



An Investigation of Internal Factors Affecting the Motivation of Turkish EFL Learners in a Negative Way

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Abstract

This paper aims to find out the factors affecting the L2 motivation of Turkish EFL learners in a negative way and discover whether gender, type of education and the level of the students have an impact on their motivation. The data gathered from 205 prep-class students at Pamukkale University School of Foreign Languages showed that although there were no differences in the factors in terms of learners' type of education and the level of English, an important and meaningful difference between male and female learners was found. Based on the findings, the implications of the results and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords

Motivation;
internal factors;
language learning;
preparatory class

Introduction

Motivation is always a significant part of language learning and teaching. Since the 1990s, researchers examining the motivation in language learning (Crookes & Smith, 1991; Dörnyei, 1990, 1994, 2001; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997) have contributed new aspects to the nature of motivation. Motivation has not been regarded as a personal, psychological phenomenon which students have beforehand and is difficult to change anymore. Instead, it has been defined as a dynamic concept which affects the success of language learning and is affected by it (Dörnyei, 2001;

Dörnyei & Otto, 1998). In the light of this new understanding, lack of motivation and the factors leading to demotivation have been also investigated. To handle all of the aspects of the motivation, not only factors aiding but also those hindering it are needed to be examined (Dörnyei, 2001).

According to Dörnyei (2001:143), *demotivation* is the flip side of *motivation*. Dörnyei suggests that *demotivation* concerns ‘specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action’. A demotivated learner is someone who has had motivation to accomplish a goal or to engage in an activity in the beginning and has lost his or her motivation to do so because of negative external influences. Demotivation can be observed even in the immediate environment in which learning takes place. For instance, a student attending a lesson with a high motivation may not want to participate in that lesson because of teacher’s negative attitude. Dörnyei (2001) states that most of these negative influences are caused by learning environment. However, each negative influence should not only be included in that. To give an example, a student might want to watch a movie instead of studying English. In that case, it would not be true to regard it as a demotivating influence since watching a movie can be seen as a more appealing activity for that learner (Dörnyei, 2001:142).

On the other side, it is crucial to differentiate between *amotivation* and *motivation*. Demotivated learners are the ones who lost their motivation because of negative external elements. However, learners not being motivated in the beginning and feeling helpless are called amotivated. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), amotivation is the lack of motivation which stems from the student’s feeling as being incompetent and helpless when faced with the activity; it does not result from the absence of motivation at the beginning. “In such a situation, people have no reason, intrinsic or extrinsic, for performing the activity, and they would be expected to quit the activity as soon as possible” (Vallerand et al., 2003: 40). Chambers (1993) defines the characteristics of amotivated learner as:

Poor concentration; lack of belief in own capabilities; no effort made to learn; ‘What’s the use’ syndrome; negative or nil response to praise; lethargy; lack of cooperation; disruptive behavior; disruptive; distracted; distracts other pupils’ throw things; shouts out; produce little or no homework; fails to bring materials to lessons; claims to have lost materials... (p. 13)

As the literature demonstrates, it is quite challenging to differentiate between the symptoms of the two phenomena as they may really intervene in each other and the absence of research on demotivation makes it quite hard to reach precise conclusions on the nature of demotivation.

Some researchers (Oxford, 1998; Ushioda, 1998; Dörnyei, 1998; Chambers, 1993; Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Keblawi, 2007; Gorham & Christopel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997; Yalçın, 2005; Çiftçi, 2005; Tagaki, 2005) have conducted studies aiming at finding out the factors affecting motivation in a negative way.

Chambers (1993) examined the problem by using questionnaires to get both student and teacher perspectives. His findings contrasted with the results of Gorham and Millette's study (1997). Teachers and students perceived the reasons for demotivation from different perspectives. Teachers regarded that the causes of demotivation are linked to psychological, attitudinal, social, historical and geographical reasons, but they explicitly excluded themselves. The students' perceived reasons for demotivation are diverse, i.e., teachers' behaviors, class size, etc.

Oxford's 1998 study took into account the time factor. She suggested that demotivation is a process and asked the participants to write a stimulated recall essay using a variety of prompts including five years. The findings obtained from the content analysis of the student essays revealed four broad sources of demotivation, i.e., the teacher's personal relationship with the student, the teacher's attitude towards the course or the material, style differences between teachers and students, and the type of the classroom activities. However, Oxford specifically gave prompts referring to the teacher's role as an underlying reason for demotivation. Thus, other potential reasons might have been ignored by the subjects.

Not giving any prompts but asking the participants to identify what they regarded as demotivating in their L2 learning, Ushioda (1998) found that the demotives were related to the teaching methods and learning tasks. Nevertheless, her findings were too broad and provided general implications for effective motivational thinking.

Dörnyei (1998) focused only on the students who had been identified as demotivated. He collected data through interviews. His findings were in accordance with the

previous studies. He grouped the negative factors affecting motivation: (1) teacher (i.e. personality, teaching methods etc.), (2) insufficient school facilities (i.e. crowded classrooms), (3) lack of self-efficacy (i.e. negative previous experiences), (4) negative attitude towards learning second language (i.e. difficulty), and (5) mandatoriness.

