

# Demotivational Factors of Non-English Major Students in Learning English

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## Abstract

Motivation is an important factor in learning a language and it influences the rate and success of second/foreign language (L2) learning. Even though motivation is an important factor in learners' success, the opposite aspect of motivation is called "demotivation", which can obstruct learners' success. This study aims to investigate the demotivational factors in learning English of non-English Major students. A modified form of demotivation questionnaire was administered to 73 non-English major students selected through random sampling at the Faculty of Education, Phuket Rajabhat University. The questionnaire comprised 18 close-ended items on a five-point Likert scale on six factors of demotivation: grammar-based teaching, teacher's behavior, course contents and teaching materials, effects of low test scores, classroom environment, and lack of self-confidence. The most cited demotivational factors by students were lack of self-confidence (M=3.59, S.D=1.12), grammar-based teaching (M=3.23, S.D=1.19) and the effects of low test scores (M=3.22, S.D=0.98) respectively.

**Keywords:** Demotivational factors, non-English students, English language learning

## Introduction

The global expansion of English and its significant role in various international arenas had evidently given English the status of an international language. With increasing recognition of English as an International language, people from various countries are now able to speak English. It is estimated that English is spoken by approximately 400 million people as their mother tongue and an additional 2 billion as a second and foreign language (Rintaningrum, 2018). Thus, English is one of the languages that is widely used in every aspect of life, such as science, education, business and entertainment (Noerhidayat, 2020).

Especially, teaching English is important as education is the basis for the development of the country. If the students have good English language skills, it will be their gateway to learn new knowledge and ideas which could be applied to develop their

country. In the context of Thailand, where English is used as a foreign language, most Thai people do not use English in their daily life. Therefore, learning English is difficult for Thai people. Thus, motivation is an important factor in learning a language and it has been studied for many decades.

Dornyei (1998) mentioned that motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language (L2) learning. Even though, the presence of motivation is necessary to success, its darker side, as Dornyei (2001) calls it, “demotivation”, can be harmful to learners’ success. The importance of examining demotivation is to understand its negative effect on students’ interest in FL learning. A demotivated learner may gradually lose his or her motivation to learn FL. The latter point is indicated in several studies (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009). Moreover, Dornyei (2001) defined demotivation as specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action. Demotivation is an issue that has been the focus of attention in the area of second language learning and teaching (Muhenon, 2004).

Some studies on demotivation have been conducted to understand the subject. As the nature of demotivation is opposite to motivation, the previous studies found that demotivation has a negative impact on students’ results and interest in learning the language. As English is a compulsory subject at the school and college level, there is a need to find a better way to address the problem related to teaching and learning English.

Dörnyei (2001b) claimed that demotivation does not mean that a learner has lost his/her motivation completely. It means that a strong negative factor limits the current motivation students have while other positive motives stay intact to be activated. For instance, a learner may still be highly motivated to learn English as an international language, even if the teachers are incompetent and lacked experience in teaching English as a foreign language. This phenomenon is mostly found in non-English major students and English particularly is a mandatory subject in almost every school and university.

## Research Questions

This study sets out to explore the under-researched area of L2 demotivational factors of non-English major students in learning English. The study expects to shed light on the problems of language education in Thailand and attempts to find out why students are demotivated in the language classroom in order to facilitate and enhance language learning. Therefore, this study is designed to answer the following research question:

- What are the main factors of demotivation in learning English of Non-English major students?

## Review of Literature

In this section, the definition of demotivation and literature related to demotivating factors that negatively affect the motivation of students in non-English Major contexts are reviewed.

Crookes and Schmidt (1991) stated that demotivation is a relatively new term in the field of second language learning and is defined as a barrier that impedes and retards second language learning. Moreover, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013) defined demotivation as “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an ongoing action” (p.139). However, demotivation is not solely external, and many researchers (e.g., Arai, 2004; Falout & Maruyama, 2004) included internal factors such as lack of self-confidence and negative attitude within learners themselves to complement external sources. Therefore, demotivation is any factor that impedes or interferes with the language acquisition of people who are learning English as a second language. It consists of internal and external factors, which adversely affect the motivation of the learners. There are many factors of demotivation that could reduce the motivation of students in learning English.

