

## Internal vs External Demotivating Factors in a Foreign Language Learning: An Analysis of the Past Studies

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### Abstract

Language learners' demotivation is one of the key reasons for their failure or poor progress in learning a foreign language. The study aimed to find the major internal and external demotivating reasons for learning a foreign language. Findings of the 44 published studies in the past years were analyzed. The results show that both internal and external factors play an important role in demotivating language learners. However, external factors related to the language teachers have been reported as more demotivating than the internal ones. Along with the teaching methodology and style of the teachers, the material used for teaching the language, facilities of the institution offering the course are the second and third largest external demotivating factors respectively. Among the internal factors, the psychological issues of the learners have been reported as the most demotivating ones. Findings of the study suggest that demotivation of the students may be avoided if language teachers employ the latest teaching techniques keeping the demands of its practical application. The psychological issues may be overcome by encouraging language learners and giving them maximum opportunities to explore their learning capabilities.

**Keywords:** Demotivation; Internal; External; Factors; Capabilities

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### Introduction

Demotivation is the "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 143). It is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon

that hinders (Al-Khairy, 2013) and influences the learning process (Falout & Falout, 2004; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013; Krishna & Pathan, 2013; Dörnyei, 2014) resulting in an unsuccessful proficiency (Hu, 2011) or the failure of language learning (Vidak & Sindik 2018). Demotivation can affect the behavior and attitude of the

learner negatively as well (Falout, Elwood & Hood, 2009).

The elements which cause discouragement of students in learning a foreign language or exterminate their willingness to learn the language (Dörnyei, 2001) are known as demotivation factors. Demotivation factors are broadly divided into two groups, i.e., internal factors and external factors. The factors related to the students, e.g. lack of confidence or negative attitudes of students about the language, etc. are called internal or intrinsic factors (Sahragard, Rahman; Alimorad 2013; Al-Khairi, 2013) and the factors related to the teachers and learning environment, e.g. teaching methodology, classroom environment and syllabus, etc. are called external or extrinsic factors (Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Al-Khairi, 2013). Demotivation factors are not constant and vary from context to context (Dörnyei, 2001; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kim, 2015) and learner to learner (Khouya, 2018).

In the past couple of decades, researchers from Finland, France, South Korea, Japan, Pakistan, Iran, KSA, Vietnam, Table 1

Selected Articles, the year and country of their publication

Sr. No	Researcher	Year of Publication	Country
1	Gorham & Cristophel	1992	US
2	Chamber	1993	UK
3	Ushioda	1998	Ireland
4	Oxford	1998	US
5	Djigunovic	1998	Russia
6	Dörnyei	2001	UK
7	Chang & Cho	2003	Taiwan
8	Muhonen	2004	Finland
9	Tsuchiya	2004	Japan

Croatia, etc., have investigated, identified and reported various internal and external demotivation factors involved in the English language learning process (Akay, 2017). Though demotivation factors vary from culture to culture and context to context (Dörnyei, 2001; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kim, 2015) yet some of them may be identified as universal ones. The objective of the study is to identify and analyze the factors reported by these studies which contribute the most in demotivating foreign language learners.

### Research Methodology

As mentioned above, during a previous couple of decades many researchers have investigated the factors that demotivate foreign language learners. The objective of the study was to analyze the findings of the previous researches to identify the key factors that demotivate the learners in learning the target language. The sample for the quantitative study consists of a secondary data comprising the 44 research articles of published in the previous years in different countries. The detail of the studies is given in Table 1.

