher's behavior, course contents and teaching materials, effects of low test scores, classroom environment, and lack of self-confidence and interest.

5.2 The Most Affective Demotivating Factors

This section intends to provide answers to the second research question: *Which factors are the most affective demotivating factors among Saudi undergraduate students at King Khalid University in learning English?* Table 3 below provides detailed answers to this question.

As shown in Table 3, *characteristics of classroom* (M=3.86, SD=.641) the most prominent demotivating factor in learning English. Students mentioned that they *did not get the opportunity to communicate in English* (M=3.86, SD=.641); they are *also supposed to repeat sentences after teacher* (M=3.81, SD=1.04), and *the classes were too crowded* (M=2.93, SD=1.20). This finding is in line with the findings of Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) study who revealed that characteristics of classroom as a demotivating factor for junior high school students in Japan. In addition, Lehtikoinen and Leinonen (2010) approved that this factor demotivate learning English among upper secondary students in Japan.

As for *course content and materials*, it was ranked as the second affective demotivating factor (M=3.45, SD=.544); students attributed this to some reasons like *the need of memorizing and translating the sentences in the textbook was obligatory* (M=4.17, SD=1.03), *English sentences dealt with in the lessons were hard to understand* (M=3.80, SD=1.08), and *Grammar formed the backbone of lessons* (M=3.68, SD=1.02). This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Afrough et al. (2014) who found this factor as a demotivating factor in learning English among Iranian high school students. Also, Krishnan and Pathan (2013) confirmed that this factor discourage Pakistani undergraduate students to effectively learn English language. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), the use of well-designed teaching materials can motivate L2 learners and address the need of L2 learners in order to enhance their desire to learn L2. Conversely, poor-designed teaching materials would fail to fulfill the learners' needs and demotivate them to learn the second language effectively (Krishnan & Pathan, 2013).

Table 3. The Most Affective Demotivating Factor among Saudi Undergraduate Students

Factor	Categories	Mean	SD
Characteristics	I was never provided with the opportunity to communicate in English	3.86	.883
	I was supposed to repeat sentences after the teacher	3.81	1.04
	The classes were too crowded	2.93	1.20
Materials	Memorizing and translating the sentences in the text book was obligatory	4.17	1.03
	English sentences dealt with in the lessons were hard to understand	3.80	1.08
	Grammar formed the backbone of lessons	3.68	1.02
	English passages in the text book were unexciting	3.54	1.26
	I was expected to produce error free sentences	3.45	1.17
	A great deal of textbooks and supplementary material were assigned for self-study	3.24	.931
	Topics of the English passages in the text book were not based on culture	3.19	1.27
	Nearly all of the lessons were designed for the University entrance exam	3.19	1.12
	Topics of the English passages used in the lessons were out dated	3.10	1.15
English questions were not clear	3.08	1.19	
Low Scores	I had a hard time memorizing vocabulary and Idioms	3.84	1.12
	I received poor grades on tests	3.54	1.19
	I couldn't speak English	3.49	1.22
	I could not keep up with my classmates	2.91	1.24
	I was often compared to my friends	2.84	1.08
Environment	Computer software was not used	3.22	1.20
	My friends did not like English	3.15	1.20
	We didn't have a language lab at school	2.75	1.29
	I disliked my classmates	2.70	1.17
	I had no access to the Internet	2.67	1.11
	Pictures, movies, and the like were not used	2.62	1.24
	Tapes were not used	2.41	1.01
Interest	I was forced to study English	3.53	1.36
	I lost my interest in English	2.50	1.34
	I lost my goal to be a speaker of English	2.47	1.38
	Saw no sense in studying English	2.17	1.38
Teachers	The pace of the lesson was not appropriate	3.21	1.27
	Teachers made one way explanations too often	3.08	1.13
	Teachers made fun of students' mistakes	2.42	1.24
	I was scolded by the teacher	2.36	1.27
	Teachers' were not able to speak English very well	2.27	1.14
	Teachers were reluctant to teach well	2.18	1.00

Effect of low test scores was ranked as the third influential demotivating factor to learn English language among Saudi undergraduate students (M=3.32, SD=.783). The students cited that *having hard time memorizing vocabulary and idioms* (M=3.84, SD=1.12), *receiving poor grades on tests* (M=3.54, SD=1.19), and *inability to speak English* (M=3.49, SD=1.22) among the issues related to this particular factor. This finding is compatible by a study conducted by Jomairi (2011) who stated that low test scores as

a demotivating factor to learn English language among Iranian undergraduate students. Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) pointed out that low test scores have a strong impact on the learners' motivation to learn English. Consequently, it is the teachers' role to guarantee the students' motivation to help them score higher in their tests and examinations (Krishnan & Pathan, 2013).

