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Probing the role of demotivation in avoidance goal orientation among EFL learners at private language institutes

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Abstract

The present study delved into English as foreign language (EFL) learners' de-motivation by investigating its role in students' avoidance goal orientation. To do so, the Persian version of the 'de-motivation scale' translated and validated by Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (forthc.) and the Persian version of Achievement Goal Orientation Inventory translated and validated by Rezaee and Kareshki (2012) were used. The former measures six constructs: teachers, characteristics of classes, experiences of failure, class environment, class materials, and lack of interest. The latter measures three dimensions of students' goal orientations: mastery-approach, performance- approach, and performance-avoidance. The findings of the study yielded via correlation revealed that all six demotivators positively and significantly predicted students' avoidance goal orientation with teachers and experiences of failure having the highest impact. The lowest correlation was detected between characteristics of classes and avoidance goal orientation. The results of regression analysis indicated that about 14 percent of variability in students' avoidance goal-orientation can be accounted for by demotivators.

Keywords: de-motivation; avoidance goal orientation; EFL learners; language institutes

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1. Introduction

Learners have different goals toward learning a field of study. Adopting a certain type of goal influences learners' performance. The focus of 'achievement goal theory' is on students' perceptions of educational goals. Ames (1992), Dweck and Leggett (1988) considered a two factor model of achievement goals including two goal orientations, namely, mastery and performance goals. Learners who adopt mastery goals focus on developing their competence or mastering a task. While, those adopting performance goals are concerned with demonstrating their competence relative to others. Dweck (1988) considered performance goals in the light of either trying to approach favorable judgments and demonstrating competence compared to others versus trying to avoid unfavorable judgments and demonstrating incompetence compared to others. Elliot (1999) has also conceptualized performance goals in terms of performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals. So, the three factor model of achievement goals including mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals was formed. According to Elliot and McGregor (2001), performance-approach goals were linked to effort, persistence, competitiveness, and high grades, while performance-avoidance goals were linked to test anxiety, low grades, and low self-efficacy. Elliot and McGregor (2001) added a fourth goal to the achievement goal framework: mastery-avoidance. It is defined as "a focus on avoiding self-referential or task-referential incompetence" (Elliot, 2005, p. 61). According to Elliot (2005), this addition to the achievement goal framework can justify by perceiving achievement goals as a function of two perspectives which involves an individual's definition of competence and valence towards competence. Mastery goal orientations are representative of intrapersonal competence while, performance goals are reflective of an interpersonal competence.

Different factors can influence adopting a certain goal. In this study demotivation as a psychological variable is hypothesized to affect goal orientation. Demotivation is considered as an obstacle in education which does not allow learners to achieve their goals. According to Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) finding the cause of the demotivation leads to understanding theories of motivation (p. 57). As a matter of fact, demotivation is viewed as the negative counterpart of motivation. In the domain of English as a foreign language (EFL), demotivating factors are among the prime elements that diminish learners' motivation to learn. According to Dörnyei (2001a), demotivation can be expressed as "specific external forces that reduce the motivational basis of behavioural intention or an on-going action"(p. 143). The process of learning a foreign language encompasses a host of determinants, such as teachers, learners, classroom environment, textbook, content and materials, lack of interest, failure experience, teaching methods and facilities. Each of these factors may have a negative influence on the learners' degree of motivation and leads to detrimental impact on their achievement.

English as an international language is taught in language institutes, schools, and universities and the problem arises when learners become demotivated to learn English. The aim of the present study is to investigate the role of demotivation in EFL learners' avoidance goal orientation. In spite of many studies investigating the relationship between EFL learners' goal orientation and their motivation, to the best knowledge of the researchers, no study has probed the possible association between students' avoidance goal orientation and the negative counterpart of motivation- demotivation- within a single framework.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Review of the literature on achievement goal orientation

The focus of achievement goal theory is on learners' perceptions of educational goals. As stated earlier, the

most widely-known model of goal orientation holds that there are three types of achievement goal orientations: mastery goals, where students pursue their competence by developing their competence or mastering a task; performance-approach goals, where learners focus on displaying their ability; and performance avoidance goals, where students' main goal is hiding their lack of ability (Elliot, 1999).

