Demotivation: Understanding Resistance to English Language Learning - The Case of Vietnamese Students

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Demotivation in English language learning was investigated, using Vietnam as a case study, with three main foci: (i) the reasons (i.e., the demotives) underlying demotivation; (ii) the degree of influence of different demotives; and (iii) students' experiences in overcoming demotivation. Using stimulated recall essays from 100 university students of their foreign language learning experiences, the findings indicated that demotivation was a significant issue for EFL learning, and a framework for discussing different sources of demotives was developed. While some categories of demotives occurred more frequently than others, no category appeared to be more or less difficult to overcome. Rather, students' awareness of the role English language and their determination to succeed were critical factors in overcoming demotivation

INTRODUCTION

There is a long history of the study of motivation in language learning. Research results indicate that motivation is one of the main determining

factors in an individual's success in developing a second (L2) or foreign language (FL) (see, e.g., Dornyei, 1990, 2001a, 2001b; Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, & Evers, 1985; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Warden & Lin, 2000). Research has shown that motivation is crucial for L2 learning (Dornyei, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1996) because it directly influences how much effort students make, how often students use L2 learning strategies, how much students interact with native speakers, how much input they receive in the language being learned, how well they do on curriculum-related achievement tests, how high their general proficiency level becomes, and how long they preserve and maintain L2 skills after language study is over (Ely, 1986a, 1986b; Spolsky, 1989; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). However, as important as motivation is, it clearly is not the only factor relevant to L2 and FL language learning. This has become particularly apparent in a world where intercultural communication and foreign language learning have increasingly become a necessity for many people.

As English has become more and more important as an international language, in most countries around the world, a large number of students are being required to learn it through compulsory programs in schools and universities. Yet, despite its apparent utility as a lingua franca or a world language (Brutt-Grifler, 2002), and the fact that students must pass examinations in it to graduate, many students fail to learn it successfully. This situation also applies to students in countries where learning other foreign languages is compulsory, but where the drop out rates in courses, once compulsion ends, are very large, in some cases being so significant that the viability of teaching some of these languages is undermined. In countries like the United States and Australia (Hornberger, 2005), students literally drop out of foreign language study, while in countries like China, Japan and Vietnam students either mentally withdraw or look for strategies to pass the required exams with minimum effort. Are these examples of resistance to language learning (Canagarajah, 1999), a lack of motivation, or might some other factor or factors be involved, particularly as part of language teaching

and learning process? Based on our own experiences, we supposed that demotivation might be a factor that would account for at least some of these problems, but that its existence and scope have not been adequately investigated. Thus, this study is the first step in defining and testing the impact of this construct in a specific context. As a starting point for investigating this question, and as a way of trying to define what this concept might consist of, we have chosen to do an intensive grounded theory case study in a fairly controlled situation in Vietnam.

Despite the current extrinsic pressures to learn English as a foreign language in Vietnam, many students don't seem ever to have developed any interest in learning English, or if they have, they seem to have lost that interest for some reason, that is, they have become demotivated. In both cases, their achievement in English as a foreign language has been negatively affected. While those without any interest in English might possibly be motivated to improve by applying conventional and available language teaching solutions, including motivational techniques (see, e.g., Ho, 1998), the problem faced by the latter group is more complicated as it requires that a critical look be taken at the underlying causes of demotivation to ensure they are properly understood so that effective solutions to the problem can be devised.

STUDIES OF DEMOTIVATION

Despite the probable importance of demotivation in learning in general, and L2 and FL learning in particular, to date few studies have focused on student demotivation. Even studies which mention it (e.g., Ho, 1998) have tended to equate demotivation with low motivation, rather than examining as a separate phenomenon. Three of the early studies, which examined the issue of demotivation, were done in the field of instructional communication. Gorham and Christophel's 1992 study tried to determine what factors were perceived as demotives by college students taking introductory communication

classes. Demotives were collected from students' responses to the open-ended question: "What things decrease your motivation to try hard to do your best in that class?" The research findings revealed three main categories of demotives, i.e., context demotives (factors likely to be regarded as antecedent to the teacher's influence), structure/format demotives (factors over which the teacher is likely to have some degree of influence, if not complete control), and teacher behaviors (factors likely to be perceived as under the teacher's direct control). Teacher-related factors, which consist of class structure or format-related demotives and thedemotives resulting from teacher behaviors, accounted for 79% of all the responses. In a follow-up study to ascertain whether the perceived sources of demotivation could be replicated, Christophel and Gorham (1995), using the same question to detect demotives with another group of college students studying communication, obtained findings that were consistent with those from the first study. However, in both studies, no attempt was made to examine the cases of the students who might have already been demotivated before entering the college class nor was it clear whether the responses were to real or hypothetical sources of demotivation, i.e., did those who indicated the so-called demotives really suffer from them?

