

# The Empirical Study on Influencing Factors of Senior High School Students' Demotivation in Rural Areas in Southwestern China

Guizhen Zhou<sup>1, a</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Foreign Languages, China West Normal University, Sichuan, China

<sup>a</sup>1455485983@qq.com

## Abstract

Motivation is an important factor that affects English learning. The current researches mainly focus on the positive impact of motivation, and to a certain extent, it ignores the demotivation phenomenon in English learning. This empirical research dedicated to identifying the demotivation factors of senior high school students' English learning in rural areas in southwestern China and put forward corresponding suggestions. Questionnaires and interviews are used to collect data. According to the research, demotivation exists widely in English learning of students in rural areas in southwestern China. The main factors are teacher-related factors, teaching environment, students and learning materials. In the end, I will combine my research to put forward specific suggestions for teachers, students, schools and parents, hoping to improve students' English learning efficiency.

## Keywords

Motivation; Demotivation; English learning; Senior high school students.

## 1. The Background and Significance of the Study

English learning motivation has been studied for many years. These studies have helped teachers' teaching and students' learning to a large extent. Later, until schools found that demotivation had a great impact on students' English learning at the same time, research on demotivation in English learning gradually became a hot topic. Since the pioneering study of Gardner (1993), research on demotivation has achieved great achievement. These studies investigated the demotivation in foreign language acquisition with objects ranged from middle school students to college students. While domestic research on demotivation in English learning started relatively later, but the research objects are mainly focused on college students, and few studies focused on junior and senior high school students, not to mention to senior high school students of rural areas in Southwestern China. In summary, many studies have only studied the types and causes of demotivation, but rarely talked about practical solutions. Starting from this, this empirical paper not only investigated the types and causes of demotivation, but also tried to propose practical solutions to overcome or reduce demotivation in English learning.

Kim (2002) pointed out that "With the rapid progress of globalization, information exchange and interpersonal communication between countries are becoming increasingly frequent, so language has become an important tool. Since English is the most widely used language in the world. It plays an extremely important part in learning and importing advanced technology. Meanwhile, it is of great importance to spread our culture and increase our international influential. Therefore, the status of English in our country is becoming more and more prominent. More and more students recognize the importance of English learning and actively participate in it. However, motivation has inevitably become a very important factor affecting English learning. There is no doubt that the research on factors that increases and decreases

motivation is extremely valuable in English learning. Zhao (2015) thought that learning has to be active so that students can make links between their schema and what they are about to learn. Many students attend to class with a passive mindset, the result is that the learning is mostly limited to transmission of information rather than the meaning construction and function of knowledge.

The situation is actually widespread in English teaching in China. In view of this situation, research on motivation and demotivation is essential. Since the teaching equipment and qualities of teachers in rural areas are usually worse in urban areas, which asks more attentions to education in underdeveloped countries.

## 2. Development of Motivation Researches

Dörnyei (2001) defined the term “demotivation” as “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action.[16] Motivation is also defined by Lai(2016)as “the force that decreases students’ energy learn and/or the absence of the force that stimulates students to learn.” [4] Motivation has been studied earlier than demotivation, numerous theories about motivation have been created, which include Maslow’s Hierarchy of Need, the Reinforcement theory, the Expectancy Theory of motivation, the Self-Efficacy Theory, Attribution Theory, the theory of multiple intelligence, self-confidence theory, Dorney’s three-level motivational framework etc. All these motivation theories have been used in the field of language. Under the guidance of previous learning and research, motivation also is a hot topic in domestic education. Since the main topic of my essay is demotivation, I will not elaborate motivation thoroughly, I will give a simple introduction to them.

### 2.1. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. Needs lower down in the hierarchy must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs higher up. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are: psychological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.

### 2.2. The Reinforcement Theory

Reinforcement theory is one of incentive theories, which firstly proposed by American psychologist-Skinner. Thinking of human behavior as a function of the stimulus it receives. In reinforcement theory a combination of rewards and/or punishments is used to reinforce desired behavior or extinguish unwanted behavior. Reinforcement theory concentrates on the relationship between the operant behavior and the associated consequences. Therefore, teachers must adopt various reinforcement methods to make students behavior consistent with the goals of the learning of language. According to the nature and purpose of reinforcement, it can be divided into two types: positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. It follows the formula: stimulus-response –reinforcement.