Researchers have explored different ways in which goal orientations relate to students, behaviors and attitudes in the classroom (Brophy, 2004; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).Generally, there is a widespread tendency for mastery goals among educationalists. Dweck (2000) mentioned that mastery-oriented learners confront challenges and tolerate difficulties. Researchers have consistently stated that mastery goals are associated with effective and adaptive patterns of learning and achievement (Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Pajares, Britner, & Valiante, 2000). Those learners who adopt Mastery-goals are intrinsically motivated and use elaboration strategies, so they have a better performance (Elliot & Dweck, 1988). While, performance-avoidance orientation tends to have a negative effect on reaching optimal motivation and learning and is associated with maladaptive learning patterns. Performance-oriented learners tend to remain safe and restrained in the face of difficulties (Dweck, 2000). It is also contended that performance-oriented learners have an extrinsic motivation and adopt superficial learning approach (Elliot & Dweck, 1988). Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996), on the other hand, stated that the performance-approach orientation has a positive influence on reaching optimal motivation and learning. Wolters and Pintrich (1996) also mentioned that students adopting a performance-approach goal showed adaptive learning patterns including deep cognitive and regulatory strategies. Nichols (1990) suggested that learners who believe that ability is defined by attempts tend to adopt mastery goals, while those who believe that ability is determined by normative comparison tend to adopt performance goals.

The relationship between goal-orientation and cognitive and metacognitive strategies was examined by Pintrich and DeGroot (1990). They found that the learners who adopt mastery goal use more cognitive and metacognitive strategies than those who focus on proving their abilities to others or avoiding the perception of incompetence. Similarly, Kharazi, Ezhehei, Ghazi Tabatabaei, and Kareshki (2008), in a study on 685 third grade high school students in Tehran, mentioned the existence of mutual significant correlations between achievement goals, self-efficacy and metacognitive strategies components. Reobken (2007) demonstrated that how different goal orientations effects on students' satisfaction and academic engagement. The results revealed that learners who adopt mastery and performance goals were more satisfied with their academic experience, had a higher degree of academic engagement and achieved better grades in comparison with students with a mastery orientation alone or performance avoidance orientation.

Church, Elliot, and Gable (2001) found that mastery goals were linked to the presence of engagement and the absence of harsh evaluation, Moreover, it has been revealed that learners' perceptions of goals being endorsed and promoted by a school may substantially affects their goal orientations across achievement situations (Maehr & Anderman; 1993, Maehr & Midgley, 1991).

In the realm of EFL education, researchers have recently paid attention to the significant role of goal orientation in explaining learning outcomes and practices. For example, Zafarmand, Ghanizadeh, and Akbari (2014) examined the interplay between EFL learners' goal orientation, metacognitive awareness and self-efficacy in a single framework. The results of SEM indicated that mastery goal positively predicted metacognitive awareness. It was also found that mastery goal had a significant role in self-efficacy. In another study, Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2015) hypothesized a dynamic nexus between perceptions of classroom activities and their goal orientations. The results confirmed this hypothesis. It was demonstrated that perception of interest was highly associated with mastery goal; while, the lowest correlation was observed between avoidance goal and joy.

2.2 Review of the literature on demotivation

According to Dornyei (2001b), demotivation is defined as a decline in the level of motivation. Vallerand and

Ratelle (2002) mentioned that demotivation commences from an external locus and before it turns into an internalized process, there has been a demotivating trigger. So motivation must exist before there can be a subsequent diminish. Demotivated learners feel lack of competence or control over their external environments, and this feeling of helplessness triggered by the lack of contingency between learners' behaviors and their outcomes. Ryan and Deci (2002) mentioned that these learners go through the motions with no sense of intending to do what they are doing until they quit the activity. It should be mentioned that amotivation is different from demotivation in some respects. Amotivation was first introduced by Deci and Ryan (as cited in Muhonen, 2004). It refers to "the relative absence of motivation that is not caused by a lack of initial interest but rather by the individuals feelings if incompetence and helplessness when faced with the activity" (p. 15). They continued that "amotivating events are events that occur within the person that signify his or her inability to master some situations or events" (p. 15). Many reasons can lead to amotivation such as; learners' perceptions toward their lack of abilities, students' perceptions toward not using effective strategies, learners' perceptions regarding the effort to reach the outcome which may be excessive, and students' feelings of helplessness in accomplishing a task.

