

DEMOTIVATION AMONG ARAB LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Demotivation in second or foreign language learning is the flip side of motivation. It concerns specific external forces that negatively affect learners' willingness to study the language and might completely eradicate their motivational basis to engage in any effort to study the language (Dörnyei, 2001). Much research has been conducted on language learning motivation but less on demotivation among learners in general and L2 (second language) learners in particular; and the very few that were conducted followed unsystematic lines.

In the current study 294 Arab adolescents learning English as a foreign language in Israel were asked to write about the factors that demotivated them. Follow up interviews with 25 students as well as 10 Arab English teachers were conducted to give more insight into the investigated phenomenon. The data revealed that English teachers were referred to directly and indirectly by almost half the students. Gender differences were detected in certain aspects as well as sharp differences between students learning under different teachers. Unexpectedly, the data revealed also that about half the respondents referred to aspects of English that demotivated them such as difficulties with grammar and vocabulary. The results and their theoretical implications will be discussed in light of the special background of the study population.

Since the recent revolution in language learning motivation (LLM) initiated by researchers such as Crookes & Schmidt (1991), Dörnyei, (1990, 1994), and Oxford and Shearin, (1994), research on LLM has proliferated (for a review see Dörnyei, 2001, see also Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001). New perspectives on the nature of motivation were established and motivation could no more be perceived as a 'have it' or 'do not have it' trait. It is rather perceived as dynamic and cyclic, going up and down; affecting language achievement and being affected by it (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998). Other important developments in the study of LLM concerned

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drawing the attention to the concept of *language learning demotivation* (LLD) and to the effects of the learning context on both LLM and LLD. However, up to date the latter received meagre attention with only a few studies addressing it. The study in hand attempts, thus, to shed more light on the phenomenon.

Motivation and demotivation

According to Dörnyei (2001, p.143), *demotivation* is the flip side of *motivation*. But what after all is motivation? Despite its unchallenged position in learning additional languages, there is, in fact, no agreement on the exact definition of *motivation* (Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Dörnyei, 1998). McDonough (1981, p. 143) refers to the term ironically, claiming that has been used as ‘a general cover term – a dustbin - to include a number of possibly distinct concepts, each of which may have different origins and different effects and require different classroom treatment’ (cited in Crookes & Schmidt, (1991, p. 471). Nevertheless, Dörnyei and Ottó (1998, p. 65) offer a thorough definition of motivation that came to recognise many of the advancement in the understanding of motivation. They perceive it as a ‘dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritised, operationalised, and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out’. Different researchers came up with different types of motives. Gardner and his associates focused mainly on the *integrative* motive (i.e. the desire to integrate in the L2 community of speakers) and to a lesser extent on the *instrumental* one (e.g. to get a better job) with a substantial amount of research (see a review in Masgoret and Gardner, 2003). Noels and her associates suggested a dichotomy between the *intrinsic* motive (e.g. love of the language) and the extrinsic one (e.g. pleasing others like parent and teachers) which were based on the self-determination theory of Deci & Ryan (1985) and have carried a number of studies based on this dichotomy (e.g. Noels, (2001a; 2001b).

Dörnyei suggests that *demotivation* concerns ‘specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an ongoing action’. A demotivated person is thus someone who initially has had motivation to accomplish a

goal or to engage in an activity and has lost his or her motivation to do so because of negative external influences. The examples of such negative influences that Dörnyei gives are all related to the immediate environment in which learning takes place, i.e. the classroom and school. However, Dörnyei stresses that not every type of negative influence should be perceived as a ‘demotivating’ influence. For example, if the learner is being demotivated because of the presence of a more appealing alternative activity (like playing football with the neighbour’s children instead of doing one’s homework assignments) then, this will not be regarded as a demotivating influence since it bears no negative value (e.g. humiliation of the learner). Dörnyei differentiates also between *demotivated* and *amotivated* learners. Demotivated learners are those who lost their motivation because of negative external elements. Amotivated learners, on the other hand, are those who were not motivated in the first place and who feel helpless. However, Dörnyei’s definition and the previous differentiations he makes are not necessarily agreed by others. Some of the following examples of the behaviours of the demotivated learner that Chambers (1993) lists apply also to the *amotivated* learner who exhibits ‘What’s the use’ syndrome:

Poor concentration; lack of belief in own capabilities; no effort made to learn; ‘What’s’ the use’ syndrome; negative or nil response to praise; lethargy; lack of cooperation; disruptive behaviour; disruptive; distracted; distracts other pupils’ throws things; shouts out; produce little or no homework; fails to bring materials to lessons; claims to have lost materials... (p. 13)

It is rather challenging to differentiate between the symptoms of the two phenomena as they really intertwine; and the dearth of research on demotivation makes it rather difficult to come to precise conclusions on the nature of demotivation. As more work is carried out, the picture can hopefully become less blurred.

Study background

There is a variety of terms used in general to refer to the Arab population living in Israel such as ‘Israeli Arabs’, ‘Israeli Palestinians’, ‘Arabs in Israel’, ‘Palestinian Arabs in Israel’, ‘Palestinian Citizens of Israel’ and ‘Palestinians from inside²’, “48 Palestinians”. All these terms and other terms that refer to the same population reflect

² This is a translation of the Arabic term *Arab al-dakhil* which could also be translated into *The Arabs of the Interior* see Talmon (2000:204).

differing perspectives depending on the context within each is used (Darwish & Andrew, 1995). The Arabs in Israel constitute a very special minority in their status and conditions (Amara, 1999). They constitute about 20 percent of the total population of the state of Israel, numbering over one million (CBS, 2004). Despite the similarity in origin, religion and language, the Arabs in Israel have developed as a community that is very distinct from other Arab communities in the neighboring Arab countries (Stendel 1992, p. 7).