### 2.3. The Expectancy Theory of Motivation

Expectancy Theory of Motivation was developed by Victor H. Vroom in 1964 and extended by Porter and Lawler in 1968. The theory is based on the assumption that our behavior is based on making a conscious choice from a set of possible alternative behaviors. According to Expectancy Theory, the behavior we choose will always be the one that maximizes our pleasure and minimizes our pain. The theory holds that an individual’s motivation for completing various tasks is determined by his expectations of the possibility of success of the task and the value given to the task. The greater the probability that the individual thinks that he or she will reach

the goal, the greater the incentive value obtained from the goal, and the stronger the motivation for the individual to complete the task.

## 2.4. The Self-Efficacy Theory

According to Bandura, self-efficacy is a constantly evolving process from Childhood to old age. Bandura believed that the best way to develop self-efficacy toward a particular task was through mastery of the subject, which in this essay is English learning. Success leads towards confidence. and failure can cast doubt on the outcome of future. Bandura claimed that there were four sources for self-efficacy: Mastery; Modeling; Persuasion; Physiological Factors We can promote learner's learning motivation by take actions from these aspects

## 2.5. Attribution Theory

In 1972, B. Weiner proposed his own attribution theory based on Hyde's attribution theory. He proposed a new dimension, which is to divide the causes into temporary and stable ones. Attribution theory is a concept in psychology. In attribution theory, there are two possible explanations for an event or an action. One is internal, also known as intrinsic; the explanation stems from the fact that someone or something is motivated by internal forces. For example, when someone says "don't mind Sally, that's just the way she is," they are illustrating internal attribution. Conversely, when situational, environmental, or extrinsic factors are believed to be the cause for something, someone exercises external attribution. In an example, one might say; "John would have gotten the report in time, but the server crashed.

## 3. Development of Demotivation Researches

For a long time, due to the complexity of the foreign language learning, scholars have different perspectives on it. Gardner (1992) defines motivation as the learner's efforts to achieve a certain purpose and the positive attitudes shown in this activity.[5] While Rod Ellis (2001) defines motivation as a learner's second language learning due to the needs or desires of learning. Dorney's definition is the process by which incentives are caused and continue without interference from external forces until the desired goal is reached (Dorney,1998,118)[18] For teachers motivation refers to the time and energy that students spend on foreign language learning in and out of class.(Lu,2003)

### 3.1. Dorney's Research

Dorney first conducted the research on the decline of English learning motivation in 1998. Under the guidance of previous theories, he focused on different types of English learning demotivation.

He investigated 50 Hungarian high school students in Budapest, who studied German and English at the same time. In addition, all students are considered as demotivational learners of English by their teachers or classmates. From Dorney's point of view, learners who do have suffered a decline in motivation of language learning are mostly likely to say the real reason about why they have lost interest in language learning. Jiang(2003) commented Dorney as a pioneer in this field, he put more emphasis on learners who are considered inactive in language learning, rather than randomly collecting data from different communities.[10] So, it can be considered as a complete research. However, his research provided important information and awareness of demotivation. This laid the foundation of the research on demotivation. Since then, other related researches on demotivation have been carried.

### 3.2. Ushioda's Research

Ushioda (1998) carried out a survey on 30 Irish French learners who are from Trinity college through two procedures of interview. In a small part of this survey, students are asked to

identify factors that reduced their English learning motivation based on their English learning motivation.

The study concluded that students attribute the success of their second language learning to personal competence and the failure of language to external factors. This study also revealed that teachers are an important factor affecting the decline of students' motivation. Tan (2016) conducted a research that confirms that maintaining and reshaping students' language motivation is extremely important for language learners who consider themselves as a failure. However, Ushioda only offers general results of the negative factors as part of this empirical study in language learning, so it probably could not produce a comprehensive framework. From another point of view, his main contribution was to make practical suggestions to enhance students' motivation.