To examine the degree to which teachers' perceptions of what affects student motivation were similar to those found in student reports, Gorham and Millette (1997) conducted a further study based on Gorham's previous research in which teacher participants were asked, with reference to a specific class, to respond to the open-ended question, "What do you perceive decreases students' motivation to try to do their best in this class and to achieve your instructional goals?" The results indicated that teachers and students agreed on a set of central factors that are relevant to demotivation. The high frequency categories were similar across both data sets and the order of frequency of the demotives mentioned was more similar than different across all categories in the data, which gave the researchers reasonable confidence to conclude that the set of demotives identified provided a viable description of classroom motivational dynamics. Despite

these similarities, teachers were more likely to attribute student demotivation to performance-related factors such as the students' lack of success on graded work, the students' lack of prerequisite skills or knowledge and the students' heavy workload. In contrast, students attributed more of their demotivation to teacher behavior, in particular poor presentational skills, lack of enthusiasm on the part of the instructor, and to the instructor's overall choice and organization of course material.

In the area of L2 classroom learning, student demotivation has not been the topic of much research with Chambers (1993), who examined the problem using questionnaires to gather both student and teacher perspectives, providing the only evidence, that is, his research is the only study that was fully devoted to demotivation in L2 learning completed so far. In contrast to the findings of the Gorham and Millette's study (1997), the reasons underlying student demotivation were perceived quite differently by the teachers and their students. Teachers perceived the causes of demotivation to be related to psychological, attitudinal, social, historical and geographical reasons, but they explicitly excluded themselves. The students' perceived reasons for demotivation also varied, i.e., teachers' behaviors, class size, etc. Unfortunately, Chambers did not try to determine what the demotives were or to look at them critically, instead simply listing the students' opinions. As a result, Chambers could draw only a few conclusions about the impact of demotives on the language learning experience. Thus, while there have been studies that have explored issues related to demotives, no attempt has been made either to create a framework to aid in better understanding the phenomenon, nor to relate it to issues of curriculum and teaching.

Oxford's 1998 study advanced the understanding of demotives by taking into account the time factor. She recognized that demotivation is a process that can be best understood by "looking backward", i.e., by asking participants to recall their learning experiences over a period of time, in this case, five years. The students were asked to write a stimulated recall essay using a variety of prompts, including "Describe a situation in which you experienced conflict with a teacher", and "Talk about a classroom in which

you felt uncomfortable". The findings drawn from the content analysis of the student essays revealed four broad sources of demotivation, i.e., the teacher's personal relationship with the student, the teacher's attitude towards the course or the material, style conflicts between teachers and students, and the nature of the classroom activities. However, since the prompts used by Oxford specifically referred to the teacher's role as a source of demotivation, other potential sources might not have been provided by participants in the study.

Ushioda (1998) filled this gap by asking the participants to identify what they found to be demotivating in their L2-related learning experience without specifying any prompts. Her findings were not unlike the conclusions arrived at in the previous studies, that is, the demotives were related to negative aspects of the institutionalized learning context such as particular teaching methods and learning tasks. Nonetheless, Ushioda provided only a very general description of her demotivation results as they formed only a part of a broader discussion on effective motivational thinking.

Finally, while it is not difficult for the students who are involved with, and quite interested in, language learning to point out things that may be classified as demotives, it is also the case that being able to name such demotivating factors does not provide any insights on the possible effects that demotives may have on different students. Dornyei (1998) addressed this issue by hypothesizing that only demotivated students, or those who have experienced demotivation, can indicate the actual reasons that resulted in their loss of interest in language learning. Thus, in selecting participants for his research, he focused only on those who had been identified as demotivated. Data were collected through long structured interviews. His findings were consistent with the results reported by previous researchers in that the largest category of demotives directly concerned the teacher. Nonetheless, while such material provides interesting insights, one may wonder whether the data collected from interviews alone are sufficient, informative and valid in dealing with such a sensitive problem, especially across all cultural situations. For example, while interviews might be

culturally suitable for use with Western students, Asian students may not feel comfortable discussing this face-confronting issue in person. In addition, it can be argued that students need time to recall demotivating incidents, so the immediacy of the interview method may not be the most effective technique for gathering clearly presented particular experiences that have led to demotivation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

While most of the literature on teaching and learning languages focuses on the motivation of students to learn a language, the high extrinsic motivational context and the failure of students to adequately learn foreign languages (especially English) under those conditions, suggests that motivation alone may not be a sufficient explanation for understanding and treating the current FL learning problems found in such contexts. In addition, the first author's own English language learning experience provided a powerful instance which suggested that demotivation, rather than a lack of motivation, might be a significant problem that needed to be investigated.

