

Factors behind Students' Demotivation in Learning Phonetics: A Case Study of 2nd Year Licence Students at Saida University.

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Abstract:

Learning Phonetics forms a crucial challenge among the EFL students at university. This challenge leads to a demotivation status between them which influences negatively their output. To investigate the reasons behind these challenges, a study on the factors which encourage the demotivation among the EFL university students when learning Phonetics was fulfilled. The purpose of this study is to investigate both: The factors that stand behind the students' demotivation and the appropriate solutions to overcome them. As a research method, one qualitative instrument which is face to face interview was applied on 30 participants. The results demonstrate that the main reasons behind the students' demotivation are the lack of the technological tools usage and the non-implementation of the multimodal teaching methods.

Keywords: EFL students, Phonetics, demotivation, technological tools, multimodal.

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1. General Introduction:

Phonetics is the scientific study of human speech sounds. It is also taught as a fundamental module to the EFL students at university. During the learning process of Phonetics, it is noticed that, the students frequently face challenges which create a kind of demotivation among them. Therefore, it weakens their performance. To investigate the problematic, a study entitled: The factors behind the students' demotivation in Phonetics is conducted.

Though the demotivation among the EFL students is a common fact, it is scarcely treated in the Algerian EFL learning context. That is to say, the prevalent studies shed light on the EFL learning in general at university. However, the current study investigates the learning of a specific and a primordial module which is Phonetics. This study aims to search not only for the reasons which lead to the demotivation among the EFL learners but also, for the solutions which help them to overcome this challenge.

The study's results bring out constructive perspectives for the EFL teachers mainly. These insights will boost the quality of EFL teaching and learning at university by innovating new teaching methods that enhance the productivity of the students. Also, the objective of the current study is looking for the factors that hinder the students from enhancing their level in Phonetics. Besides, it looks for the solutions which help them in the amelioration of the learning process. In addition, this study aims to provide the adequate suggestions and recommendations; for the purpose of creating a successful learning atmosphere for the students of Phonetics

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1/ What are the factors behind the EFL students' demotivation in learning Phonetics at university?

2/ How can the EFL students overcome these factors?

To answer the previous mentioned questions, the researcher opted for a single qualitative instrument; a face to face interview. By the analysis of the results, the common answers between the participants were highly taken into consideration. Based on the participants' answers, a set of recommendations was suggested to both the students and the teachers. These suggestions could represent a useful guide to found a positive and successful teaching/learning process in the Phonetics session.

2. Theoretical Background:

EFL teaching and learning has become a fundamental process in the Algerian educational context. This process is marked by several complications and challenges which become more evident at the university level, where English is taught as an independent major. Teaching English as a major includes various sub-fields, among which is Phonetics. Phonetics is defined as the scientific study of human speech sounds. For EFL students, it is considered a fundamental module that enhances their pronunciation competence and, consequently, their speaking and listening skills. A common stereotype about Phonetics at the university level is that it is a purely scientific discipline. This perception makes it difficult for many students to engage with, especially those with a literary background. As a result of these challenges, students may gradually become demotivated in learning Phonetics. Demotivation has been defined by various scholars from different perspectives.

According to Dornei (2001, as cited in Cankaya, 2018), demotivation is explained as a set of external (extrinsic) factors that impede and weaken a person's behaviour. Also, in 2009, Sakai & Kikuchi described demotivation as a kind of negative impact that decreases EFL learners' motivation. Furthermore, in 2004, Falout & Maruyama identified demotivation as the lack of interest in learning due to the negative learning atmosphere surrounding the learner.

Demotivation has been a controversial research topic over the years among scholars in the EFL field. Various theories have been developed to address this issue. The most relevant theory to this study is the Self – Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci & Ryan, which is derived from a psychological basis. This theory emphasizes three essential psychological needs: Autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy: It refers to the self-direction of an individual's actions external pressure. In educational settings, it refers to learners' ability to make choices about their learning and to have control over the learning process. Then, competence refers to the capacity of completing tasks and mastering skills. While, relatedness refers to the necessity of being connected with the others within the same learning environment. According to the authors, when these components are available in learners, they promote positive outcomes, and as a result, learners become self-determined in their learning.

The common point between the Self- Determination Theory (SDT) and the focus of this study is that both aim to identify the factors behind learners' demotivation. In the Algerian context, a study on contextual factors causing demotivation among EFL students was conducted at Jijel University. According to

Baka & Kherbouche (2016), the study demonstrated that EFL students are demotivated due to several reasons: the teacher's personality, students' low self – confidence, and administrative obstacles. Similarly, in the Moroccan context, Baba (2018) conducted a study entitled Students' Demotivating Factors in the EFL Classroom at the Secondary Level. This study found that the overcrowded classrooms, the English textbook , and the classroom atmosphere are the main reasons behind students' demotivation. The current study demonstrates that motivation is a crucial element in learning Phonetics. It emphasizes that motivation cannot arise from nothing; rather, multi factors contribute to sustain it. They are mainly the use of technological tools and multimodal teaching methods that take into account students' individual differences.

3. Research Methodology:

1.3. Research Questions & Hypotheses:

In this section, the researcher aims to address the following research questions. The first question investigates the reasons behind students' demotivation in learning Phonetics, whereas the second question explores possible solutions to enhance students' motivation in learning the same module. Regarding the hypotheses related to the first research question, it is assumed that students may be demotivated due to the complexity of the syllabus content or because they are exposed deeply to Phonetics for the first time. Concerning the hypotheses addressing the second research question, it is suggested that teachers should develop effective teaching methods that accommodate different proficiency levels. In addition, they should revise and adapt the syllabus content to better meet students' needs.

