Analysis on the Differences in EFL Learners’ Demotivating Factors After COVID 19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The change in the learning environment as what happen ed in the aftermath of COVID 19 pandemic can lead to learners’ demotivation. The present study aims to analyze how COVID 19 pandemic can affect the differences in demotivation factors of a group of EFL learners. Therefore, a set of questionnaires were distributed before and during COVID19 pandemic. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights on the matter. The results suggest significant differences in demotivational factors that affect the respondents before and after COVID19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, inadequate school facilities were the most demotivating factor. After the pandemic, test scores become the most demotivating factor among the respondents. However, teachers’ related factors and learning materials still relatively affect the respondents after the pandemic. Besides, online learning was found to be one of the demotivating factors among the respondents as they feel deprived from real life inter-action and burdened with lack of stable internet connection and suitable gadgets for online learning. The results suggest that changing the learning environment can affect learners’ demotivation and motivation. Thus, it seems imperative for the teachers to be able to adapt their approach and materials to suit changing conditions especially during the pandemic.

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emotivation is a specific concept in EFL learning called amotivation. Demotivation can be defined as forces outside of learners which can diminish the motivation for learners’ intention or action (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). They insisted that demotivation is not the absence of motivation, one which was defined by Deci & Ryan (1985) as amotivation. In this regard, demotivation and amotivation are two different concepts. Whereas amotivation can be regarded as the relative absence of motivation due to the learner’s feeling of incompetence and helplessness with language learning activities, demotivation is the diminution of resultant forces by external factors such as incompetent teachers. Furthermore, Dörnyei & Ushioda (2013) maintain that while demotivation is specifically caused by external causes, a motivation is caused by unrealistic outcome expectations. The above points explain the definition of demotivation.

Investigating demotivation and factors which cause it is important because it will provide information on how to overcome demotivation among learners. Although it can affect EFL learners significantly, there is a lack of research toward demotivation because it is considered as a relatively new field in EFL learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Oxford, 1998). While motivation influences learners positively (Ng & Ng, 2015), demotivation can affect learners’ attitudes and behavior negatively (Falout, Elwood & Hood, 2009). In addition, demotivated learners are less likely to achieve their learning goals than motivated ones (Vibulphol, 2016). As an opposite of motivation, demotivation is investigated due to its negative effects on language learning. Regarded as the dark side of motivation (Rastegar et al., 2012), it is claimed that each failure in second language learning might be caused by the existence of demotivating factors in learners (Kaivanpa-nah & Ghasemi, 2011). They also argued that language learning can be more difficult and less interesting when students are demotivated. In addition, as argued by Falout et al. (2009), demotivation can influence learners’ attitudes and behaviours as well as teachers’ motivation. Demotivated learners might lose interest in language learning, resulting in them failing to achieve learning outcomes. A study of Evans & Tragant (2020) demonstrates a correlation between demotivation and dropout among adult learners in Barcelona. Their study shows that learners who are demotivated with external factors such as poor teaching practice, lack of speaking practice and staggering differences between their desired level of fluency and their current level of fluency can lead to their discontinuing their language learning.

Furthermore, demotivation is regarded as a complicated problem which can happen to numerous foreign language learners (Chambers, 1993). Several studies suggest that demotivation has a negative impact on the learning outcomes of high school students in compulsory education settings (Hasegawa, 2004; Kikuchi, 2015). Numerous studies on demotivation which have been conducted in the USA (Cristophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham & Mitlette, 1997), Japan (Arai, 2004), Vietnam (Trang & Baldauf, 2007) and China (Zhang, 2007) suggest the negative effects of demotivation language learning. The weight of evidence suggests that demotivation can be regarded as a serious problem for language learners because it can happen to any language learner and results in negative changes in learners’ attitudes, behaviours as well as learning outcomes.