Since Israel is defined as a state for “the Jews”, as stated in its Declaration of Independence, members of the Arab minority were not considered legitimate part of it and were thus denied equal access to the resources of the country (Rouhana, 1997). Consequently, the Arabs in Israel suffer from marginalisation and much neglect by the state (Bishara, 2000) and from wide discrimination in many aspects (Haidar, 1995; Yiftachel, 1999; Kretzmer, 1990). Nevertheless, they are officially considered citizens of the state and are allowed to practice some rights like voting for the Israeli Parliament. Jews are clearly the dominant group in Israel, with the Arabs subordinate to them in every aspect of social, political and economic status (Shavit, 1992). One important aspect of these perpetuated discriminatory policies is evident in the Arab education system where decision making is essentially driven by political considerations rather than professional ones; thus, negatively affecting the quality of teaching in the Arab sector (Al-Haj, 1995; Al-Haj, 2003; Abu-Saad, 2004). In fact, the discrimination in education impacts upon every aspect of education in the Arab sector such as budget allocations, condition of buildings, libraries, sport facilities, vocational and technical education, and laboratories (Human Rights Watch, 2001).

English and the Arabs in Israel

The hegemony of English in the world is not without its effect on the different populations in Israel. English words penetrate Hebrew and through it penetrate Arabic as well (Rosenhawz, 2004). Spolsky and Shohamy (2004) concentrate on describing how English penetrates the language of science and technology in Israel; and in another work, Spolsky and Shohamy (1999) describe how English is being perceived more and more important by Arab and Jewish parents in Israel.

Arab students as well as Jewish students start learning English in the third grade although in some schools they start earlier. When they reach high school, all students have to set for a matriculation English test as a requirement for enrolment for universities. However, the achievements of Arab learners are modest and the gaps between them and their Jewish counterparts are quite wide. For example, analysing the data published by the Ministry of Education shows that the percentage of Arab 12th graders who passed the English matriculation tests in the years 2001-2003 is constantly lower than that of their Jewish counterparts by 26-30 points (Ministry of Education, 2003a & 2003b). Keblawi (2003) points at a number of problems that cause these gaps and which primarily stem from the explicit and implicit discriminative policies against Arab students. First, there is a shortage of budgets offered to Arab schools compared to Jewish schools; thus the physical conditions in Arab schools are not satisfactory and the services they offer to students are quite limited. The curricula are mainly written by Jewish writers and the English curriculum is no exception. Hence, the needs of the Arab learners are largely overlooked. Third, The English textbooks are written and designed by Jewish authors although they are meant to serve both Arab and Jewish learners. They usually lack consistency and there are gaps between the textbooks written for the different levels. Fourth, many of the Arab teachers who choose to pursue a teaching career (including English teachers) do so because of lack of other alternatives (they do not have much careers to choose from). Political considerations in appointment of teachers override the professional ones and the qualification Arab teachers get is far from adequate; hence, the quality of English teachers is indeed a matter of concern. Finally, it could be observed that, in contrast to the Jewish sector, there is little diversity in the teaching methods used in the Arab sector and most teaching is frontal.

Research on demotivation

Stevick (1980, p. 84) asserts that 'success depends less on materials, techniques, and linguistic analyses and more on what goes on inside and between people in the classroom'. In a similar vein, researchers in the general field of motivation (e.g. Sivan, 1986; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991:325) and in LLM (Gardner, 1985; Skehan, 1991; Julkunen, 2001), in particular, have stressed in different ways

and different strengths the effects of the learning context on learners' motivation. For example, Sivan (1986, p. 209) claims that 'motivation is inseparable from the instructional process and the classroom environment'

Empirical research on LLM has shown that the immediate learning context can affect learners' attitudes and motivation. For example, a study by Inbar, Donitsa-Schmidt and Shohamy (2001) and another by Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, and Shohamy (2004) show that good quality instructional efforts can positively affect learners' attitudes and motivation even when the relations with the groups are marked by serious political tension. In another longitudinal study on Hungarian learners of English between 6 and 14, Nikkolov (1999, in Dörnyei, 2001) found that the most important motivating factors for all the age groups were related to the specific learning situation such as the learning context, the teacher, the tasks and the materials. These factors had more influence on learners than the integrative or instrumental motivations.

Not much research has been conducted on demotivation in general and on demotivation in L2 learning, in particular. One inductive study aiming at finding out the factors that students perceive as motivators / demotivators in college was conducted by Gorham & Christophel (1992). The study compared students' perception of the demotivating and motivating factors. As to demotivating factors, the factors related to teacher's behaviour were the most frequent, 43%, those under partial control of the teacher were second in frequency (e.g. assessment and choice of textbooks), 36%, and only 21% related to contextual factors over which the teacher has little control. In terms of the data as a whole, the teacher behaviour contributed equally to both motivation and demotivation. However, the researchers found after examining the results from different perspectives that, 'motivation is perceived as a student-own state, while lack of motivation is perceived as a teacher-owned problem'. A replication of their study gave similar results (Christophel & Gorham, 1995)

Within the field of LLM, Dörnyei (2001) reports the findings of four investigations, Oxford (1998), Ushioda (1998), Dörnyei (1998b) and Chambers (1993); all of which show the crucial role of the immediate learning context on LLD. However only the latter was directly aimed at investigating demotivation in language learning.

