

On Demotivation Of College Students In English Learning And Its Coping Strategies

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ABSTRACT: By conducting a questionnaire survey on 134 junior students and an interview with 3 teachers responsible for their English teaching, this paper investigates the factors that affect college students' demotivation in English learning with the corresponding strategies proposed. The decreasing interest in English, the ignorance of the cultures of English-speaking countries and passive learning attitudes are prominent internal factors from the learners themselves while higher expectations from the parents on their academic achievements, previous unpleasant learning experiences and the teachers' rigidity in teaching are influencing external factors. The coping strategies are provided from the perspectives of college students, the teachers and the students' parents. For college students: 1) Increase self-confidence in learning English; 2) Master proper English learning strategies; 3) Make positive self-evaluation. For the teachers: 1) Optimize teaching methods to motivate the students to learn English; 2) Create a good atmosphere for English learning; 3) Offer effective feedback to the students; 4) Guide the students to reasonably assess their English academic achievements. For the students' parents: 1) Provide their children with positive guidance and supports; 2) Strengthen home-school cooperation.

Keywords: demotivation in English learning, college students, influencing factors, coping strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

As one of the most influential factors in foreign language acquisition, learning motivation can directly stimulate, regulate and promote students' language learning. However, the traditional exam-oriented education and the singularity of teachers' methods in teaching make English class lack of vitality. The students gradually lose their confidence in learning English which leads to an obvious decline in the effectiveness of English learning. This study is to analyze the factors that affect college students' demotivation in English learning with the corresponding strategies proposed with the aim to enhance their English proficiency, which will be a valuable reference for English teachers both in theory and practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning motivation refers to a driving force that triggers and maintains students' learning behavior and directs them to achieve academic goals. Gardner and Lambert¹ (1972) classified foreign language learning motivation into two categories: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. The former is the main source of effectively promoting foreign language learning with which the learners have special interest in the target language and expect to be members of the target language community. The latter reflects what are the actual

advantages of learning a foreign language brought to the learners. Deci and Ryan² (1985) held that intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are two forms of learning motivation. The former refers to a spontaneous inner necessity and is relatively stable which makes the learners stay in a state of active learning while the latter is mainly the result of external compulsion and thus is relatively momentary.

The two terms “amotivation” and “demotivation” are generally adopted by the scholars to express “lack of motivation”. Amotivation refers to the total loss of motivation resulting from the learners’ helplessness in learning rather than the lack of interest while demotivation emphasizes a particular external force that reduces the learners’ ongoing behaviors³. Since the 1990s, research on demotivation in foreign language learning has been conducted in European and American countries, most of which focused on the influencing factors leading to the state of being less-motivated^{4,5,6,7,8}. The findings showed that low self-confidence and passive learning attitudes are prominent factors resulting in the decline of motivation. Domestic scholars’ research on demotivation in English learning is in its infancy^{9,10,11}. The results showed that the teacher is the main influencing factor apart from poor English foundations, and low confidence from the factors of the students themselves.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method will be introduced including research questions, subjects and instruments in this section.

3.1 Research Questions

The issues to be explored in this study are as follows:

- 1) What are the factors that affect demotivation of college students in English learning?
- 2) What are the strategies to deal with demotivation of college students in English learning?

3.2 Participants

The participants of questionnaire survey are 134 junior students majoring in Primary Education of Grade 2017 in LPS University Guizhou China. The reason for choosing them is that they are in the intermediate stage of college education. Familiar with the requirements of the teachers, they have formed some learning habits which can be of help in making reasonable judgments when filling in the questionnaire. The participants of interview are 3 teachers in the same university who are responsible for English teaching of those 134 junior students.

