

## A Study on Demotivation Factors in Chinese EFL Learners

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### Abstract

**A phenomenon can never be neglected that college students show less and less interest in English class. Based on the survey of 81 students in NCEPU(Baoding), the paper focuses on a research conducted to probe the causes of students' learning demotivation and try to find out the direction to solve the problem.**

### Keywords

**Motivation, demotivation factors, college English learners.**

### 1. Introduction of motivation and demotivation theories

As one of the most dynamic elements, motivation plays an important role in Second Language Acquisition. Experts give a diverse definition towards motivation on different stages. Gardner believes that there are two criteria in judging whether an individual possesses motivation: one is that individual presents some targeted action; the other is that individual can show some efforts to reach their goals. Gardner emphasizes that motivation should have clear target and strong desire as well as efforts with positive emotional experience [1]. On the contrary, Williams and Burden highlight that motivation is a temporary mood driving on deciding whether an action should be carried out [2].

Nationally and internationally, from 1980s to present, researchers have studied on motivation theory from different aspects of psychology and put forward various motivation modes which deepen people's understanding and offer new perspective on motivation theory. However, one aspect has been neglected for long: the demotivation of the learners in language learning. Because it is rather difficult to explain the complicated motivation of foreign language learning simply from single perspective, negative influence factors which impede or lower the motivation has become the target of researchers in recent years.

Demotivation, as defined by Dornyei (2001:143) is "specific external forces that reduces or diminishes the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action." Demotivation starts from an external locus, a demotivating trigger, before it becomes an internalized process, and motivation must exist before a subsequent decrease [3]. The definition proposed by Dornyei mainly focuses on the external forces that diminish the motivational basis of learners. However, many researchers hold that not only external factors but internal factors such as lack of self-confidence and negative attitude when defining demotivation (Falout & Maruyanma, 2004; Sakai & Kikuchi,2009) [4]. Therefore, demotivation in the present study refers to the phenomenon that the motivation level of learners declines as a result of external factors or internal changes caused by external factors.

### 2. A Research Design

#### 2.1 The purpose of the design

It is evident for the researchers to notice a common phenomenon: the English teacher is talking excitedly in class, while many students think the class is dull, they focus their attention on other things than the English class, some even fall asleep. Obviously, students are suffering from the decay of learning motivation. They are reluctant to put more efforts into English. Why does it happen? What factors can affect students' learning motive? How can we tackle it? Based on the three questions, a

survey is conducted to find out what elements will influence students' learning motivation and probe the possible causes. Correspondently, relevant measures can be taken.

## 2.2 Research subjects

81 average-level students were picked from non-English major of 2016 as the subjects, because demotivation is more obvious in average-level students than those in the advanced classes through observation for years (The class division is based on a standard test at the very beginning of the students entering college. Those whose scores are above 75 will be admitted into advanced class).

## 2.3 Content of the questionnaire

In order to find out the demotivation factors in English learning, a questionnaire is adopted in the research process. There are 34 items in the questionnaire, including five aspects: student-related factors, teacher-related factors, curriculum-related factors, teaching material and language learning environment.

Student-related factors consists of 16 items, teacher-related factors 10 items, other factors 8 items (including curriculum, teaching material and learning environment).

The measurement of the questionnaire was a four-point semantic scale (1=strongly agree; 2= agree; 3=disagree; 4= uncertain)

## 2.4 Research Tools and Process

After the pre-test and refinement of the questionnaire, it was put on [www.sojump.com](http://www.sojump.com) (a website specially for releasing and collecting questionnaires or polls), all the 81 students were asked to finish the questionnaire within 20 minutes, and all the 81 questionnaires collected are valid.

## 2.5 Description and Analysis of the results

The research results collected online show the proportion of the four points in the measurement. Details of each part are as follows:

Table 1. Student-related factors

Item	strongly agree%	agree %	disagree %	uncertain %
I have no interest in listening	23.46	33.33	34.57	8.64
I have no interest in reading	14.81	20.99	54.32	9.88
I have no interest in translation	17.28	20.99	49.38	12.35
I have no interest in oral English	14.81	14.81	62.96	7.41
I have no interest in writing	17.28	38.27	35.8	8.64
I have no interest in foreign culture	8.64	14.81	71.6	4.94
I don't know how to learn autonomously	28.4	39.51	24.69	7.41
I can't find suitable learning method	34.57	38.27	18.52	8.64
I don't know the aim of learning English	13.58	11.11	66.67	8.64
The aim of learning English is to pass kinds of exams	13.58	32.1	50.62	3.7
The scores of my English tests are always low	27.16	35.8	24.69	12.35
Vocabulary and grammar are difficult to me	28.4	43.21	24.69	3.7
It's difficult to make progress even though I try hard	18.52	38.27	29.63	13.58
I dare not speak English for fear of being laughed at	19.75	43.21	32.1	4.94
I prefer learning English by myself than with others	11.11	25.93	45.68	17.28
Learning style and strategy, learning attitude, volition and other internal factors are key influential factors of my learning English	43.21	45.68	7.41	3.7