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<b>10</b>	Falout & Maruyama	2004	Japan
<b>11</b>	Falout & Falout	2004	Japan
<b>12</b>	Arai	2004	Japan
<b>13</b>	Hasegawa	2004	Japan
<b>14</b>	Keblawi	2006	US
<b>15</b>	Trang & Baldauf	2007	Vietnam
<b>16</b>	Hamada & Kito	2008	Japan
<b>17</b>	Kim	2009	S. Korea
<b>18</b>	Kikuchi	2009	Japan
<b>19</b>	Sakai & Kikuchi	2009	Japan
<b>20</b>	Haque	2009	Bangladesh
<b>21</b>	Hirvonen	2010	Finland
<b>22</b>	Hamada	2011	Japan
<b>23</b>	Ahmad, et al	2011	Pakistan
<b>24</b>	Khan	2011	KSA
<b>25</b>	Pinzón	2011	Spain
<b>26</b>	Bekleyen	2011	Turkey
<b>27</b>	Jung	2011	S Korea
<b>28</b>	Meshkat & Hassani	2012	Iran
<b>29</b>	Al-Khairi	2013	KSA
<b>30</b>	Sahragard & Alimorad	2013	Iran
<b>31</b>	Yadav & BaniAta	2013	KSA
<b>32</b>	Ali & Pathan	2017	Pakistan
<b>33</b>	Tanaka	2017	Japan
<b>34</b>	Quadir	2017	Bangladesh
<b>35</b>	Akay	2017	Turkey
<b>36</b>	Çankaya	2018	Turkey
<b>37</b>	Zhang & Ding	2018	China
<b>38</b>	Haryanto, at el	2018	Indonesia
<b>38</b>	Vidak & Sindik	2018	Croatia
<b>39</b>	Khouya	2018	S Korea
<b>40</b>	Adara, et al	2019	Indonesia
<b>41</b>	Clare, et al	2019	US
<b>42</b>	Abaunza, et al	2020	Colombia
<b>43</b>	Vakilifard, et al	2020	Iran
<b>44</b>	Liu, et al	2020	China

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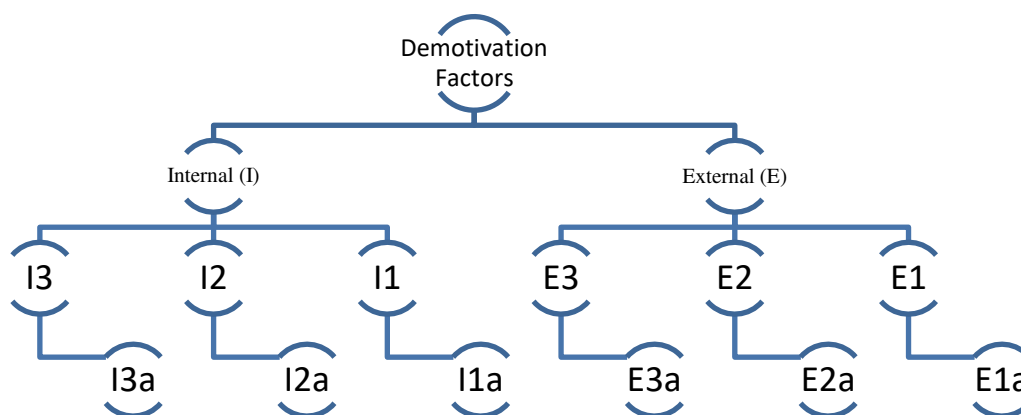
The study involves classifying the demotivating factors reported by the

researches into different categories and identify the key factors that demotivate the

learners/students in learning the foreign language. First, the demotivational factors reported by the studies were enlisted. Secondly, the internal and external factors

were sorted out. Thirdly, the factors were classified in further subcategories using the procedure given in figure 1.

Figure 1  
Internal and External Demotivation Factors



### External (E) Demotivational Factors

This part involves the identification and analysis of the factors related to the teacher, teaching material, learning environment, etc. The E1, E2 and E3, in figure 1 denote the different internal factors where E1a, E2a and E3a represent the further classification of E1, E2 and E3 respectively.

