

## **Investigating the Oral Performance of Demotivated and Motivated Iranian Seminary EFL Learners**

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### **Abstract**

The concept of demotivation and removing possible barriers of learning has been researched and advocated throughout the ESL/EFL literature but it seems that it has not been well studied at least on Iranian seminary EFL learners. As such, this study aimed at investigating the effect of demotivation on oral performance of Iranian EFL seminary learners and finding possible demotivating factors which may affect it. The participants were 50 male intermediate EFL learners studying at Islamic Propagation Office, Isfahan, Iran, selected based on their performance on the Oxford Placement test. A pretest-posttest design oral performance exam was used. The participants were divided into two groups of motivated and demotivated group based on the motivational questionnaire (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, (1996). The collected data included: (1) the results of the motivational questionnaire, (2) the results of the oral tasks (used as pre and post tests) and (3) responses to a semi-structured interview regarding the possible demotivating factors which may influence participants' oral performance. The independent sample t-test and paired samples t-test were used to determine whether there were significant inter and intra-group differences. The results provide evidence that motivation helps enhance EFL seminary learners' oral performance and demotivation significantly hinders improving it.

**Keywords:** Motivation, Demotivation, Seminary EFL Learners, Oral Performance

### **Introduction**

Research on motivation in foreign language learning has emphasized the underlying reasons behind the involvement or noninvolvement of EFL learners in academic activities (Muftah & Rafik-Galea, 2013). "Motivation," "remotivation" and "demotivation" are important factors that play a crucial role in academic study in general, and in the process of sustained English language acquisition in particular (Dörnyei, 2009). The word "motivation" has been defined as the intrinsic and external forces that account for the initiation, selection, and direction of behavior towards a goal (Babae, 2012). It refers to the characteristics of learners "that initiates and maintains the learning process, or that leads to the avoidance or rejection of learning (Stern, 1983: 385)". It is, therefore, one of the key factors which determine the design and implementation of language instruction, and which influence the success or failure of learning a foreign or second language (Alamin & Ahmed, 2013).

On the other hand, demotivation is regarded as specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action (Goodluck, 2013). It refers to factors which act in opposition to motivation and diminish a student's drive to learn English and participate in learning activities (Alavinia, 2012; Ikeno, 2002). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) have remarked that in addition to positive factors that encourage action, there are negative factors that have the opposite effect. They add that the darker side of motivation, de-motivation, has been found to play a crucial role in the learning process, yet it has been neglected as a research topic until fairly recently. Thus, a demotivated learner is someone who has lost his or

her interest to study due to various sources of demotivation like experiencing failure, inappropriate teacher behavior, or the lack of consideration to learners' needs (Hu, 2011).

It is worth to explain that seminary students are those clergy students studying in theology schools. Because of personal interest or being interested to learn English to propagate Islam, the students included in the research study English in Islamic propagation office which is the center for extra school studies of seminary students. Not all of these students seem sufficiently interested in pursuing L2 learning, therefore, an effort has been made in this study to identify whether demotivation negatively influences their oral performance of the participants under study or not. Attempts to investigate demotivation in the language teaching domains are associated with Dornyei (1994) and Rudnai (1996). However, mainly inspired by Dornyei (1994, 2001), many researchers investigated the phenomenon of learners' demotivation (Tabatabaei & Molavi, 2012; Akbarzadeh & Sharififar, 2011; Amirkhiz & Mahmoudi, 2011; Jomairi, 2011; Tran Thi, 2007; Wang & Malderez, 2006; Tsuchiya, 2004a, 2004b, 2006a, 2006b; Arai, 2004; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Hasegawa, 2004). But review of the existing literature suggests that no study has been conducted focusing on the identification of the role of demotivation on EFL oral performance of Iranian Islamic seminary EFL students—thus, this forms the focus of the present study. This study also aimed to find out whether there is a meaningful relationship between the amount of motivation and demotivation and the oral performance of Iranian Seminary EFL learners or not.

### **Research Questions**

The present study attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1. Does demotivation have any significant effect on oral performance of Iranian intermediate EFL Seminary learners?
2. What are the possible demotivating factors which may affect oral performance of Iranian intermediate EFL seminary learners?

### **Research Hypotheses**

Demotivation has no significant effect on oral performance of Iranian intermediate EFL Seminary learners.

It should be mentioned that the first research question was descriptive, so no hypotheses was formulated for it.

### **Literature review**

“Over the last twenty years, research on motivation for foreign language learning has evolved considerably from focusing on describing what composes student motivation to a detailed and elaborated list of suggestions that help teachers initiate, and further promote student motivation. However, because of the novelty of the term demotivation not much research has been conducted on the subject. To put it another way, despite the probable importance of demotivation in learning in general, and L2 and FL learning in particular, to date few studies have focused on student demotivation (Tabatabaei & Molavi 2012)”. This section deals with the previous studies on motivation and demotivation.