Keivanpanah and Ghasemi (2011) identified five categories of demotivating factors: 1) learning contents, materials and facilities 2) attitude toward English speaking communities 3) the teacher 4) experience of failure 5) attitudes toward second language learning. Rastegar et al. (2012) also stated that teacher’s competence, behavior and teaching method can play an important role in demotivating students. Bahrami and Araghi (2013) unveiled seven demotivating categories: 1) teacher related factors 2) course-book related factors, 3) administration related factors, 4) personality related problems, 5) class environment-related factors, 6) finance related factors, and 7) other factors which included negative attitude of the society toward English language and not having access to language institutes in the neighborhood. According to this study, teacher related factors which include: teacher’s inactivity, teacher’s incompetence, teacher’s behavior, teacher’s attitude toward weak students, error correction, teaching style, level adjustment, were the most frequent demotivating factors.

Similarly, Alkaboody (2013) showed that teacher’s behavior is implied to be the most demotivating factor in the classroom. According to several researchers who studied the factors associated with demotivation factors in learning English, they have identified factors that lead to a decline in learner’s motivation to learn English. The researchers cited teachers factors such as teacher behavior and teacher abilities affecting student’s motivation to learn English. Furthermore, the study of Pratiwi (2019) investigated and explored demotivational factors in learning English of non-English major students in order to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. The subject of this qualitative case study

was learners of the information system and computer department in STMIK Bina Adinata, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The result showed that lecturers' inappropriate teaching methods, inadequate facilities, grammatically teaching material, lack of students' self-confidence, low scores, and limited opportunity to practice and lack of students' awareness were the most demotivating factors for non-English major students.

Keblawi (2006) conducted a research in Israel in which 294 Arab learners of English from 6 public schools were included. To determine the demotivating factors among the Arab adolescents learning English as a foreign language, the findings revealed that teachers, the learning group, and textbooks could demotivate students if perceived negatively. AL-Khairy (2013) also conducted a quantitative research to investigate the factors perceived as demotivational. The result reported that textbooks, English faculty behaviors, peer pressure, teaching methods, insufficient use of modern teaching aids, difficult English vocabulary and grammar were the demotivating factors for the Saudi university undergraduates in learning English language.

An interesting study by Ali and Pathan (2016) aimed to determine both demotivating and motivating factors for Pakistani college students of Quetta in learning English language. The findings revealed that course content and teaching material emerged as the most salient demotivating factor. On the other hand, instrumental motivation emerged as the most influential source of motivation among students. Based on the aforementioned research studies, the findings confirm that the factors contributing to demotivate students in learning English are basically caused by external factors such as inadequate facilities, teachers and textbooks.

On the other hand, Falouta et al. (2009) conducted research about demotivating factors in studying a second language and the effect of past demotivating factors on the present proficiency. The study revealed three factors: external conditions of the learning environment, the internal condition of the learner, and the reactive behaviors to demotivating experiences. Finally, the results showed that the internal and behavioral reactions were influential in the future learning outcome.

Similarly, the study of Falout and Maruyama (2004) with 64 first-year students who were divided into higher- proficiency and lower-proficiency groups showed that for both groups, the internal factor was the most important demotivating factor in the issue of self-confidence. According to the findings of related studies, there are many demotivation factors in learning English which could be categorized into internal and external factors. The external factors include teaching methods, inadequate facilities, and grammar teaching material. On the other hand, the internal factor is mainly imposed by the lack of students' self-confidence.

This study aimed to find out the most important demotivating factors for language learners of the student teachers of Phuket Rajabhat University. In order to do so the following question was investigated:

What are the main factors of demotivation in learning English of Non-English Major students?

## **Research Methodology**

### **Participants**

The participants of the study comprised 73 non-English students-teacher in the Faculty of Education, Phuket Rajabhat University. They were first to fourth-year students selected by a random sampling method. The participants were from nine different majors: 20 students of Social Studies major, 15 students of Early Childhood major, 8 students of Thai major, 8 students of Physical Education major, 7 students of Math major, 7 students of Chemistry major, 5 students of Science major, and 3 students of Computer major. The participants have more than 10 years of experience learning English in Thai schools and learned English by using the core curriculum, 2008.

### **Data collection**

To study the demotivation factors in learning English of non-English major students, the data was collected via an online questionnaire. The essential questionnaires relevant to demotivational factors in English language learning (ELL) were designed. The questionnaires consisted of 18 items which were divided into 6 typical items; Factor 1: Classroom Environment, Factor 2: Contents and Teaching Materials, Factor 3: Grammar-Based Teaching, Factor 4: Teacher's Behavior, Factor 5: Low Test Scores, and Factor 6: Lack of Self-Confidence (adapted from Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009).