3.3 Research Instruments

The research instruments adopted in this study are a questionnaire (Cronbach’s Alpha=.894) on the students and an interview with the teachers designed by the Chinese scholar Liu Xinye¹² in 2018 with slight modifications in expression so as to be suitable for the study itself. The former consisting of two parts with a total of 42 questions is helpful for the author to understand the intensity of college students’ English learning motivation and thus analyze the factors that affect demotivation of them in English learning while the latter with a total of 4 questions can facilitate the author’s further understanding of the teachers’ opinions on the weakening motivation of students in English learning. Excel and SPSS 22.0 are used to make the data analysis on the results of the questionnaire.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and discussion of the research will be revealed on demotivation of college students in English learning

which will lay a solid foundation for proposing the coping strategies followed in next section.

4.1 Results and Discussion of the Questionnaire Survey

The first part of the questionnaire with 8 questions aims to investigate the intensity of college students' English learning motivation (Note: Question Number=QN; The Number of the Selection=NS; Assignment=As; The Mean Score=MS; The Average Mean=AM; Strongly Disagree=SD; Disagree=D; Uncertainly=UNC; Agree=A; Strongly Agree=SA).

Table 4-1 Data Analysis of Results on College Students' Internal Motivation

QN \ NS	SD	D	UNC	A	SA
1	2.83%	3.82%	28.59%	35.24%	29.52%
3	19.00%	20.04%	22.86%	27.62%	10.48%
5	32.48%	35.14%	20.00%	5.74%	6.64%

Question 1 shows that 64.76% of them like learning English and want to know the cultures of English-speaking countries with Only 6.65% of them making the choices of "totally disagree" and "disagree". Question 3 shows that 38.10% of them think that pronunciation contributes a lot to a fluent oral English. Question 5 shows that only 12.38% of them admit that English is interesting. It can be seen that some college students are internally less-motivated due to low interest in English learning and ignorance of the importance of English pronunciation.

Table 4-2 Data Analysis of Results on College Students' External Motivation

QN \ NS	SD	D	UNC	A	SA
2	8.52%	6.71%	17.11%	41.00%	26.66%
4	2.86%	3.02%	16.38%	34.83%	42.91%
6	5.57%	17.09%	18.19%	46.75%	12.40%

Question 2 shows that 67.66% of them express their motivation in learning English to succeed the exams. Question 4 shows that 77.74% of them believe that good English proficiency can increase the opportunities to find good jobs in the future. Question 6 shows that 59.15% of them expect good academic results for much recognition of the teachers and parents. It can be seen that strong urges for success in exams, approval of the teachers and parents and ideal jobs in the future function as strong extrinsic motivations to stimulate them to learn English.

Table 4-3 Data Analysis of Results on College Students' Performances in English Learning

QN \ NS	SD	D	UNC	A	SA

7	4.76%	4.91%	18.43%	65.38%	6.52%
8	3.01%	3.81%	30.83%	47.27%	15.08%

Question 7 shows that 71.90% of them are willing to actively communicate with the classmates and teachers in class and get fun from English learning. Question 8 shows that 62.35% of them have made great efforts on English learning.

Based on the data analysis above, we can draw a conclusion that students are less-motivated internally and less-interested in English learning with passive performances in class.

The second part with 34 questions is to explore the factors affecting college students' lack of English learning motivation(Note: SD=1 point; D=2 points; UNC=3 points; A=4 points; SA=5 points).

Table 4-4 Data Analysis of Results on College Students' Confidence in English Learning

QN	NS As	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	MS	AM
		3	37.10%	26.70%	18.11%	12.36%	5.73%	2.218
4	22.62%	26.73%	20.13%	21.84%	8.68%	2.513		

Question 3 and 4 show that the mean scores are 2.218 and 2.513 respectively with the average mean of 2.365, which indicates that they have no confidence in English learning and tend to be affected by the test results, which in turn affects the intensity of their motivation in English learning.

Table 4-5 Data Analysis of Results on College Students' Interest in English Learning

QN	NS As	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	MS	AM
		5	2.85%	22.66%	17.34%	29.47%	27.68%	3.532
6	27.52%	30.58%	15.19%	22.86%	3.85%	2.418		

Question 5 and 6 show that the mean scores are 3.532 and 2.418 respectively with the average mean of 2.975, which indicates that unsatisfactory English test results and not being enthusiastic in English class lead to insufficient interest in English learning.