Reviewing the available literature on demotivation highlights some important points which deserve further attention. In the majority of cases, demotivation was conceptualized as a stable and constant construct which could be objectively observed, evaluated, and measured (e.g., Molavi & Biria, 2013; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Seo & Kim, 2012; Tabatabaei & Molavi, 2012; Tuan, 2011).

Mora Vázquez, Trejo Guzmán, and Roux Rodríguez (2010) conducted a small scale investigation into Mexican university students' language learning motivation. The participating students in this study identified teacher-specific motivational components and group-specific motivational components as the two most influential factors from their learning context in determining their L2 learning motivation levels.

Tuan (2011) examined the difference between perceived demotivating factors by demotivated and motivated learners of English in Vietnam.

Kaivanpanah and Ghasemi (2011) investigated the main sources of Iranian students' demotivation in L2 learning. Akbarzadeh and Sharififar (2011) in an attempt investigated demotivating factors among EFL learners and found classroom-related factors as the highest demotivating ones among three factors of teachers-related factors, learners-related factors, and classroom-related factors, particularly for less motivated learners.

Meshkat and Hassani (2012) worked on demotivating factors for learning English. A demotivation questionnaire was administered to 421 high school students. The results indicated that Iranian students considered factors like lack of school facilities, overemphasis on grammar, long passages, and expectancy to use grammatically correct English in the classroom as strong sources of demotivation. Regarding gender, a significant difference was found between male and female students.

By decoding the quantitative data obtained from 6301 elementary school students and the qualitative findings from 17 teachers in Korea, Kim and Seo (2012) extracted three demotivators, the Teachers, Excessive Social Expectation and Students' Proficiency Gap.

In another study in the context of Iran, Sahragard and Alimorad (2013) investigated demotivating factors in public schools of Iran by administering a 48-item questionnaire to 194 Iranian high school students. Sahragard and Ansari-pour (2014) also investigated demotivating and remotivating factors among Iranian MA students of TEFL. Farmand and Abdolmanafi Rokni (2014) also investigated the main demotivating factors among Iranian university students of TEFL.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The participants were 50 male intermediate EFL students studying English at Islamic Propagation Office, Isfahan aged 20-30, chosen non-randomly by administering Quick Placement Test (QPT, version 1) to over 120 EFL students in order to make sure that the participants were homogeneous with regard to their language proficiency. They were divided into two groups, one class as the experimental group ( $n = 25$ ) and the other one as the control group ( $n = 25$ ). It is worth to mention here that the teaching materials that the participants studied during the semester (as the course book and backbone of the research) were mainly the New Interchange book series (Richards, Hull, and Proctor, (1997)), the first half of the Book III, for both groups. There were mainly three major sections in teaching the two groups including: (1) vocabulary, (2) dialogue, and (3) sentence structure.

### **Materials**

The current study employed a hybrid method design which included both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Such a method integrates both approaches to provide a much more detailed and comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under investigation. In this study the qualitative investigation included the possible demotivating factors which may affect oral performance of Iranian intermediate EFL seminary learners. The qualitative data was gathered

through an interview and regarding the quantitative data different materials were employed in this study to carry on the intended research. In the following subsections, they are described in detail.

### **The QPT**

To identify the proficiency level of the participants Quick Placement Test (QPT, version 1) was used. The test as shown in attachment consists of two parts; part one has 40 questions testing situations (five questions), cloze passages– testing prepositions, grammar, pronouns, and vocabulary– (15 questions), and completion questions (20 questions). The second part contains 20 questions; 10 questions on cloze passages and 10 questions of completion type questions. All questions are multiple-choice items.

### **Motivational Questionnaire**

In order to understand about the students' motivation toward learning English after this study, a questionnaire containing 41 items was used. It was adapted from the Motivational Questionnaire (MQ) outlined by Celce-Murcia (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, (1996).). The questionnaire was a likert-type scale coded on a 5-point scale. The five answers were listed according to the order of frequency: (1) fully agreed (5 points), (2) agreed (4 points), (3) no idea (3 points), (4) opposed (2 points), and fully opposed (1 point). Most of the questions were asked from the positive point of view (e.g., I enjoy learning English), and such questions would score 5 points, 4 points, 3 points, 2 points, 1 point corresponding to the answers of always, often, sometimes, seldom, and never.

### **Oral Tasks**

Two oral tasks were used in this study as pretest and posttest. The tasks involving paired dialogues designed to test the participants' oral communicative competence regarding the linguistic features. The oral tasks designed in this study were interaction-based tasks, which usually involved turn-takings. The reasons for including paired oral task as measurement of communicative competence were that, according to Weir (1995), "we want candidates to perform relevant language tasks and adapt their speech to the circumstances, making decisions under time pressure, implementing them fluently, and making any necessary adjustments as unexpected problems arise" (p. 31).