Besides decreasing the efficiency and purpose of the lessons (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; Krishna & Pathan, 2013), demotivated learners can influence vocabulary learning of learners negatively (Tanaka, 2017) and make them lose both instrumental and integrative motivation (Bahrami & Araghi, 2013). Due to the severity of demotivation’s effects toward language learners, researchers attempted to investigate how to motivate students or how language learning processes can be affected (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Oxford, 1998; Sawyer, 2007). Considering the negative impacts of demotivation, the analysis on demotivation might help teachers to deal with
demotivated learners from various educational contexts (Ghadirzadeh et al., 2012) and help to provide better understanding of motivation theories (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). Kikuchi (2009) remarks that investigating demotivational factors is important because it can provide insights on how to learn target language effectively. Furthermore, demotivation can be solved if it is explored in different contexts and at different levels of education (Molavi & Biria, 2013). The above points suggest the importance of investigating demotivation and demotivational factors.

Related to the above idea, analyzing demotivational factors seems imperative to be conducted to help solving demotivation. Several studies have attempted to identify demotivational factors. A study of Ghadirzadeh et al. (2012) analyzed a group of EFL learners in Iran showing the following demotivation factors: lack of perceived individual competence, lack of intrinsic motivation, inappropriate characteristics of teachers’ teaching methods and course contents, inadequate university facilities and focus on difficult grammar. Furthermore, a study of Kim & Kim (2016) suggest that demotivation can also be caused by the changes in the learning environment and goals. Chong et al. (2019) insist that learners can be positively or negatively influenced during the learning process and it is important to closely examine both influences. In addition, no language acquisition or teaching is prone to be affected by influences that learners might bring along with them during the learning process (Candlin & Mercer, 2001).

Thus, it seems important to analyze both factors in order to reduce or solve learners’ demotivation. In regards to the present study, an external factor which can affect the respondents greatly is COVID 19 pandemic. In order to reduce the spread of COVID 19, students have to study at home instead of at formal or informal institutions. Such changes in the learning environment might lead to demotivation. Although several studies such as Adara (2018), Adara et al. (2019), Khusyabaroh et al. (2018) have managed to investigate demotivation among EFL learners in Indonesia, there seems to be lack of studies which compare the differences in demotivation factors before and after the pandemic, especially in the context of EFL learners in Indonesia. By analyzing the differences in demotivation factors before and after the pandemic, it will provide more insights on how the changes in the learning environment can lead to demotivational factors. Therefore, the present study is specifically guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1. Is there any difference in demotivational factors before and after the pandemic?

RQ 2. What are the most salient demotivational factors before and after the pandemic?

METHOD

The Respondents

The respondents were twenty college students of a private university in Bekasi, Indonesia. They major in English language and literature study at one of private universities there. The present study used convenience sampling due to the time and place constraints. Although such sampling has been criticized as biased and lack of generalizability (Jager et al., 2017), convenience sampling has its own advantage because it is more affordable and easier to be executed than purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2015). However, Jager et al. (2017) argue that clearer generalizability on convenience sampling can be easier to be achieved because of homogeneity in convenience sampling. The more homogeneous a population is, the easier it is to produce a representative sample. Thus, although it is not entirely eliminated, the chance of bias in sampling can be reduced by intentionally constraining the sampling frame to minimize the amount of socio demographic heterogeneity (Jager et al., 2017). It can be said that convenience sampling, despite its disadvantages, can be used to create a valid research.

Research Instruments

The present study applies a mixed method to obtain its data by administering a set of questionnaires adapted from Sakai & Kikuchi (2009) and conducting semi structured interviews to four respondents. The first set of
questionnaires was distributed before the pandemic while the second set of questionnaires was distributed after the pandemic spread in Indonesia around April 2020. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted. The questionnaire was found to be reliable with a coefficient of 0.81 and Cronbach Alpha coefficient more than 0.65. The questionnaire consists of thirteen items which measure five variables; Learning Contents and Materials, Teachers’ Competence and Teaching Styles, Inadequate School Facilities, Lack of Intrinsic Motivation and Test Scores. In addition, a four-response Likert-scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) was used in the questionnaire. The results of the quantitative method were measured using SPSS 23 to measure its mean and median.

