

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: DEMOTIVATING FACTORS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) LEARNERS IN USAS**

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**ABSTRACT :** *This paper attempted to determine the salient demotivating factors in learning the English language among ESL learners in Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah (USAS). Questionnaire consisted of 20 items which was adopted from Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) and is used as the instrument to collect the data from Diploma students of USAS in this study. Finding of this study had extracted six factors which were Course book, Inadequate School Facilities, Test Scores, Non-communicative Methods, Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles and Social. It was also reported that the most demotivating factor was Non-Communicative Methods ( $M = 2.99$ ) meanwhile the weakest demotivator was Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles ( $M = 1.93$ ). The implications of this study are the emergence of new teaching approaches that could increase the motivation of students in learning the language and a reference for language centers to improve their language policies based on the findings of the study.*

**KEYWORDS** - *Demotivation, Demotivating Factors, English Language Learning, Undergraduates, Malaysian Context*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Conceptualising Demotivation**

Dornyei (2001) has defined demotivation as a “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action” (p. 143). Dornyei’s definition covers the external forces that affect demotivation of the learners. Deci and Ryan (1985) use a term amotivation as a synonym to demotivation. They defined it as “the relative absence of motivation that is not caused by a lack of initial interest but rather by the individuals experiencing feelings of incompetence and helplessness when faced with the activity”. However Yan (2009) differentiates between the term demotivation and amotivation which amotivation is related to general outcomes and expectations that are unrealistic for some reason whereas demotivation concerns specific external causes. It can be said that by demotivation we mean a state or conditions that hinders a person from doing his or her best in achieving a specific purpose. (Soureshjani, Kamal & Riahipour, 2012). Recently, Kikuchi (2015) in his book states that demotivating internal and external forces are the demotivators which pull the learners down and make them demotivated.

### **1.2 Previous Studies**

According to Dornyei and Ushioda (2011), there is a “dark side” of motivation and identified various factors that may negatively affect the language learner motivation in which they referred them as demotivating factors. Researchers have found that individuals’ resilience varies across context (Ungar, 2013); age (Palgi, Shrira & Shmotkin, 2015) and gender (Moreno-Walton & Koenig, 2016). Hence, different individuals may have different factors that demotivate them when learning the language.

Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) had investigated learner’s demotivation to study English among Japanese learners. Their findings noted that two of the five demotivating factors found in their study which were non communicative methods and course books were perceived to be demotivating by the respondents due to the lesson’s orientation and the material used. Learning content toward text books may be a demotivating factor. It is obviously to see that some text books used in language class (Erlina, Marzulina, Pitaloka, Astrid, Fikri Yansyah, & Mukminin,

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2018), for example: difficult grammars or vocabulary words, not suitable or uninteresting materials, will decrease learners' motivation (Dörnyei, 2001; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kikuchi, 2007). A study also found that insufficient use of school facilities by teachers in English classes- can highly discourage students in learning English (Maryam Meshkat & Massoumeh Hassani, 2012). This is parallel to the recent study which found that inadequate institutional facilities and huge class size were the most cited complains by the learners when the learning process takes place (Quadir, 2017). This is later supported by a much recent study in Morocco found that learning environment was the most demotivating factor compared to student him/herself, English language, and teacher of English (Baba Khouya, 2018).

Time allocation can also affect learning process. To make students focus on material, students need efficient time to receive the material (Haryanto, Makmur, Ismiyati & Siti Aisyah, 2018). Based on the study, it can be inferred that inadequate time could be one of the demotivating factors to learn the language as students feel like they do not have enough time to learn bit by bit in details due to the limited time provided for each topics. A study conducted by Abrar, Mukminin, Habibi, Asyraf, Makmur, and Marzulina (2018) claim that the external factors, such as classroom environment, and negative comments from teachers and peers, may hinder the learners from actively engaging, and eventually make them having difficulties to speak.

As for Malaysian context, there were still not many studies focusing on demotivation. Muftah and Rafik-Galea (2013) in their study examine language learning motivation among Malaysian pre- university students had found that the participants were instrumentally motivated. Learners were motivated to learn when there was a certain goal or a purpose for instance in gaining some social or economic incentives. Their study also found few demotivating factors among the respondents namely few opportunities to access English, not encouraged to speak English which lead to less confident and have to spend a lot of time learning grammar.