### Internal (I) Demotivational Factors

This part involves the identification and analysis of the factors related to the personality or feelings of the language learners. The I1, I2 and I3, in figure 1, denotes the various internal factors where

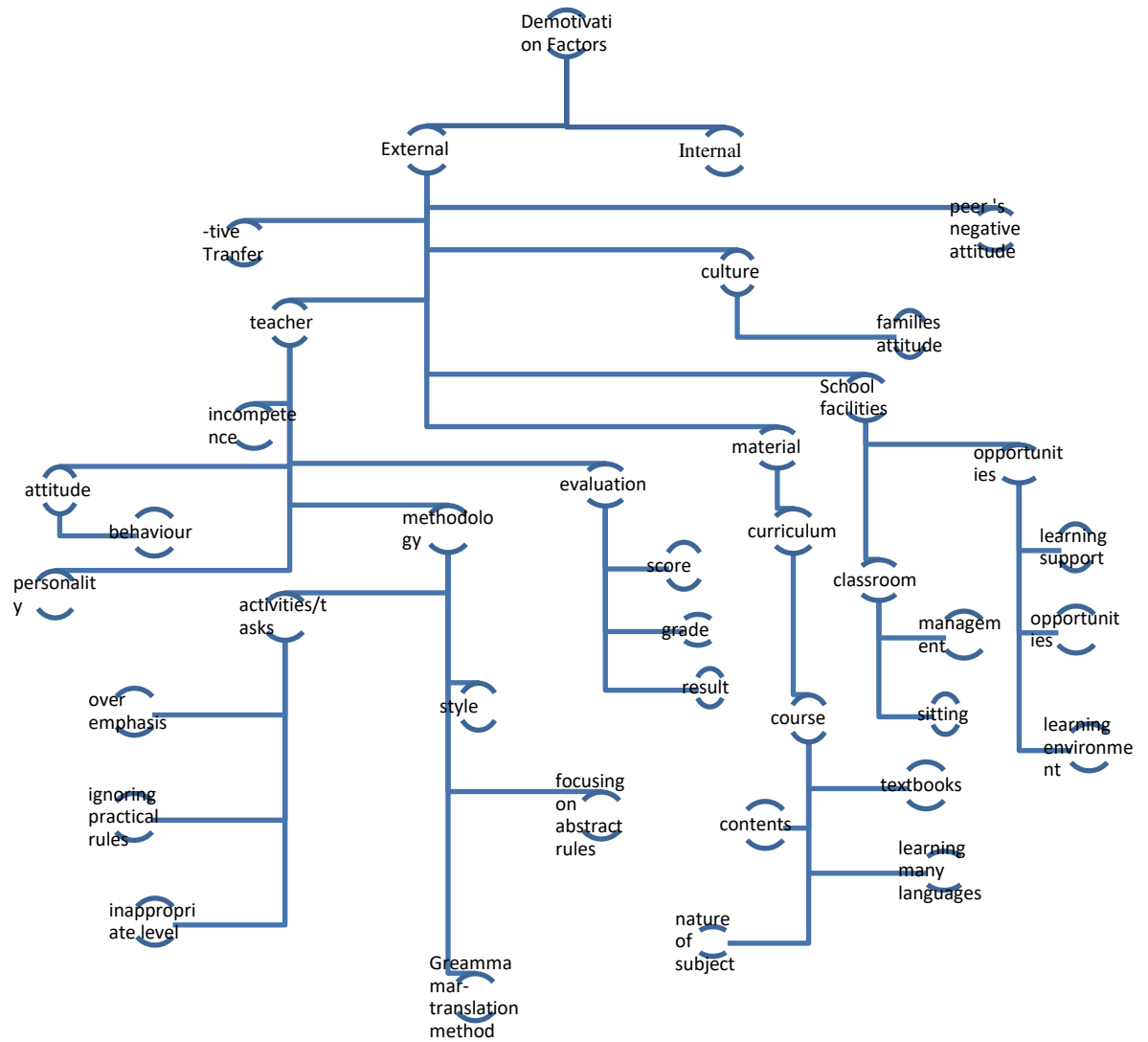
I1a, I2a and I3a represent the further classification of I1, I2 and I3 respectively.

