A Comparative Empirical Research on English Learning Demotivators (ELDs) between Urban and Rural Junior High School Students

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Abstract. English learning demotivation refers to the situation where students will generate less enthusiasm for learning English due to the influence of several factors in the process of learning English. In this study, four different types of junior high school students from Qiaocheng District, Bozhou City, Anhui Province are chosen as the research object. By means of using empirical research methods, four factors were found: teacher-related demotivators, social environment related demotivators, learner-related demotivators and learning environment related demotivators. In addition, there exist significant differences on teachers’ basic teaching skills, learners’ language attitude, learners’ confidence and economic support between urban and rural students. Based on the above analysis, this paper put forward some suggestions.

Introduction

In recent 20 years, many researchers set out to study “demotivation” in language learning (Liu Honggang, 2009). Researchers in China have got down to paying attention to demotivation and carried out plenty of empirical studies. Nevertheless these studies mostly focus on college students (Deng Yanzhen, 2011; Zhou Cibo & Wang Wenbin, 2012), A small number on senior high school students and less on juniors (Liu Honggang & Ying Bin, 2013). This study takes students of four junior high schools in Anhui as an example to analyze the English learning demotivators (ELDs) in northern Anhui province. This research will help researchers and teachers explore the reasons for junior students’ learning demotivation so that they can make suitable strategies to improve teaching effects.

A Brief Literature Review on Demotivation

There are many researchers who have been devoted to studying demotivation. The methods they adopted and the conclusions in each research may be various, but some common points can be summarized as follows.

Teacher plays an important role in students’ learning English. Teacher’s behavior, ability and teaching methods have a great influence on students’ English learning (Trang & Jr. Baldauf, 2007). Although most teachers can prepare a lesson carefully, present it attentively and guide students in time, they fail to pay attention to students’ emotion and thus they cannot connect love with their teaching. Consequently, students are unlikely to feel the pleasure of learning English.

Learning environment is another factor affecting English learning motivation, including school facilities, English tests and so on. Different course books for different stages have their unique features, which requires students to have different levels. Most students will feel English is becoming hard when they get admission to senior high school. Meantime, they are not capable of solving these problems and thus they begin to get bored with English (Liu Honggang, 2014).

Learner-related demotivators are mentioned in many researches. Students’ confidence is a major
one that influences them most. Some students will meet difficulties when they are studying, and if they cannot handle them properly, they will feel a sense of being upset, which is likely to prevent them moving on (Zhou Cibo & Wang Wenbin, 2012). Besides, there are some students holding a wrong attitude to English. They believe that English is helpless to their future and refuse to learn it. A few of them even hold the opinion that as Chinese, we should not learn English (Liu Honggang & Yingbin, 2013).

Social environment also has a great effect on students’ English learning. Parental guidance is an important one. This factor is less mentioned than others. It may be because this factor is not valued enough.

In all, the learning situation of junior students hasn’t caught enough attention. Although some studies have chosen them as research subject, they failed to make a comparison on demotivators influencing students’ English learning. As a result, this study will choose junior students as research subject to explore demotivators which have an influence on students’ English learning. Besides, some work will be done to find out the differences on ELDs regarding rural and urban students.

**Research Design**

This survey was made among the 472 junior students (247 males and 225 females) from four different secondary schools in Bozhou city, Anhui province to address the following two specific questions:

1. What factors demotivate junior high school students’ English learning?
2. What are the differences on demotivators regarding rural and urban junior high school students?

A questionnaire called *Questionnaire on demotivators affecting students’ English learning*, which is adapted from Liu Honggang (2014), was adopted. It was constructed by four dimensions—teacher-related demotivators, social environment related demotivators, learner-related demotivators and learning environment related demotivators. This study questionnaire is tested by 472 students from four junior schools and the total Cronbach’s alphas of each sub-dimension are: 0.73, 0.66, 0.72, 0.66, 0.53, 0.52, 0.49. Generally speaking, the Cronbach’s alphas of these seven demotivators is reasonable. One of the sub-dimensions is below 0.50. However, in the field of applied linguistics, the reliability of questionnaire below 0.50 is acceptable. Therefore, on the whole, the reliability of this questionnaire is relatively high.