### **Research instruments**

To examine the demotivational factors of non-English major students in learning English, two instruments were used in collecting data including a close-ended questionnaire and written documents. Sakai and Kikuchi's (2009) demotivation questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument of this study.

**Table 1**

*External and internal demotivating factors and their issues*

Demotivating Factors	Categories
<b>External Factors</b>	
<b>The factor of Classroom Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dislike classmates</li> <li>- No Internet facility</li> <li>- Grouping of students by proficiency</li> <li>- Overcrowded classrooms</li> </ul>
<b>The factor of Course Contents and Teaching Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Boring lectures and lessons</li> <li>- Lengthy English lessons</li> <li>- Uninteresting textbooks</li> <li>- Work overload</li> <li>- Less emphasis on speaking skills</li> </ul>
<b>The factor Grammar-Based Teaching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Too much emphasis on grammar</li> <li>- Focus on memorization</li> </ul>
<b>The factor of Teacher's Behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers' misbehaviour</li> <li>- Teacher as a one man show</li> <li>- Lack of teachers' feedback</li> </ul>
<b>The factor of Low Test Scores</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unable to achieve high marks</li> <li>- My friends achieved better marks</li> </ul>
<b>Internal Factors</b>	
<b>The factor of Lack of Self-Confidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fear of committing mistakes</li> <li>- Shyness</li> </ul>

**Data Analysis**

The statistical data were analyzed to arrive at the mean and standard deviation (S.D). The questionnaire data were analyzed using Likert criteria.

**Table 2**

*The definitions of levels of agreement*

Range	Level of agreement
4.21-5.00	Strongly agree
3.41-4.20	Agree
2.61-3.40	Neither agree nor disagree
1.81-2.60	Disagree
1.00-1.80	Strongly disagree

## Findings

### Part 1: Results of the questionnaire

**Table 3**

*The demotivational factors of students learning English.*

No.	Factor of demotivation	Mean.	S.D.
1	Lack of Self-Confidence	3.59	1.12
2	Grammar-based teaching	3.23	1.19
3	Effects of low test scores	3.22	0.98
4	Course contents and teaching materials	3.17	0.95
5	Teachers' behaviour	3.16	1.1
6	Classroom Environment	2.92	0.97

According to table 3, the lack of self-Confidence (M= 3.59), (S.D.=1.12) was the most salient demotivating factor. The findings revealed fear of making mistakes (M=3.62), (S.D.1.06) and shyness (M=3.56), (S.D.1.19) as the reasons which demotivated students to learn English.

Grammar-based teaching (M=3.23), (S.D.0.77), being the second most demotivating factor, most of the students attributed this to lessons which focused on memorization (M.3.23), (S.D.0.85) and heavy emphasis on grammar (M=3.20), (S.D.0.69).

Effects of low test scores was the third influential demotivating factor among non-

English major students in learning English ( $M=3.22$ ), ( $S.D.0.98$ ). According to students' responses, two key issues related to this factor were their unsuccessful attempt to achieve high marks ( $M.3.25$ ), ( $S.D.1.02$ ) and their friends scoring better marks ( $M=3.20$ ), ( $S.D.0.93$ ).

Course contents and teaching materials were reported as the fourth influential demotivating factor ( $M=3.17$ ), ( $S.D.=0.95$ ) and attributed the cause of demotivation to Less emphasis on speaking skills ( $M=3.26$ ), ( $S.D.=1.05$ ), Work overload ( $M=3.19$ ), ( $S.D.=1.08$ ), Lengthy English lessons ( $M=3.15$ ), ( $S.D.0.78$ ), include Uninteresting textbooks ( $M=3.15$ ), ( $S.D.=0.93$ ) that demotivated students enthusiasm to learn English.

Teachers' behaviour emerged as the fifth factor ( $M= 3.16$ ), ( $S.D.= 1.1$ ) as students stated that the teacher does not provide feedback to student's problems ( $M=3.29$ ), ( $S.D.=1.14$ ), misbehavior of teachers ( $M=3.10$ ), ( $S.D.=1.20$ ), and teachers carry out one-man show or teacher-centered teaching ( $M=3.10$ ), ( $S.D.=0.95$ ) in class. These factors reduced their motivation to learn English language.

