

DEMOTIVATION-TRIGGERING FACTORS IN LEARNING AND USING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE – AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

Elena BONTA ^{a*}

^a “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău, Mărășești 157, 600115, Romania

Abstract

The study concentrates on the multiple factors that make learners face the risks of becoming amotivated, demotivated, experimenting resistance to language learning, resenting and even refusing to learn a foreign language. Our research revealed that both internal/learner-related factors and external demotivating factors may hinder the process of learning a foreign language and this requires awareness and a special attention from the teachers` part, as well as appropriate measures to counteract them. The study used the qualitative analysis of the data provided by narrative accounts. We started from the material gathered during an international project that worked on language autobiographies of (young) adults, more precisely on their reflections upon their own experience with foreign language learning and use. The participants to our study were young teachers of English, who were asked to write their linguistic autobiographies; we assumed that if teachers become aware of the factors that demotivated them during the process of language learning, they could, in their turn, understand their students` demotivating factors and thus, counteract them through their attitude, teaching style and teaching methods, strategies and techniques that they use in the classroom.

Key words: Amotivation; demotivation; language autobiography; motivation; risk

1. Framework of the study

1.1. Motivation, amotivation and demotivation

Learning a foreign language is a complex and difficult process since it involves a number of (internal and external) factors that are responsible for learners` achievement of different levels of

* Corresponding author. Professor, PhD
E-mail address: bonta.elena@ub.ro

proficiency. One of the most important factors (sometimes considered a prerequisite for learning) is motivation, which “provides learners with an aim and direction to follow” (Alizadeh, 2016, p. 11). It involves desire, attempts, attitudes (Gardner, 1985) and effort towards the accomplishment of a definite goal: learning a new language on either an intrinsic or an extrinsic basis (Dörnyei, 1998). There exists a large number of studies dedicated to the topic of motivation in second language (L2) or foreign language learning, taking into account such issues as: types of motivation, role of motivation in language learning, its key factors, motivation variables, ways of boosting motivation or, its dynamic character (as reflected in its temporal variation – Pawlak, 2012, p. 249).

The ten commandments for motivating language learners (Dörnyei&Csizér, 1998:215) center around the teacher`s strategies in the classroom, with particular focus on his being a model for learners, creating a relaxed classroom atmosphere (in which learners are linguistically self-confident, have autonomy in learning and are goal-oriented) and a good rapport with learners, using the proper tasks in an interesting, personalised language class, in which learners get familiar with both the foreign language and the culture of the people whose language they are learning.

Individuals` motivation of learning a foreign language is influenced by both individual and contextual factors. In the process of learning the language, learners may experience what Deci & Ryan (1985) call *amotivation*; this represents the individuals` relative absence of motivation triggered by the feelings of helplessness or incompetence they experience whenever they learn or use the language. *Demotivation* is related to “...specific external forces” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 143) that may cause learners to “reduce or diminish” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 143) or even lose their interest in what they are doing. According to Dörnyei, the difference between amotivation and demotivation consists in the latter`s possibility of transforming into amotivation, once the learner loses completely the interest in doing the respective activity.

Chambers (1993, p. 13) summarized the characteristics of the demotivated learners, as resulted from the analysis of the questionnaires filled in by teachers from four schools:

...“poor concentration; lack of belief in own capabilities; no effort made to learn; <What`s the use>? syndrome; negative or nil response to praise; lethargy; disruptive; distracted; distracts other pupils; throws things; shouts out; produces little or no homework; falls to bring materials to lessons; claims to have lost materials.”

Demotivating factors are of different kinds, with various potential influences on learners and, at the same time, they differ in terms of their short/ long effect. Dörnyei (2001) believes that if

some types of demotivating influences/factors cease to exist, the learner can gain his/her motivation again and demotivation characteristics are reduced or disappear completely. Studies on demotivation in language learning and use have revealed several themes. We are going to mention the ones that involved a large number of participants, in different national contexts. Thus, Dörnyei (1998), after the interviews conducted with 50 Hungarian students, categorized the demotivating factors; the highest frequency was related to teachers (their personality, competence, teaching methods). Other demotivating factors were inadequate school facilities, textbooks, negative attitudes towards the second language or to the community having that language as their mother tongue and students' reduced self-confidence.