Besides the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were administered to four respondents. The findings of qualitative methods were analyzed using open coding. The interviews results were transcribed and coded into several categories such as learners’ demotivational factors before and after the pandemic, teachers’ related factors, learning contents and materials, test scores, inadequate school facilities, and learners’ intrinsic motivation.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Results**

The present section aims to discuss the findings of the present study. The table below shows the differences in demotivational factors before and after the pandemic.

| Table 1. The differences in demotivational factors before and after the pandemic |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Before pandemic                 | Mean   | Med    | Std. Dev | After pandemic | Mean   | Med    | Std. Dev |
| Inadequate school facilities   | 2.35   | 2.00   | .988    | Test scores    | 2.50   | 3.00   | 1.000    |
| Learning contents and materials| 2.30   | 2.00   | .856    | Teachers’ competence and teaching styles | 2.10   | 2.00   | .718     |
| Teachers’ competence and teaching styles | 2.30 | 2.00 | .657 | Inadequate school facilities | 2.00 | 2.00 | .973 |
| Test scores                     | 2.25   | 2.00   | 1.209   | Learning contents and materials | 1.95   | 2.00   | .605     |
| Lack of intrinsic motivation    | 1.70   | 2.00   | .657    | Lack of intrinsic motivation | 1.70   | 1.50   | .801     |

The table 1 shows that before the pandemic the most salient demotivating factor is inadequate school facilities (M= 2.35). Next, learning contents and materials and teachers’ competence and teaching styles become the second most salient demotivating factors (M= 2.30). Before the pandemic, test scores (M= 2.25) and lack of intrinsic motivation (M= 1.70) are the least demotivating factors. After the pandemic, the most salient demotivating factors are test scores (M= 2.50) and teachers’ competence and teaching styles (M= 2.10). After the pandemic, inadequate school facilities (M= 2.00) and earning contents and materials (M= 1.95) are not the most salient demotivating factor anymore. On the other hand, lack of intrinsic motivation (M= 1.70) still considered as the least salient demotivating factors.

**Discussion**

The present section will discuss the findings of both quantitative and qualitative methods of the present study. The discussion will be
organized based on the most to the least salient demotivational factors after the pandemic occurred.

Test Scores

After the pandemic, the findings show that getting bad test scores demotivates the participants the most. Covid 19 pandemic forced students to study from home instead of at school. Instead of being demotivated with school facilities like they faced before the pandemic, the respondents seem to be more demotivated with low test scores. One of the respondents commented that test scores demotivated him because he thought teachers showed a positive reaction to his performance in the classroom but his test score did not reflect the expected results. In this regard, the respondent might think that positive reactions from the teachers will be reflected on his test scores. Similar to the results of the present study, numerous studies have reported test scores as the most salient demotivational factors (Jomairi, 2011; Kim, 2012; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). There are several reasons why low test scores can lead to demotivation. Krishnan & Pathan (2013) argue that students might develop inferiority complexes when they get low scores. Although some learners might be more stimulated to learn English after getting low scores, they can also be demotivated because they might think they have failed in learning English (Kim & Kim, 2016). In order to prevent the learners being demotivated with low test scores, it seems important for the teachers to ensure their students that having low scores does not reflect failure in English learning but something that can be corrected along the way. In addition, boosting students’ confidence (Alavinia & Sehat, 2012) and encouraging them to know the values of English learning (Kim & Kim, 2016; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009) might help them from being demotivated by the low test scores. Besides, reducing demotivation can be conducted by providing effective study methods to manage the stress of exams (Song & Kim, 2017). It can be said that providing a supportive learning environment where learners are not afraid of getting low scores and be aware of the value of language learning can reduce the learners’ demotivation.