Chambers distributed questionnaires to 191 year nine pupils enrolled in eight classes in Leeds in 4 schools in the UK and 7 questionnaires to teachers as well. All teachers expressed slight to great concern regarding their student's demotivation. The teachers blamed a number of reasons including psychological, social, attitudinal, historical and geographical but did not blame themselves. In terms of what can be done, the teachers raised a number of suggestions including immediate pay off; enhancing teacher-pupil relationship; and appropriate materials and tasks. Students on the other hand, although recognising the importance of the language course in their majority, placed most blame on teachers and the learning materials and conditions. Examples of teachers' behaviour that was perceived as demotivating included going on without realising that most students are lost, lack of clear, sufficient instructions, using inferior equipments, not explaining things sufficiently, criticising students, shouting at students when they do not understand things and using old fashioned teaching materials. Chambers found that demotivation could originate from the home or from previous experience with learning languages. Chambers also noted that there were some students who proved to be hopeless cases because their problem was not with studying languages but rather with learning in general. The three other investigations also revealed that teachers' negatively perceived behaviours played a crucial role in demotivating students. But because of space limits, the other studies will no be reported in detail. However, it could be noted that Dörnyei identified ten categories of demotivating elements to which at least two of his respondents referred. The largest category, 40% of the total frequency of occurrences, directly concerned teachers. Such factors included teacher's personality, commitment to teaching, attention paid to students, competence, teaching method and style. In addition, 15% of the occurrences were still related to the teacher (e.g. perception of strict marking). The other two studies did also find that teachers could play a negative role in demotivating students.

Study question and hypotheses

The study is aimed at answering the following question: 'What are the factors that Arab learners of English in Israel (henceforth AELI) perceive as demotivating while learning English?'. Based on the findings of the few studies on LLD reported above, it can be hypothesised that (1) the majority of the factors perceived as demotivating by

ALEI will be related to the immediate learning context; and (2) the demotivating factors related to the teacher are the most dominant.

Participants

Participants in the study were 294 Arab learners of English in Israel in years 9 and 10 (15 and 16 years old). The participants came from 12 average and good classes representing 6 public schools, 3 junior high schools (JHS); and 3 high schools (HS). There were 137 JHS students; 157 high school students; 87 male (M) students and 201 female (F) students³. They studied English four-five hours a week.

Research method and tools

An eclectic approach that utilises qualitative as well as quantitative research tools was adopted (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). The students were presented with an open question during one of the classes that read: ‘What makes you frustrated or demotivated when studying English?’. It was explained to the students that their participation was voluntary and full confidentiality was asserted. The writings of the 294 students who mentioned demotivating factors were codified and categorised quantitatively. In addition, semi-structured interviews (ibid; Bryman, 2001) were conducted with 25 students (8 M, 17 F; 11 JHS, 14 HS) and 10 teachers (ages 26-56; 4 M, 6 F; 4 JHS, 5 HS; and one taught in both phases).

Results and discussion

Analysing the written responses of the students was not always straightforward since some gave vague or general answers. Some students mentioned one or more demotivating factors (DF); whereas others mentioned up to five or six. On the whole, however, the written responses of students as well as the interviews with them gave rise to two broad categories of DF: (a.) demotivating factors related to the learning context (contextual demotivating factors or CDF) that were mentioned by 63.6%, $N=184$, of the 294 participants; and (b.) demotivating factors related to the subject (subject demotivating factors or SDF) that were mentioned by 64.3%, $N=189$ (the percentages add up to more than 100% because some mentioned both CDF and SDF).

³ There were noticeably more females than males because two of the 12 classes came from an all-girls’ school and because in good and average classes there are usually more females than males.

Results from the first category lend much support to both hypotheses. However, the results classified under the second category (SDF) were not expected.

Contextual demotivating factors

Table 1
Frequencies and Percentages of the different categories related to CDF by phase and gender

	T	TP	TS	EX	BK	EV	GL	Other	Total
Junior High Schools									
Count	38	18	25	16	3	11	43	6	98
% within JHS-DF	24.2	11.5	15.9	10.2	1.9	7.0	27.4	3.8	62.4
% within JHS-CDF	38.8	18.4	25.5	16.3	3.1	11.2	43.9	6.1	100.0
High Schools									
Count	49	36	32	11	7	18	23	8	89
% within HS - DF	35.8	26.3	23.4	8.0	5.1	13.1	16.8	5.8	65.0
% within HS - CDF	55.1	40.4	36.0	12.4	7.9	20.2	25.8	9.0	100.0
Male									
Count	22	13	13	3	1	5	18	3	42
% within male - DF	25.3	14.9	14.9	3.4	1.1	5.7	20.7	3.4	48.3
% within male - CDF	52.4	31.0	31.0	7.1	2.4	11.9	42.9	7.1	100.0
Female									
Count	65	41	44	24	9	37	48	11	142
% within female - DF	32.3	20.4	21.9	11.9	4.5	18.4	23.9	5.5	70.6
% within female - CDF	45.8	28.9	31.0	16.9	6.3	26.1	33.8	7.7	100.0
Count	87	54	57	27	10	46	66	14	187
% within - DF	29.6	18.4	19.4	9.2	3.4	15.6	22.4	4.8	63.6
% within - CDF	46.5	28.9	30.5	14.4	5.3	24.6	35.3	7.5	100.0

Key: JHS=Junior High School, HS=High School, T=teacher, TP=teacher's personality, TS=teacher's style, TB=textbook, EX= experience EV=evaluation, GL=group of learners, Other=other CDF

As can be seen in table 1, most students who mentioned CDF referred to factors under direct control of teachers, 46.6%, N=87 (e.g. the teacher does not explain things to us properly). Second in frequency within CDF were factors related to the group of

learners, 35.3%, N=66. The other factors were less common: previous experiences (mainly with teachers), 14.4%, N=37; textbooks and learning materials (e.g. texts alien to the Arab learner), 5.3%, N=10, tests and the evaluation system (e.g. unfair marking), 15.5%, N=29, other CDF, 7.5%, N=14 (e.g. too many students in the class). In what follows the main CDF will be discussed.

