



Demotivation in Vocabulary Learning: A Qualitative Approach to ESL Learners' Related Factors

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Abstract: *The research aims to evaluate demotivating factors connected to ESL learners in vocabulary learning. Data were collected from 300 ESL students studying at the university level. Participants were asked to provide comments to help the researchers identify the elements they believe are detrimental to their vocabulary. Six key topics were found in the examination of written feedback. The researchers proposed advice to ESL students and teachers in light of the findings. The study concluded that learners' related factors contribute significantly to demotivate them from vocabulary learning. The study concluded that lack of interest, lack of opportunities to use English, confusion over the material selection, time management mistakes, excessive use of smartphones, and lack of exposure are the factors reported by the ESL learners in vocabulary learning.*

Key Words: ESL Learners, Demotivation, Vocabulary Learning, Qualitative Research

Introduction

A person's vocabulary may be described as a collection of all the available words to a person, with knowledge of the meaning and appropriate contextual usage being the norm. A person's list of vocabulary items, on the other hand, may differ from the lists of other individuals. The quantity of instruction and one's age and experience determine one's level of vocabulary. Individuals with higher levels of education, for example, tend to have a larger vocabulary. The relationship between age and experience is similar. People should be able to employ a more extensive range of phrases as they grow older and gain more experience than the limited vocabulary of children and teenagers. This, however, cannot be regarded as a general norm. There have been so many advancements in learning methodologies that help students who are eager to increase their vocabulary.

Vocabulary has unquestionable cultural and social impact and value. Language acquisition is difficult without providing word precedence. But obtaining strong vocabulary is not easy; instead, it is hard for most language learners ([Nyikos and](#)

[Fan, 2007](#)). In addition, the first problem such students encounter is how to cope with a new term. When changing from one language to another, there is a shift in mentality. Second language learners must make additional efforts to acquire new or foreign terms. They usually build on the foundations or patterns of their original language that they know about the new vocabulary. It may sound naive, but it does have its merits and downsides, as described later in the research. In addition, vocabulary can disturb the second language learner and constitute a direct barrier in second-language learning if not appropriately handled and on time. This is precisely why an ESL class comprehending this topic is one of the most important techniques.

Problem Statement

It is challenging for students in Pakistan who are learning English as a second language to acquire an extensive vocabulary. In some cases, learning a language's vocabulary can be difficult because of several factors. The factors can be ranged from differences between written and spoken forms, the

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number of words that learners must learn, and the limitations of information sources available to them to incorrect pronunciation, which is primarily due to the differences in the sound resemblance between English and the indigenous language spoken by the learners.

Literature Review

Motivation plays a pivotal role in learning a language. Many researchers have concluded that motivated learners are better learners.

Because internal factors such as low self-esteem and group behaviour are common, demotivating influences are divided into two main subheadings: internal factors such as low self-esteem and poor group behaviour; and external factors such as books/references, texts, instructors' characteristics, and so on. Students' internal factors are interconnected with one another and contribute to negative outcomes. In contrast, external sources of demotivation, such as instructors, course materials, the learning environment, and so on, are employed by external sources of motivation (Jomairi, 2011).

Comprehensive research norms are established based on the different SL-apprentices and the direct relationship to learning between these distinctions. The early treatments of individual differences are based on the necessity of classifying the students who should be taught a foreign language and by developing assessments predicting their performance. Learners might be classified as 'good and terrible, smart and sloppy, motivated and not motivated'. There is a range of dimensions in which ESL students display their unique characteristics. The essential distinctions include capabilities, age, character, cognitive styles, learning techniques, memory, and motivation. The reasons for more success of some, compared to the failure of others, have been tested in a recent study of SL students. The primary body of SLA efforts focusing on the universal features of L2 acquisition is included in these investigations. [Dornyei \(2005\)](#) states that individual differences (IDs) continuously refer to L2 output and no substantial variable. Language teachers see this as a common notion that all pupils differ in their learning habits and attitudes, while some others find it difficult to handle and engage in the lessons. The inherent features of learners are the reasons for these variations in success ([Dornyei,](#)

[2005](#)). Therefore, the nature and meaning of these IDs that influence SLA would be a relevant topic.