Learning de-motivators are the factors which diminish learners' energy and stimulation for learning (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997). Dornyei (2001a) considered the following factors as de-motivators:

- Teachers' personalities, commitments, competence, teaching methods.
- Inadequate school facilities (large class sizes, unsuitable level of classes or frequent change of teachers).
- Reduced self-confidence due to failure experience or lack of success.
- Negative attitude toward the foreign language studied.
- Compulsory nature of the foreign language study.
- Interference of another foreign language that pupils are studying.
- Negative attitude toward the community of the foreign language spoken.
- Attitudes of group members.
- Course books used in class.

Based on different studies on motivation, Sakai and Kikuchi (2008) categorized demotivating factors in to the following six groups:

- Teachers: Teachers' attitude, teaching competence, language proficiency, personality, and teaching style
- Characteristics of classes: Course contents and pace, focus on difficult grammar or vocabulary, monotonous and boring lessons, a focus on university entrance exams and the memorization of the language
- Experiences of failure: Disappointment due to test scores, lack of acceptance by teachers and others, and feeling unable to memorize vocabulary and idioms
- Class environment: Attitude of classmates, compulsory nature of English study, friends' attitudes, inactive classes, inappropriate level of the lessons, and inadequate use of school facilities such as not using audio–visual materials
- Class materials: Not suitable or uninteresting materials (e.g., too many reference books and/or handouts)
- Lack of interest: Sense that English used at schools is not practical and not necessary. Little admiration toward English speaking people.

Recently, demotivators and their detrimental effects on language learning have attracted the attention of EFL researchers. Kaivanpanah and Ghasemi (2011) found the main sources of de-motivation in EFL learning and analyzed learners' gender and educational level with respect to de-motivating factors. Data was collected by a questionnaire comprising 32 items which were filled by 327 participants. Based on factor analysis, five elements emerged as demotivating factors: (1) Learning contents, materials, and facilities, (2) Attitude towards English speaking community, (3) The teacher, (4) Experience of failure, and (5) Attitude towards second language learning. According to findings the 'learning contents, materials, and facilities' was the main source of

de-motivation and female learners were more de-motivated than male. Findings also revealed that 'attitude towards English speaking community' was the major source of de-motivation for university students than junior high school and high school students. Another study was done by Alavinia and Sehat (2012) explored Iranian EFL learners de-motivating factors. The researchers employed a battery of questionnaires developed by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009), Warrington (2005), and Muhonen (2004). The second questionnaire included an open-ended question about what elements contribute to students' de-motivation and was filled by teachers. The results revealed that there was no significant difference among the classes except for the factors related to the teachers' behavior and personality and also learner's and learner's experience of failure. The findings also demonstrated that both internal and external factors might demotivate learners.

Moreover, Molavi and Biria (2013) attempted to investigate and compare the performance and achievement of 50 motivated and de-motivated Iranian seminary students in EFL learning. Three questionnaires and tests were utilized for collecting data. At the first step, 50 students were selected by the use of Oxford Placement Test (OPT) in order to choose intermediate homogenous students. The next step was the application of Gardner's Attitude/ Motivated Test Battery (AMTB) to choose motivated and de-motivated learners. In the final step, Interchange Objective Placement Test (IOPT) was conducted on learners to check students' English Proficiency. The finding demonstrated that de-motivation influenced EFL learning certainly and learners with high score in AMTB had high score in proficiency test as well.