Finally, classroom environment emerged as the sixth and the least demotivating factor ( $M=2.92$ ), ( $S.D.= 0.97$ ) as students stated that grouping of students by proficiency ( $M.=3.18$ ), ( $S.D.=0.89$ ), no Internet facility ( $M.=3.10$ ), ( $S.D.=0.98$ ), overcrowded classrooms ( $M.=3.04$ ), ( $S.D.=1.02$ ), and dislike classmates ( $M.=2.36$ ), ( $S.D.=0.99$ ) reduced their motivation to learn English language respectively.

## Discussion

In the present study, 73 non-English major students were asked to complete a questionnaire on the demotivating factors. The questionnaire consisted of 18 items which were divided into 6 factors. This section discusses the issues related to each factor.

The first factor, lack of self-confidence is considered the most important demotivating factor among the non-English major students. The lack of self-confidence in students was mainly propelled by their fear to make mistakes. Thai people can be very shy about speaking English. They fear of not being understood and subsequent loss of face. As argued by many theorists, fear of mistake becomes one of the main factors of students' reluctance to speak in English in the classroom (Nunan, 1999; Yi Htwe, 2007; Robby, 2010). With respect to the fear of making mistakes, Aftat (2008) added that this fear is linked to the issue of correction and negative evaluation. In addition, this is also much influenced by the students' fear of being laughed at by other students or being criticized by the teacher. As a result, students commonly stop participating in the speaking activity (Hieu, 2011). Therefore, teachers need to convince their students that making mistakes is not a wrong or bad thing because students can learn from their mistakes.

The second factor is grammar-based teaching. The students specified that focus on



memorization was the main factor which demotivated them the most. When Thai students learn English with a Thai teacher, they generally focus on grammar. Students are expected to memorize hard fast rules of grammar, and a large number of English words. Noguchi mentioned that “we need to teach not so much rules of grammar but principles of writing” (1991). Research validates his theory and the following principles have been proven to be more effective than teaching grammar as a separate subject. Therefore, teachers need to provide extensive opportunities for students to read and write in the classroom.

Third, the factor of low test scores was linked to students’ inability to achieve high marks. It cannot be denied that Thai students tend to place more emphasis on grades than what they learn from the lessons. They always remember what they studied for exams. When the exam is done, they forgot the lessons they had learned. Thus, students getting low test scores often feel inferior to others and think they are not good at learning English. This instills a negative attitude among students and leads to declining interest in learning a language. Rebecca pointed out that an education system that emphasizes grades is not really good for students instead providing feedback on a regular basis with a focus on the individual student is helpful to develop and promote the learning skills of the learner (2017).

The next factor, course contents and teaching materials are attributed to students getting limited exposure to spoken language input and less emphasis on speaking skills in the English class. There are a number of factors involved in this issue where learners may encounter different problems, such as a lack of teachers with expertise in their disciplines or cultural issues. If the problem is cultural, for instance, in certain cultures it is unusual for students to talk out loud in class, or students feel really shy to talk in front of other students then one way to break this cultural barrier is to create and establish a safe classroom practice. The teacher could create their own classroom culture where speaking out loud in English is the norm. Teacher could also encourage their students to ask for things and questions in English and give positive feedback to motivate and relax shy students to speak more.

The fifth factor was the teacher’s behavior. The students indicated that lack of teacher feedback was the issue that demotivated them. A widely-cited educational article described “feedback as one of the most powerful influences on learning” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81). Thus, giving feedback to students was an important aspect of learning English. The teacher should avoid giving feedback on grammatical aspects only and start giving equal importance to speaking skills and provide feedback on conversational aspects as well. For instance, from feedback on their use of speaking strategies (such as checking, understanding, buying time, or self-correction) they will be able to correct their errors. Similarly, while giving feedback on writing, teachers should

consider the accuracy of the content and the correctness of the writing form. One meta-analysis (Biber et al., 2011, p. 47) found that there were greater gains in grammatical accuracy when feedback focused on both content and accuracy than focusing on accuracy alone.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the demotivational factors in learning English of non-English major students. Given this, a questionnaire was devised to probe 73 student's demotivational factors in learning English. The analysis of student-teachers responses to the questionnaire revealed that the lack of self-confidence was the main factor that demotivated them to learn English. There were two aspects related to lack of self-confidence, the first one was fear of making mistakes and, the second one was shyness. Hence, the internal demotivating factor had a significant influence on the non-English major students' motivation in learning English. Moreover, grammar-based teaching and the effects of low test scores were also influential demotivating factors among non-English major students in learning English. The results of this research could be useful for teachers who observe students becoming demotivated in learning EFL in their classrooms.

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