Oxford (1998) investigated the learning experience of 200 American high school and university students and identified some "detrimental forces impeding second language acquisition" (Li & Zhou, 2013, p. 800), based on his students' recall essay methodology. By far, the main source proved to be the teacher, in terms of his style, the attitude towards the course material and the relationship established with the students. Trang & Baldauf Jr. (2007) (in a Vietnamese context), asked 100 students to list factors that demotivated them in learning English; they identified 48 demotivating factors, classified into two large groups: internal attributions (student-related factors: students' attitude towards the foreign language and their unhappy experiences all along learning and using the language process) and external attributions (teacher-related, environment-related factors). Meshkat & Hassani (2012) applied the study to 421 Iranian high school students. The demotivating factors that were identified, were learning contents and materials, teacher's competence and teaching styles, inadequate school facilities and lack of intrinsic motivation.

1.2. The case of language autobiographies

Personal narratives/ autobiographies, along with (non)participant observation, in-depth interviews, reflective journals, document analysis, have become powerful research tools in qualitative research (Bonta&Galița, 2011, p. 65). A particular type of autobiographical writing is constituted by language autobiographies (LAs), which are life stories centred on the languages that individuals know; they disclose the way languages have been learned/acquired, used and even abandoned (Pavlenko, 2007); they are self-reflection discursive presentations of the individuals' language practices. Pellegrino (2015:93) considers that "the data collected through these methods consist of the biased, subjective perceptions of the study's participants", offering "the private thoughts, expectations and attitudes of learners" (2015, p. 92).

Literature in the field discloses that reflecting on language class activities may help both learners and their teachers make sense of the language learning process (Bonta, 2015, pp. 119-122). Thus, LAs

a) help learners

- to become aware of their own resources and potential, while reflecting on crucial points within the autobiography which led them to decide in favour/against a certain language variety;
- to reflect on their language repertoires on an affective level;
- to reveal linguistic anxieties;
- to understand how language identities are negotiated;
- to become aware of the influence of learning behaviour on success in language acquisition (Pellegrino, 1998)
- to develop their own reflective abilities and critical thinking about language development factors within a meaningful context (Danielson, 1989)

b) reveal

- the perceived level of success and attributions of success and failure (Tse, 2000)
- the role of the language classroom in language learning; the influence of the social environment in language acquisition (Pellegrino, 1998)
- the steps in the process of language acquisition; the learning progress, with its ups and downs (Koch, 2007)

c) make it possible

- to identify the individual's certain inner resources; to sketch out prospects for further development (Agapova, 2007)

As for the teachers, LAs help them to understand the learners, their thoughts, expectations and attitudes regarding their experiences with languages (Pellegrino, 1998), as they suggest ways for individuals to make sense of the past, while they may set a direction for their future learning (Myahara, 2010, p. 7).

The aim of the study was to offer teachers the opportunity of a critical reflection upon the development of their language learning process and to develop awareness and understanding of themselves as learners of a foreign language, as well as of the role played by other factors in the acquisition, motivation and demotivation in the learning process.

The study addresses the following research questions:

- a) What are the demotivation-triggering factors in the participants' foreign language learning and its use?;
- b) How do they determine the learners' attitude towards these two processes?;
- c) What is the frequency of the demotivating factors?;
- d) How did the participants "voice" the demotivating factors, as well as the feelings associated to them?

2. Research methodology

2.1. Participants

The study was conducted at "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău, Romania. The participants to the present study were 30 English teachers, former students of the Faculty of Letters, who were chosen as the target group in an international project on the topic of language autobiographies.

2.2. Instruments

We analysed the language autobiographies both qualitatively and quantitatively, by means of conceptual categories. Our discussion takes in view the casual and functional relationships established between categories.

