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Foreign Language Learning Demotivation: A Construct Validation Study

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Abstract

Demotivation is an issue, which has been recently the focus of attention in the field of second language (L2) learning and teaching [8] (Muhonen, 2004). Since the present researchers failed to find any studies conducted in this area in Iran, this study was carried out to investigate Iranian high school teachers' and students' ideas about demotivating factors with regard to practicing the speaking skill. To achieve this goal, 312 high school students and 92 high school teachers of English were interviewed. Then the interviews were thematically analysed. The findings along with the researchers' reviews of the related literature were used to develop a questionnaire to explore Iranian L2 students' and teachers' perceptions of the factors which decrease students' motivation to improve their L2 speaking ability. This questionnaire was administered to 150 Iranian male and 150 female EFL learners and 40 male and 40 female teachers. To analyse the data, the researchers employed principal components analysis with varimax rotation. The factors which emerged were negative attitude toward learning L2, teacher's inadequate competence and performance, lack of technological facilities in classroom, lack of adequate teaching materials, unfavourable classroom environment, and insufficient opportunities for speaking practice. The interpretable factor structure, the high loadings of items on the abovementioned factors, and the relatively high amount of variance accounted for by this factor structure show that the questionnaire is a valid instrument to be used in similar studies. Also, the internal consistency estimates of the factors show that they enjoy high reliability.

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1. Introduction

Motivation plays an important role in the process of language learning and teaching. It is usually defined as “an internal state that arouses, directs, and maintains behaviour. We all know how it feels to be motivated, and to move energetically toward a goal. We also know that it is something like working hard, even if we are not fascinated by the task. Also motivation directs our behaviour [11] “(Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2003, p.354). Students who have higher motivation are more successful and efficient in their learning [4] (Ely, 1986). There are certain factors which reduce motivation or, in other words, cause demotivation. [2] Dornyei (2001) has defined demotivation as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivation basis of a behaviour intention or an ongoing action" (p.143).

Demotivation can happen with respect to the learning of different language skills. One of the skills that learners might feel unable to develop is speaking, especially in contexts like Iran where speaking practice does not happen much. Most teachers tend to use Grammar Translation method in their classes in the official system of education in Iran, which clearly ignores the oral skills of speaking and listening in the golden age of communicative approach in language education. Also, they tend to use the mother tongue in order to explain repetition and question answer drills. Consequently, students feel few opportunities exist inside or outside the classroom for genuine spoken communication. Moreover, learners spend seven years of studying English (three years in junior of high school, three years in high school and 1 year in pre-university level), the majority of learners who graduate in this environment are incapable of utilizing the taught materials for speaking in real- life situations. Speaking is often considered as a neglected skill in foreign language education and is regarded as the most complex and difficult skill to acquire [10] (Ur, 1996).

A consequence of this educational atmosphere is students' loss of motivation for improvement of their oral skills. This is a major concern in ELT because motivation plays an important role in the learning process and the related literature shows that those students who have higher motivation are more successful and efficient in their learning [4] (e. g., Ely, 1986). Many researchers [1][2][9] (e.g. Crookes& Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei, 2001; Oxford, 1994) have investigated how students can be motivated. Hence, it is taken for granted that motivation and demotivation as well as speaking is very important factors in the process of language learning.

Considering the picture presented above in regard with the current condition in language education in Iranian schools, it is necessary to conduct a study, which helps to enhance the speaking skill. Furthermore, many theories have been proposed to explain why students want to learn something or what motivates them. Nevertheless, few studies focus on the reasons why students are not motivated to learn a second language. The only study the researchers could identify as remotely related to this topic conducted in Iran was [6] Heidari and Riahipour (2012). The main aims of this study were to explore the perspectives of language teachers and learners on the factors, which may negatively affect the speaking performance of language learners, and the similarities and differences between the students' and teachers' attitudes. The main findings of the study are: first, speaking skill as an active, dynamic language skill, may be strongly affected by demotivating factors such as teachers, peers, materials, etc. The second finding of the study was that on the basis of teachers' ideas, the most demotivating factors on speaking ability are factors related to teachers, time and classroom. Besides, based on the students' perspectives the most demotivating factors were related to teachers, equipment and class utility.

Despite the importance of demotivating factors and severity of the problem of speaking instruction, few insightful profound studies have been carried out on this issue in the context of Iran. Hence, this study makes a deliberate effort to partly fill the existing gap through investigating Iranian high school teachers' and learners' idea about demotivating factors with regard to practicing the speaking skill to carry out a construct validation of an instrument.

2. Method

The present study was conducted in two phases; the first phase, which was the exploratory one, was carried out to investigate Iranian high school teachers' and learners' idea about demotivating factors involved in practicing the speaking skill. The second phase was devoted to the confirmatory construct validation of the instrument developed during the first phase of the study.

2.1. The Qualitative Phase

In this phase, a purposeful sampling procedure was used since the researchers had decided to collect data solely from demotivated students and their teachers. Participants were 12 third grade six male and six female high school students, who were identified by their teachers or peers as being particularly demotivated, and six male and six female language teachers from four different high schools in Bandar Abbas, Iran. A semi-structured interview was conducted to gather information about the students' and teachers' perspectives on demotivating factors influencing high school students' practice of speaking. The data were thematically analysed, and the findings were incorporated as items in the questionnaire were developed and validated in this study. The procedure will be discussed in detail below.