Teachers’ Competence and Teaching Styles

The findings of present study suggest that after the pandemic the respondents’ level of demotivation toward teachers’ competence and teaching styles arose. In addition, the interviews results suggest teachers’ related factors as the most demotivating factor for the respondents. Mostly, the respondents were demotivated due to their teachers’ teaching styles that they think are not interesting. Following are the comments of one of the respondents regarding teachers’ competence and teaching styles.

“[COVID 19] pandemic shows us that being taught by teachers in the classroom is better than online learning because in the classroom we can directly engage with teachers who guide us. [In addition], the way teachers present materials is important because no matter how interesting the material is, it will look boring [in the hand of incompetent] teachers” Student B.

The above comment shows how important the roles of the teachers are in the learning system. Besides, their engaging presence, and interesting materials need to be delivered in interesting manners to motivate learners to learn English.

Related to the above paragraph, although teachers’ related factors are not mentioned as a variable that demotivates learners the most in some studies (Çankaya, 2018; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), other studies toward demotivation suggest that teachers can be the most salient demotivational factor for some learners (Zhang, 2007; Gorham & Christphel, 1992; Kim, 2011). In regards of Indonesian EFL learners, the study of Adara et al (2019) on the differences of demotivational factors of two groups of EFL learners in Indonesia show that the teachers’ competence and teaching styles as the most demotivational factor as teachers have important parts in the provision of learning content and materials. Similar results are shown by Quadir’s (2017) study.
Furthermore, Kim et al (2018) find that grammar focused lessons, the emphasis on rote learning, and teachers’ inability to deliver lessons in engaging manners are demotivational factors. Besides affecting the current language learning, teachers’ related factors might cause negative learning experience, resulting in demotivation (Lamb, 2011). Several studies show how teachers’ demotivation can lead learners’ demotivation (Aydin, 2012; Karavas, 2010; Chong et al, 2019; Lamb, 2017; Wyatt, 2013). In this sense, both the teachers and the students can be demotivated and affect each other. Agustiani (2016) argues that improving the achievements and motivation of students can be performed by developing teachers’ motivation. It is because highly motivated teachers can increase learners’ motivation (Bernaus, Wilson, & Gardner, 2009; Lamb & Wedell, 2015). The weight of evidence suggests how teachers’ related factors can affect learners’ demotivation.

In addition, it seems important to provide sufficient teachers’ training so that the teachers are aware of demotivation and how to prevent or reduce it. In regards to the findings of present study, Student C commented that although suitable learning facilities such as computers can help, teachers have an important role in developing engaging lessons for their students. In addition, she said that teachers should have their own unique approaches so that the students can be motivated to follow English lessons. Her comment is quite similar to that of Student B who added that it is important for the teachers to know their students to avoid demotivation. In order to develop a better approach, Quadir (2017) proposes providing teachers’ training that can develop competence among the teachers so that the students will not be de-motivated. It can be said that demotivation due to teachers’ related factors can be prevented or reduced if the teachers are competent enough to deal with learners’ demotivation and know how to provide teaching that suits the learners’ needs.

Inadequate School Facilities

The prominence of demotivational factors can change depending on the condition. The results of present study suggest that before the pandemic, inadequate school facilities such as lack of computers for language learning, lack of presentable classrooms, or else demotivate learners the most. Nevertheless, it becomes less demotivating after the pandemic. The interviews results also did not indicate inadequate school facilities as one of the most salient demotivational factors. In regards to other studies, a study of Kikuchi & Sakai (2009) found inadequate school facilities as the least demotivating factor. However, several studies on demotivational factors highlight in-adequate school facilities as the most salient demotivational factor (Dörnyei, 1998; Hassas-khah et al, 2014; Hirvonen, 2011; Kikuchi, 2009). Adara et al (2019) postulate that learners might be less demotivated with school facilities when they feel that their school has provided suitable facilities for language learning. The weight of evidence suggests that the salience of demotivational factors is fluid and can be influenced by external factors that happen to the learners.