A demotivated learner may simply be characterized as someone without a particular or imprecise interest in language study. [Dornyei and Ushioda \(2011\)](#) presented demotivated learners to show different impacts on motivation (138). A demotivated student, according to them, is not a student who was never motivated in the past but is actually merely the reverse of motivation. The learner, therefore, becomes part of L2 because of some incentive but discovers a number of causes or variables during the learning process that destroys his/her interest and makes him/her totally lose interest. These variables are known as demotivates since they end the students' prior motivation. Demonstrations are opposed to or against motivations. Motives are active agents that push students to study, yet demotivation cause students to lose their attitude in the learning process (138-139).

Nine factors often causing demotivation were identified by [Dornyei \(1998\)](#), including teacher, skill, insufficient school facilities, low self-trust, unwanted attitudes towards L2, compulsory L2 study, implications of studying one more language, negative conduct of fellow student groups, and books on the courses. Without vocabulary acquisition, language learning is impossible simply because effective or excellent communication cannot happen without the knowledge of vocabulary. In this context, [Nation \(1990\)](#) has identified three problems that make it difficult to acquire a new word: (a) impact of the mother language, strong L1 connection and influence impede new word-learning (b) the intrinsic difficulty in which some words are more difficult to study, and (c) the boring vocabulary technique.

Previous Research

In the larger area of language study, demotivation has been handled, and literature reveals a lack of research that focuses on demotivation as an element of vocabulary development. The teacher's responsibility is to find a link between the learners' wishes and wants to study and various language learning activities for inspiring learners. Demotivation is accountable for both external and internal issues. The internal variables are largely due to a negative attitude to learning and low self-esteem or trust. The demotivating elements

mentioned in different research by EFL and ESL learners are also relevant for a quick explanation.

EFL learners have been researched by [Kim et al. \(2018\)](#). These students were of primary and secondary level. The study identified the primary drivers for the demotivation of pupils. The study showed that the teaching style of elementary school pupils was one of the key motivating factors among students. While the quality, the substance and the practices of memorizing or learning from the heart instead of usage were primary elements that degraded the secondary level pupils. This study readily shows that the function of instructors in EFL learning is paramount. If the teachers cannot properly present the courses, it increases the amount of demotivation of pupils in an intriguing and more engaging way.

The demotivation elements of the pupils of Laos EFL have been examined by Xaypany, Ismail and Low (2017). Its findings show that the majority of factors of demotivation relate to students. Five demotivation factors among learners are determined by the data obtained using the survey questionnaire. This included fear, the correctness of language, curriculum, lack of resources and bad behaviour. The study found out that the main element of demotivation was foreign language fear. The results of most investigations also showed that the demotivators have the same dimension and are verified by further research. One such example is the study carried out in Bangladesh by [Quadir \(2017\)](#). In this study, 36 interviews were analyzed. Three different universities participated in these interviews. The results indicated that the prior investigations were consistent. Teachers were recognized as having a major effect on the demotivation of students (p. 137). The interview questionnaire data obtained showed that the instructor's approach, conduct, and skills are the key elements in motivating the learner. The research also advised that the teacher's factors be matched with the interest of the students. This might decrease the amount of demotivation in language learning, according to [Quadir \(2017\)](#).

[Trang and Baldauf \(2007\)](#) studied English language learning demotivation in Vietnam and found it as a serious concern for EFL students. The goal of the study piloted in Japan by [Falout et al. \(2009\)](#) was likewise to classify demotivating variables among EFL students. Nine hundred

university students were included in the study. As a consequence, three demotivation categories were observed: external factors, internal conditions and the students' response behaviour. The extrinsic variables that impact the motivation of Japanese students were given attention by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009). The study was conducted in two major Japanese cities on a hundred and twelve EFL students. Facts were collected utilizing the internet using feedback forms. The information collected indicated five demotivation patterns that included instructor competency and conduct, poor facilities, scores of exams, instructional methods.

[Falout and Maruyama's study \(2004\)](#) was based on a 49-article survey taking into account [Dornyei's categories \(2001\)](#). The study showed that the lesser skills students were generally demotivated with little faith, unfavorable attitude to L2, the study materials and teachings and the group fellows' negative approach. While self-assurance was the major factor of all demotivation in a highly skilled group.