2.3. Data collection procedures

During the meeting with the participants to the study, we first introduced the concept of language autobiography (LA) to them, along with its structure, functions and characteristics, as well as with its benefits for both learners and teachers. Then, we encouraged them to write their own LAs. We expected them to mention learning of such languages as English, French or German – that are among the compulsory school subjects frequently offered as options for learners from primary schools up to high schools (and even universities).

During the discussion with the teachers, we advised them to look back to their foreign language learning experiences in school contexts and give accounts of learning stages, their own effort of learning, the teachers' role in the process of language teaching and learning, happy or sad experiences they passed through, helpful or hindering factors in the process of learning, as well as feelings they experienced along this process.

We assumed that if teachers become aware of the factors that demotivated them during the process of language learning (in formal contexts of instruction) they could, in their turn, understand their students` demotivating factors and thus, counteract them through appropriate attitudes, teaching styles, strategies and techniques. After having collected the language autobiographies, we read them carefully, with attention given to the identification of demotivating factors that we coded, taking into consideration a list of factors, thus establishing a manageable base of information. Then we established the number of occurrences/the frequency and percentages for each factor.

3. Results

Analysing the language autobiographies written by the English teachers, we identified, in line with authors in the field of analysis, both internal and external factors that brought their demotivation during the process of learning a foreign language (English and French in all cases). We identified a number of 164 demotivating instances/experiences. Table 1 offers a perspective on the number of instances, corroborated with the main types of demotivating factors (according to the way in which we coded them), as well as the percentage for each category of instance. Discussion is also sprinkled with random samples taken from language autobiographies.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of demotivating instances grouped according to types of demotivating factors

Demotivating instances according to demotivating factors		n	%
Internal factors /learner-related factors	The learner (L)	46	28
Subtotal		46	28
External factors	The teacher (T)	82	50
	The school system (SS)	18	11
	Others (O)	18	11
Subtotal		118	72
TOTAL		164	100

A general look at the above table displays our findings; we identified:

- 1) 164 demotivating instances related to two large categories of factors: internal/learner-related factors (n=46//28%) and external factors (n=118//72%);
- 2) the external factors are related to the teacher (n=82//50%), the school system (n=18//11%) and other factors (n=18//11%);
- 3) one external factor (related to the teacher) accounts for 50% of all instances in which external demotivating factors occurred. This was not a real surprise for our study; the result comes in line with findings in other studies, from different countries - as the literature in the field had already identified the factors related to the teacher as the ones with high(est) ranks (Chambers, 1993; Oxford, 1998; Dörnyei, 1998);
- 4) the other half of instances is a combination of internal (related to the learner – n=46//28%) and external factors (related to the school system and other factors – n= 36//22%). The surprise consisted in the equal frequency (n=18) and percentage (11%) of the school system and other factors occurrences.

3.1. Internal factors (learner-related factors)

The analysis of the learner-related factors revealed the fact that they could be grouped into certain classes (Table 2).

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of categories of internal/learner-related demotivating factors

Factor	Descriptor	n	%
The learner (L)	difficulty in learning and using the language	22	28
	poor self- confidence	7	
	poor self-image an poor self-esteem	5	
	threat of failure	3	
	personal traits: shyness	2	
	“shameful experiences” in class/during the lessons	3	
	frequent low score	3	
	change of plans/activities	1	
	Subtotal	46	

The learners` perceptions of all these factors were accompanied by various feelings including dislike, frustration, nervousness, embarrassment and even fear, which were very clearly and openly stated by participants.

Table 3: Feelings associated with internal demotivating factors

Feeling	Descriptor
fear	to speak the language in class because of poor abilities, poor self-confidence, threat of failure of the teacher
embarrassment	after “shameful” experiences
nervousness	because of poor abilities and personal traits (shyness)
frustration	the individual did not get the same opportunity to use the language in the classroom, as other students did
dislike	of the teacher of the foreign culture of the foreign language

Learning a foreign language is a challenging process for learners of different ages; some find it easy to do that, some find it very difficult. Difficulties vary from one learner to another. Encountering difficulties and not being able to cope with them may bring demotivation from the part of the learner. The first place among the internal demotivating factors, as number of instances (n=22), is occupied by the learners` difficulty of learning and, at the same time, of using the language in class and outside it. Difficulty was obvious in their mentioning:

- a) vocabulary
 - problems with multiple meaning words;
 - English – a language with too many synonyms;
- b) receptive skills
 - troubles with associating a particular sound to particular letters ([ə]; [ʃ]; [dʒ]; [ʒ]; [ð]);
 - problems with discrimination between short and long sounds ([i]/[i:]; [e]/[æ]);
 - problems with decoding oral messages at normal speed;
 - poor reading comprehension;
- c) productive skills
 - problems with pronunciation of particular words;
 - problems in understanding and answering questions;
 - hesitant speech;
 - failure to elaborate answers;

- problems with discrimination between sounds ([i]/[i:]; [e]/[æ]) when pronouncing or writing words;
- d) grammar knowledge
 - too difficult grammar (especially for French)
 - problems with memorization of the large number of irregular verbs (for English);
 - problems with conjugating verbs;
- e) discourse abilities
 - although they know the meaning of words, they cannot build up coherent and correct sentences;
- f) pragmatic abilities
 - difficulties in discrimination among registers.

Participants showed poor self-confidence in their poor or medium-level abilities (n=7) and expressed it openly. Aware of their inability, they experienced different feelings. Thus, they felt worried, nervous, extremely tense or fearful. These feelings were triggered by the perceived threat of failure (n=3) - accompanied by poor marks (n= 3) – or by their being frightened by the fact that they might lose “their face” /image in front of the others (Goffman, 1959); consequently, they felt demotivated.

The most predominant feeling was that of fear; they were fearful of their performance in front of the teacher and of the other peers, as they sensed they could fail or disappoint

My English was not good and I was so nervous.

I did not understand the teacher`s explanations (especially about grammar); it seemed to me too difficult

I couldn't speak French although I understood what the others were saying. I felt embarrassed.

I always found it difficult to speak English to strangers... I could hardly utter any word!

Self-confidence generally helps the learning process and improves learners` performance. Reality shows that learners are not always self-confident. Being not secure in their abilities was associated with poor self-image; this is why their lack of self-confidence triggered a poor view of themselves and consequently, poor self-esteem (n=5), especially when comparing with their peers

I was really ashamed of my accent in French, as I considered it awkward and clumsy

Many of my colleagues spoke English better than me and that made me feel nervous.

They showed awareness of the fact that they could ruin their image in front of the others and even attract some nasty comments from their part

I felt a certain fear of not making mistakes and give my classmates a reason to laugh...and thus refused to speak.

Awareness of their lack of competencies (“combinations of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which facilitate the application of knowledge to real world contexts” - according to Cook et al., 2012) results in less involvement in classroom activities or even an ultimate attitude, such as the one expressed by a participant to the study: “...and thus [I] refused to speak”.

Fear of the teacher is linked with the latter’s authoritarian attitude in the classroom, as it brings certain degrees of coercion. Bledsoe & Baskin (2015) dealt with the problem of fear, mentioning the teachers’ role in helping learners to overcome it by means of well-established strategies, as fear can have an important negative impact on learners at different individual levels:

Fear can cause students to experience adverse responses physiologically (e.g., shortness of breath), cognitively (inability to focus or concentrate, obsessive thinking, replaying in their minds problematic incidents that occurred in previous classes), and emotionally (easily agitated, overcome by excessive nervousness, frustration, and other negative feelings).

The authors also stressed on the fact that manifestations of fear may “result in inappropriate class behaviour, poorly completed or missing assignments, frequent absences, or dropping out of courses at the first sign of trouble.”

One instance reflects another perception: the individual felt frustrated as he did not get the same opportunity to use the language in the classroom, as other students did.

I used to raise up my hand and let him know I would like to answer, but he wouldn’t ask me anything.