Thus, the first purpose of the present study was to examine the level of the student demotivation in EFL learning and to document the underlying sources of demotivation suffered by students. In this context, it is important to note that all four of the L2 studies that addressed demotivation included a mixture of ESL/EFL students and those studying a language other than English (LOTE). Therefore, the setting selected for this study also provides a change of focus as it examines whether the special status of English as an international language makes any difference in terms of student demotivation, i.e., it allows us to compare and contrast the demotives found in earlier research with those suffered by EFL students.

In addition, it seemed reasonable to assume that demotives are different in terms of their degree of influence on individuals (i.e., some may be more potent than others, and be more difficult to overcome). However, none of the

previous studies took into consideration the long term effect of demotives to see whether particular demotives have a differential impact. Some types of demotives might have a permanent effect on students, while other types of demotives might be easier to overcome once the detrimental influence ceased to exist. The focus of this study was therefore on the role of demotivation in students' learning of English as a foreign language with the following four issues being addressed:

(1) To what extent is demotivation a problem?
(2) If demotivation is a significant problem, what are the factors that are likely to contribute to demotives?
(3) Are demotives different in terms of their levels of impact?
(4) What are the factors that assist students to overcome demotivation?

Vietnam was chosen to be the context for initially testing these questions.

CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

Participants in the study were 100 second-year EFL students from a University of Economics in central Vietnam. The students were not English majors and so were studying English to fulfill their four semesters of English graduation requirement, but would have been aware of the importance of English for the economy and business of Vietnam. More than 90% of the students had studied English for at least 8 years prior to doing the stimulated recall tasks, while their place of home residence indicated that they came from different parts of the country. Thus, the sample met four key requirements needed for an initial study of the demotivation construct:

(1) long term exposure to mandatory FL English instruction and, therefore, the increased possibility of having experienced demotivation,
(2) a focus on extrinsic, rather than intrinsic motivation (e.g., English

majors might be more intrinsically motivated and be less likely to suffer demotivation),

(3) coming from a range of home locations, thereby providing a variety of English instructional experiences, and

(4) coming from a discipline (economics) where English is significant to career prospects and, therefore, a probable extrinsic motivational factor.

Stimulated recall methodology was used to collect retrospective data. Students were asked to recall their English learning experiences, to think back across the whole learning process, and then to write a three-part essay. The first section of the essay dealt with the existence of demotivation and its sources ("Have you ever been demotivated in learning English? Why?"); The second section examined whether or not students had been able to overcome demotivation, and their experiences in coping with demotivation ("Do you like learning English now? How have or haven't you recovered your interest in learning English?"); The third section was to explore student perceptions on how best to minimize demotivation ("In your opinion, what are some possible solutions to minimize demotivation?"). The prompts were provided to focus students' attention on their own demotivating experiences, and avoided suggesting any specific source for the demotives, for instance, teacher behaviors. To avoid any threat to face, students wrote their essays anonymously outside of university class time, and none of the students were ones that had been taught by either of the researchers. Students were asked to write their essays in Vietnamese so as to facilitate their ability to express themselves, and were given a week to complete the task.

Initially, all 100 essays were classified into four groups based on students' answers to the prompts: Group 1 (9 students) indicated they had not been demotivated, Group 2 (47 students) indicated they had been demotivated but had recovered from it, Group 3 (21 students) indicated they had been demotived and then had overcome demotivation but not absolutely, and Group 4 (20 students) indicated they had been demotivated and were still feeling demotivated. The remaining three students consisted of two who were unmotivated to study English and one who presented confounding information.

Translation and coding were done for the first section of the student essays, which dealt with demotivating factors, and the second section of the student essays, which dealt with the factors that helped students overcome demotivation. The third section of the student essays that provided students' suggestions on how to minimize demotivation was recorded and analyzed separately.