The foregoing research demonstrates that demotivation is the major component in learning and that for the world's academic circles, it remains of interest and concern.

Theoretical Framework

The above survey of the related literature clarifies that vocabulary knowledge is an essential component of language learning. Vocabulary knowledge contributes to the understanding and producing the target language and acts as a sign of the acquisition and performance of certain language skills. Social interaction and exposure to the target language are a priori requirements of learning L2 or FL.

Though vocabulary plays an essential role in learning a language, it has been seldom given its due importance. For most language instructors, learners' linguistic competence is more important than vocabulary knowledge. It would not be beside the point to reiterate that to communicate, learning grammar and phonetics alone are not sufficient for the learners unless they have a wide range of words available at their disposal to express their meanings. Words exist interactively and become productive in relation to other words. Learning non-productive words is like trying to write a grammatically correct sentence without

knowing the importance of the words. Therefore, learners should have breadth and depth of vocabulary to have lexical and communicative competence.

Most of the L2 and language learning researches have given more importance to motivation. In contrast, a few studies have highlighted the need to address the demotivating factors. Based on the studies cited above, the aim of the present study is to explore and identify learner related factors that demotivate students in vocabulary learning at university.

Research Questions

1. What are learners related demotivating factors in vocabulary learning?

2. How do the learners' related demotivating factors influence vocabulary learning?

Research Design

The current study is qualitative. A total of 300 ESL learners studying at the graduate level in university participated in the study. Data was obtained via written feedback. Participants had to write comments to help the researcher figure out what they think that demotivating factors have a destructive impact on their vocabulary learning with a particular reference to the English Language.

Analysis of Data

Written remarks were the opinion gathered from the learners, and the analysis of data revealed six themes.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

No		
1.	Lack of interest	64.9
2.	Lack of opportunities to use English	89.6
3.	Confusion over material selection	67.7
4.	Time management mistakes	60.9
5.	Excessive use of smartphones	73.8
6.	Lack of exposure	89.6

The above table indicates that 64.9% of the participants reported that due to lack of interest, they face hurdles in vocabulary learning. In relation to the lack of interest, a participant stated: "I am not motivated to learn new words as I stick to already known words and try to use only those words. It is difficult for me to memorize so many words". Another participant commented: "English is a very complicated language to learn, which is why I lose interest in vocabulary learning". One more participant raised the same issue and stated, "I don't find someone who could help me in vocabulary learning and correct me". Learners face many problems as a participant stated: "I face difficulty in learning to read words because of the problem of English spelling and my mother-tongue interference".

89.6 percent of those who answered the survey claimed they had no possibility of using vocabulary items and sharing them with their professors and peers. There is very little opportunity for individuals to express themselves in front of their peers. In response to the lack of

opportunities to communicate in English outside of the classroom, one participant remarked, "Most of the time I speak Urdu, Punjabi, or Saraiki with my friends outside of the class". "I have no possibility of learning or enhancing my vocabulary, and I am dissatisfied with my current level of vocabulary," remarked another participant. Another participant expressed the following: "A lack of vocabulary learning and practice leads to a loss of motivation, and I am the most demotivated".

Novels, short stories, poetry, biographies, theatre, letters, articles, reports, travel brochures, and instructions are just a few of the sorts of reading materials that participants indicate they come across in their daily lives (67.7% of participants). Without adequate direction, learners are unable to learn a language even though there is an abundance of reading material around them. One of the participants emphasized the importance of uncertainty over material selection as a key source of demotivation. "I truly don't know what I should be studying to increase

my vocabulary,” he said. Another participant made the following claim: “There is no one in my family who can assist me with material selection to increase vocabulary because I am the only one who is pursuing an education”. One of the participants said the following: “We have to memorize stuff for our exam alone, without comprehending it. Therefore, we do not feel the need to study alternative resources to increase our vocabulary”.

Further, 60.9% of the participants don't have enough time to learn new words. In this regard, a male participant stated: “I belong to a lower-middle class, and I have to go to work to earn money to support my family”. Another participant mentioned: “I am always stressed with the mid and final exams, and I do not have enough time to learn and practice vocabulary, which is not included in my exam”. Another participant stated: “It is really hard to make time for learning vocabulary, and I don't know how to manage time for it”. A participant claimed: “English vocabulary learning is a time-consuming process, and it is challenging for me to make arrangements for it”.