In order to reduce demotivation, teachers need to use and be equipped with suitable school facilities that support language learning. Meshkat & Hassani’s (2012) study on demotivating factors of a group of EFL learners in Iran suggests that inadequate use of school facilities in English classes as the most discouraging for students. Adara et al (2019) add that their respondents seem to be specifically demotivated because their teachers did not use ICT (Information and Communication Technology) tools for English learning. On the other hand, the use of ICT tools has been shown as beneficial to improve learners’ motivation (Ayres, 2002; Greenfield, 2003; Young, 2003). Therefore, it seems important for language classrooms to be equipped with suitable tools such as video-projectors and language laboratories to improve learners’ motivation (Jomairi, 2011). In regards to the present study, although in-adequate school facilities cannot be considered as the most salient demotivational factor, providing suitable school facilities that can cater the needs of language learning and motivate students to prevent demotivation seems
imperative in reducing learners’ demotivation.

Learning Contents and Materials

Before the pandemic, learning contents and materials are the second most demotivational factor. Student C also said that uninteresting learning contents and materials demotivate her the most before the pandemic happened. However after the pandemic, she was more demotivated with online learning which makes her less focused. Similarly, most respondents are less demotivated with learning contents and materials. Nevertheless, it does not mean that learning contents and materials are less significant. The findings of several studies also suggest that learning contents and materials as the most demotivational factor (Heidari & Riahiipour, 2012; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). It can be said that learning contents and materials can still be demotivating for some students.

Learning contents and materials can be demotivating if they focus too much on grammar learning and less on developing learners’ English skills. A study of Sakai & Kikuchi (2009) particularly noted the participants’ apprehension toward the grammar translation method that the teachers used. Similarly, a study of Çankaya (2018) shows that the participants seem to be less willing toward grammar-oriented lessons and prefer more communicative activities that include daily conversation, language activities, or else. In regards to the present study, Student B noted that he felt demotivated if English textbooks or teachers focus too much on giving grammar lessons without paying attention to speaking skills. Therefore, it seems important to provide a balanced teaching of four English skills in order to encourage more students to learn a foreign language (Baba Khouya, 2018) and make learning more enjoyable to avoid demotivation (Chambers, 1993). Although it does not negate the importance of grammar teaching, it can be said that providing balanced focus on learners’ English skills can prevent learners’ demotivation.

Teachers should provide learners with interesting learning content and materials to reduce learners’ demotivation. Besides grammar-focused lessons, learners can be demotivated if there is a disconnection between course content and future goals (Evans & Tragrant, 2020). In addition, it is argued that less relevant materials which have no relation with their lives might make students less motivated (Mahdi, 2015). For instance, learners initially wanted to learn a foreign language to communicate with native speakers but when the existing lessons only focus on grammar, students might be demotivated. In this regard, teachers should provide materials that can cater learners’ needs and suit the curriculum. Furthermore, the effectiveness of learning materials could be measured by how good it is in facilitating language learning, helping learners to learn and motivating learners (Núñez Pardo & Téllez, 2009; Tomlinson, 1998). Firstly, teachers can provide authentic materials. In this sense, authentic materials refer to ones that are used by native speakers in their daily life such as newspapers articles, poems, songs, or else (Peacock, 1997). A study of Sari (2016) on learners’ opinions on the use of authentic materials on EFL classrooms reported the participants’ positive reactions toward the use of authentic materials which they regard as motivating and interesting. However, the use of authentic materials still needs to consider learners’ interests, age, needs, language levels and goals (Oguz & Bahar, 2008). Secondly, in addition to the authentic materials, teachers can provide students with materials they develop by themselves. Although teachers’ produced materials may be poor and lack of quality in terms of clarity and durability (Block, 1991; Harmer, 2001), teachers’ produced materials can suit learners’ needs better because teachers know students’ needs and condition (Howard & Major, 2004). It can be said that presenting authentic materials or teachers’ produced materials might improve learners’ motivation.