The constant comparison approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to develop categories for coding, with the unit of analysis being each phrase, sentence or paragraph which described a separate observation or incident related to student demotivation. These categorizations were applied after reading and rereading each piece of student writing and then listing the related segments of the essay on a computer screen. For example, "teacher was too strict" was placed in the subcategory "teacher behavior". After all the essays had been analyzed in this way, the labels were then grouped into categories based on the similarity of their attributes. For example, "teacher behavior" and "teaching method" were grouped under the category "teacher-related factors". Then, these categories were classified into two main groups, i.e., internal attributions and external attributions, the former being student-related factors, while the latter were external or outside factors.

Next, the demotivating descriptions, categories and subcategories were assigned code designations (see Table 1 in Appendix), and then the list of categories for coding was used to code the complete set of data. Coding was done separately for each group so that it could be used to examine the possible degree of influence of different demotives. This group-based coding also allowed a synthesis of demotives to easily be created.

Three English teacher colleagues were recruited to do co-coding of the data, the results were compared and adjusted in order to ensure coding reliability. In addition, a group of five teacher researchers were also recruited to do a Q-sort of the subcategories (Kerlinger, 1964). That is, a list of all subcategories that had been generated was given to each of them for sorting into categories. Their results were then compared with the groupings developed by the researchers, discussed and the category groupings were

adjusted accordingly. This list of demotives was then used to generate the final framework for the 88 essays in which demotivation was mentioned (see Table 1 in Appendix).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Extent of the Demotivation Problem

The first research question dealt with the extent to which the demotivation had been an actual problem for language students in Vietnam. Out of the sample of 100 students, 88 indicated they had been demotivated to a greater or lesser extent, most on several occasions. Many students found demotivation to be an unavoidable phenomenon, in other words, they did not seem to be surprised about or reluctant to acknowledge its existence. While demotivation was a matter of concern for the students themselves, they seemed to have accepted its existence even though they were uneasy about it. Furthermore, demotivation often was found to occur over discontinuous periods of time with 21 of the 88 students who overcame their demotivation for some period of time, but not absolutely, since they subsequently were demotivated.

The Types of Demotives that Students Encountered

The second research question was concerned with factors perceived by students as demotives that had made them lose their interest in learning. A total of 372 demotivating encounters related to 48 demotives were found, which were grouped into 14 categories. Based on the nature of the demotive categories, these 14 categories were classified into two groups: internal attributions and external attributions (see Table 1). The former included students' attitudes towards English, their experiences of failure or lack of success, and incidents related to their self-esteem; the latter consisted of teacher-related factors, the learning environment, and other external factors.

TABLE 1

A Coding Framework for Demotivation: Categories of Instances Mentioned by Vietnamese Economics Students

Internal Attributions		
IA. Attitudes towards English (58)	IE. Experiences of failure or lack of success (65)	IS. Self-esteem (12)
IA1. difficult to pronounce (6) IA2. large vocabulary (26) IA3. complicated grammar (26)	IE1. fail to understand lessons (lost background knowledge) (31) IE2. left behind classmates (7) IE3. fail to answer teacher's questions, do exercises, tests (8) IE4. fail to communicate in English (11) IE5. get low marks despite having studied seriously (8)	IS1. feel insulted (5) IS2. unconfident (fear of losing face/ incompetence/afraid of not being able to satisfy parents' expectation) (7)

External Attributions			
Teacher-related demotivating factors			
ETb. Teacher behavior (24) ETb1. insult students (4) ETb2. lack of care, enthusiasm (13) ETb3. strict, inflexible (5) ETb4. demonstrate favoritism (2)	ETc. Teacher competence (14) ETc1. fail to pronounce, difficult to understand (6) ETc2. low credibility (8)	ETm. Teaching methods (97) ETm1. uncreative, boring ways of conveying knowledge (39) ETm2. teaching language skills incomprehensively (22) ETm3. speed of teaching is too fast (10) ETm4. ineffective distribution of L1 & L2 use (6) ETm5. lessons limited to textbook (6) ETm6. repeated lessons from class to class (1) ETm7. different teaching methods among different teachers (1) ETm8. frequently test students (1) ETm9. inappropriate workload (11)	ETg. Grading and assessment (5) ETg1. test outside lessons (does not cover material) (2) ETg2. not equal to students' levels of proficiency (2) ETg3. no corrective feedback (1)