It is obvious that inadequate opportunities to speak or to use the language itself have somehow diminished their motivation to learn the language. One of the factors that cause EFL learners to have poor performance in English language are due to learners having insufficient or lacking of exposure to the language as there is a limited opportunity to use English outside the classrooms (Normazidah, Koo & Hazita (2012); Trawinski (2005). Situations that hinder them from using the language can somehow trigger them to lose their interest and the eagerness in learning the language. Since majority of our future graduates are still poor in their command of the English Language, hence this study was conducted to improve the situation thus may indirectly contribute to the solution of the problem revolving our undergraduates especially in English language learning.

### 1.3 Problem Statement

Many researchers dealt with students' motivation, however it is equally important to investigate on the other side of motivation, which is demotivation. It is a problem in Malaysia because even though the language is being regarded as a second language, students still have problems with learning the English language especially in terms of communication. So far, studies on students' motivation in the English language learning revealed that Malaysian students were actually aware of the importance of English for their future undertaking. A study by Baba Kyouha (2018) stated that a highly overwhelming number of respondents agreed on the importance of English language in the school curriculum. Desire to get good grades and opportunities for career advancement are some of the extrinsic motivation factors that keep them motivated in improving their English (Ainol Madziah & Isarji, 2009; Thang 2004). Nevertheless, Thang, Ting and Nurjannah (2011) contended that extrinsically motivated students do not necessarily lead to better performance in English.

Despite getting 11 years of formal education previously in primary and secondary schools, researchers found that a majority of Malaysian undergraduates have poor command of English (Naginder, 2006; Nor Hashimah, Norsimah, & Kesumawati, 2008). In a more recent study by Hiew (2012) on English language teaching and learning issues in Malaysia, it was revealed that some of the possible reasons for students' passiveness in the English language classroom were worries about making grammatical mistakes, felt embarrassed of their low language proficiency, scared that they will received negative physical response (smirk) if they say the wrong thing and found it difficult to switch from their mother tongue to their second language due to lack of practice.

Demotivation could be one of the factors that would account for at least some of these perceived hindrances in English language learning, but its existence and scope has not been adequately investigated (Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007). Research on motivation and demotivation may not be a new issue in the field of second language (L2) learning (Habibi, Sofwan & Mukminin, 2016; Mukminin, Muazza, Hustarna & Sari, 2015). However, there are only few studies conducted in the Malaysia context specifically in the tertiary education. Due to the novelty of this particular area of research, there is a limited amount of information available on demotivation in L2 and further

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examination is much needed especially in the Malaysia context which this study attempts to unravel. There was only a few convincing empirical evidences documented on demotivation, making this current study relevant and necessary. Identifying specific factors that could lead to students' decrease in motivation to learn English may provide crucial information for education practitioners to understand and deal with the current L2 learning problems particularly at the tertiary level in Malaysia. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the salient demotivating factors in learning the English language among ESL learners in USAS.

### **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This was a descriptive research whereby the groundwork was already established by previous researchers, hence this current study was conducted in pursuance of exploring the field and expanded the scope especially in Malaysia context and specifically in USAS. The respondents chosen for this study consisted of 40 of Diploma students from Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah (USAS). The year one students participated in this study since they were evaluated based on their SPM English results. Questionnaire used in this study was divided into two sections namely Sections A and B. Section A consisted of basic questions about respondent's personal details such as year of study, programme, gender, and SPM English result. Meanwhile, Section B consisted of a list of items designed to measure students' demotivation in English language learning which were adopted from Sakai and Kikuchi (2009). The questionnaire consisted of 20 items designed to identify students' demotivation towards English language. A five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) were used to measure each item. The questionnaires were distributed to the students and returned on the same day. The collected data were tabulated and analyzed using SPSS 16.0.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Respondents' Background Information**

A total of 45 questionnaires were distributed to USAS undergraduates who are currently taking ESL course. All questionnaires were returned and five questionnaires with missing data were rejected. The total number of respondents used for the statistical analysis was 40. The respondents were of high proficiency students who scored from A+ to B in English subject for SPM and lower proficiency students who scored from C+ to F. Out of the total 40 students, 12 (30%) are of higher proficiency learners (HP), while the remaining 28 (70%) are of lower proficiency learners (LP). The details are tabulated as follow:

Table 4.1.1 Questionnaire's respondents (Gender)

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Male</b>	13	32.5
<b>Female</b>	27	65.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4.1.2 Questionnaire's respondents (SPM Result)

<b>SPM Result</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>A+ / A/A-</b>	4	10.0
<b>B+ / B</b>	8	20.0
<b>C+ / C</b>	11	27.5
<b>D</b>	11	27.5
<b>E</b>	5	12.5
<b>F</b>	1	2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### **3.2 Item Ranking for Combined Hp and Lp Learners**

Item analysis was conducted to look at the pattern of responses from the respondents in order to gain better insights and understanding on demotivating factors among the students. First, the mean score for each item of a total

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of 20 items was calculated to see if there is a pattern. Then, top five and bottom five items ranking for the respondents were analysed to see any similarities or differences between these two groups of students.