Lack of Intrinsic Motivation

Contrary to other variables, lack of intrinsic motivation consistently becomes the least demotivating factors. The interview results also do not show intrinsic motivation as the

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most salient demotivational factor. Furthermore, the respondents said that they are more motivated to learn English after the pandemic because they have more time to study and less distracted with other things. Although it cannot be deduced that most respondents have a high level of intrinsic motivation, they seem to be motivated to learn English because they find it interesting or intrinsically motivated. Regarding other studies, although the findings of Adara et al.’s study (2019) suggests lack of intrinsic motivation as one of most salient demotivational factors among the respondents, Meshkat & Hassan (2012) do not consider lack of intrinsic motivation as demotivating. The findings of Sakai & Kikuchi’s (2009) study showed that lack of intrinsic motivation demotivates less motivated students more than motivated students. It can be said that demotivation can be reduced by improving learners’ intrinsic motivation.

Related to the previous point, developing learners’ intrinsic motivation can be conducted in numerous ways. Carreira’s study on motivation of a group of Japanese young EFL learners (2011) suggests that the participants’ level can change over time. Similar conclusion is also found in the study of Adara et al.’s (2019) which suggest that the respondents were more intrinsically motivated when they were taught by competent teachers or motivated by their families and peers. Both studies show that the more enjoyable learning experiences, the more motivated students can be. In addition, Qian (2018) remarks that extrinsic rewards such as passing an exam, having better salary or future can improve learners’ intrinsic motivation. By encouraging students to have long term personal goals that can be reached by being fluent in a target language, teachers can make learners become more intrinsically motivated to learn the target language. It can be said that intrinsic motivation still needs to be nurtured by external factors such as teachers, families and peers. Online Learning

Besides the above variables mentioned in Sakai & Kikuchi’s (2009) questionnaire, the interviews results show online learning as one of demotivational factors. The respondents who are used to being taught in the classroom find online learning demotivating because they are deprived from valuable interaction with teachers and peers. This lack of real life interaction seems to be demotivating for the respondents. In addition, online learning can cause additional problems when students are not equipped with appropriate learning tools such as reliable internet connection, computers or cellular phones. As argued by Kim & Kim (2016), demotivation can be influenced by external factors that happen to learners. Furthermore, the findings of Hassaskhah et al’ (2015) study show that external factors such as institution-related categories (textbook, lack of facilities, school staff treatment and commitment, low quality education, or else) demotivate the participants the most. These factors are sourced from educational, school, social and economic matters. In regards to the present study, the respondents can be demotivated because they are not used to using online learning which seems to deprive learners from real-life communication and can be troubled by various technical issues such as the lack of suitable internet connection or gadgets.

CONCLUSION

As one of the least explored fields in EFL study, demotivation needs to be investigated because it may provide insights to educators and researchers on how to avoid it. The results show that before the pandemic, the most salient demotivational factors are inadequate school facilities, learning contents and materials, teachers’ competence and teaching styles, test scores and lack of intrinsic motivation. On the other hand, after the pandemic took place, the most salient demotivational factors are test scores, teachers’ competence and teaching styles, inadequate school facilities, learning content and materials, and lack of intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the findings of present study suggests online learning as one of the demotivational factors. The respondents who are used to real-life classrooms feel demotivated with online learning which seems to deprive them from real life
communication and can be burdened by various technical problems such as lack of stable internet connection and suitable gadgets. The results suggest that the change in learning environment can affect learners’ demotivational factors. Thus, it seems important for teachers to adapt their approach to suit the change in learning environment.

Despite the efforts to minimize them, the present study is not without limitation. It, however would gain better results if it was equipped with more diverse research instruments such as students’ journals to capture students’ perceptions regarding the learning situation during the pandemic. In addition, the present study would reflect the population better if it has more respondents. Besides, it would gain more insights if it was conducted for a longer period. Nevertheless, the present study can still be considered as a milestone for similar studies. Further studies can investigate the differences in demotivational factors between urban and rural areas. In addition, next study can analyze demotivational factors of students toward online learning.

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