Learning environmental demotivating factors

ELc. Classroom atmosphere (17)	ELo. Opportunities to use English (18)	ELl. Learning conditions (23)	ELt. Class time (12)	ELb. Textbook (9)
ELc1. quiet and boring (6) ELc2. stressful (10) Elc3. negative behaviors of classmates (1)	ELo1. lack of opportunities to contact to foreigners in class (8) ELo2. lack of opportunities to use English outside class (10)	ELl1. crowded groups (4) ELl2. insufficient teaching and learning facilities (10) ELl3. unequal levels of proficiency between classmates (6) ELl4. lack of extra-curricular activities (3)	ELt1. unfavorable class time (1) ELt2. limited class time (11)	ELb1. boring (3) ELb2. not equal with students' levels of proficiency (5) ELb3. availability of instruction books (1)

Other external demotivating factors

EOb. Obligation (13)
EOb1. compulsory nature of English (4)
EOb2. parents' interference (1)
EOb3. social burden (1)
EOb4. have to study many other subjects apart from English or concentrate on main subjects for college entrance exams (7)

EOn. Negative changes (5)
EOn1. replace teachers from the better to the worse (1)
EOn2. change learning environment, away from old friends (4)

TABLE 2
Frequencies and Distribution of Demotives by Coding Categories

	Demotive categories	N	Percentage
Grand total		**372**	**100%**
Internal attributions			
IA. Attitudes towards English		58	16%
IE. Experiences of failure or lack of success		65	17%
IS. Self-esteem		12	3%
Total		**135**	**36%**
External attributions			
Teacher-related factors	ETb. Teacher behavior	24	7%
	ETc. Teacher competence	14	4%
	ETm. Teaching method	97	26%
	ETg. Grading and assessment	5	1%
	Subtotal	**140**	**38%**
Learning environment	ELc. Classroom atmosphere	17	5%
	ELo. Opportunities to use English	18	5%
	ELl. Learning conditions	23	6%
	ELt. Class time	12	3%
	ELb. Textbook	9	2%
	Subtotal	**79**	**21%**
Others	EOb. Obligation	13	4%
	EOn. Negative changes	5	1%
	Subtotal	**18**	**5%**
	Total	**237**	**64%**

As can be seen from Table 2, student-related demotives accounted for 36% of the total number of demotivating encounters, whereas external factors related to 64%. Among the external demotives, teacher-related factors were the main source of demotives, accounting for 38% of the total number of demotivating encounters. Demotives that resulted from the learning environment accounted for 21%, and the remaining 5% were related to other external factors, including obligation factors and negative changes in students' courses.

TABLE 3
Internal Demotivating Factors

Category	N	Percentage
IA. Attitudes towards English	**58**	16%
IA1. difficult to pronounce	6	
IA2. large vocabulary	26	
IA3. complicated grammar	26	
IE. Experiences of failure or lack of success	**65**	17%
IE1. fail to understand lessons (lost background knowledge)	31	
IE2. left behind classmates	7	
IE3. fail to answer teacher's questions, do exercises, tests	8	
IE4. fail to communicate in English	11	
IE5. get low marks despite having studies seriously	8	
IS. Self-esteem	**12**	3%
IS1. feel insulted	5	
IS2. unconfident (fear of losing face/incompetence/afraid of not being able to satisfy parents' expectation)	7	
Total	**135**	**36%**

Internal factors accounted for 135 out of 372 demotivating encounters. As summarized in Table 3, students' experiences of failure or lack of success were the highest of the internally related factors, accounting for 17% of the total number of demotivating encounters. There were 65 demotivating encounters involved in this demotive category with many students admitting to have lost interest in learning due to the decline in their background knowledge of English. Students' negative attitudes towards English generated 58 demotivating encounters (16%), while 3% of demotivating encounters were related to students' characteristics, that is, their self-esteem.

External attributions consisted of 237 demotivating encounters, accounting for 64% of the total (see Table 2). These factors were classified into three sub-groups: teacher-related factors, learning environment, and others with a total of 11 demotive categories, generating 129 (35%), 90 (24%) and 18 (3%) demotivating encounters, respectively. Teacher-related factors were the most frequent causes of student demotivation. Specifically, ineffective and improper teaching methods caused a large number of demotive encounters, that is, 97 out of 372 demotivating encounters, or 26%.

Among teacher-related factors, teaching method had the highest frequency in demotivating students (26%), followed by teacher behavior (7%), teacher competence (4%), and grading and assessment (1%). Out of 88 demotivated students, 59 had, to a greater or lesser extent, been affected by demotivation through teaching method. As can be seen from Table 4, teaching method triggered 9 demotives, in which uncreative, boring ways of conveying knowledge was found the most demotivating.