### **Procedure**

This study manipulates a qualitative/quantitative method. In the first stage, 50 intermediate homogenous participants were selected through simple random sampling from among Iranian Islamic seminary EFL students in Isfahan, Iran who were supposed to be at intermediate level by the application of Quick Placement Test (QPT, version 1). In order to understand about the students' motivation and demotivation toward learning English, a questionnaire containing 41 items were used. It was adapted from the Motivational Questionnaire (MQ) outlined by Celce-Murcia (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, (1996).). The questionnaire was a likert-type scale coded on a 5-point scale. The selected learners were non-randomly assigned to two groups: the demotivated group, and the motivated group.

Then the first oral task was administered at the beginning of the semester as the pretest and the second one toward the end of the semester as the posttest. The first oral task was show and tell. In this task, the students in both groups were paired to perform dialogues in front of the whole class, showing and talking about photos of their families. The students brought photos of their family members to class and talked about the persons in the pictures with their partners. The

students had one week to prepare before they presented in class. And each pair was given five minutes to perform their dialogue. A scoring rubric, adapted from Weir (1990) was used along with the scoring sheet for the purpose of grading. The grading of the linguistic competence of oral tasks was based upon five criteria: (1) appropriateness (20%), (2) adequacy of vocabulary for purpose (20%), (3) grammatical accuracy (20%), (4) intelligibility (20%), and (5) fluency (20%). The second oral task that the students performed as the posttest was asking about their partners' favorite football team. The system of rating was the same as that of the pretest. In addition, the participants' performances on the oral tasks were transcribed by three raters based on the scoring rubric and actual scoring sheets of oral task developed by Weir (1990) was adopted as the grading criteria for the later analysis.

Regarding the possible demotivating factors which may effect on oral performance of Iranian intermediate EFL seminary learners, the participants were interviewed in order to extract general ideas on what may be demotivating them in the improvement of their oral performance. The interview was a qualitative semi-structured one. A semi-structured interview format was employed since in comparison to the structured and unstructured interview alternatives, the semi-structured format offers a compromise between the two extremes (Dörnyei, 2007). Also, all the interviews were transcribed.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collection for analysis in this study included: (1) the results of the motivational questionnaire, and (2). the results of the two oral tasks. Finally, intra group and inter group comparisons were used through SPSS version 16, to address the research question of the study. Having collected all the data for describing and analyzing the information, using the SPSS software version 16, the principles of descriptive statistics were applied in order to identify and describe the data. The measures of mean and standard deviation were calculated. Inferential statistics were applied to test the proposed hypotheses. The means of the two groups were compared by the application of a paired sample t-test.

### **Results**

To this end, two classes of EFL Iranian intermediate level adult male seminary students (25 each) were selected as the motivated and demotivated groups (n=25). The homogeneity of the participants in terms of their English proficiency was tested through administering the QPT. Later, an oral task as the pre-test was run on two groups and then the two groups underwent the treatment and both groups were tested afterwards using the post test, to do this, another oral test was administered.

Before starting the experiment, the performance of the participants in the two groups were to be compared to make sure that they were homogeneous at the beginning of the treatment, to this end an QPT was administered and according to the results of the mean scores of the control and experimental groups, as it was shown, there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of these groups. Therefore it was concluded that the two groups were homogeneous.

The hypothesis of the present study was that demotivation has no significant influence on the oral performance of Iranian intermediate EFL Seminary learners. According to the statistics depicted in table 1 it can be seen that the mean difference of pre and post –tests for the demotivated group is 1.16 (the mean for pre-test being 60.60 and for post-test 61.76) which is not statistically significant.

**Table 1.** *The results of the mean comparison between the oral scores of pre and post-tests of demotivated group*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	VAR00001	60.6000	25	11.78276	2.35655
	VAR00002	61.7600	25	11.76959	2.35392

In order to ascertain that the mean difference between the pre and post-tests of demotivated group is not so significant (it is obvious that some improvement should be observed even in the demotivated group) a paired sample t-test was run between the pre and post-test scores. Table 2 illustrates the results of this t-test.

**Table 2.** *The results of the Paired Samples Test between the oral scores of pre and post-tests of demotivated group*

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	VAR00001 - VAR00002	-5.98367E1	11.69107	1.67015	-63.19480	56.47867	-35.827	48	.000

On the other hand the mean score difference for motivated group is 11.16 (the mean score for pre-test being 61.40 and that for post-test being 72.56) that is a difference of 11.16 which is considered to be significant. (the mean score for post -test being 61.76 for the motivated group and that for the motivated group post-test being 72.56) The mean comparison for the motivated group is illustrated in table 3.