Teachers as demotivators

The DF that students referred to and that were related to teachers could be classified into two main groups: teachers' style, i.e. the way they taught and presented the material to students, and personality traits, i.e. the way they behaved with students. The total picture revealed that both aspects of the teacher can play a negative role if perceived negatively by students since the amounts of reference to both aspects were very similar, N=54, 28.9%, for personality and N=57, 30.5%, for style. Many students were uncomfortable with both aspects, linking them together:

In the previous year I liked English. Teachers used to say to me that I make a lot of effort in studying English. But this year I do not like the teacher ... If I once forget the book, she would say bad words to me. She does not know how to teach. When I ask her about something that I do not understand, she says to me that I have not been paying attention to her. She always yells at us and speaks badly to the students.' (written statement – female, HS)

There were not much gender differences in reference to teachers (M: 52.4%, N=22; F: 45.8%, N=65) as DF, but there were more noticeable phase differences. The majority of HS who mentioned CDF referred to their teachers as demotivators, 60.5%; whereas the percentage among JHS was less, 44.5%. The reasons for this difference are not clear, but it could be the case that HS become more critical of their teachers than JHS as they become more aware of the qualities teachers should have in order to meet the higher requirements in HS.

Table 3
 Frequencies and Percentages of the different categories related to CDF by
 JHS classes

	T	TP	TS	EX	BK	EV	GL	Other	Total
JHS-1, N=34									
No.	13	5	11	4	0	1	8	0	17
% within CDF	76.5	29.4	64.7	23.5	0.0	5.9	47.1	0.0	100.0
% within total	38.2	14.7	32.4	11.8	0.0	2.9	23.5	0.0	50.0
JHS-2, N=39									
No.	5	4	1	4	0	1	6	2	17
% within CDF	29.4	23.5	5.9	23.5	0.0	5.9	35.3	11.8	100.0
% within total	14.7	10.3	2.6	1	0	2.6	15.4	5.1	43.6
JHS-3, N=34									
No.	14	6	10	2	2	1	19	0	24
% within CDF	58.3	25.0	41.7	8.3	8.3	4.2	79.2	0.0	100.0
% within total	41.2	17.6	29.4	5.9	5.9	2.9	55.9	0.0	70.6
JHS-4, N=24									
No.	4	1	3	0	0	0	6	1	11
% within CDF	36.4	9.1	27.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	54.5	9.1	100.0
% within total	11.8	4.2	12.5	1	0	0	25	4.2	45.8
JHS-5, N=40									
No.	0	0	0	6	1	5	3	2	12
% within CDF	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	8.3	41.7	25.0	16.7	100.0
% within total	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.0	2.5	12.5	7.5	5.0	30.0
JHS-6, N=32									
No.	2	2	0	0	0	3	1	1	8
% within CDF	25.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	37.5	12.5	12.5	100.0
% within total	6.3	6.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.4	3.1	3.1	25.0

Key: JHS=Junior High School, T=teacher, TP=teacher's personality, TS=teacher's style, TB=textbook, EX= experience EV=evaluation, GL=group of learners, Other=other CDF

Table 4
Frequencies and Percentages of the different categories related to CDF by HS classes

	T	TP	TS	EX	BK	EV	GL	Other	Total
HS-1, N=23									
No.	4	5	3	2	0	4	1	0	11
% within CDF	36.4	45.5	27.3	18.2	0.0	36.4	9.1	0.0	100.0
% within total	17.4	21.7	13.0	8.7	0.0	17.4	4.3	0.0	47.8
HS-2, N=34									
No.	16	13	12	4	2	1	8	1	21
% within CDF	76.2	61.9	57.1	19.0	9.5	4.8	38.1	4.8	100.0
% within total	47.1	38.2	35.3	11.8	5.9	2.9	23.5	2.9	61.8
HS-3, N=26									
No.	5	2	3	0	0	3	2	1	9
% within CDF	55.6	22.2	33.3	0.0	0.0	33.3	22.2	11.1	100.0
% within total	19.2	7.7	11.5	0.0	0.0	11.5	7.7	3.8	34.6
HS-4, N=33									
No.	10	6	7	1	2	3	7	2	16
% within CDF	62.5	37.5	43.8	6.3	12.5	18.8	43.8	12.5	100.0
% within total	30.3	18.2	21.2	3.0	6.1	9.1	21.2	6.1	48.5
HS-5, N=34									
No.	11	9	6	0	1	2	0	0	16
% within CDF	68.8	56.3	37.5	0.0	6.3	12.5	0.0	0.0	100.0
% within total	32.4	26.5	17.6	0.0	2.9	5.9	0.0	0.0	47.1
HS-6, N=32									
No.	3	2	2	4	2	5	5	4	8
% within CDF	37.5	25.0	25.0	50.0	25.0	62.5	62.5	50.0	100.0
% within total	9.4	6.3	6.3	12.5	6.3	15.6	15.6	12.5	25.0

Key: HS= High School, T=teacher, TP=teacher's personality, TS=teacher's style, TB=textbook, EX= experience EV=evaluation, GL=Group of learners, Other=other CDF

The differences among classes in reference to their teachers were more conspicuous and less difficult to explain (see tables 3 and 4). In some classes, no or very few students referred to their teachers as a DF but in others the situation was quite the

opposite since the majority of those referring to CDF referred to teachers. The responses of students from the first type of classes and the interviews with some of them revealed that students who were satisfied with their teachers tended to say that they were close to them and that they liked their style which made them enjoy their lessons as well. On the other hand, in classes where students referred to their teachers as demotivators, they often agreed on the same aspects of their teachers' personality or style that they perceived negatively. For example, almost half the students in class HS-2 referred to teacher-related DF and complained, particularly, about their teacher's inability to control the class and about the bad treatment of students (e.g. yelling at them).