TABLE 4
Teacher-related Demotivating Factors

Category	N	Percentage
ETb. Teacher behavior	**24**	7%
ETb1. insult students	4	
ETb2. lack of care, enthusiasm	13	
ETb3. strict, inflexible	5	
ETb4. demonstrate favoritism	2	
ETc. Teacher competence	**14**	4%
ETc1. fail to pronounce, difficult to understand	6	
ETc2. low credibility	8	
ETm. Teaching method	**97**	26%
ETm1. uncreative, boring ways of conveying knowledge	39	
ETm2. teaching language skills incomprehensively	22	
ETm3. speed of teaching is too fast	10	
ETm4. ineffective distribution of L1 & L2 use	6	
ETm5. lessons limited to textbook	6	
ETm6. repeated lessons from class to class	1	
ETm7. different teaching methods among different teachers	1 1	
ETm8. frequently test students	11	
ETm9. inappropriate workload		
ETg. Grading and assessment	**5**	1%
ETg1. test outside lessons	2	
ETg2. not equal to students' levels of proficiency	2	
ETg3. no corrective feedback	1	
Total	**140**	**38%**

The learning environment accounted for 21% of demotivating encounters. Specifically, the learning environment generated five demotive categories, including unfavorable classroom atmosphere (5%), insufficient opportunities

to use English (5%), unfavorable learning conditions (6%), unfavorable class time (3%), and improper textbook [use / selection] (2%).

Two factors that caused demotivation for students, which could not be grouped with the other external categories, were obligation and negative changes (See specifics in Table 1 in Appendix).

The Influence of Different Demotives

The third research question was concerned with the degree of influence of different demotives. In order to consider the long-term effect of demotives and find the answer to the question of whether demotives are different in terms of their degree of influence, the sample was limited to the 88 students who, to a greater or lesser extent, had experienced demotivation, these being: Group 2 (53%) those successfully overcoming demotivation, Group 3 (24%) those who were uncertain of whether they had overcome demotivation or not because they still felt demotivated at times, or forced themselves to study English, and Group 4 (23%) those who were still feeling demotivated.

First, the demotives suffered by the students in each of the three groups were compared and contrasted so as to determine whether there were any distinctions that could account for the fact that some students overcame demotivation while others seemingly could not. In Group 2, 47 students described 189 demotivating encounters, for an average of 4 demotives per student, while in Group 3, 21 students discussed 84 demotivating encounters, also providing an average of 4. 20 students in Group 4 indicated 99 demotives, for an average of 5. However, it was not usually possible to tell from the students' essays whether the demotives they suffered occurred on a single occasion or happened at different times. Thus, even though the ratio of demotives per student in Group 4 was on the average higher than that in Groups 2 and 3, there was insufficient evidence to conclude that the number of demotivating experiences that students suffered had some effect on their ability to overcome demotivation.

With regard to the distribution of different demotive categories for each of

the three groups, Figure 1 shows the trends across demotive categories. While there was a difference in terms of quantity, in general, the three groups had quite similar patterns in their distribution of demotivating categories.

FIGURE 1
Distribution of Demotive Categories by Group
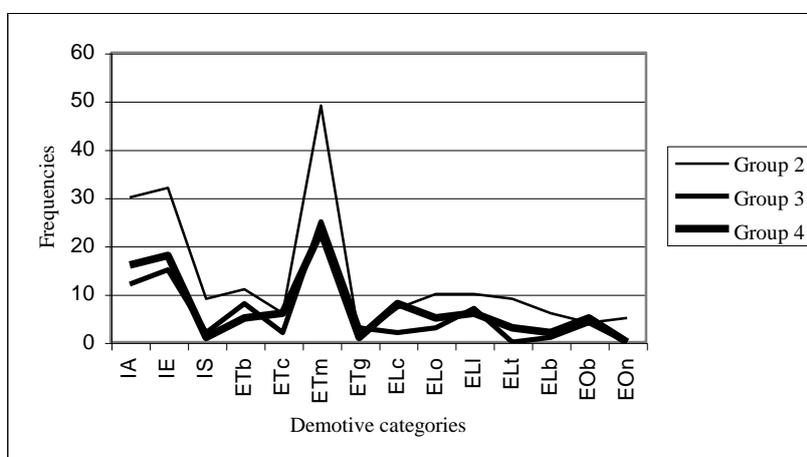
When the rank orders of demotive categories among the three groups were compared, it was impossible to conclude that particular types of demotives had an effect on whether or not students could overcome demotivation. It was also not possible to determine from this data which demotives were easier to overcome than others.

