An Empirical Study on Factors of Senior High Students’ English Learning Demotivation (ELD): A Perspective of Falout’s Three-dimension Framework

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Key words: Senior high school students; English learning; demotivation

Abstract. This current paper reports a study exploring the factors distracting senior high school students’ English learning motivation. Utilizing questionnaire as the major instrument, this study targeted 120 students aged 17-18 in two high schools in China. The results indicate nine demotivators, namely, teacher immediacy (M=5.37; SD=.97), value (M=4.41; SD=1.40), self-confidence (M=4.27; SD=1.31), course level (M=4.20; SD=1.39), help-seeking (M=3.73; SD=1.68), grammar-Translation (M =3.72; SD=1.62), self-denigration (M=3.52; SD=1.79), enjoyment-seeking (M=3.05; SD=1.70) and avoidance (M=2.64; SD=1.61). In the final part of the paper, the implications are presented accordingly.

Research Background

Chambers (1993) introduced the term “demotivation” into the field of English education. Since then, studies of demotivation have attracted the attentions of researchers around the whole globe. Dörnyei (1998) defined demotivation as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action" (Dörnyei, 2001: 143). Then he summarized nine demotivators in students’ English learning, namely, teachers’ personality, commitment, ability and teaching methods; students’ dissatisfaction of facilities in their schools, lack of self-confidence and failure in their previous learning experiences, negative attitudes to the second languages that they were learning, to countries using the second language that they were learning and to peers around them; the second language as a compulsory lesson; disturbance of the other foreign language; textbooks used in their class. These nine factors have become essential references for studies on demotivation both abroad and at home (Liu Honggang, 2009).

Ushioda (1998) carried out a qualitative research on twenty Irish learners who studied French. She found demotivation in learning the second language was unexceptionally related to the negative impact of institutionalized learning environment, especially certain specific learning tasks and teaching methods.

Ikeno (2002) made an inquiry into the demotivation of foreign language learning of 65 college students who majored in education and human sciences. He summarized thirteen reasons for demotivation, most important of which were disbelief in their teachers’ capability and the exam-oriented learning atmosphere.

Researches above did not afford enough attention to internal factors of English learners. Gradually, more researchers began to investigate whether students’ internal demotivators had an influence on students’ learning process.

Falout et al (2009) made a survey to investigate the demotivators in learning English as a foreign language. They found out three categories of demotivators (1) external conditions of the learning environment, including teacher immediacy (TC), grammar-translation (G-T) and course level (CL); (2) internal conditions of the learner, containing self-denigration (S-D), value (VAL) and...
self-confidence (S-C), and (3) reactive behaviors to demotivating experiences, having three sub-categories, helping-seeking (H-S), enjoyment-seeking (E-S) and avoidance (AV).

Within mainland China, it’s until 2009, the first literature review on language learning motivation came out (cf. Liu Honggang, 2009). The first quantitative study was carried out by Hu Weixing & Cai Jinting (2010). The results of their research yielded seven demotivators of non-English major university students’ English learning: (1) learning interest (including interest in language and culture); (2) learning aims (including both short-term and long-term goals); (3) personal needs (including importance and cost); (4) anxiety (including anxiety in class and usage); (5) attribution (including subjective and objective factors); (6) learning environment (including factors of opportunities for practice, management, textbooks and teachers); and (7) behaviors of learning demotivation (including attention, endurance, initiative and time). Liu Honggang (2014) paid close attention to junior high students with English learning demotivation in rural countries in China. The research built a four-factor theoretical model, which consisted of teachers’ factors, social factors, learning environment (contents) factors and learners’ factors. The model was confirmed by combining the methods of exploratory factor analysis with confirmatory factor analysis. As for junior students in the Chinese countryside, the most influential factors were the internal factors, including poor basic learning ability, negative attitude towards learning English and lack of parents’ economic support.

As reviewed above, it is not difficult to find researchers have proposed many demotivator models, but Falout’s three dimension model (Falout et al, 2009) was adopted in this current study to explore senior high school students’ English learning demotivators in China, because it considered not only external and internal demotivators, but also reactive factors at the same time.

Research Design

This current questionnaire-based research is to explore the demotivators in students’ English learning. A 46-item constructed EFL Demotivational Questionnaire by Falout et al (2009) was adopted in this research. Students were asked to make only one choice among the six points indicating from “1” (the statement is completely not true of me) to “6” (the statement is completely true of me). The reliability of each dimension is ranged from .52 to .82, which evidences itself as highly insistency. The study involves 120 students from a key senior high school in Suihua, Heilongjiang Province, 47% among whom are male and the rest are female. This investigation was undertaken in August, 2016. 120 questionnaires were distributed and 118 were returned, which were all valid.

Results and Discussions

A descriptive statistics analysis was run with the help of SPSS 17.0. The results displayed a low to high ranking, i.e., teacher immediacy ($M=5.37; SD=.97$), value ($M=4.41; SD=1.40$), self-confidence ($M=4.27; SD=1.31$), course level ($M=4.20; SD=1.39$), help-seeking ($M=3.73; SD=1.68$), grammar-translation ($M=3.72; SD=1.62$), self-denigration ($M=3.52, SD=1.89$), enjoyment-seeking ($M=3.05; SD=1.70$), avoidance ($M=2.64; SD=1.61$).