### Results and Discussion

The results of the data depict that demotivation factors in learning a foreign language mentioned by the studies broadly involve both of the categories, i.e., External factors and Internal factors.

### External Demotivation Factors

An analysis of the studies reveals that among the external factors, the factors relating to the teacher are the most demotivation factors in learning a foreign language than that of the student itself.



An analysis of the data (Figure 2) indicates that among the external factors, the factors related to the teacher (Chamber, 1993; Muhonen, 2004; Tsuchiya, 2004; Keblawi, 2006; Hirvonen, 2010; Jung, 2011; Quadir, 2017; Çankaya, 2018; Vidak & Sindik, 2018; Liu, et al, 2020), i.e., his/her teaching methodology, competence, attitude, etc. are the most demotivation factors. The teaching material and institutional facilities are the second and third most demotivation factors respectively. According to the results, peers' negative attitude, culture, language negative transfer, etc. also contribute to demotivating the foreign language learners in learning the language.

### **The Teacher**

The findings of the previous studies show that the teacher contributes the most in demotivating a foreign language learner (Muhonen, 2004; Quadir, 2017). Though the incompetence of the teacher (Hamada & Kito, 2008; Kim, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Vidak & Sindik, 2018; Adara, et al, 2019; Adara, et al, 2019; Abaunza, et al, 2020) and his/her behaviour, attitude (Gorham & Cristophel, 1992; Oxford, 1998; Dörnyei, 2001; Arai, 2004; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Arai, 2004; Hasegawa, 2004; Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Kikuchi, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Pinzón, 2011; Al-Khairi, 2013; Akay, 2017; Clare, et al. 2019; Liu, et al, 2020) and personality (Gorham & Cristophel, 1992; Dörnyei, 2001) contribute considerably in the demotivation yet his/her teaching methodology, techniques or style (Ushioda, 1998; Oxford, 1998; Dörnyei, 2001; Chang and Cho, 2003; Muhonen, 2004; Tsuchiya,

2004; Arai, 2004; Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Hamada & Kito, 2008; Kim, 2009; Khan, 2011; Pinzón, 2011; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Abaunza, et al, 2020) have been reported as the most demotivation factors. The findings of the studies also suggest that inappropriate classroom activities (Ushioda, 1998; Arai, 2004; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Çankaya, 2018; Khouya, 2018) used by the teacher or his/her level of teaching contributes to the demotivation of the learners (Falout & Falout, 2004). Some teachers overemphasize the certain abstract things (Falout & Falout, 2004), some mere focus on the grammar-translation method (Kikuchi, 2009; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012) and ignore the practical usage of the language (Falout & Falout, 2004) which not only disheartens the students but also has a negative effect on the language learners. The studies also reveal that evaluation criteria, grading (Gorham & Cristophel, 1992; Keblawi, 2006; Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Kim, 2009; Jung, 2011) or testing system (Kikuchi, 2009; Hamada, 2010; Khouya, 2018) of some institutions discourages the learners.

### **The Teaching Material**

An analysis of the results of the studies also clears that teaching material used to teach the foreign language (Gorham & Cristophel, 1992; Djigunovic', 1998; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Muhonen; Falout & Falout, 2004; Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Hirvonen, 2010; Vakilifard, et al. 2020) including textbooks (Dörnyei, 2001; Arai, 2004; Keblawi, 2006; Hamada & Kito, 2008; Kikuchi, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi; Haque, 2009; Hirvonen, 2010; Hamada,

2010; Al-Khairi, 2013; Ali & Pathan, 2017; Quadir, 2017, Akay, 2017; Vidak & Sindik, 2018), course contents or compulsory nature of the language (Dörnyei, 2001; Tsuchiya, 2004; Kim, 2009; Hamada, 2010; Jung, 2011; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Ali & Pathan, 2017; Çankaya, 2018; Khouya, 2018; Vaklifard, et al. 2020) has negative effects on the learners. Some of the studies also reveal that teaching more than one language at a time (Hirvonen, 2010) confuses some of the students in yielding the desired results. The studies have also found difficulties in learning the vocabulary of the foreign language (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Falout & Falout, 2004; Kikuchi, 2009; Yadav & BaniAta, 2013; Tanaka, 2017), spellings, articles, prepositions, conjunction, forms of verbs, sentence arrangement, narration and comprehension (Ahmad, et al., 2011) result in the demotivation of the learners.