The calculated mean scores for all items were arranged in descending order in order to see top five and bottom five items raking as illustrated in Table 4.2. The Likert’s scale (comprising 5 for strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for neutral, 2 for disagree and 1 for strongly disagree) was used to measure score the items.

Table 4.2 Overall mean score of each item

Items	Mean	
Q12 Most of the lessons focused on grammar.	3.33	Top Five Items
Q10 I seldom had chances to communicate in English.	3.23	
Q1 English passages in the textbooks were too long.	3.23	
Q19 I was expected to use (or speak and write) grammatically correct English.	3.18	
Q4 Computer equipment was not used.	3.18	
Q11 A great number of textbooks and supplementary readers were assigned.	3.13	
Q9 I had difficulty memorizing words and phrases	3.08	
Q6 Visual materials (such as videos and DVDs) were not used	3.05	
Q8 I could not do as well on tests as my friends.	2.98	
Q5 The Internet was not used.	2.95	
Q13 Most of the lessons were entrance examination oriented	2.95	
Q3 English sentences dealt with in the lessons were difficult to interpret.	2.78	
Q2 Topics of the English passages used in lessons were not interesting.	2.60	
Q15 Teachers’ explanations were not easy to understand	2.50	
Q7 I got low scores on tests	2.48	
Q20 The number of students in classes was large	2.45	Bottom Five Items
Q14 Teachers made one-way explanations too often	2.30	
Q18 I was often compared with my friends	1.88	
Q17 Teachers ridiculed students’ mistakes	1.70	
Q16 Teachers’ pronunciation of English was poor	1.58	

The item ranking indicated from the most salient demotivating factor to the least salient demotivating factor. Based on the ranking, three items were in the top five items were related to grammar. Hence, it can be inferred that the respondents were not keen in learning the language in a setting that focus on too rigid rules like grammar and where the materials for the lessons used traditional ways of presenting such as ‘chalk and talk’ way of teaching. A recent study on demotivation was also conducted at the vocational setting and it was found that the most frequently mentioned demotivating factor was due to the grammar, exam and translation-oriented lessons (Cankaya, 2018). This is parallel to the result of this study where students were found to have difficult times with grammar oriented lesson. The absence of computer equipment during the lesson was also considered among the salient demotivating factors. Students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are prone to use technology when giving lessons in classes as technology could make the lessons more interesting and make them feel more motivated in learning the language particularly in the presences of audio and visual to aid their lesson. Interestingly, item 10 (I seldom had chances to communicate in English) was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>. This appeared that students found chances and opportunities in using English as a factor that could motivate them to learn the language better. The result contradicted with the researcher’s experience of being a lecturer where most of the times students were not giving cooperation and reluctant to speak the language whenever being asked to used it during the lessons.

From the bottom five of the ranking which can be inferred that among the least salient demotivating factors, involved the teachers’ competence in the pronunciation of English words during the process of the ongoing lessons. This showed that, the respondents did not believe that teachers’ ability was the reason of them feeling demotivated in learning the language. Besides that, it was also supported with the presence of other items related to the teachers’ competence and teaching styles in the bottom five of the ranking. Thus, this inferred that demotivating factors involving teachers’ ability or way of teaching could not alter their motivation in learning the language. The results of this study contradicted with Hasegawa (2004) findings where teachers’ behavior may had been a strong demotivating factor among her respondents, who were Japanese learners of English language. It is safe to assume that the result of this study could be attributed to the Malaysian culture in which teachers are regarded as the bearer of knowledge, thus the respect they have towards the teacher inhibited them from blaming them as the reason why students were demotivated in learning the language.