2.2. The Quantitative Phase

The aim of this phase is the construct validation of the developed instrument.

2.2.1. Participants

There were two groups of participants: 80 language teachers, 40 male and 40 female, who were chosen through convenience sampling and were required to respond to the prepared questionnaire. The age of the teachers taking part in the current study ranged high 30. The second group consisted of 300 third grade high school students, 150 male and 150 female, who were chosen through convenience sampling and were required to respond to the prepared questionnaire. The age of the learners taking part in the present study ranged from 17 to 19. The researchers chose third grade high school students because they have adequate experience of language learning in the context of high school to provide proper answers to the questions.

2.2.2. Instrumentation

The developed questionnaire, which was used, consisted of Likert-type items. It was developed based on the analysis of the teachers' and students' interview responses in the qualitative phase, Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) by [5] Gardner (2004), and the literature available. The first draft of the questionnaire consisted of 27 items and the final draft includes 25 items.

2.2.3. Procedures

Two questionnaire development experts reviewed the developed questionnaire. Based on their feedback, certain modifications were made on the structure of the instrument and some items, and the revised developed version was administered to the respondents and the data were fed into SPSS and analysed. In order to check the construct validity of the questionnaire, factor analysis was employed, and the extraction method was principal axis factoring. Cronbach Alpha was used to estimate the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire as well as those of the individual extracted factors. To check for the factorability of data, the determinant, KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett Test of Sphericity were used. With regard to the rotation procedure, Varimax, the most common orthogonal rotational criterion, which was used in the development of TSES, was drawn upon.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Factor analysis

In order to check the construct validity of the developed 27-item questionnaire, the gathered data were subjected to Principal axis factoring with Varimax Rotation and Kaiser Normalization. We used different choices to determine the number of factors. First, based on eigenvalues greater than 1, the analysis yielded 7 factors some of which were impossible to interpret since, as anticipated, the Kaiser Criterion overestimated the number of factors. More precisely, the researchers could not impute factor labels from factor loadings of the variables grouped in those

factors. For example, in some cases the label assigned to a particular group of items happened to fit another group too.

Therefore, we chose to check different factor solutions and found the 6-factor solution as the most interpretable one. Consequently, item 18, “Being boring classes”, and item 23, “No/little emphasis on improving the speaking skill in school programs” which were unrelated to the factors they had loaded on were removed. Then, factor analysis was run again. Table 1 displays the loadings of the 25 items under the six extracted factors as well as the labels of the factors in “Foreign Language Learning Demotivation” (FLLD) scale. The highest loading is .851 and the lowest loading is .419. This factor structure accounts for 55.35% of the whole variance.

Table 1: The factors structure of FLLD

Items/factors	Loading
Factor 1: Negative attitude toward language learning and speaking	
1. Negative attitude toward speaking English	.851
2. Negative attitude toward language learning	.802
3. Not enjoying learning to speak	.677
4. lack of self-confidence to learn to speak	.595
5. Lack of self-confidence to speak English in classroom	.505
Factor 2: Teacher's inadequate competence and performance	
1. Teachers' poor pronunciation ability	.738
2. Teachers' uninteresting teaching methods	.678
3. Not encouraging students to speak English in classroom	.626
4. Teacher's not speaking English in classroom or doing so little	.536
5. Teachers' inadequate language abilities	.444
6. Teachers' not using speaking practices of textbooks	.419
Factor 3: Lack of technological facilities in Classroom	
1. No or little use of visual aids such as videos and DVDS	.735
2. No or little use of computers	.729
3. No or little use of Audio devices and CDs	.656
4. No or little use of the internet	.631
Factor 4: Lack of adequate teaching materials	
1. Old topics and texts used in the lessons	.686
2. Boring topics used in lessons	.677
3. Useless speaking drills in the textbook	.626
Factor 5: Unfavorable classroom climate	
1. Classmates' not speaking English in classroom	.662
2. Not doing speaking activities because of short class time	.523
3. Feeling anxious while speaking because of classmates' laughter and teacher's inappropriate reactions	.450
Factor 6: Insufficient Opportunities for speaking practice	
1. Little chance of communicating in English inside the class	.692
2. Little chance to communicate in English outside the class	.645
3. Doing speaking activities just for score not to communication	.421

3.2. Reliability of the instrument

The reliability of the developed instrument, using Cronbach Alpha, was found to be .885, and the reliability estimates of its different factors were .811, .721, .758, .636, .573, .625 for “Negative attitude toward language

learning and speaking”, Teacher’s inadequate competence and performance”, Lack of technology in classroom”, Lack of adequate teaching materials”, “Unfavorable classroom climate”, “Insufficient opportunities for speaking practice” respectively. This shows that the questionnaire enjoys an acceptable level of reliability.

4. Conclusion

Only a few empirical studies have been conducted in areas related to communication in L2 in Iran, such as the contributions of technology to communication in L2 [3] (e.g., Ebrahimi, Eskandari, and Rahimi, 2013) and the impact of teachers’ attitude about communicative language teaching on their practice [7] (e.g., Mowlaie & Rahimi, 2010). Hopefully, the development of “Foreign Language Learning Demotivation”(FLLD) scale will result in an increase in research in this area. However, the fact that this instrument was validated only in the context of Iran restricts the generalizability of outcomes of the use of the developed instrument. Therefore, its validity must be established in different contexts, so that it can be used in similar projects around the world.

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