2.3. Research Instrument and Participants:

In the current study, thirty students were selected from different groups as follows: The first group consisted of high achieving students, the second group included students with intermediate proficiency, and the third group comprised students with a basic level of proficiency. The small sample size of thirty participants is adequate for this qualitative study because it is manageable and deep in terms of analysis. To address the research problem, the researcher employed a qualitative instrument namely a face to face interview. The interviews were conducted at the end of each session, and responses were collected from all participants.

3.3. Research Findings and Analysis:

A thematic analysis was conducted to examine students' responses. Interview data were transcribed and coded. The derived codes were used to generate themes that explain the main factors contributing to students' demotivation in the study of Phonetics.

3.3.1. Main Themes:

1. Lack of Audio-Visual Tools:

The absence of audio-visual resources emerged as a major theme in Phonetics classes. The majority of participants reported that the neglect of technological support during lectures hindered their understanding of essential abstract concepts. In this regard, one student declared: " Without visual or audio material, it is hard to understand the production of sounds". Another student commented regarding this theme: " The lesson is based only on theoretical concepts and it lacks concrete practice". From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, these challenges may negatively affect students' competence, as the lack of technological tools limits their ability to comprehend the course material.

2. Insufficient Prior Knowledge:

With regard to this theme, many students justified their demotivation in learning Phonetics to a weak foundation in the module during their first year. This deficiency created a gap in their ability to engage with second year course content. One participant noted: " We did not have sufficient information concerning the basics of Phonetics in the first year that's why it seems complicated in the second year." From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, this finding suggests that a lack of solid prior knowledge in Phonetics diminishes students' competence which leads to their demotivation.

3. Complexity of the Phonetics Module:

The scientific nature of the module was identified as a major challenge as well. Most EFL students come from a literary background in secondary school which makes it difficult for them to analyze phonetic patterns such as transcription and syllabification. One student mentioned: " Transcription is the hardest task in Phonetics. IPA symbols are too difficult to remember. "Another student stated: " Syllabification is misleading because it requires a thorough analysis." From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, the inherent complexity of Phonetics may reduce student's competence, thereby contributing to their demotivation to learn.

4. Nature of Teaching Methods:

Participants expressed various opinions regarding the teaching methods used by the course instructor. One student declared : " The teacher explains the lesson clearly and the most of the lesson is understood." Other students stated: " The method does not take into account the different levels of the students". From the perspective of Self- Determination Theory , ineffective teaching methods may restrict students' autonomy and competence ,as they are unable to understand the content independently and engage in the lesson. Consequently, this may lead to a loss of motivation for learning.

5. Proposed Solutions:

Concerning the proposed suggestions, the majority of students emphasized the revision of the syllabus design and the variety of the teaching methods. One student declared: " The program should be modified to suit the students needs." Others insisted on the integration of technology and the variety of teaching methods. " Using audios and videos can facilitate the assimilation of the lesson in addition to the different teaching methods used by the teacher". These student-proposed solutions encourage their sense of competence and autonomy, which are essential factors for enhancing motivation according to Self-Determination Theory.

4.3. Discussion:

The findings of this study can be effectively interpreted through Self-Determination Theory proposed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. The results suggest that students' demotivation in learning Phonetics is primarily associated with the lack of competence and autonomy. Students' difficulties in understanding phonetic basics, along with insufficient prior knowledge and the lack of technological support, weaken their sense of competence. In addition, teaching methods that do not accommodate different learning levels may reduce students' sense of autonomy. Therefore, enhancing motivation in Phonetics learning requires the implementation of effective instructional practices that support these psychological needs by providing clear multimodal explanations and integrating adequate teaching tools.

5. General Conclusion:

This study investigates the factors underlying students' demotivation in learning Phonetics among second year Licence students at Saida University. Based on the thematic analysis of interview data, several factors factors were identified,

including a lack of technological resources, insufficient prior knowledge, the complexity of Phonetics content, and limited teaching methods.

The findings demonstrate that a combination of cognitive, pedagogical and contextual factors contributes to students' demotivation. Specifically, the scientific nature of Phonetics, particularly lessons related to transcription and syllabification, presents a challenge for students with a literary background. In addition, the absence of technological tools and the lack of multimodal teaching methods that lead to these difficulties.

Based on the interpretation of Self-Determination Theory, several pedagogical implications can be traced. It is necessary to update the Phonetics syllabus to meet students' needs. In addition, the integration of audio-visual materials and the diversity of teaching methods that take into account individual differences among learners are essential. These measures can significantly enhance students' motivation. In conclusion, improving the teaching and learning environment in Phonetics relies on promoting a learner- centered approach that supports students' motivation and development.

6. Recommendations:

1. Recommendations for Teachers & Students:

- The Phonetics instructor should design an appropriate syllabus and update it annually to meet students' needs.
- The instructor should also avoid complex or unnecessary content in order to prevent student demotivation.
- In addition, the instructor should adopt multimodal teaching methods in which audio-visual tools are used when appropriate, while also taking into consideration individual differences within the classroom.
- An additional session should be included in the timetable to provide opportunities for intensive practice.
- Students should demonstrate interest and seriousness during the learning process; that is, they should attend lectures regularly.
- Students should focus during the explanation as they have the right to suggest the best learning method for them on the module's instructor.

- Students should practice both inside and outside the classroom in order to achieve their learning objectives.
- Students as academic learners, they should further elaborate their understanding of the module through independent study and research outside the classroom.

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