### 3.3 Frequency Table

The study was then analysed using factor analysis where the frequency was tabulated for each item according to its factor. Five of the factors were adopted from Sakai & Kikuchi (2009) study and a new factor has been created. The factors were listed as follow:

1. Course Books
2. Inadequate School Facilities
3. Test Scores
4. Non-communicative Methods
5. Teacher's Competence and Teaching Styles
6. Social

#### 3.3.1 Factor 1: Course Book

The first factor was course book. There were three items in this factor which were Item 1 (English passages in the textbooks were too long), Item 2 (Topics of the English passages used in lessons were not interesting) and Item 3 (English sentences dealt with in the lessons were difficult to interpret). The data for each item was tabulated as shown below:

Table 4.3.1 Frequency table for factor 1 Course Book

<b>Factor 1 : Course Books</b>												
Item		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		N
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Q1	English passages in the textbooks were too long	0	0	8	20.0	19	47.5	9	22.5	4	10.0	40
Q2	Topics of the English passages used in lessons were not interesting	4	10.0	14	35.0	16	40.0	6	15.0	0	0	40
Q3	English sentences dealt with in the lessons were difficult to interpret	3	7.5	10	25.0	21	52.5	5	12.5	1	2.5	40

#### 3.3.2 Factor 2 : Inadequate School Facilities

The next factor is Inadequate School Facilities. There were four items that were categorized under this factor which were Item 4 (Computer equipment was not used), Item 5 (The Internet was not used), Item 6 (Visual materials (such as videos and DVDs) were not used) and Item 20 (The number of students in classes was large) and the results for each item were presented in the Table below:

Table 4.3.2 Frequency table for factor 2 Inadequate School Facilities

<b>Factor 2 : Inadequate School Facilities</b>												
Item		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		N
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Q4	Computer equipment was not used.	5	12.5	6	15.0	13	32.5	9	22.5	7	17.5	40
Q5	The Internet was not used.	7	17.5	9	22.5	12	30.0	3	7.5	9	22.5	40
Q6	Visual materials (such as videos and DVDs) were not used	4	10.0	9	22.5	13	32.5	9	22.5	5	12.5	40
Q20	The number of students in classes was large	6	15.0	15	37.5	16	40.0	1	2.5	2	5.0	40

#### 3.3.3 Factor 3: Test Scores

The third factor in this study was Test Scores. Out of 20 items of the questionnaire, there were three items in this factor. The items were Item 7 (I got low scores on tests), Item 8 (I could not do as well on tests as my friends.), and Item 9 (I had difficulty memorizing words and phrases). The data of the study for these three questions were illustrated in the Table below.

Table 4.3.3 Frequency table for Factor 3 (Test Scores)

<b>Factor 3 : Test Scores</b>											
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Item	N	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Q7 I got low scores on tests	40	6	15.0	17	42.5	10	25.0	6	15.0	1	2.5
Q8 I could not do as well on tests as my friends.	40	2	5.0	10	25.0	18	45.0	7	17.5	3	7.5
Q9 I had difficulty memorizing words and phrases	40	2	5.0	10	25.0	12	30.0	15	37.5	1	2.5

3.3.4 Factor 4: Non-communicative Methods

The fourth factor is Non-Communicative Methods. There were five items under this category of demotivating factors which were item 10 (I seldom had chances to communicate in English), item 11 (A great number of textbooks and supplementary readers were assigned), item 12 (Most of the lessons focused on grammar), item 13 (Most of the lessons were entrance examination oriented) and item 14 (Teachers made one-way explanations too often). The results for each of those items were shown in the Table below:

Table 4.3.4 Frequency table for Factor 4 (Noncommunicative Methods)

<b>Factor 4 : Noncommunicative Methods</b>											
Item	N	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Q10 I seldom had chances to communicate in English	40	3	7.5	6	15.0	13	32.5	15	37.5	3	7.5
Q11 A great number of textbooks and supplementary readers were assigned	40	1	2.5	10	25.0	15	37.5	11	27.5	3	7.5
Q12 Most of the lessons focused on grammar	40	0	0	8	20.0	14	35.0	15	37.5	3	7.5
Q13 Most of the lessons were entrance examination oriented	40	2	5.0	12	30.0	13	32.5	12	30.0	1	2.5
Q14 Teachers made one-way explanations too often.	40	5	12.5	21	52.5	12	30.0	1	2.5	1	2.5

3.3.5 Factor 5: Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles

The fifth factor is Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles. The items under this category of factor were item 15 (Teachers' explanations were not easy to understand), item 16 (Teachers' pronunciation of English was poor) and item 17 (Teachers ridiculed students' mistakes). The data for these questions were presented in the Table below:

Table 4.3.5 Frequency table for Factor 5 (Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles)

<b>Factor 5 : Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles</b>											
Item	N	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		F	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Q15 Teachers' explanations were not easy to understand	40	7	17.5	10	25.0	19	47.5	4	10.0	0	0
Q16 Teachers' pronunciation of English was poor	40	24	60.0	11	27.5	3	7.5	2	5.0	0	0
Q17 Teachers ridiculed students' mistakes	40	23	57.5	10	25.0	4	10.0	2	5.0	1	2.5