### **School Facilities**

Findings of the many studies show that inappropriate or unsuitable teaching atmosphere, limited facilities (Dörnyei, 2001; Muhonen, 2004; Tsuchiya, 2004; Arai, 2004; Hamada & Kito, 2008; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Hirvonen, 2010; Khan, 2011; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Quadir, 2017; Akay, 2017; Haryanto, et al, 2018; Khouya, 2018; Adara, et al, 2019; Abaunza, et al, 2020; Vaklifard, et al. 2020; Liu, et al, 2020) demotivate the foreign language learners. Limited opportunities, lack of learning support and classroom management (Chang & Cho, 2003; Arai, 2004; Haque, 2009; Bekleyen, 2011; Çankaya, 2018) have also been

reported with the negative effects on the learners.

### **Peer Pressure**

The results of the studies also indicate that the peers' negative attitude (Dörnyei, 2001; Tsuchiya, 2004; Keblawi, 2006; Al-Khairi, 2013; Quadir, 2017) towards their fellows on their poor performance, or their good performance (Pinzón, 2011; Tanaka, 2017; Haryanto, et al, 2018) also pressurize the learners and cause demotivation in learning the target language.

The word "demotivation" among the students presupposes that students who join the foreign language classes have motivation for the language (Hamada & Kito, 2008) but during the classes, some factors have adverse effects on them resulting in their demotivation. The analysis of the findings shows that both external and internal factors play a considerable role in demotivating the language learners, however, the role of the external factors contributes higher than the internal ones. Even among the external factors, mostly the factors related to the teacher including his/her teaching methodology and style, behaviour and attitude with the learners, and his/her competence demotivate the learners. It is worth considering that a teacher who is meant to teach the language to the learners not only fails to do the assigned job but acts otherwise by destroying the motivation already present among the learners. Some students have limited exposure to the language or lack confidence or feel difficulty in learning the structure or vocabulary of the target language. The old, odd or inappropriate methodologies used by



the teachers demotivate them further. Sometimes, the negative and harsh attitude and behaviour of the teachers with the learners discourage them in learning the language. Sometimes, evaluation criteria have negative effects on the learners as well. The above results highlight the needs for an updated teaching methodology, interesting classroom activities, a positive and encouraging attitude of the teacher to enhance the motivation of the foreign language learners.

The findings of the results also expose the limitations of the teaching material and course contents of the foreign language. They reveal that a majority of the students is demotivated because they find the material uninteresting or inappropriate for the level, they are learning the language. An overemphasis on some specific contents, ignoring the practical usage of the language or compulsory nature of the language sometimes discourage the learners as well. Therefore, the material used for teaching the language should be interesting and coping up with the practical demands. The course designed to keep the levels and capabilities of the learners may have a positive effect on the language learners.