Hosseini and Jafari (2014) explored 604 Iranian secondary school students' de-motivation including 318 male and 286 female learners. A de-motivation questionnaire and some questions about learners' experiences on their motivation to learn English was utilized. The findings reveals three factors as demotivating1) Insufficient school facilities, 2) Inappropriate teaching materials and contents, and 3) lack of intrinsic motivation. The last item was considered as the main source of de-motivation. The results also indicated that inappropriate teaching materials and contexts was the major de-motivating factor for more and less motivated learners. While, Chambers (1999) also examined demotivated learners in four schools in Leeds, UK. The researcher distributed a questionnaire among 191 learners and seven teachers. Results demonstrated the following features for a demotivated learner: 1) lack of interest, motivation and no concentration on learning process, 2) lack of self-confidence and eagerness in doing home works, 3) distracting other students in class.

Learners considered teachers as main source of de-motivation due to several reasons 1) using traditional teaching method, 2) presenting insufficient description on lesson, 3) not using up-to-date equipment. Bednarova (2011) explored the negative effect of de-motivational factors on learners' motivation in learning English. The study was an attempt to find the source of de-motivation from learners' point of view. The qualitative method was utilized for gathering data. Based on analysis of 54 learners' essays, the findings revealed that de-motivation was a crucial problem which affected negatively learners' motivation and performance. The results also revealed that external factors were more destructive than internal ones and 'the teachers' were considered as the main de-motivational factor from learners' point of view. Taken together, many studies have been done to identify the most influential demotivators and examine their relationships with other variables, but to the researchers' best knowledge, no documented study up to now has substantiated the effect of demotivators on students' goal-orientation with a specific focus on avoidance goal.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants of the present study comprised 125 EFL learners (61 male, 64 female) selected according to convenience sampling among EFL students learning English in two private language institutes in Mashhad, a city in north east of Iran. After a brief explanation of the purpose of the research, all participants received the Persian versions of the 'de-motivation scale' and Achievement Goal Orientation Inventory. To gather reliable data,

the researchers assured all participants that their views would be confidential by asking them not to write their names. They were just required to indicate demographic information such as, age, gender, average, and proficiency level. The questionnaires were coded numerically.

The profile of the participants is as follows: Their age varied from 12 to 41 years old (M= 25.55, SD= 5.70), with the average between 12 and 20 (M= 16.62, SD= 1.71) and different proficiency levels varied from elementary to advanced. As mentioned before, all 125 students were studying English in private language institutes during November and December of 2014.

3.2 Instruments

De-motivation Questionnaire - To determine EFL students' de-motivation, the Persian version of 'de-motivation scale' designed and validated by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) and translated to Persian by Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (forthcoming) was utilized. The de-motivation questionnaire comprises 35 statements evaluating six constructs of de-motivation: teachers (6 items), characteristics of classes (7 items), class environment (7 items), experiences of failure (5 items), class materials (6 items) and lack of interest (4 items). The scale measures the six constructs via a 5-point Likert-type response format (1: not true, 2: to some extent not true, 3: not either true or untrue, 4: to some extent true, and 5: true). Validity evidence for construct interpretation investigated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were indicative model fit (A GFI of .91 and a RMSEA of .06). Sample items for each subscale are as follows: *Teachers*: 1) Teachers' explanations were not easy to understand, and 2) The teacher ridicules students' mistakes. *Characteristics of classes*: 1) Most of the lessons focus on grammar, and 2) I seldom have chances to communicate in English. *Experiences of failure*: 1) I get lost in how to self-study for English lessons, and 2) I get low scores on test. *Class environment*: 1) Visual materials (such as videos and DVDs) are not used, and 2) The computer is not used. *Class materials*: 1) English passages in the textbook are too long, and 2) Topics of the English passages used in lessons are not interesting. *Lack of interest:* 1) I have lost my goal to be a speaker of English, and 2) I have lost my interest in English.

The Persian version of the questionnaire translated and validated by Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (forthcoming) enjoyed acceptable validity and reliability estimates. The validity indices were computed via CFA and are as follows: the chi-square/df ratio= 2.1, the RMSEA= .062, NFI=.90, GFI= .89 and CFI= .91. The Cronbach's alpha estimate for the six de-motivators was.95 regarding 35 items. The reliability of the subscales ranged from .72 to .87 (teachers= .87, characteristics of classes= .72, class environment= .72, class materials= .82, experiences of failure= .84, and lack of interest= .87). All items had accepted factor loadings and ranged from .42 (item 21 measuring classroom environment) to .86 (item 33 measuring lack of interest).