Teacher immediacy includes how the English teacher treats students and reacts to students questions. Under this dimension, the English teacher’s friendliness ($M=5.63; SD=.85$) and patience ($M=5.63; SD=.85$) come to the top of the list. It was generally acknowledged that if the teacher often made mistakes, students would be discouraged from learning English. Teachers’ attitudes towards the course that they were teaching would have an effect on students’ English learning demotivation as well. Liu Honggang & Ying Bin (2013) found that students were voluntary to learn English from the bottom of their heart if the English teacher was careful and patient enough to find solutions to students’ questions. Those teachers who have a strong sense of responsibility and can provide them with some useful advice for students’ English learning would be more likely to be admired and appreciated by students.
The second important demotivator is value, which refers to students’ judgments and choices of this subject (whether learning English is a painful or joyful task). Under this dimension, two factors descended in terms of mean value, i.e., loss of English learning interest ($M=5.42; SD=.79$) and increasing love for English learning ($M=4.58; SD=1.40$) strongly influence students’ learning demotivation. Many students felt upset when they could not meet parents’ or teachers’ expectations. With time passing, they would become less confident. If students grew more enthusiastic in learning a subject, they would put more effort in learning this subject. Accordingly, they would have a tendency to blame themselves. Even their parents and teachers would sometimes criticize them for their poor performances, which seriously hurt students’ feelings and confidence. Researchers have found out that many learners failed to take notice of the importance of learning English, so there is no doubt that it will result in English learning demotivation (Falout & Maruyama, 2004).

Self-confidence is the third ranked dimension. It refers to whether students have faith in learning English. There are two factors that rank higher than other factors under this dimension, which are students’ embarrassment in speaking English ($M=5.08; SD=.85$) and lack of confidence compared with other peers ($M=5.00; SD=.87$). Deci and Ryan (1985) believed when people began to feel incompetent and helpless, they were demotivated.

Course-level mainly refers to students’ attitudes to coursebooks and their interest in class-room activities. Rhythm of the English class ($M=4.77; SD=1.30$) and students’ interest in in-class activities ($M=4.64; SD=1.24$) come to the top two factors of this dimension. When asked students if they would like to choose to learn English, even if it was not a compulsory curriculum course ($M=3.81; SD=1.98$), students would abandon learning English.

Help-seeking is students’ responses to the decrease of learning demotivation. Students might accept help from peers, friends and teachers, or they would seek assistance from them. Students preferred help from teachers ($M=4.29; SD=1.60$) and help from friends ($M=3.58; SD=1.70$). If there is no appropriate learning environment for students to communicate and learn from each other, students will not be fully involved in English learning. If teachers are not available when students meet difficulties in learning English, some students will give up (Liu Honggang, 2014).

Grammar-translation means students’ learning attitudes to rigid teaching methods or learning methods. Students’ preference for teacher-oriented class ($M=4.25; SD=1.44$) and their rigid method of memorizing words ($M=3.87; SD=1.79$) lowered the efficiency and interest in learning English. Some students’ learning methods are inflexible, but they cannot master some productive ones.

Self-denigration refers to students’ self-blame and self-reflection when faced with English learning demotivation. Students’ lack of learning motivation ($M=4.06; SD=1.89$) and self-blame ($M=3.47; SD=1.75$) become the top demotivators in this dimension. When facing difficulties, students could not insist on figuring them out. So the learning motivation would reduce.

Enjoyment-seeking includes ways of increasing students’ English learning motivation, such as music, movies, English stories and foreigners’ help. Some students felt there was no pleasure in learning English ($M=3.78; SD=1.71$). Most students would be more likely to enjoy listening to English songs ($M=4.04; SD=1.96$). Students’ learning motivation would be largely improved if English can be widely used in their leisure time.

Avoidance means students’ choice of how to act in the English class. It was found that some students learn other subjects instead of English in their English class ($M=3.28; SD=1.86$). A considerable amount of students would decide to give up learning English ($M=3.12; SD=1.79$). The same findings also show in Falout’s (2009) investigation. Japanese students are not permitted to go out of class in the class time and they have to take some tricks of learning other subjects or doing what they like in the English class, which is the same as students in this research.

Implications

Based on the above analysis, this paper put forward the following implications. First, it’s necessary to build a harmonious relationship between teachers and students. According to the investigation, the factor of teacher immediacy has a direct influence on students’ learning demotivation. Teachers
should be careful of their own behaviors and try their best to get close to the students. Second, what is essential for teachers is that they should provide the students with extra English learning materials and efficient advice. Teachers should render more care to their students. After class, teachers should present students with supervision, encouragement and support. At the same time, diverse approaches to learning English should be taken to increase the students’ motivations. Third, learners’ self-confidence should be built up. Teachers should try their best to construct a positive learning environment to remove students’ anxieties of English learning. Teachers are suggested taking more positive discourses to encourage students to involve themselves into the class-room activities. Gradually, students will overcome their mental obstacles and get involved in the English class. Finally, they will make constant progress.

Acknowledgement

This paper was reframed based on the first author’s unpublished MA thesis. Thanks for the help of all the participants. This paper has also been generously supported by Research on junior high school students’ demotivation to learn English in Jilin Province (2014B040), Funding of Department of Education of Jilin Province (2014-2017).

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