In the light of the results of these studies, factors affecting motivation negatively have been grouped as follows:

1. *Internal factors* include attitudes towards the target language and culture, negative previous experiences or failures, lack of self-efficacy.
2. *External factors* involve the factors related to the teaching process (i.e. classroom environment, textbooks, in-class activities etc.), school facilities (i.e. inferior equipment), limited opportunity to use the L2, high expectation of the parents, curriculum, and feeling of mandatoriness.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the factors affecting motivation of prep-school students at Pamukkale University negatively depending on different variables. Thus, this research was designed to answer the following research questions

1. What are the most influential factors affecting students' motivation negatively?
2. Is there any meaningful relationship between the factors affecting motivation in a negative way and gender?
3. Is there any difference between the participants in terms of their education type (c) and the factors affecting their motivation?
4. Does the English level of Turkish EFL learners make a difference in negative factors affecting students' motivation according to their level of English?

Methodology

Participants

The present study aims to explore the factors affecting EFL learners' motivation in a negative way. The study was conducted at Pamukkale University, School of Foreign Languages. A total of 205 students enrolled at Pamukkale University School of Foreign languages were randomly selected from three different English levels which are elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate level. Students were placed according to the placement test administered by the School of Foreign Languages at

Pamukkale University. Of the 205 subjects, 100 were female (48.8%) while the number of male students was 105 (51.2%). The majority of the respondents graduated from Anatolian high school ($N=114$). 51.2% of the participants were in morning classes. The subjects were from different regions of Turkey, Aegean ($N=133$) being the predominant group. One hundred and two of the students (49.8%) were in A classes, which represents an elementary level. Table 1 displays the demographic information about the participants.

Table.1 Descriptive statistics of the participants

Variables	Levels	n	%
Gender	Female	100	48.8
	Male	105	51.2
High School Type	High school	79	38.5
	Vocational	3	1.5
	Science	3	1.5
	Anatolian	114	55.6
	Teacher's training	6	2.9
Education Type	Morning Class	100	48.8
	Evening Class	105	51.2
Level of English	A2 (elementary)	102	49.8
	B1 (pre-intermediate)	69	33.7
	B2 (intermediate)	34	16.6
Total		205	100

Data collection and instruments

As for data collection, the quantitative research instrument is the questionnaire adapted from Sariyer (2008). The questionnaire had two major parts;(a) questions on demographic information of the participants and (b) 13 statements about the internal factors affecting L2 motivation in a negative way. Demographic questions regarded as gender, type of graduated high school, type of education (morning or evening), department, a region of the hometown in which the student lives, and the level of English. The questionnaire was in Turkish to ensure that students with different English proficiency levels could adequately understand the questions.

Procedure

As for procedures, 205 prep students from Pamukkale University School of Foreign Languages were chosen as a sample. Students were given the questionnaire during their regular classes in the last week of the fall term. The participants were informed beforehand that they would be asked questions related to what they think about the factors affecting their motivation in English language learning. The researcher introduced the purpose of the survey and explained how to respond in Turkish. The participants were told the questionnaire was not a test and there were no wrong answers. All items in the questionnaire were rated on a 4-point rating scale. The subjects were asked to rate their agreement to the items from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree) with each statement. They were also ensured that all the data gathered would be confidential and they would be informed about the results of the study.

Data analysis

As a research method, the quantitative research method was employed in the study. The data gathered from the participants were analyzed via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 16.0). The quantitative analysis of the questionnaire was conducted through descriptive statistics including mean, SD, and frequency. In addition, independent t-test and one-way ANOVA was performed to show the direction and relationship between the variables. The results were evaluated with 0.05 meaning level.

Results

As seen in Table 2, item 8 stating, “I do not think that learning English will be beneficial in the future for me. So, I am not eager to learn it” had the highest mean ($\bar{X} = 3.75$) while item 1, which stated “When I get a low mark in an exam, I lose my enthusiasm to learn,” had the lowest mean ($\bar{X} = 2.31$). This shows that most of the students responded to item 1 as I strongly agree (N=37) and item 8 as I strongly disagree (N=164). In other words, most of the prep students at Pamukkale University strongly agreed that they lose their enthusiasm to learn when they get a low mark in an exam and strongly disagreed that English will not be beneficial for them in the

future. According to these results, bad exam results are the most demotivating factor whereas the benefit of learning English, in the long run, is the most motivating factor to learn English for the prep class students at Pamukkale University.