Previous experiences

The discussion above related to the demotivating elements which students attributed to their *current* teachers and which were largely under teachers' control. There were, however, other elements that students mentioned but that related to their experiences with their *previous* teachers and were mentioned by, 14.4%, $N=27$, of those referring to CDF. When students discussed the dark sides of their experience with studying English, the first, and many times, the only thing that they mentioned were their teachers. Females, in particular, reported more such negative experiences ($N=24$, 11.9%) showing that they were possibly more discriminated against more than males, ($N=3$, 3.4%). Many students reported that their dislike of English was triggered by the behaviour or style of one of their previous teachers and a similar picture was revealed in the interviews with students. The following quote give much insight into how lack of teachers' immediacy and their perceived negative behaviour can demotivate learners:

It all started in the elementary school and it was because of our teacher Mrs. X. It is known that in order to like a subject one first needs to like the teacher. She was a bit arrogant and made us feel that she was better than us. She was far from us and she was biased. Mrs X taught well but she did not treat us well. (Interview – female, JHS)

The group as a source of demotivation

Second in frequency were CDF related to students' behaviour. More than a third, $N=66$, 35.3%, of those mentioning CDF, referred to classmates' behaviour as a DF that made the learning environment inconvenient. Again, JHS reported noticeably more discomfort with their classmates' behaviour, 43.9%, $N=43$, than did HS students, 25.8%, $N=23$, showing that discipline problems and lack of seriousness were more common among JHS than HS students. In fact, teachers at JHS reported more discipline problems than HS teachers. One female teacher, aged 28, who taught both JHS and HS students, claimed that teaching HS students was easier since they were more disciplined. The reason the teacher gave was that HS students could be more 'controlled' through the evaluation system since they care more about their achievements. Some gender difference were found as more males, 42.9%, $N=18$, reported DF related to the learners group than females, 33.8%, $N=48$. This finding is rather surprising since it could have been assumed that females would be more annoyed than males since they are quieter and less involved in disruptive behaviour.

The more significant differences were again found among classes. In some classes (e.g. JHS-3, JHS-4, HS-1, HS-5), no student referred to classmates' behaviour as a source of demotivation. But in others the situation was totally different. JHS-3 emerged as the class in which the most reference to classmates' behaviour was made. In fact, about 56% of the students referred to their classmates' behaviour as a DF and in class HS-2 the situation was similar to a great extent. No wonder that in such environments frustration among good students is high since little learning occurs:

The students are not serious. They talk with their peers and they do not pay attention to what the teacher says. Sometimes I feel frustrated when there is no proper learning environment because of the noise that students make. Even if the teacher died, no one would notice! (Interview – female, JHS)

Another student claims:

My classmates are not serious about learning in general. There are five girls who are serious about studying English and only one student. Girls are better because they study more. They do the house chores and go to study. Boys have many other things to do. They make a lot of noise and their behaviour is not suitable at all. They behave with discipline and seriousness in Mr X class because he can control the class. (Interview – male, JHS)

Textbooks and the evaluation system

Only a small percentage of students, 5.3%, $N=10$, of those mentioning CDF, referred to the textbook as a DF claiming mainly that it was boring or it did not discuss topics that were related to the ALEI. However, 9 of the students interviewed claimed that the textbooks were boring. This is the case since as noted earlier textbooks are written by Jewish authors and little consideration is given to the needs of the Arab learner.

But there was a higher percentage, 15.5%, $N=29$, of those mentioning CDF, who referred to the process of *evaluation* and the *marks* they get as DF. Failing tests can lead to demotivation and frustration:

My average [in English] is low and this demotivates me. I do not know why I do not pass the English tests. I know that English is not difficult. On the contrary, it is easy. But the low marks I get frustrate me. (Interview – female, HS)

In the environment of the Israeli education system in general (both in Arab and Jewish schools) where instruction is mostly test-driven, tests can become a serious source of anxiety for learners. When the results are not as expected, the consequences can be quite harmful. One student explains:

Yes [I like my teacher] very much. But when I get my test paper, I feel that I do not like her. When I do a test I feel that I have done well but when I get the exam paper I discover that my result was contrary to my expectations....Now she has given us back the exam papers. I have got a low mark and I have decided that I do not want to study English anymore. I have not participated at all in today's class [activities]. (Interview – female, JHS)

When the direct and indirect roles of teachers are considered together, the role teachers can play in demotivating students becomes quite evident. About 30%, $N=87$ of all 294 participants perceived their teachers as *direct* demotivators; 51.3%, $N=151$ perceived them as indirect demotivators, and 62.2%, $N=183$ perceived them as either *direct* or *indirect* source of demotivation. These findings re-endorse the findings of the few other studies on LLD and learning demotivation in general which have also underscored the role negatively perceived teachers can play in demotivating learners.

Teachers' Perspective

The majority of the teachers interviewed, $N=9$, did also recognise the negative effects teachers can exert on their students' attitudes and motivation if they are perceived negatively by them. One HS female teacher, aged 29, claimed that 'in case the students fear the teacher or dislike him, they will not learn anything' and then explained more:

An English teacher is perceived as a frightening teacher. [Students say to themselves] 'we will certainly fail English'. Students have negative predispositions. Many times it is because of the teacher. This year I had a 12th grade class who were taught by another teacher. The first thing that I had to do was to change their negative beliefs about English before I work on their English level. I had to change their views on English.