Table 4-6 Data Analysis of Results on College Students' English Learning Experience

QN	NS As	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	MS	AM
		7	18.00%	17.24%	19.19%	37.96%	7.61%	3.010
8	24.67%	22.02%	21.95%	24.71%	6.65%	2.647		
9	18.06%	22.90%	25.81%	27.54%	5.69%	2.809		

Question 7, 8 and 9 show that the mean scores are 3.010, 2.647 and 2.809 respectively with the average mean of 2.822, which indicates that unpleasant learning experiences such as being afraid of being asked by the teachers in class and being depressed brought about by lower test scores have greatly affected their enthusiasm for learning English.

Table 4-7 Data Analysis of Results on College Students' Learning Abilities

NS \ QN \ As	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	MS	AM
10	31.41%	29.51%	10.43%	21.00%	7.65%	2.428	2.370
11	21.74%	30.50%	18.12%	19.00%	10.64%	2.551	
12	25.69%	34.30%	15.29%	17.12%	7.60%	2.475	
13	38.12%	35.22%	15.29%	8.42%	2.95%	2.028	
14	30.43%	30.52%	17.10%	14.28%	7.67%	2.369	

Question 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 show that the mean scores are 2.428, 2.551 , 2.475, 2.028 and 2.369 respectively with the average mean of 2.370. The higher mean scores of Question 11 and 12 indicate that students' weak learning abilities are reflected by their inactive participation in class and not previewing before class.

Table 4-8 Data Analysis of Results on College Students' Learning Strategies

NS \ QN \ As	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	MS	AM
15	25.70%	25.72%	15.34%	23.70%	9.54%	2.656	2.765
16	20.00%	21.92%	14.27%	34.33%	9.48%	2.923	
17	19.95%	35.20%	20.09%	19.00%	5.76%	2.542	
18	17.10%	21.00%	20.05%	34.26%	7.59%	2.942	

Question 15, 16, 17 and 18 show that the mean scores are 2.656, 2.923 , 2.542 and 2.942 respectively with the average mean of 2.765. The higher mean scores of Question 16 and 18 indicate that students' unconsciousness of learning strategies are prominently reflected by their no mastery of the skills of words memory and ignorance of grammar laws as well as ineffective preparation for exams.

Table 4-9 Data Analysis of Results on College Students' Recognition of English Importance

NS \ QN \ As	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	MS	AM
1	54.21%	28.67%	7.60%	1.92%	7.60%	1.780	1.742
2	52.36%	32.40%	9.51%	2.82%	2.91%	1.704	

Question 1 and 2 show that the mean scores are 1.780 and 1.704 respectively with the average mean of 1.742, which indicates that most of them know the importance of English learning.

Table 4-10 Data Analysis of Results on Influencing Factors of the Teachers

NS \ QN \ As	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	MS	AM
19	30.48%	31.40%	18.13%	13.35%	6.64%	2.342	1.986
20	48.57%	28.53%	16.23%	3.79%	2.88%	1.828	
21	40.00%	35.24%	15.24%	7.62%	1.90%	1.962	
22	43.81%	32.38%	14.27%	5.71%	3.83%	1.932	
23	42.90%	34.25%	17.10%	3.86%	1.89%	1.867	

Question 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23 show that the mean scores are 2.342, 1.828, 1.962, 1.932 and 1.867 respectively with the average mean of 1.986. The higher mean scores of Question 19 and 21 indicate that teachers' poor pronunciations and oral expressions together with rigid teaching methods lead to their ineffectiveness in English learning.

Table 4-11 Data Analysis of Results on Influencing Factors of the Textbook

NS \ QN \ As	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	MS	AM
24	29.50%	22.88%	17.14%	21.88%	8.60%	2.572	2.419
25	28.57%	35.24%	21.90%	10.48%	3.81%	2.257	
26	38.10%	40.95%	11.45%	7.60%	1.90%	1.943	
27	18.10%	18.00%	22.00%	37.14%	4.76%	2.906	

Question 24, 25, 26 and 27 show that the mean scores are 2.572, 2.257, 1.943, and 2.906 respectively with the average mean of 2.419. The higher mean scores of Question 24 and 27 indicate that students' low frequencies to express in English in class and the learning difficulties brought about by the textbook itself result in their ineffectiveness in English learning.