Figure 3

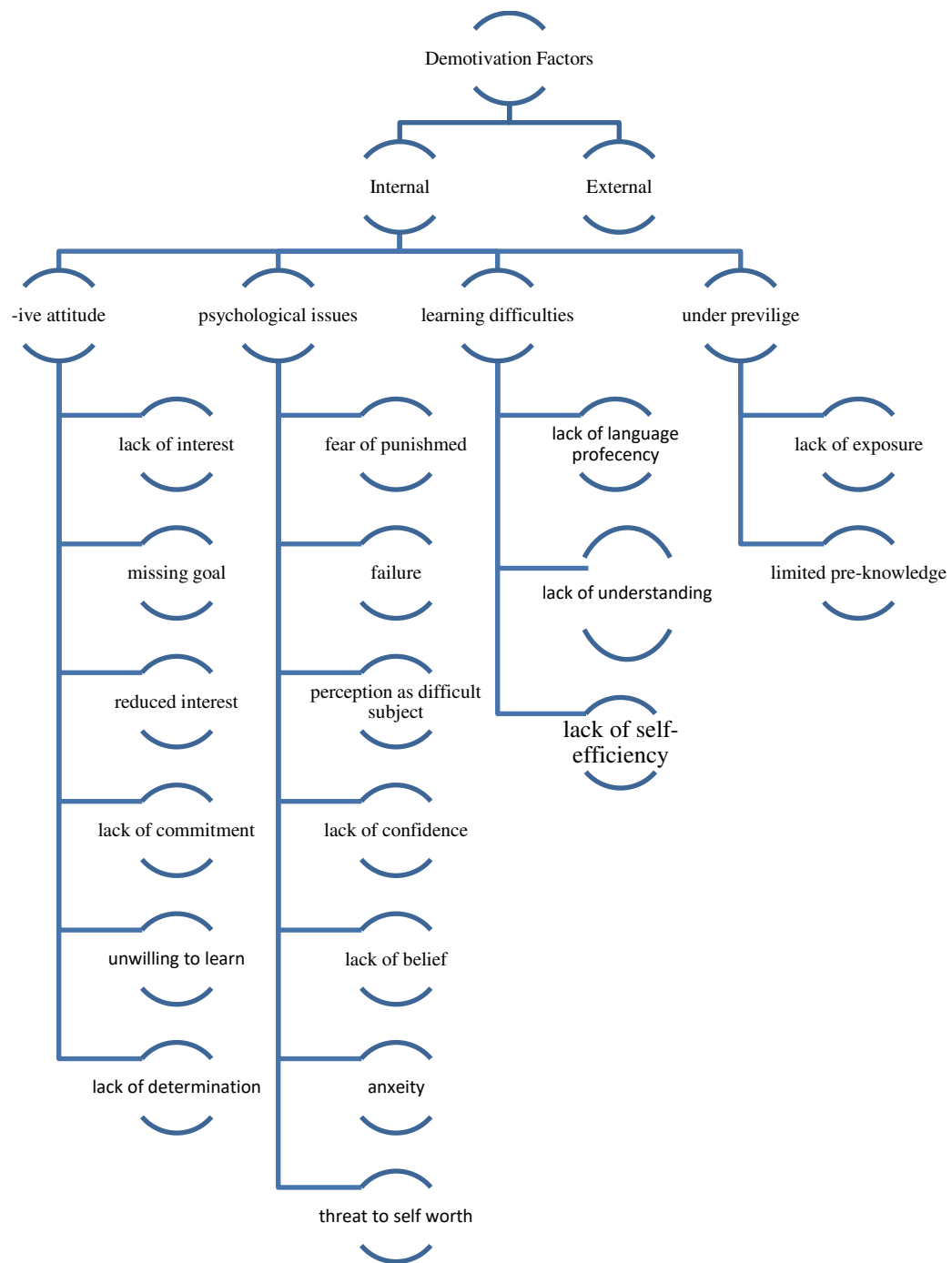
External Demotivation Factors

According to the finding of the previous studies, another highest demotivating factors in learning a foreign language is the institution. The limited facilities, classroom setting or teaching environment affect the motivation of the language learners. It means that the institutions where learners get more opportunities or learning support yield good results, and the institutions that have poor classroom management and lacking facilities affect the motivation negatively.

### **Internal Demotivation Factors**

The internal factors related to the language learners have also been identified by the previous studies. Table 3 shows that psychological issues and negative attitude of the language learners towards foreign language learning affect the learning process negatively. Findings of the studies have also pointed out some other internal demotivation factors, e.g., personal difficulties in learning the language, underprivilege, lack of self-efficiency and lack of determination hinder the progress of the learners.





The internal demotivation factors enlisted by the studies may broadly be grouped under the following categories.