Data in the table shows it's not true to say that students totally lose interest in English learning. In the part of five basic skills of English, 56.79% and 55.55% of the students lack interest in English

listening and writing separately, while 54.32%, 49.38%, and 62.96% of the students have interest in English reading, translation and oral English separately, and 71.6% of the students have interest in foreign culture. During the learning process, 71.61% of them believe vocabulary and grammar are still difficult points till now; and 62.96% of them have not enough confidence to speak English; and even they try hard(56.79%), it's difficult to make progress; 62.96% of them think their scores are low. In the learning strategy part, 67.91% of the students have no idea about autonomous learning, and 72.84% of the students cannot find suitable learning method. With regard to the learning goal, 66.67% of the students have exact goals, and 50.62% of them aim at other things instead of just passing exams. In learning style aspect, 45.68% of them prefer learning in groups, while 37.04% of them prefer learning individually. Therefore, we can see that majority of students do want to learn English well and they hunger for more of other cultures, but lack of learning strategy and explicit goal causes their demotivation in English learning.

Table 2. Teacher-related factors

Item	strongly agree%	agree %	disagree %	uncertain %
Teacher's pronunciation is poor	2.47	9.88	81.48	6.17
I don't like the teacher because of his/her personality	3.7	6.17	87.65	2.47
Teacher will criticize those who answers incorrectly	1.23	6.17	92.59	0
Teacher focuses on the textbook only	2.47	7.41	87.65	2.47
Teacher seldom teaches practical English	3.7	17.28	72.84	6.17
Teacher gives implicit explanation of language points	2.47	8.64	83.95	4.94
Teaching method is dull, lack interesting activities	3.7	22.22	65.43	8.64
Teacher seldom interacts with students	2.47	12.35	71.6	13.58
Teacher ignores students' mastery of knowledge	4.94	17.28	64.2	13.58
Teacher's personality, teaching style, teaching method, learning environment and other external factors are important influential factors of my learning English	27.16	34.57	25.93	12.35

From the low proportion of "agree"(the highest one is 25.92%), we can see that the detailed teacher-related factors, such as some specific teacher's pronunciation, personality, teaching method, teaching content, are not the chief reasons which cause the demotivation of the students' English learning, which is somewhat out of expectation. While students do think that teacher's personality, teaching style, teaching method, learning environment and other external factors are important influential factors of English learning, the proportion is 61.73%. Thus, apart from the teacher-related factors in the table, there must be some other factors which are not included in this part, then, importance of learning environment and other external factors need a further survey.

Table 3. Other relevant factors

Item	strongly agree%	agree %	disagree %	uncertain %
I'm not interested in the articles in the textbook	27.16	39.51	27.16	6.17
The textbook is outdated and boring	25.93	41.98	25.93	6.17
Class period is not enough to provide more knowledge	16.05	35.8	38.27	9.88
There aren't many chances to communicate in class	14.81	38.27	37.04	9.88
English courses offered cannot meet my requirements	16.05	43.21	24.69	16.05
Lack of authentic context to practice English after class	43.21	38.27	17.28	1.23
I don't know the classmates from other majors	12.35	41.98	37.04	8.64
Classmates around me are not fond of English	11.11	32.1	45.68	11.11

Data in table 3 (all the proportions of “agree” are above 40% ) indicate that the boring content in the textbook, lack of learning environment (the proportion of “agree” reach up to 81.48% ), simple and invariable English course offered by the university, influence of peers, and less chance to communicate are important factors resulted in their learning demotivation. In this part, some detailed impactive external factors are listed and verified.

### 3. Instructions for the Teaching Reform

The research shows that factors which result in English learning demotivation are mainly include: students’ lack of proper learning strategy and goal to help them conquer the difficult points and make them insisting; simple teaching contents, teacher’s teaching style and teaching method; out-dated teaching material, lack of learning environment, invariable English curriculum, and form of classroom organization.

To solve the problem found in the survey, educators must employ a list of corresponding reform procedures. First of all, provide diverse English courses which not merely can arouse the students’ different interests in English, but can also help students find explicit goal of learning English. Second, choose proper and up-to-date teaching material for each course which can provide students the latest information and most practical language. Third, educators should adopt proper teaching method based on both the teaching material and the students. Fourth, educators are supposed to give instructions on learning strategies which are suitable for different students. At last, during class period, educators should try to create a relaxed atmosphere and design some activities which can engage every student in. In order to make this process feasible and beneficial, educators should motivate each student do enough preparation before class and do some creative after-class work. In this process, educator’s innovative work plays a very important role.

### 4. Conclusion

Findings of demotivation factors in the survey provide a direction of the English-teaching reform. According to the survey results, some instructions are listed, while this is merely a general guideline for the reform, some other impactive factors, detailed and practical teaching method should be further explored during the teaching process.

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