The findings suggest that other aspects might involve in the degree of influence of demotives, which should be more carefully considered in a more focused study.

Overcoming Demotivation

To better understand how students (in Group 2 and Group 3) had overcome demotivation, they were compared and contrasted and the reasons provided

were classified into two groups: internal factors and external factors. Most of the factors that helped the students in Group 2 overcome their demotivation (see Table 5a, 5b) concerned internal factors (71%) rather than external factors (29%). Five internal factors that significantly contributed to students' overcoming demotivation were: an awareness of the importance of English (27%), personal reasons (16%), self-improvement (12%), self-determination (12%), and positive attitudes towards English (4%). These responses suggest that by keeping the importance of the role of English in mind, students were encouraged to try to learn more, and importantly, had a good reason to try to overcome their demotivation. External factors included positive changes in teacher behavior (6%), teaching method (7%), learning conditions (9%), and external encouragement (7%). These students cited 121 instances of re-motivating encounters, which meant that each student needed on average 2.57 motives to regain their interest in learning.

TABLE 5a
Reasons for Overcoming Demotivation – Group 2

Internal Factors

Category	N	Percentage
Self-improvement	**14**	12%
- get progress and like English more	8	
- have better learning method, well-arranged time schedule	6	
Attitudes towards English	**5**	4%
- like English itself	2	
- like to understand multi-cultural aspects of English speaking countries	3	
Personal reasons	**19**	16%
- don't want to feel inferior because close friend is better at English	2	
- want to discuss with boyfriend in English	1	
- want to help father in studying English documents	1	
- code-switching	1	
- like to translate English idioms, songs into Vietnamese	2	
- like English football teams, English songs, funny stories	9	
- like to be able to understand world news on TV, internet	3	
Awareness of the importance of English	33	27%
Self-determination	15	12%
Subtotal	**86**	**71%**

TABLE 5b
Reasons for Overcoming Demotivation – Group 2

External Factors

Category	N	Percentage
Teacher behavior	**7**	
- more enthusiastic, devoted, caring	6	6%
- proper criticism	1	
Teaching method	**9**	7%
- better and more effective teaching method	9	
Learning conditions	**10**	
- proper class size	2	9%
- availability of learning facilities	6	
- more opportunities to contact to foreigners in class	2	
External encouragement	**9**	
- friends' encouragement	3	
- teachers' praises	1	7%
- teacher support and encouragement	3	
- family encouragement	2	
Subtotal	**35**	**29%**
Total	**121**	**100%**

The students in Group 3 indicated 22 re-motive encounters (see Table 6), which meant that each of them only benefited from about one motive.

TABLE 6
Reasons for Overcoming Demotivation – Group

Category	N	Percentage
Internal factors		
Attitudes towards English	**2**	9%
- like to communicate in English	2	
Personal reasons	**2**	9%
- like English songs	2	
Awareness of the importance of English	14	64%
Subtotal	**18**	**82%**
External factors		
Teacher behavior	**1**	4%
- more enthusiastic	1	
Teaching method	**3**	14%
- better and more effective teaching method	3	
Subtotal	**4**	**18%**
Total	**22**	**100%**

Thus, students in Group 2 and Group 3 differed in terms of the number of motives (i.e. 2.57 vs 1.1) that had helped them recover their interest in learning, and it can be concluded that the more motives students have, the more possibilities they have to completely overcome demotivation. With regard to types of motives, in direct contrast to demotivating factors, internal factors were seen to have greater effect on students in both groups than external factors, and students' awareness of the importance of English was the motive that was the most salient. The greatest practical benefit that students supposed they could get from having a good English proficiency was that they would have a better opportunity to get a good job. This was, indeed, very important in motivating students as well as in helping them to recover their motivation. Importantly, among internal factors, the self-improvement factor and the self-determination factor were found only in Group 2 students. That is, students' self-determination pushed them to study harder and get better results, thus increasing the feeling of being motivated and being more likely to overcome demotivation absolutely. Moreover, students' awareness of the importance of English was the principle reason that set up and maintained their self-determination. It is, therefore, reasonable to suggest that student self-determination in overcoming demotivation is an important factor to foster.

Students' perspectives on solutions to overcome demotivation were also gained from students' responses to the essay prompts: "In your opinion, what are some possible solutions to minimize demotivation?" There were 26 strategies suggested by 57 students to help overcome demotivation. Apart from emphasizing the responsibilities of students to overcome their own demotivation, the respondents also placed more emphasis on the responsibilities of teachers. In particular, they posited that teachers have a greater impact on learners during the learning process than others.