Table 4-12 Data Analysis of Results on Influencing Factors of the School

NS \ QN \ As	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	MS	AM
28	37.14%	34.29%	20.00%	6.67%	1.90%	2.020	2.086
29	28.57%	34.29%	17.14%	14.29%	5.71%	2.345	
30	43.81%	34.29%	13.33%	5.71%	2.86%	1.894	

Question 28, 29 and 30 show that the mean scores are 2.020, 2.345 and 1.894 respectively with the average mean of 2.086. The higher mean score of Question 29 indicates that less ex-curricular activities held by the universities relevant to English skills training and English culture result in their ineffectiveness in English learning.

Table 4-13 Data Analysis of Results on Influencing Factors of the Peers

NS \ QN	As	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	MS	AM
31		26.64%	29.54%	19.05%	17.10%	7.67%	2.487	2.282
32		37.10%	34.33%	16.19%	7.61%	4.77%	2.077	

Question 31 and 32 show that the mean scores are 2.487 and 2.077 respectively with the average mean of 2.282. The higher mean scores of the two questions indicate that being inferior to the peers in English academic results and being mocked at them lead to the decreasing motivation in English learning.

Table 4-14 Data Analysis of Results on Influencing Factors of the Parents

NS \ QN	As	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	MS	AM
33		21.05%	18.19%	22.01%	27.75%	11.00%	3.106	2.901
34		23.71%	24.86%	20.00%	19.96%	11.47%	2.696	

Question 33 and 34 show that the mean scores are 3.106 and 2.696 respectively with the average mean of 2.901. The higher mean scores of the two questions indicate that being criticized by the parents and their higher expectations on English academic results also lead to college students' decreasing motivation in English learning.

To sum up, the internal factor of low learning interest ranks the first in college students' demotivation in English learning with the external factors of higher expectations from the parents on their academic achievements and previous unpleasant learning experiences followed.

4.2 Discussion of the Interview with the Teachers

Question 1: How many college students in your class do you think have the problem of demotivation in English learning? What are their performances ?

As to this question, more than half of the college students in the teacher's view are in the state of being less-motivated by performing not so well such as being absent-minded, dozing off in class, not previewing before class and reviewing after class as well as copying homework of the others, etc. Based on the survey on the teachers, we can see that college students' lack of English learning motivation is featured by poor classroom performances, careless English homework and poor English learning habits.

Question 2: What are the reasons for college students' lack of motivation to learn English in your opinion ?

The factors mainly from college students themselves examined by the teachers result in their lack of English learning motivation which can be explained by poor learning habits, no clear learning objectives and low interest in English study. It is also mentioned that the impact of family education on students together with the teachers' teaching methods may lead to their poor performances in English.

Question 3: What do you think is the relationship between college students' demotivation in English learning and their academic achievements?

College students' demotivation in English learning and their academic achievements, in teachers' opinions, are two interactive factors which exert impacts on each other. Lack of learning motivation will directly lead to the students' weariness and poor performances in English and unsatisfactory academic achievements, which will

in turn leads to their negative attitudes toward English study and decreasing interest in it.

Question 4: What measures do you think can be taken to stimulate college students' English learning motivation ?

Three approaches from the teachers' perspective are effective in promoting college students' motivation in English learning. First, teachers' encouragements to college students' active participation in English class and teachers' optimization of teaching methods will direct them to set reasonable goals and make plans for academic study. Second, extra-curricular activities of different types such as English speech contest and English song competitions should be held to familiarize them with English culture and stimulate their interest in English. Third, more attention being paid to the mental health of college students will win their trust on their parents and teachers, which surely increases their confidence and motivate them to learn English well.