Table 2. Mean and Standard deviation of the variables

No Variables	N	M	Sd
1. When I get a low mark in an exam, I lose my enthusiasm to learn.	205	2.31	.863
2. I do not believe that I will be successful so I do not want to study.	205	3.28	.789
3. Being afraid of making mistakes while speaking, I do not want to participate in the lesson.	205	2.61	.914
4. The fear of keeping behind my classmates affects my English learning negatively.	205	2.98	.918
5. As I am sure that no matter what I do I will be unsuccessful, I gave up studying.	205	3.50	.698
6. As my English background is poor, I have difficulty in understanding lessons and fulfilling activities which make me feel insufficient.	205	2.72	1.047
7. When my friends have completed an activity but I have not yet, I feel anxious.	205	2.29	.914
8. I do not think that learning English will be beneficial in the future for me. Therefore, I am not eager to learn it.	205	3.75	.561
9. I do not like the pronunciation and grammar of English. If I had a chance, I would choose another language to learn.	205	3.21	.806
10. I do not like the culture and lifestyle of England and the USA. Therefore, I do not want to learn the language they speak.	205	3.18	.803
11. English is a difficult language to learn. Having difficulty in learning English affects my eager to learn English negatively.	205	2.86	.869
12. I am not only reluctant to learn English. I am also unwilling to study most of the lessons.	205	3.25	.770
13. I do not have clear, definite objectives to learn English. Therefore, I am not very willing to learn English	205	3.19	.795
Internal Factors	205	3.01	.485

To check whether the internal factors that affect learners' motivation negatively were normally distributed or not, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used. The findings given in Table 3 demonstrated that the dependent variable "Internal factors" was normally distributed ($Z=1.099$; $p > 0.05$). Therefore, parametric tests were employed for the following analyses.

Table 3. Kolmogorov –Smirnov test results related to internal factors

Variables	Z	p
Internal factors	1.099	.179*

* $p > 0.05$

To examine whether there are any differences between the factors affecting male and female students' motivation negatively, independent *t-test* was performed. The findings were shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Findings related to the internal factors affecting students' motivation negatively according to the "gender" variable

	Gender	n	\bar{X}	Sd	t	p
Internal Factors	Female	100	2.94	.49	-1.98	.049*
	Male	105	3.08	.47		

* $p < 0.05$

According to the results of this analysis, there is a gender difference in terms of internal factors ($t = -1.98$; $p < 0.05$). When we looked at the mean score of two genders, the mean of male students' responses ($\bar{X}_E = 3.08$) was higher than those of female students' ($\bar{X}_K = 2.94$). Therefore, we can conclude that girls get more negatively affected by internal factors in their language learning factors than the boys get.

To find out the relationship between the internal factors affecting students' motivation in language learning negatively and their type of education, independent *t-test* was used. The results were shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Findings related to the internal factors affecting students' motivation negatively according to their type of education

	Type of education	n	\bar{X}	Sd	t	p
Internal Factors	Morning	100	3.02	.53	.27	.785
	Evening	105	3.00	.44		

The results of this analysis indicated that there is no difference in terms of demotivating factors according to the type of education ($t = 0.27$; $p > 0.05$). In other words, type of education does not affect students' internal demotivating factors.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical analysis was used to understand the differences between the three different English level groups' scores on the internal factors affecting motivation in language learning negatively. The findings were shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Findings related to the internal factors affecting students' motivation negatively according to their English level

	Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Internal factors	Between groups	.240	2	.120	.506	.604
	Within groups	47.844	202	.237		
	Total	48.084	204			

According to the findings of one-way ANOVA, there is no difference in internal factors affecting the students' motivation in language learning. ($F= 0.506$; $p > 0.05$). In other words, level of English does not have any impact on the internal factors demotivates students in language learning.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the factors affecting motivation of prep-school students at Pamukkale University negatively depending on different variables. In other words, this study was designed to find out (a) the most influential factor affecting students' motivation negatively and whether there is a difference in internal factors affecting learners' motivation to learn English according to different variables: (b) gender, (c) type of education, and (d) level of English.

The findings of the investigation indicated that low exam results are the most negative and influential factor on language learning while the advantage of learning English that they expect to have in the future is the most motivating factor to learn English for the prep class students at Pamukkale University. Specifically, the study revealed three more results.

First, the present research showed that there is gender difference in internal factors affecting learners' motivation to learn English. Thus, internal factors related to language learning affected girls more negatively than the boys. Second, this study

showed that there is no education type difference in terms of demotivating factors, which means that both the students in morning classes and those in the evening classes attributed to the similar factors about their demotivation in English learning. Last but not least, the findings showed no difference in internal factors affecting the students' motivation in language learning when analyzed according to their English level.

The findings of the present study have several important implications for teachers, test producers and researchers who have interested in the factors affecting students' motivation in a negative way. Although students from a different type of education, and levels have similar reasons to lose their motivation in language learning, exam results are the most common factor in their motivation. It may be concluded that teachers and the test producers should be more careful in preparing exams in order not to discourage learners in language learning process.

Nevertheless, the results of this study could not be compared with the previous ones as studies conducted so far were mostly investigated either the general factors or the external factors having an impact on language learning. Similar studies related to the internal factors negatively affecting motivation of the students in language learning needs to be surveyed in different contexts.

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