Achievement Goal Orientation Inventory - Students' avoidance goal orientation was measured via the translated version of Achievement Goal Orientation Inventory designed by Midgley et al. (1998). The inventory consists of three subscales, 6 items for each goal orientation which make a total of 18 items, and it allows responses ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 7 (very true of me). Table 1 demonstrates three possible goal orientations as follows:

Table 1

Subscales of the AGOI along with the Corresponding Descriptions

Subscale	Definition	Alpha	Items
Mastery-approach	Attaining task-based or intrapersonal competence	.85	1-6
Performance-approach	Attaining normative competence	.89	7-12
Performance-avoidance	Avoiding normative incompetence	.74	13-18

The Persian version of the scale– translated and validated by Rezaee and Kareshki (2012)–demonstrated acceptable reliability indices (.81, .89, .83, respectively). The results of confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the validity of the translated version (GFI= .92, AGFI= .88, RMSEA=.07). In the present study, the reliability indices computed via Cronbach's alpha were found to be as follows: mastery=.75, performance=.72, and

avoidance=.71.

4. Results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of EFL student demotivation of language institute learners. Throughout this study, TEA stands for teachers, COC for characteristics of classes, CEN for classroom environment, EOF for experiences of failure, CMA for classroom materials, and LOI for lack of interest.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Student Demotivation

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
TEA	125	6.00	25.00	19.4160	5.30396
COC	125	12.00	33.00	25.1280	3.94105
EOF	125	6.00	22.00	16.6160	4.18288
CEN	125	10.00	31.00	24.3360	4.69547
CMA	125	6.00	27.00	20.2000	4.52591
LOI	125	2.00	10.00	6.2480	1.88224
Valid N (listwise)	125				

As the table indicates, among the six constructs of student demotivation, characteristics of classes receives the highest mean (*M*= 25.12, *SD*= 3.94) followed by classroom environment (*M*= 24.33, *SD*= 4.69). Table 3 shows descriptive statistics of EFL students' goal orientation of institute students.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Student Goal orientation

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mastery	125	15.00	30.00	22.8000	3.13153
Performance	125	11.00	30.00	22.4560	3.34207
Avoidance	125	9.00	27.00	22.4560	3.03077
Valid N (listwise)	125				

According to this table, all the three dimensions of student goal orientation receive almost equal means. Mastery-approach (*M*= 22.80, *SD*= 3.13), performance-approach (*M*= 22.45, *SD*= 3.34), and performance-avoidance (*M*= 22.45, *SD*= 3.03). To investigate the relationship between demotivators and students' avoidance goal orientation, multiple correlations were run. The results of Pearson Product Moment correlations are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

The Correlation Coefficients among Demotivators and Avoidance Goal-orientation

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. TEA	1.00						
2. COC	.670**	1.00					
3. EOF	.762**	.627**	1.00				
4. CEN	.710**	.646**	.667**	1.00			
5. CMA	.787**	.645**	.753**	.726**	1.00		
6. LOI	.716**	.579**	.734**..	.637**	.634**	1.00	
7. Avoidance	.381**	.310**	.392**	.377**	.371**	.339**	1.00

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in the Table, all six demotivators have positive significant relationships with avoidance goal orientation. The highest correlation was found between experiences of failure and avoidance goal orientation (r = 0.392, $p < 0.05$) followed by teacher (r=0.381, $p < 0.05$). The lowest correlation was detected between characteristics of classes and avoidance goal orientation (r = 0.310, $p < 0.05$).

To see what percentage of variability in avoidance goal orientation is accounted for by taking the six motivators into account, a regression analysis was conducted. In this analysis, demotivators were considered as the independent variables, the role of which in avoidance goal (dependent variable) was estimated. The following Table is the ANOVA table of regression. The magnitude of *F*-value (F= 4.419) and the amount of the respective *p*-value (p<0.05) indicate the considered model is significant.