FURTHER DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the large proportion of students in the sample who admitted having

experienced demotivation, it is clear that not only does the phenomenon of demotivation exist in EFL learning in Vietnam, it is also a serious problem. Despite strong extrinsic motivation, for some students demotivation had a very strong impact that destroyed their interest in learning English, whereas for others, demotivation decreased their interest in learning English. In all cases, it was evident that demotivation had a negative impact on students, preventing them from gaining expected learning outcomes. These results suggest that the demotivation is a significant problem that needs to be specifically addressed in FL learning.

One of the findings of the study that is consistent with the general results reported in previous studies is that the largest source of demotives was related to teachers. Teachers were found to have a strong impact on students' demotivation or motivation to learn. Furthermore, it is teachers who, if they are aware of the demotivation phenomenon, are best placed to deal with it effectively.

Within the four demotive categories related to teachers, teaching methods provided the largest source of demotives. The majority of the student participants admitted having suffered from some negative aspects of teaching methods, raising the need to reconsider the teaching methods that have been used to teach English (or other foreign languages) in order to understand possible mismatches between teaching methods and preferred student learning styles. No matter how devoted the teacher is, teaching and learning may not be effective if teaching methods do not match student learning styles. While teachers can not cater to all student needs, surveying students' expectations of teachers and satisfaction with methodology in tertiary courses can make teaching more effective and more closely aligned with students' needs. Appropriate teacher classroom behavior also needs attention because negative behaviors usually hurt students, leaving them with negative feelings toward English that are difficult to overcome.

Another important finding is that many students were demotivated because of inadequate background knowledge of English. School and university syllabi set progressive standards for subsequent classes that students were

supposed to have met, and teachers in subsequent classes kept these in mind when preparing lessons. Therefore, the large number of students who failed to make adequate progress in their previous classes found themselves with gaps in their knowledge, were not capable of dealing with current lessons, and felt demotivated. The data suggests several possible reasons for this related to students, teachers and curriculum. First, some students were not motivated to work hard and failed to develop adequate background knowledge. Second, as we have already shown, demotivating teacher behaviors contributed to students' lack of progress. And third, different educational settings may apply different standards of teaching, resulting in different levels of knowledge for students entering universities. This indicates the need for a more consistent curriculum for students below the tertiary level, and programs of remedial assistance to help weaker students to overcome their demotivation by helping them to develop the skills needed to continue on with more advanced work.

In particular, students' awareness of the importance of English was the most frequent motive that helped them to overcome demotivation and recover their interest in learning. Thus, the data supports the argument that the special status of English as an international language, and its importance to economics students in this study play a very important role in motivating students as well as in helping them to recover their motivation, with most of the students who had absolutely overcome demotivation or who had overcome demotivation for some period of time having used this as a re-motivating factor. Nevertheless, an awareness of the importance of English alone was not enough to help students to overcome demotivation absolutely. Students were more likely to completely overcome demotivation if their awareness of the importance of English triggered their self-determination to learn English, making them more autonomous and independent of affective factors. In this respect, teachers need to support this effective internal strategy in order to help students to set up and maintain their self-determination by making clear the practical benefits of learning English. The study also suggests that teachers need to include other motivational techniques in their

classes as the extent to which students could overcome their demotivation was greatly affected by (i) the number of motives they experienced and (ii) their degree of self-determination.

This study suggests that student demotivation – the loss of motivation due to particular circumstances – is a major problem in foreign language learning settings like Vietnam. While motivation strategies may help to avoid or overcome demotivation, there are other causes of demotivation, particularly extrinsic ones related to students, teachers and the curriculum, that also need to be more explicitly addressed. Better teacher training and awareness, and more appropriate curriculum and support would undoubtedly help to reduce these extrinsic problems. However, further research into matters like the match or mismatch between teaching styles and learning styles, or studies designed to obtain information about the demotivation phenomenon at different levels of education to consider age related variables need to be undertaken.

Thus, for this group of FL students at least, extrinsic factors were the principal causes of demotivation, while intrinsic factors were those that had the most impact on remotivation. This suggests that changes in teaching and curriculum practices have the potential to have greatest impact on increasing students' success in FL learning.

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END NOTE

1. Students have to pass examinations to progress in their educational studies and careers. Specifically, they have to take an English test as part of their graduation examinations in secondary and upper secondary schools. English is also a subject to be examined in the university entrance examinations for many subject majors. A Certificate of English is also a job requirement in a variety of fields.

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