Another female teacher, aged 35, maintained that some of the students' bad experiences are to be blamed on their previous teachers, but also hinted that teachers are not always to be blamed. There were indeed a number of issues raised by teachers which showed that with some elements, they had little or no control at all.

Teachers, in the large Arab heterogeneous classes, where students with different levels study together, encounter serious dilemmas. They are torn between their desire to meet the needs of all students, including the weak ones, and meeting the high expectations of good students. One HS male teacher, aged 31, explains:

In heterogeneous classes you are torn between living up to the expectations of the good students who justifiably demand more because they expect and are expected to pass their Bagrut [matriculation] tests and the weak students who are lagging far behind. If you attend to the good students you will lose the weak ones, if you attend to the needs of the weak students you will lose the good ones who will also complain about you. The weak ones are the easier group to lose though with much agony and a heavy price.

In a similar line, other teachers blamed the qualification they get at colleges which does not equip them with the necessary skills to deal with the realities of the Arab schools and does not prepare them to cope with real teaching situations as one JHS male teacher, aged 36, explain:

At teacher training colleges, they taught us about teaching a heterogeneous class with different levels. But no one showed us how to do this *de facto* and away

from theories. The teacher is not a Superman. Teachers should be better qualified. They need knowledge, skills and tools.

In addition, the physical conditions in many Arab schools were a source of concern and discouragement to many teachers. One of the teachers claimed that 'in Arab schools we do not have English labs. The physical conditions are not proper and we are far away from having them [i.e. English labs]'. Most teachers, $N=7$, expressed as well different degrees of dissatisfaction with the textbooks they use referring mainly to the unsuitable themes they present but also complained about their poor organization.

But it could be also the case that teachers are sometimes referred to as demotivators unjustifiably. One of the interviewed students criticised the behaviour of her classmates since they demonstrated little seriousness and claimed that they always tend to 'place all blame on the teacher'. In fact, teachers in JHS, in particular, complained about the little things they can do to cope with the distractive behaviour of many of their students. This again brings to mind the notion that students tend to attribute success to themselves and failure to external factors (as in Gorham & Christophel, 1992).

Teachers and the other CDF over which they have some control are not the only factors that can be demotivating to students. Other demotivating factors were referred to by students such as personal and more general educational problems, though the percentage of students referring to them was low. Some students indicated that their problem was not actually in English and that they were weak at all subjects. In fact this was a complaint of some of the teachers. Most teachers ($N=7$) complained particularly about their students' poor knowledge of their native language (i.e. Arabic). One female JHS teacher, aged 26, reflects on the problems she faced with many of her students:

If you look at their school reports, you will find that they are weak at Arabic, religion education and at all other subjects. In translation activities, when they are given a sentence in Arabic to translate into English, they do not understand the Arabic sentence.

But demotivators related to the teachers or the learning context were not the only type of demotivation that ALEI referred to. Another broad category that related to the subject being learned was also referred to by a large percentage of the participants.

Demotivating factors related to subject (SDF)

Table 5
Frequencies and Percentages of the different categories related to SDF by phase and gender

	VO.	GR.	DO.	DN.	TD	NL	other	Total
Junior High School								
Count	19	26	29	28	82	16	1	103
% within JHS-DF	9.4	12.8	14.3	13.8	40.4	7.9	0.5	65.6
% within JHS-SDF	18.4	25.2	28.2	27.2	79.6	15.5	1.0	100.0
High School								
Count	18	26	14	33	77	12	3	86
% within HS DF	9.9	14.4	7.7	18.2	42.5	6.6	1.7	62.8
% within HS - SDF	20.9	30.2	16.3	38.4	89.5	14.0	3.5	100.0
Male								
Count	15	15	13	25	53	11	3	64
% within male- DF	11.7	11.7	10.2	19.5	41.4	8.6	2.3	73.6
% within Male - SDF	23.4	23.4	20.3	39.1	82.8	17.2	4.7	100.0
Female								
Count	22	36	29	33	103	16	1	121
% within female - DF	8.9	14.5	11.7	13.3	41.5	6.5	0.4	60.2
% within female -SDF	18.2	29.8	24.0	27.3	85.1	13.2	0.8	100.0
Total								
Count	37	52	43	61	159	28	4	189
% within DF	9.6	13.5	11.2	15.8	41.3	7.3	1.0	64.3
% within SDF	19.6	27.5	22.8	32.3	84.1	14.8	2.1	100.0

Key: JHS=Junior High School, HS=High School, V=vocabulary, G=grammar, DO=difficulty with other aspects, DN=difficult-not specified, DT=total reference to difficulty, NL=not like subject or subject boring, Other=other SDF

Unexpectedly, 64.3%, $N=189$, of those mentioning DF ($N=294$) referred to SDF (see table 2). There were not much phase differences but there were some gender

differences. More males referred to SDF, 73.6%, $N=64$, than females, 60.2%, $N= 21$. The great majority, 84.1%, $N=159$, of the 189 who mentioned SDF, referred to difficulties with different aspects: 19.6%, $N=37$, referred to difficulties with vocabulary (e.g. ‘It is difficult to remember all the words’); 27.5%, $N=52$, to difficulties with grammar (e.g. ‘English grammar is difficult’); and 22.8%, $N= 43$, to difficulties with other aspects (e.g. reading or listening comprehension, spelling and writing); whereas 32.3%, $N=61$, did not specify the difficulties they encountered. There were 14.8%, $N=28$, who expressed boredom or hatred of the subject.