Table 5

The ANOVA Table of Regression for Demotivators and Avoidance Goal-orientation

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	208.824	6	34.804	4.415	.000[b]
1	Residual	930.184	118	7.883		
	Total	1139.008	124			

Note. a. Dependent Variable: Avoidance. b. Predictors: (Constant), LOI, COC, CMA, CEN, EOF, TEA

Table 6 revealed that the model containing the six demotivators can predict 14 per cent of avoidance goal orientation. The R value is 0.428, which indicates the correlation coefficient between demotivators and avoidance goal. The square is 0.142, and this indicates that about 14 per cent of the variation in avoidance goal orientation can be explained by taking demotivators into account.

Table 6

R2 Table for Demotivators as Predictors of Avoidance Goal

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.428[a]	.183	.142	2.80765

Note. a. Predictors: (Constant), LOI, COC, CMA, CEN, EOF, TEA

5. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the role of learners' demotivation in their avoidance-goal orientation. In this study, the focus of researchers was mainly on those learners learning English in private language institutes. Actually, there are different channels in Iran for learning a new language such as, institutes, schools and universities. It seems that among the students who learn English in such contexts learners who study in institutes are more instrumentally and integratively motivated. They have versatile inspirations to attend classes such as: enjoying learning English, enhancing English knowledge, living abroad, finding a related job, comprehending English movies, magazines, newspapers, or scientific texts, and having financial purposes. By the same token, there is a higher likelihood for these learners to experience demotivation than university and school counterparts during the learning process. This in turn would influence their choice of goal and their achievement, all of which might lead to negative consequences like withdrawal of the process of learning. Results of this study demonstrated that those learners who are demotivated have a tendency toward avoidance goal which aims at hiding their lack of ability.

In learning process, there are different factors which can diminish learners' energy and stimulation for learning which are known as de-motivators. Sakai and Kikuchi (2008) considered the following six groups as de-motivators in learners: 1) Teachers' attitudes, teaching competence, language proficiency, personality, and teaching style, 2) Features of the classroom, content of the course, pace of presentation and focus on each lesson, difficult grammar or vocabulary, monotonous and boring lessons, a focus on university entrance exams and the memorization of the language, 3) Experiences of failure: disappointment due to test scores, lack of acceptance by teachers and others, and feeling unable to memorize vocabulary and idioms, 4) Attitudes of classmates, compulsory nature of English study, friends' attitudes, inactive classes, inappropriate level of the lessons, and inadequate use of school facilities such as not using audio–visual materials, 5) Uninteresting materials (e.g., too many reference books and/or handouts), 6) Lack of interest: feeling that English used at schools is not practical and not necessary, and little admiration toward English speaking people.

According to results of this study, among different de-motivators, experiences of failure– an internal demotivator– was found to have the highest impact on the adaptation of avoidance goal. The findings of the present study can be justified in the light of previous research corroborating the association of demotivation and avoidance-goal. For example, Gorham and Christophel (1992) as well as Gorham and Millette (1997) found that demotivation can diminish learners' energy and stimulation for learning. So these demotivated learners have tendency toward avoidance goals. Pajares (2003) as well as Wolters and Pintrich (1996) reported a positive relationship between anxiety and negative attitudes which are the features of demotivated learners and avoidance goals. According to Dweck and Leggett (1998), learners with lower self- confidence, as the features of demotivated learners, adopts avoidance goals. Molavi and Biria (2013) investigated the significant difference between the achievement of motivated and de-motivated Iranian seminary students in EFL learning. The finding revealed that de-motivation influenced EFL learning and learners' achievement which in turn impacted on learners goals as well. It was noted that motivated learners had higher score in proficiency test in comparison with demotivated learners.

In conclusion, the present study revealed the effect of demotivation on avoidance-goal. Learner may become demotivated due to different factors, like course books, teachers, class room environment, learners, material and content, lack of interest, failure experience, teaching methods and facilities. Demotivators in turn affect on types of the goals learners adopt for learning. Those learners who are demotivated tend to adopt avoidance-goal. So it is beneficial to identify and diminish demotivating factors to foster enthusiasm in learners and guide them toward mastery goals.

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