Classroom environment was reported as the fourth affective demotivating factor (M=2.79, SD=.736); the students attributed some reasons for this factor as *the lack of using computer software* (M=3.22, SD=1.20), *my friends did not like English* (M=3.15, SD=1.20), and *the lack of language labs at school* (M=2.75, SD=1.29). This finding supports the findings of Dörnyei (1998); Hirvonen (2010) who found that classroom environment demotivates learners to effectively learn English language. Jomairi (2011) claimed that the lack of facilities might create negative L2 learning atmosphere; therefore classrooms should be facilitated with proper teaching equipment such as video-projectors, data shows, and listening labs.

Lack of interest is said to be the fifth affective demotivating factor (M=2.67, SD=.955) with the reasons of *being forced to study English* (M=3.53, SD=1.36), *losing interest in learning English* (M=2.50, SD=1.34), and *losing the goals to be a speaker of English* (M=2.47, SD=1.38). This finding is in line with the studies of Dörnyei (1998), and Krishnan and Pathan (2013). In this regard, teachers are required to create a more stress-free environment where students can be encouraged and motivated to learn English. In this way, learners would overcome the negative feelings they have towards learning English language (Krishnan & Pathan, 2013).

Finally, teachers' behavior is appeared to be the sixth affective demotivating factor (M=2.59, SD=.758) as students reported that *the pace of the lesson was not appropriate* (M=3.21, SD=1.27), *teachers made one way explanations too often* (M=3.08, SD=1.13), and *teachers made fun of students' mistakes* (M=2.42, SD=1.24) were among the reasons related to this factor. This finding supports the findings of Kikuchi (2011) who found teachers' behavior factor as the least affective demotivating factor reported by Japanese high school students. However, teachers can play their own role in creating more comfortable learning environment through encouraging learners to participate in the learning process (Dörnyei, 1994).

5.3 Variance in Demotivating Factors among Students

This section presents the findings obtained regarding the variance in demotivating factors among the students from three faculties in learning English. To investigate such difference, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized (see Table 4).

Table 4. Variance in Demotivating Factors among Students.

(I) Faculty	(J) Faculty	Mean	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Languages and Translation	Sharia	3.26	-.46522*	.12513	.002	-.7763	-.1542
	Humanities	3.17	-.37361*	.12615	.015	-.6872	-.0601
Sharia	Languages and Translation	2.80	.46522*	.12513	.002	.1542	.7763
	Humanities	3.17	.09161	.12882	.777	-.2286	.4118
Humanities	Languages and Translation	2.80	.37361*	.12615	.015	.0601	.6872
	Sharia	3.26	-.09161	.12882	.777	-.4118	.2286

As displayed in table 4, the frequency means for demotivating factors among students from Faculty of Languages and Translation was (M=2.80), Sharia (M=3.26), and Humanities (M=3.17) respectively. The results showed statistical significant difference in demotivating factors between the students from different faculties $p \leq .005$). Students from Faculty of Languages and Translation were less demotivated compared to their colleagues from faculties of Sharia and Humanities. However, no statistical significant difference was found between students from faculties of Sharia and Humanities $p \geq .005$) in relation to demotivating factors. This finding is consistent with the study of Moivaziri and Razmjoo (2014) who found that types of school might affect the demotivating factors reported by students. This might be attributed to the nature of the faculty; most students in the Faculty of Languages and Translation were not obliged to study this major (English language), but they chose to specialize in it. On the contrary, English language is just an obligatory course which should be taken from the students from other faculties such as Humanities and Sharia as a graduation requirement. Therefore, students find themselves obliged to take such English courses.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The current study investigated the demotivating factors of learning English among Saudi students at King Khalid University. The results revealed six factors that affect the learning of English among those students (i.e. characteristics of classes, teacher's behavior, course contents and teaching materials, effects of low test scores, classroom environment, and lack of self-confidence and interest. Due to the results obtained in this study, Saudi English language teachers would be in a better position to know the causes of demotivation among their students and provide some remedies for such causes. The findings of the current study would be of great interest for the researchers in Saudi Arabia who intend on the demotivation and motivation field. Therefore, it is highly recommended to conduct more studies on this field to gain better understanding and deeper insights toward this issue in order to facilitate the process of learning English language among ESL/EFL learners.

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