### 3.3. Oxford's Research

Xu (2007) In 1998, 250 university students and senior high school students from America are invited to be the research objects by Oxford. Participants are asked to write an essay recalling their previous foreign language learning experience in the past four years. It had been found that the effect of teacher has received enormous attention. Oxford found four items are tightly related to students' demotivation in language learning, which include (a) nitpicking, belligerence, lack of care and praises/bias (b) the teacher's attitude towards the student's learning style or class, (c) conflicts between students' learning style and teachers' teaching style, (d) traits of the classroom activities.

### 3.4. Gorham and Christophel

Demotivation studies started from the field of communication to evaluate how teachers' behaviors affected students' motivation. Gorham & Christophel (2013) conducted a research in college where 308 undergraduate college students are asked what factors motivated or demotivated their learning and what teacher's behavior affects their attitudes towards the course. [17] They are asked to respond to the lesson immediately before the investigation. Researchers analyze the data given by the participants and to sum up three demotivating factors: structure (e.g. size of class, classroom environment, classroom facilities, etc.) context (attitudes towards courses, teachers and textbooks, etc.) and teacher (teacher's proficiency, personality, etc.) teacher factor is the most influential. The result shows that students think teacher should take responsibility for their demotivation in learning, which is further testified in the study of Bensoussan (2015) and Zhang (2017) [19]. Teachers ignore their influences on students' demotivation when students believe that motivation is teacher-led.

Generally speaking, foreign studies on negative motivation in second language acquisition have developed rapidly, but they are not very comprehensive and require more detailed research and analysis by scholars.

## 4. Method

This investigation aimed to further clarify demotivating factors which students might encounter in the process of English learning. It is inevitable to firstly propose corresponding research questionnaire to collect data and combine with the interview to put forward practical suggestions.

### 4.1. Research Questions

As mentioned above, there is not enough research specially designed for high school students. Harmer (2000) Also, most of the research on demotivation is aimed at college students, and few people study high school students. [27] After all, English is a required subject for college entrance examination, so most of students' learning motivation is to pass the exam and get

admitted into a prominent university. After entering the college, their motivation of learning has dropped significantly.

The research questions are as follows:

(1)What are the main factors contributing to high school students' demotivation in English learning?

(2)To what degree students are influenced by these factors ?

(3)What kind of advice should be given?

## 4.2. Research Participants

52 students from the fifth class of Guangan Senior High School students were chosen as the research objects. They are students with different level and learning efficacy. The author went through internship in this school for 5 months, so the author has a basic understanding to these students to support the research. All participants in my research have learned English for more than 6 years. Most of them have expressed frustration in English learning.

## 4.3. Research Instruments

The reliability analysis of Demotivation Questionnaire

In order to guarantee the credibility of the questionnaire, I politely asked them to think twice before they chose the answer. Zhao(2018)The study concludes that the Cronbach's Alpha of all the items is 0.755.[2]It shows the quality of the data collected. Therefore, the questionnaire and the results can be regarded as persuasive.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. The Analysis of Students' Factors

There are eight questions set for the influencing factors of the students themselves. According to the chart, the highest mean is the second item, the mean is 3.57. It can be seen that interest has an important influence on the motivation of students to learn English. The dullness of English learning makes students lose their interest in learning English. Learning strategies also have a relatively large impact, with a mean value of 3.46. For instance, students do not know how to start learning English and cannot find a suitable learning method. Learning ability and willpower also have a certain influence. For example, students can never recite words and phrases. Moreover, the quality of English foundation, that is, the connection of junior high school English and senior high has a great influence on English learning motivation. For instance, if students have low proficiency of English in junior high, they feel they are already backward, they are more demotivated to learn English.