### **Psychological Issues**

An analysis of the findings of the studies shows that student's psychological issues are the greatest internal demotivating factors in foreign language learning. The results reveal that fear of punishment or failure (Chang & Cho, 2003; Vaklifard, et al. 2020), perception of the language as a difficult subject (Kim, 2009; Vidak & Sindik, 2018) or learning of the language as a threat to self-worth, lack of confidence in their learning capabilities (Chamber, 1993; Muhonen, 2004; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Hamada & Kito, 2008; Hamada, 2010; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Liu, et al, 2020) and anxiety (Chang & Cho, 2003) have negative effect on the foreign language learners.

### **Negative Attitude of the learner towards the language**

Results of the studies also reveal that negative attitude of the learner towards the target language (Dörnyei, 2001; Tsuchiya, 2004; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Hirvonen, 2010; Zhang & Ding, 2018; Clare, et al. 2019; Vaklifard, et al. 2020) is one of the most demotivating factors in learning a foreign language. The results show that sometimes students have reduced or lack interest in the target language (Gorham & Cristophel, 1992; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013; Akay, 2017; Abaunza, et al, 2020), they are unable to show commitment to their work (Chang and Cho, 2003), they do not have clear goals for learning the language (Zhang & Ding, 2018) or lack learning motivation (Hirvonen,

2010) which affect the capabilities of the learners negatively.

### **Learning Difficulties**

The studies also indicate that sometimes students find the language difficult to understand (Djigunovic', 1998; Chang & Cho, 2003; Kim, 2009; Çankaya, 2018; Abaunza, et al, 2020) or lack the required proficiency for learning the language (Arai, 2004) that results in their demotivation.

### **Limited exposure to the language**

The results of the studies also show that sometimes students have limited background knowledge or exposure to the target language (Djigunovic', 1998) which causes demotivation in learning the language.

The results of the findings of the studies indicate that among the internal factors, the psychological problems of the learners are the most demotivating ones. They show that if a student lacks confidence in his/her capabilities, feels depressed or is afraid of punishment or failure, he/she may not be able to learn the language properly. Some students have limited exposure to the target language and initially feel difficulty in learning the vocabulary, structure or grammar of the language. This difficulty may result in a perception of the language as a difficult one and ultimately demotivates the learners. At other time, students want to learn a language but lack compassion for learning the language. They either fail to show commitment to the assigned tasks or do not have definite goals for learning the language that result in their progress negatively. The internal factors may be overcome by encouraging the learner, adopting a positive attitude by the teaching or realizing the

learner the importance of the language (Hirvonen, 2010).

### Miscellaneous Factors

An analysis of the findings of the studies shows that they have also reported miscellaneous factors, e.g., negative attitude of the family towards the language (Quadir, 2017), the culture of the language learner (Al-Khairy, 2013), negative transfer of the language, attitude of the community (Dörnyei, 2001) social status of the learner, improper guidance, family pressure (Khan, 2011) and teacher-student relationship (Oxford, 1998; Chang & Cho, 2003) may also turn as the demotivation factors.

### Conclusion

The study aimed to find the most common external and internal demotivation factors in learning foreign language as reported by the previous studies. The findings indicate that both external and internal factors play an important role in demotivating the learners. Among the external factors, the teacher and his/her related factors contribute greater than others. According to the findings, teaching material and school facilities are the second and third most demotivating factors respectively. As for internal demotivation factors are concerned, psychological issues of the learners create a considerable hindrance in learning the language. The other reported internal factors are the learner negative attitude towards the language and his/her lack of confidence in his/her learning capabilities. Keeping the findings in view, it is recommended that the language teachers should update themselves with the latest language teaching methodologies. They should devise classroom activities keeping the level of the students. The institutions

may enhance the motivation of the learners by providing them with opportunities and proper learning support. The teaching material should be interesting and coping up with the demands of practical use. The internal demotivation factors may be addressed by encouraging language learners and realizing importance of the language.

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