**Results and Discussion**

**Types of Students’ ELDs**

A descriptive statistics was done with the help of SPSS in order to answer the first question. The ELDs (See Table 1) can be listed as follows: teacher-related demotivators (*M*=5.26, *SD*=.68), social environment-related demotivators (*M*=5.11, *SD*=.76), learners-related demotivators (*M*=5.02, *SD*=.67) and learning environment-related demotivators (*M*=4.52, *SD*=1.18).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-related demotivators</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social environment-related</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demotivators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners-related demotivators</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning environment-related</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demotivators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, teacher-related demotivators included teacher’s basic teaching skills (*M*=5.41, *SD*=.75) and teacher’s responsibility (*M*=5.10, *SD*=.87). The first one played a significant role in teaching. It
could influence student’s attitude toward learning English directly. It was universally acknowledged that teacher’s unskilful basic teaching skills, for example, spelling wrong words or substandard pronunciations, would discourage students from learning English (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Zhou Cibo & Wang Wenbin, 2012). The second one was teacher’s responsibility. Teacher’s attitude toward the course he taught would also influence student’s English learning motivation. Liu Honggang & Ying Bin (2013) held that students were willing to learn English if English teacher was careful and responsible, patient enough to solve questions which were put forward by students, encouraged students and gave them some useful advice on English learning. Relatively speaking, teacher’s basic teaching skills ($M=5.41, SD=.75$) had a greater effect.

Second, social environment-related demotivators included economic support ($M=5.20, SD=.89$) and parents tutoring ($M=4.98, SD=1.17$). With the rapid spread of English in this world, a number of parents desired to make their children exposed to English and mastered this language so that they could have a bright future. Parents would invest in children’s English learning. However, this investment had a great difference between urban and rural areas. In general, considering economical level and personal ability, investment in rural areas was lower than it in urban areas. The second one was parent’s tutoring. This factor varied with rural and urban areas. By investigation, it was obvious that urban parents could offer more guidance to their children than rural parents. This was because rural parents did not have a high level of English. They were not capable of offering effective guidance to their children. Relatively speaking, economical support ($M=5.20, SD=.89$) had a greater influence on learners.

Third, learners-related demotivators included learner’s confidence ($M=4.56, SD=.93$) and language attitude ($M=5.30, SD=.71$). This study found that student’s confidence would be frustrated if they failed to live up to their parents’ or their teachers’ expectation. This was consistent with previous opinions that frustration of student’s confidence caused by external factors would lead to student’s English learning demotivation (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Li Lin, 2013). The second one was learner’s language attitude. Researchers had found out that many learners failed to take notice of the importance of learning English. So there was no doubt that it would result in English learning demotivation (Falout & Maruyama, 2004). Relatively speaking, learner’s confidence ($M=4.56, SD=.93$) was the key factor, which influenced learners more.

Finally, learning environment-related demotivators included learning contents ($M=4.51, SD=1.16$). Too many tests and exercises would lead to demotivation, which was similar to previous opinions, but had its own features. In previous studies, inadequate teaching facilities (multimedia and audio facility) would lead to demotivation. But in this study, all four involved schools were equipped with multimedia facilities. English teachers could make use of multimedia facilities to help teach. So there was no problem of inadequate teaching facilities.

**Differences of ELDs between Rural and Urban Students**

The differences were analyzed by means of independent sample T-test. Because of the similar quantity of samples in urban and rural areas, with the help of SPSS17.0, the collected data ($N_{urban}=245; N_{rural}=227$) was processed and a comparison between urban and rural junior high school students was made. The findings (See Table 2) indicated economic support ($t(472)= -4.70, p<0.05$), teacher’s basic teaching skills ($t(472)= -3.59, p<0.05$), learner’s confidence ($t(472)= -2.60, p<0.05$) and language attitude ($t(472)= -2.63, p<0.05$) vary greatly with different areas. To be specific, these demotivators have a greater effect on learners in rural areas than those in urban areas.
Table 2. The Independent Sample T-test of ELDs between Urban and Rural Areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demotivators</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic support</td>
<td>urban(n=245)</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>-4.70</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rural(n=227)</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s basic</td>
<td>urban(n=245)</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-3.59</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching skills</td>
<td>rural(n=227)</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language attitude</td>
<td>urban(n=245)</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>-2.63</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rural(n=227)</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner’s confidence</td>
<td>urban(n=245)</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>-2.60</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rural(n=227)</td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reasons for this difference can be listed as follows:

1. The general economy level in rural area is much lower. In recent years, though rural economy has been improved greatly, it is still far away from the average level when compared with urban economy. Then some bad results may come from it. For example, rural parents don’t have enough money to support their children and invest less, while urban parents have adequate source to equip their children. They can offer some learning devices or find a tutorial class for their children.

2. Rural teachers generally have poor basic teaching skills. Although our country attaches great importance to the development of rural education and encourages teachers to go to villages and towns to start their career, it just can change the partial current situation of rural education. In addition, rural teachers rarely have the opportunity to study further so that their level of professional development is limited. What’s worse, there are so few opportunities for rural schools to cooperate and learn from other advanced schools that they cannot receive to the forefront teaching methods in time. At the same time, teachers in urban areas have more opportunities to go out to learn and improve themselves, which improves the overall quality of them to a large extent.

3. Rural students don’t realize the significance of learning English. Due to the lack of good English learning environment, rural students cannot learn English effectively, and they also think that English can be used nowhere but only in the English class. This may lead to the appearance of students’ negative emotions of learning English and thus conflict learning English.

4. Rural students are lacking in confidence. Due to poor their family situation, rural students will suffer inferiority complex, which will affect their performance in school. They will think they lack ability to learn English. If they cannot be successful in English, they are likely to humble themselves, leading to English learning demotivation.

Implications

Several discoveries are made in the current research. Firstly, there are four demotivators influencing junior high school student’s English learning; secondly, rural students are influenced more by four distinctive sub-demotivators than urban students. In terms of these questions, some suggestions are put forward as following:

1. Teachers should strive to improve their professional level in order to be learned and outstanding. Teacher-related factors are the most important factors affecting students’ ELDs. There is no doubt that the changes of teachers will definitely have an effect on students’ English learning. Therefore, teachers ought to enhance their professional level so that they are capable of dealing with relations with students or their parents comfortably; in addition, teachers’ careful preparation not only reflects teachers’ responsibility for their work, but also strengthens the professionalism of the teachers themselves. As a result, they will have a good command of teaching contents and are skilled at presenting language points. Thus, teacher's progress will directly affect student learning enthusiasm.

2. Improving rural teachers’ average teaching level. This includes improving teachers' moral level and teaching level. In general, the level of rural teachers is lower than the urban teachers’. If rural
teachers would like to improve their average level, there are at least three measures which should be taken. On the one hand, teachers themselves should study more teaching and educating theories, read some books about teachers' professional ethics and take an active part in all kinds of moral practices, by which they can improve themselves, influence others and develop their good moral image. On the other hand, schools must provide teachers with a variety of learning and communication opportunities in order to promote the improvement of teachers’ literacy. In addition, our country should strongly encourage students to build their career in rural areas. In this way, they can bring their advanced teaching theories and good science literacy for rural education. Teachers should adopt a variety of teaching methods and take some effective measures to help students gradually build up their confidence in learning English. As is known to us, students’ confidence represents their psychological state, which, of course, will have a direct effect on students. Therefore, teachers ought to take various measures, such as more questions, more encouragement, and more communication, to help students regain their confidence.

3. The role of the school cannot be underestimated. School is a big environment which has a great impact on the professional development of teachers. Whether school supports the development of teachers will directly determine whether teachers have access to advanced teaching ideas and teaching methods. If the school supports them, they will get a lot of opportunities to communicate with colleagues from other schools and learn from experts. As a consequence, the school plays an important role in teachers’ development.

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References