**Table 3.** *Results of the mean comparison between the oral scores of pre and post oral tests of motivated group*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	VAR00001	61.4000	25	11.04913	2.20983
	VAR00002	72.5600	25	12.06607	2.41321

In order to statistically be more reasonable a paired sample t-test was run between the oral scores of pre and post –test scores of the participants in the motivated group, the scores gained from the oral test of the participants in the motivated group were utilized as the post test, the results of which are depicted in table 4. As it is clear the t- observed of the scores (-3.051) is greater than the t-critical (2.064), therefore the formulated null-hypothesis is rejected.( $p < .05$ )

**Table 4.** *The results of paired Samples t-test between the oral scores of pre and post tests of motivated group*

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
pair VAR000 01 VAR000 02	- 1.11600E1	18.29089	3.65818	-18.71011	-3.60989	-3.051	24	.005

Regarding the possible demotivating factors which may affect on oral performance of Iranian intermediate EFL Seminary learners, more than a decade experience of the researcher and the results of the qualitative semi-structured interview with the demotivated participants recognized the following demotivating factors which affect oral performance of Iranian EFL Seminary students. The results of the interview are tabulated as follows:

**Table 5.** *Demotivating factors affecting Iranian intermediate EFL Seminary learners' oral performance*

No.	possible demotivating factors affecting Iranian intermediate EFL Seminary learners' oral performance (Internal and External Factors)
<b>INTERNAL FACTORS</b>	
1	Sense of English uselessness: unclear purpose of using the target language especially the oral skill (communication in English) in their daily life and seminary school structure
2	Learners' lack of interest and attitude toward English speaking communities, culture and English itself
3	Learners' feeling of disappointment and lack of purpose or goal for language learning
4	lack of belief in learners' capabilities, test anxiety and self-esteem and Inconsistent studying way
5	Being shy, laziness and unwillingness to learn,
6	lack of self-confidence and attitude as a result of lack of success and experiences of failure
<b>EXTERNAL FACTORS</b>	
1	Different teachers have different styles: teachers' competence and teaching styles
2	Total curricular seminary school and extra school work overload (Seminary students must study a lot of other school subjects and so having no time to concentrate on English.)
3	Attitudes towards English: Some communicative topics included in coursebooks act as a hindrance to learning English as they are prohibited by Islam.
4	teacher controlled classrooms rather than student centered ones
5	Not considering students' previous learning and knowledge as course content is selected (e.g. difference teaching methods compared with seminary schools)
6	In some cases inappropriate placement of the students which causes a hindrance for the class progress (Unequal proficiency levels among students)
7	lack of enough teachers' direct and indirect corrective feedback (Lack of revision and instruction on how to do oral self-study for English classes)
8	Assessment: Exams incorporate unrelated or difficult questions like oral exam questions.
9	lack of enough time to be prepared for the class oral activities

10	Financial problems, which urges learners to work more to compensate.
11	overall length of English course
12	Interference with another language: learners' first language interferes and for some learners experience in learning another language like Arabic with learning English

### Discussion

According to the data obtained from this study and the statistics presented in based on the oral tasks administered on both groups, it is obviously clear that the demotivation has a significant effect on the oral skill performance of the Iranian EFL seminary learners and demotivation has a negative effect on oral skill performance of Iranian seminary EFL learners. Moreover, the significant improvement of the participants' language proficiency possibly resulted from the fact that discussing, creating, and thinking in a group, rather than individually, can provide a less anxiety-producing context. If group mates feel positively interdependent with one another, a supportive atmosphere can develop their learning too (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). Furthermore the participants enumerated some demotivating factors which they considered to influence on their EFL oral performance which were tabulated in table 5.

### Conclusion

This study was in fact an attempt to shed light on the point whether demotivation could bear any influence on the oral performance of Iranian EFL seminary students or not. As it was illuminated in the preceding section of the study, the findings of the study revealed that, there is a high correlation between the demotivation and oral skill of language learners. Based on the results obtained through the statistical analysis on the collected data, it can be safely claimed that there is a significant difference between the oral performance of those Iranian EFL seminary students who are motivated than the demotivated ones. Finally the participants mentioned some possible demotivating factors which they believe may influence on the improvement of oral performance among which attitudes towards English, assessment, lack of interest, lack of time, lack of practical occasions to use English, work load, lack of providing enough feedback from the side of the teacher and the overall length of English course are of great importance. So it seems a must for the EFL curriculum developers at Islamic Propagation Office, Isfahan, Iran to think about remedies for overcoming demotivation among their EFL learners like persuading them to: realize the importance of English, recognize English as an international language, recognize English as a fundamental skill of educated people, find English as an easy language, make EFL learners more interested and excited, ask teachers to focus on communicative activities, provide more practical and real opportunities to use English in a class and so on.

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