3.3.6 Factor 6: Social

The last factor is Social factor. There were two items in this factor which were item 18 (I was often compared with my friends) and item 19 (I was expected to use (or speak and write) grammatically correct English). The results were tabulated as follow:

Table 4.3.6 Frequency table for Factor 6 (Social)

<b>Factor 6 : Social</b>											
Item	N	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	

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		f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Q18	I was often compared with my friends	40	7	17.5	10	25.0	19	47.5	4	10.0	0	0
Q19	I was expected to use (or speak and write) grammatically correct English	40	24	60.0	11	27.5	3	7.5	2	5.0	0	0

Interestingly, a new factor emerged from the items asked in the questionnaire which was Factor 6, Social. This may have been due to the fact that the social setting of Japanese learners and Malaysian learners were different in terms of the importance of English language for their learners. In Malaysia, English language is regarded as a second language (ESL) whereby in Japan, the language is regarded as a foreign language (EFL). Thus, social factor could be an attribute towards the Malaysian learners in learning English as it is considered important since it is the second language of the country and the learners are aware of the significance in learning it.

#### 4. COMPARISON AMONG DEMOTIVATING FACTORS

The study was then further analysed whether the six factors differ in terms of the respondents' responses. The mean score for each factor was calculated and compared. The results were illustrated in the Table as shown below:

Table 4.4 Mean scores for each factor

Factor	Mean (M)
1. Course Books	2.87
2. Inadequate School Facilities	2.91
3. Test Scores	2.84
4. Noncommunicative Methods	2.99
5. Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles	1.93
6. Social	2.53

The factor which scored the highest mean score was perceived to be the most demotivating factor for this population in this study. Factor 4, Non-communicative Methods (which focuses on items without communicative use of English) scored the highest (M= 2.99) hence, it could be an indicator that the students found emphasis on grammar and way of teaching may function as a demotivating factor among USAS's learners of the English language. As discussed earlier non-communicative method such as inadequate chances in using it could alter the motivation of the learners and this was supported by Muftah and Rafik-Galea (2013) study where respondents felt that the opportunities of accessing and using the language to communicate with others could have been a demotivating factor. This may have been due to the situation where teachers were interested in focusing more on finishing the syllabus consisted of grammars and theories rather than the communicative part of the English language.

Meanwhile, the factor that scored the least was Factor 5 (Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles). The result tallied with the item ranking as items related to the teachers' ability and teaching styles appeared to be in the bottom five which were an indicator of them being weak demotivators in learning the language. As discussed above, the respondents' perception regarding the teacher's role may have played a part where in the Malaysian context, a teacher is looked highly among the learners and demotivation could not have been because of them. However, this was not further discussed as it was beyond the scope of this study.

#### CONCLUSION

The problem of poor command of English language may have been due to the several factors and one of them was probably due to the demotivation of the learners when learning the language. Based on the findings of this study, it was assumed that factors like Course book, Inadequate School Facilities, Test Scores, Non-communicative Methods, Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles and Social are demotivating factors in learning the language but the difference between all six factors may have lied in the scale of strong demotivator to weak demotivator. The results of this study also reported that there were no significant differences in determining the demotivating factor either according to genders or proficiency levels. Thus, it could be an indicator that in spite of genders and proficiency levels, the students did not have different perceptions regarding demotivating factors in learning the language.

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The implication of this study is the emergence of new teaching approach that could be created based on the findings of this study. Education practitioners could refer to the significant demotivating factors listed in the findings and could be able to come up with a new way of teaching in order to increase the motivation in learning the language among the learners. Besides that, the findings could also be a reference for language centers especially at USAS's Centre of Language to improvise the English language policy in the university.

However, there are several limitations in this study. First, the researcher followed Dornyei's definition of demotivation of only focusing on external forces. Thus, this study did not investigate in terms of internal forces that could also have been the demotivating factor in learning the language for instance self-confidence. Secondly, the population of this study is very small, thus the results could not be generalized as it only covered only small group of learners. Besides that, this study was also using imbalance quantity of respondents on their proficiency level. Thus, it is difficult to generalise the findings to learners having the same proficiency level in English.

In order to overcome these limitations, future studies could examine the influences of internal factors and investigate the relationships between the internal factors and external factors. Besides, the researchers could also increase the number of respondents in order to cover a larger target of the population to improve the accuracy of findings for better generalizations of the study. Considering all issues into account, it is necessary for further studies to be made in future in order to get deeper insight about demotivating factors in learning English language among undergraduates as well as practitioners in Malaysia.

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