Based on discussion of the results of questionnaire and interview survey above, we can see that compared with insufficiency of the intrinsic motivations, college students are comparatively motivated by the extrinsic motivations which will in turn promote their intrinsic motivations. In addition, some of them are not actively involved in learning activities such as unwillingness to communicate with the teachers and classmates, inability to find the pleasure from learning English and less efforts being made on it. Therefore, it is necessary to put forward the corresponding strategies by the combination of the internal and external factors so as to motivate them to learn English.

5. COPING STRATEGIES

Based on the questionnaire survey on the students and the interview with the teachers, The strategies to cope with college students' demotivation in learning English are proposed from the perspectives of the students themselves, the teachers and the students' parents.

5.1 College Students' Coping Strategies

College students are both the initiators and the beneficiaries of English learning. Thus, the students themselves should be in priority in the discussion of the strategies to deal with their demotivation in English learning.

5.1.1 Increase Self-confidence in English Learning

College students' confidence in English learning can be achieved by setting reasonable English learning goals and developing a good habit of autonomous learning. Setting learning goals is one of the important approaches to arouse learning motivation. The teachers are supposed to encourage college students to set reasonable goals according to different courses requirements. Cultivating a person's sense of autonomy can lead him to produce ongoing behaviors conducive to his own growth. A good habit of autonomous learning such as previewing and reviewing, thinking diligently, taking notes and completing homework independently is indispensable to college students' progress in English.

5.1.2 Master Proper English Learning Strategies

Having a good mastery of learning skills about words and grammar will facilitate the efficiency of college students' English study. Frequently used methods of word study are classification memory, associative memory and affixation memory. Summary of key points and familiarity with grammatical rules and their applications are proper ways to learn grammar well.

5.1.3 Make Positive Self-evaluation

College students' positive self-evaluation is reflected in three aspects of keeping an optimistic attitude toward mistakes in English learning and teachers' feedback, reasonably assessing English academic scores and managing the emotions when facing the challenges.

5.2 Teachers' Coping Strategies

Teachers, as the designers of course and initiators of classroom teaching, have a great influence on college students' English learning.

5.2.1 Optimize Teaching Methods to Motivate College Students to Learn English

Teachers are suggested to adopt various teaching methods to motivate college students to learn English such as implementing situational teaching, enriching the English teaching materials, increasing the input of English cultural knowledge, making full use of the multimedia and enriching extracurricular activities.

5.2.2 Create a Good Learning Atmosphere

Various approaches to help the teachers to create a good learning atmosphere include making friends with college students, encouraging them to study in the form of group discussion and increasing the frequencies of face-to-face communications between the teachers and the students inside and outside the classroom.

5.2.3 Offer College Students Effective Feedback

A sense of belonging given by the teachers helps college students to generate strong autonomous motivation in learning. Teacher's encouragements and positive comments on students will surely stimulate them to learn English and increase their self-confidence.

5.2.4 Guide College Students to Reasonably Assess Their English Academic Achievements

English teachers should guide college students to realize that success in English learning is closely related to their own diligence and hard work. With the ability to reasonably assess their English academic achievements, the students can make full use of their advantages to enhance their English proficiency.

5.3 Parents' Coping Strategies

Family education plays an important role in the process of students' growth. Proper guidance and supports from the parents will facilitate their children's English study.

5.3.1 Provide Positive Guidance and Supports to Their Children

In the process of the growth of students, the parents should not only attach importance to their children's academic results, but also to their mental health. Positive supports provided by the parents will keep them a good mentality which ensures their progress in English learning in a long term.

5.3.2 Strengthen Home-school Cooperation

College students' parents should actively cooperate with the universities by timely communicating with the teachers their children's changes in psychology and study and devoting much respect and patience as well as trust to the teachers when confronting obstacles in education of their children.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Demotivation of college students in English learning is affected by various factors, among which the ones related to the learners themselves are in prominence. With the teachers' improvements in teaching and positive guidance and supports from the teachers and the students' parents, they should take the initiatives to increase

their confidence in learning English, adopt proper learning strategies and make positive self-evaluation so as to maximize the effectiveness of their English learning.

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