The fact that about a third of those referring to SDF did not specify the kind of difficulty they faced can be interpreted in a number of ways. First, it indicates that some of those who gave such brief answers could not think strategically and locate the specific areas with which they face serious problems. The former can be the first step in helping them overcome the specific difficulties with English which they feel demotivating. Second, such students might have one or more specific problems or some bad experiences that overshadowed their whole attitude to English, creating a belief that English is ‘simply difficult’. Third, it is easier for weak students to keep their self-esteem through attributing failure to the ‘intrinsic’ difficulty of English rather than to themselves; and thus also prevent others from blaming them, as they did with teachers. However, it could be the case that the open question introduced to the students was not specific enough.

Students who specified the difficulties that demotivated them referred to a variety of aspects such as reading and listening comprehension, writing, and spelling. However, most reference was either to grammar, in the first place, or vocabulary in the second place. The discussion will focus on the last two elements since they were the most frequent and since they affect the mastery of all L2 skills.

Difficulties with grammar and vocabulary

The many problems that characterise TEFL in the Arab sector, such as poor language services at schools, outdated methodologies, lack of instruction on learning strategies, unsuitable materials, and unqualified teachers can explain part of the subject-related demotivating difficulties that ALEI encounter. In other words, the learning context can as well be partly blamed for the SDF. However, this might not be the whole

picture as another aspect of L2 learning might also be responsible for some of these difficulties.

It has been argued that studying another language is different from studying other subjects as it also involves social aspects such as understanding the culture and the society of the speakers of L2 (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2003a; Dörnyei, in press; Williams, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997). Such adoption might be less relevant when studying a foreign language⁴. However, what might be more relevant in both foreign language and second language contexts is to come to terms with the way native speakers of the target language *think* when they use the language. If the assumption that language and thinking are interrelated and that language affects, at least partially, the way people think (see Harley, 2001 and Field, 2004) for brief discussions and Gentner, & Goldin-Meadow, 2002 for different views), then it could be argued that L2 learners should, at least in certain aspects, need not only adopt ‘new social and cultural behaviours, and ways of being’ (Williams & Burden, 1997 p. 117), but also *new ways of thinking*.

In the case of Arab learners, experience tells that there are certain difficulties in grammar that might stem from the different ways in which English and Arabic categorise the world. Particularly, ALEI find serious difficulties in differentiating among the delicate differences between the different tenses in English (English has more than 14 whereas Arabic has only 3). Khuwaileh and Al-Shoumali (2000) found that tense errors were among the most frequent in the writings of Arab university students. Difficulties with prepositions can also stem from the different ways in which Arabic and English conceptualise time and space. Other structures like the verb *to be* can also be difficult. Mukkatesh (1986) found that Arab learners might not acquire it at all and reach a state of *fossilisation* regardless of how much they are taught about it.

⁴ The terms *foreign* and *second* language learning can be used interchangeably because there are many similarities between the two processes (Mitchell & Myles, 1998). However, researchers tend to differentiate between the two. The first refers to a situation in which the learner comes in direct contact with the community of the target language (e.g. an Arab learning English in the UK). The latter however, refers to the case in which the target language is learnt without such a contact between the learner and the speakers of the target language (e.g. an Arab learner learning English in Israel) (e.g. Oxford & Shearin, 1994). However, the differences can be seen as falling into a continuum and are not necessarily as sharp as they appear as implied by Lambert (2000) and Gardner (2001).

With vocabulary, the difficulties can be seen from different angles. First, the vocabulary repertoire of many ALEI is quite limited. A limited vocabulary means that reading, which is a major source of substantial vocabulary growth (Nation & Meara, 2002), becomes slow, tiring and unpleasant since the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension is quite strong (Smith, 1988; Harris & Sipay: 1975; Chall 1987; Carrel & Grabe, 2002); and this explains the demotivation felt by such students. This can also have negative effects on other language skills like writing listening and speaking. In addition, some mistaken beliefs about vocabulary knowledge are common among many ALEI as was evident in the interviews. One of them is that one needs to know *every* word he or she encounters in order to understand texts they read or listen to in a foreign language. This and other mistaken beliefs are not common among Arab learners only (e.g. Light, 1997; McLaughlin, 1992; Larsen-Freeman, 1995; Folse, 2004; also Hubbell, 2002 in a Japanese context). Such beliefs can be responsible for feelings of demotivation since it is beyond learners to know all vocabulary items even in their L1. Third, for vocabulary growth to occur incidentally there is a need for extensive amounts of oral and written input. This, however, is not the case in the Arab sector since ALEI exposure to English is quite limited (Amara & Mar'I, 2002); and since ALEI do little extensive reading (many of the students interviewed could not come up with the name of one book they had read in English). Finally it could be argued that, in the case of many ALEI, knowledge of vocabulary items is often 'incomplete', as one teacher complained, 'Students know the words [i.e. recognise what they mean] but do not know how and when to use them'.

However, it has to be stressed also that not all students are demotivated by the difficulties they encounter when learning grammar and vocabulary or other aspects of the language. To some this was a challenge they enjoyed. In other words, for some this was a source for *intrinsic* motivation (see Deci & Ryan, 1985; Noels, 2001a). The question to be asked now is whether facing difficulties, particularly, with understanding grammatical patterns or encountering unfamiliar items can indeed be demotivating.

Difficulty and demotivation, what is the relation?

English, compared to other subjects is perceived by many Arab teachers as more demanding to teach and to learn. One teacher explained, 'They [i.e. Students] need to make effort more than they do with other subjects'. In addition, the results showed that more than half of the students mentioning DF think that English or aspects of it are difficult enough to arouse senses of demotivation in them. However, it is not always easy to delineate the fine boundaries between what is *difficult* and what is *demotivating* and it is not easy to decide when a difficult element can become demotivating. The following observations might prove helpful steps towards understanding the relationship between both.