73.8% of the participants stated they routinely use smartphones instead of vocabulary for messaging, emailing, and social networking. One of the participants noted that “I strongly rely on a smartphone for orthography, translation and pronunciation, as it enables studying anywhere, but I believe that it has a negative impact because without it I don't feel secure”. Another participant said: “I spend much time chatting with my pals on my phone in English, but I don't utilize the right language and grammar”. “I'm not sure I can study English without my cellphone”, one of the participants said. Another person shared the same point of view, saying: “I cannot recall what I was reading on my cell phone”. A participant stated that: “While the dictionary is available on my smartphone and it is always there to help me, I don't need to learn and memorize the English language”.

89.6% of participants reported being exposed most of the time to their local language. When people do not hear properly spoken English, it is difficult to learn English correctly. Another significant aspect is the restricted learning environment outside of the class. Furthermore, they don't speak English at home or with friends. Moreover, they usually have no contact with a speaker of Standard English and hence cannot talk

to such a person when they come across one. “There is no time to watch English shows, hear English music, chat face to face with English speakers, read English publications or newspapers, send email messages to help improve our vocabulary and grammar,” said a participant. Another participant stated, “I don't have any relative or friend who is a native speaker of English. I don't write emails or chat with any foreigner”. Another participant mentioned: “I usually don't communicate in English outside of my classroom”. A participant clearly mentioned, “I belong to a poor family, and I never had a chance to travel abroad and communicate with speakers of the target language”.

The majority of motivation research studies focus on aspects connected to the learner. Research by Trang and Baldauf is one such example (2007). They indicate that the typical learner-related demotivating variables are loss of respect, fear or experience of failure or negative attitudes. The imminent failure is the most important element in demotivation among the three reasons, as mentioned earlier. The participants said that it was incredibly difficult to compete with or get along with students who were successful for most of their learning process because of their failure at different learning process levels and steps. In addition to their knowledge, the gap between them and their peers widened, and they were demotivated by the prospect of future failure and unable to keep up with the rest. Learning English is tough because it has a difficult set of rules, vocabulary and grammar. These students tend to lose their interest in language study and feel demotivation because of these obstacles.

Findings

Based on the ESL learners written feedback, lack of interest, lack of opportunities to use English, confusion over the material selection, time management mistakes, excessive use of smartphones and lack of exposure are learner related demotivating factors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the light of the data and the study of literature, the researchers indicated that several demotivating variables link to vocabulary learners. There are a variety of methods by which ESL students can enhance their vocabulary. Learners

must be careful with their vocabulary when reading. They must listen to these words in the environment around them. The learners should jot down the sentences they hear and try to use words and phrases in speech. Vocabulary games are a fantastic method to enhance vocabulary. If students have trouble with homophones, synonyms and antonyms, they might try to construct their vocabulary through various games.

Learners should utilize appropriate resources to acquire vocabulary with or without tutors and use their studies to the best possible extent. ESL students must use their time effectively to study vocabulary. The students must establish reading habits to increase their vocabulary. ESL learners may read and share knowledge with others by indulging in interesting literature, history, poetry and plays. The learners must be aware of their learning style so that they monitor and advance their learning as autonomous students. They should look for different methods to enhance their performance via planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning.

ESL teachers may urge students in their vocabulary classrooms to employ audiovisual tools. Instructors and students may work together in inventing or creating valuable and meaningful learning material. Students should be able to work in pairs and groups so that they may learn from others. Weak students should be called upon to participate in debates and activities in classrooms actively. They need opportunities to demonstrate their vocabulary and prizes to keep them engaged. Vocabulary items may be taught in suitable situations and diverse contexts by using words and phrases. The decrease of stress is a prerequisite for good vocabulary learning. A stress-free environment must be given to students, including them in various classroom activities, i.e. role plays. ESL teachers should enhance their enthusiasm for vocabulary acquisition through fun activities and innovative content.

It is suggested that other researchers may carry out more studies by utilizing different research tools to examine student demotivation in vocabulary acquisition at different levels.

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