### 5.2. The Descriptive Analysis of English Course

Three questions were designed from the perspective of the course. Different from the previous research, the author added the factor of junior high school connection. During the internship, the author observed that many students' decline in English learning motivation caused by the inability to adapt to high school study and life. As can be seen from the table, the most influential factors for students' motivation are textbooks. Textbooks based on vocabulary and grammar make students lose their interest in English learning, Followed by junior high school connection, and then the characteristics of the classroom. In the classroom, it is inevitable to focus on college entrance examination links and test sites, which to a certain extent leads to the purpose of the course being too strong, which will reduce the students' motivation to learn

### 5.3. The Descriptive Analysis of Teachers' Factors

Teachers have always been an important factor influencing students' motivation to learn English. Five questions were designed from the perspective of teachers. It can be seen from the

table that every factor related to teachers has the potential to cause students' motivation to learn English to decline. Teacher's personality, sense of responsibility, attitude to students, teaching style, teaching methods all have a great impact on students

#### **5.4. The Descriptive Analysis of Learning Environment**

Seeing from the learning environment, the author designs topics from three aspects: school, family, and social environment. According to the chart, it can be concluded that the school environment, that is, the atmosphere of the class, has a great influence on students' motivation to learn English. Most of the students in the class are not motivated to learn English, and the learning atmosphere is not good, which has become a major reason for the decline in the motivation of some students to learn English. Schools do not pay enough attention to English and rarely hold English activities, which has also become a major factor affecting English learning motivation. This is consistent with what the author observed during the internship. The school basically did not hold English activities within half a year, which caused some students, especially those with low motivation to learn English, to have lower motivation. It can be seen that the improvement of the class atmosphere and the importance of the school helps to restore the students' motivation to learn English. Parents' educational level and economic conditions also have an impact on English learning motivation, but the impact of family and society is far less than the impact of campus.

### **6. Pedagogical Implications**

#### **6.1. Teacher-specific Motivational Components**

According to my research, teachers play an important part in students' motivations, who act not only as demotivators but also motivators as well as re-motivators throughout the process of learning and teaching. It is equal to a teacher is crucial not only avoid their negative influence and maintain their motivation of English learning but also in arousing students' interest. So my implications from teachers' aspect are as follows. (A) Using various teaching approaches to initiate students' interest. As what I learned in my questionnaire and the interview, students reflect due to the dumbness of the teacher and the class, they felt sleepy in the class. So to arouse or maintain students' interest in learning in class, teachers have to take students' different needs and personalities into consideration, taking different teaching methods which students prefer. For example, teachers can use games to enlarge students' imaginations or teach the text through the way of telling a story. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to choose appropriate methods in accordance with specific teaching situation and students, favor. (B) Developing adequate teachers' competency and skills. Only the teachers are totally good at the subject can students adore the teacher and follows his teaching. Especially, the well-educated teacher is not enough, they also need to be skilled at conveying their knowledge and expressing their views. At the same time, teachers should equip with the competence of well guiding the whole class with harmonious atmosphere and support teachers' work. (C) Establishing harmonious relationship between students and teachers. For students with low grade and proficiency, they often feel frustrated at learning English. They are more eager for teachers' attention and love, because they feel excluded by their teachers and also some good students, they are more demotivated students. So teachers should show equal enthusiasm to both low competent students and high proficient students. Giving students help in and after class, showing students with respect. Remembering never to insult students, it will only get the adverse effect. (D) Creating successful learning experience for students. It is obvious that the good experience of learning will fortify students' learning desire.

## 6.2. Learner-specific-Motivational Components

(A) Strengthening self-management skills. Students are supposed to own the ability of planning and performing the arranged tasks by themselves instead of listening to the teachers for tiny stuff. The students can award themselves when they get progress. (B) Promote students' self-efficacy, which means teachers can find ways to let students believe in their capabilities and teachers can divide the tasks to different students according to their competence, students can find their role in the task. (C) Enhancing the students' awareness of self-value, students are supposed to aware of their tasks and their own value to improve their autonomy in studying. (D) Learning to be self-regulated and self-motivated. lead students themselves to involve in making decisions and making plans, students should monitor their own learning process to be the master of learning.

## 6.3. Course-Specific-Motivational Components

(A) Building a positive classroom atmosphere. If students thought classroom as a happy and safe place, students will more willing to learn in class. (B) Creating learner-focused classrooms, it is acknowledged that students need to improve their abilities in the class rather than get high scores, so teachers should focus more on students. (C) Providing enough chances for students to practice, to make sure students get successful experience from the practice will definitely enhance their English learning. (D) Forming healthy and supportive atmosphere. Competition will definitely exist in learning, therefore, it is advisable for teachers to combine the cooperation and competition to promote the effect of learning.

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