Another way for explaining demotivation that arises from difficulties with language is with the help of general cognitive theories on motivation. Consideration will be given here to goal-theories (Ames, 1992). *Goal theories* encompass a bunch of theories which posit that the types of goals individuals have affect their performance. For goals to be effective in motivating learners they have to be *difficult*, *specific* or *explicit*, and perceived as both *important* and *attainable* (Locke, 1996).

If one considers studying grammar or increasing the vocabulary repertoire as *sub-goals* to learning the language as a whole, then these goals should be perceived as *attainable*. Learning new things should be challenging and difficult to a certain level as suggested by goal theories but it should not be perceived as *unattainable*. To many students, grammar or the other difficult aspects referred to by students are perceived *unattainable* goals. One student complained:

Grammar is the most important thing in a language. But I hate grammar. I encounter problems when studying it because it is difficult. I study it against my will and if I fail [English] it is only because of grammar'. (Written statement – male, JHS)

It can also be added that the goal of mastering grammar, increasing vocabulary, mastering writing or other aspects of the language are also long term goals that take much time to accomplish and despite being less general than the goal of *learning a language*, they are still not *specific* enough.

The above quotation also reveals that such difficulties might have a *domino effect* as they might lead to general failure in learning English. It is true that not every difficulty with aspects of English can be demotivating but it is still safe to assume that facing *recurring* difficulties in learning aspects of English might eventually lead to a sense of *demotivation* with the belief that ‘whatever I do, I will not learn English’, as expressed by some students. At the same time, one can hypothesise that *cursory* or *temporary* difficulties are not likely to lead to demotivation.

Demotivation – a few other observations

Before concluding, it is necessary to highlight a few observations about demotivation that the interviews with students and teachers gave rise to. First, as with motivation, demotivation can also be dynamic whether it is the result of CDF, SDF or other DF. Thus, it is not always the case that a student is either demotivated or not demotivated. One student gave the following response:

When there is a subject that I do not understand in grammar, I do not feel comfortable. When I do not understand things I do not like the lessons. But when I understand things, I look forward to the English class.(Interview – female, JHS)

Another student who was quoted above (p. 16) came to the interview with evident signs of demotivation because of failing one of her tests. Although the above student was quite demotivated at the time of the interview, she was likely to regain her motivation later as the negative effects of failing that test were over. But if failing tests recurs with this student, she might eventually lose her motivation and become totally demotivated. It is thus possible to refer to demotivation as a *state* and demotivation as a *trait* (in the same way that motivation has been seen by Brophy, 1987). A student can at some point feel totally demotivated but can after a while regain his or her motivation. For others demotivation can become a trait when it accompanies them throughout their learning experience. Following this line of thinking, it is also possible to look at demotivation and motivation as falling on a continuum (see Dörnyei, in press, p. 90). At one end, lie students who are totally demotivated and at the other end lie students who are quite motivated and experience minor or passing feelings of demotivation.

It could also be observed that there are various demotivating elements that can work differently with different students under different circumstances (see also Chambers, 1993). Similar experiences that different students undergo can have different effects on them. For example, the very same characteristics of teachers could be seen as motivating and demotivating at the same time in the eyes of different students unless they are extremely negative (e.g. bad treatment and loss of control of class). In some classes for example, some students referred to their teachers' seriousness as a motivating factor whereas other students, in the same classes, referred to it as a demotivating factor since they wanted more 'fun'.

Conclusions

The study in hand aimed at finding the common factors that are perceived demotivating by Arab learners of English in Israel. The results of the study suggest that as with the other few studies in the field, factors in the immediate learning context like the teacher, the learning group and textbooks could demotivate learners if they are perceived negatively. In particular, negative teachers' traits and behaviours were the most reported contextual demotivating factors. In the case of Arab learners of English in Israel there is a need to introduce changes in the learning environment in order to minimise the effect of the contextual demotivating factors. Some of the major changes are discussed here.

First, Arab schools should be better equipped in order to supply their students with the necessary language services like language labs and readers. Second, teachers should be better qualified to deal with the difficult realities in Arab schools (such as large classes and disruptive students) and their appointment should follow objective and professional considerations. Third, Arab experts should be involved in the writing of the English curriculum and the textbooks so that they can address the particular needs of the Arab learner. Finally, it is important to listen to the concerns of Arab teachers in order to learn about the factors that negatively affect their performance.

However, context-related factors are not the only main source of demotivation as was suggested by previous studies. There are other important forces that can cause demotivation and that relate to some aspects of the language like grammar patterns or vocabulary items that prove, repeatedly, difficult to master. Thus, students' negative

beliefs about aspects of the language that are caused by negative experiences they undergo while learning them can as well cause demotivation. This is the case since it cannot be ruled out, at least in the case of some students who referred to SDF, that they were initially motivated to study English but as a result of recurring difficulties with some aspects of English they became demotivated in different degrees. Thus demotivation can be experienced without the existence of 'external' powers. In light of these findings, it becomes reasonable to suggest an expansion to the definition of demotivation that was suggested by Dörnyei (2001, p. 143) to include, in addition to the external demotivating elements, aspects of the language that prove difficult to master by learners. There is also a need to examine more closely and sophisticatedly the issue of language and thinking as it relates to L2 learning as well as the different areas in which motivation and demotivation can be similar (e.g. dynamicity). In addition, the different cognitive theories on motivation, such as goal theories, seem to have the potential to facilitate the understanding of some aspects of demotivation. All these issues warrant further investigations since only the tip of the iceberg has been discovered.

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