Feelings towards the teacher or towards the foreign language are very clearly and directly stated (*I simply did not like the teacher; Speaking French gave me a very strange feeling; it made me feel awkward*), implicitly expressed (*I believe that if I were to try to speak French, I’d choke*)

or, their expression follow explanations or justifications, in the individual's attempt to "sweeten" the impact of his/her words:

I considered it a very beautiful, musical language, both my parents knew it and encouraged me to learn it better, but I did not feel attracted to it.

The participants also expressed the feeling towards the foreign culture: dislike of one or more elements of the particular culture

...speaking French was and still is a bit uneasy. Although I know a lot of words, I express myself with great difficulty. The reason may be the fact that I do not like French movies.

Personal traits, as perceived by participants to the study, add one more demotivating factor: shyness. It is a common trait among learners, which means they lack the necessary comfort, and feel tense, especially when surrounded by other people.

I was a shy girl and I wouldn't have had the courage to try to establish a conversation.

Shyness and nervousness were enhanced by the "shameful" experiences they had in particular situations or by the low score they used to get:

Being shy and nervous, when my turn came, I forgot the poem and became voiceless, making my classmates laugh at me. It took me a long time to overcome this shameful experience.

I felt nervous anytime he asked me a question; I could not utter a word and sensed I might get a poor mark again.

Another demotivating factor, expressed in a direct way, makes the difference from the others. The learner made a free choice: to cease the learning activity – the way he did it before (in an active, developmental way) - and allot more time to other activities that he felt more appropriate for his age:

I didn't learn English anymore, I started being preoccupied by teenage activities and I thought back then that what I have learned was really enough.

3.2. External factors

There exists a close connection among the above-enumerated subcategories within the category of internal factors (Table 2) and the external ones; the latter group determine or complement the learner-related factors. The analysis of language autobiographies revealed a large number of external demotivating factors, falling into three groups: *the teacher* (Table 4), *the school system* (Table 5) and *others* (Table 6). The following three tables illustrate, one at a time, their frequency and percentage.

Table 4: Frequency and percentage of external demotivating factors: the teacher

Factor	Descriptor 1	Descriptor 2	n	%
The teacher (T)	attitude	too authoritarian	3	4.27
		lack of enthusiasm for teaching	3	
		conceited attitude	1	
		Subtotal	7	
	teaching style	lack of autonomy offered to students	11	19.51
		lack of equal and fair support and encouragement offered to students	7	
		inadaptability to class level	6	
		lack of attractiveness/boring lessons	4	
		inflectional organizational structures	2	
		the way correction was made (use of sarcasm or put-downs)	2	
		Subtotal	32	
		teaching methods and techniques	dull teaching methods (learning by heart/memorization – especially for vocabulary)	
	little practice		5	
	inadequate method/methods, not adapted to the learners' age		5	
	excessive teaching of grammar (much theory; many rules; very little practice)		4	
	excessive use of just one method (the translation method, especially)		1	
	Subtotal		27	
	classroom management	inability to manage the class	3	1.83
		Subtotal	3	
	teaching aids and materials	number: few materials	7	7.93
		design: lack of attractiveness	4	
		authenticity: not authentic	2	
		Subtotal	13	
		Total	82	

Table 5: Frequency and percentage of external demotivating factors: the school system

Factor	Descriptor 1	Descriptor 2	n	%
The school system (SS)	curriculum, materials, staff	imposition of the foreign language to be studied	5	
		lack of textbooks	4	
		too large classes	4	
		the frequent changing of teachers	3	
		the time when the language started to be studied (as compared to other languages)	2	
		Subtotal	18	

Table 6: Frequency and percentage of external demotivating factors: Other factors/Others

Factor	Descriptor	n	%
Others	few or no opportunities to meet native speakers or other foreign people, in order to practise the language outside class	12	
	lack of external stimuli	4	
	difference between the language taught in school and the one used by natives/in the “real” world	2	
	Subtotal	18	

The teacher is by far the most-mentioned external demotivating factor, present in 82 instances (50%). Participants to the study brought into discussion aspects linked to their teachers` attitude (n=7//4.26%), teaching style (n=32//19.51%), teaching methods (n=27//16.46%), classroom management (n=3//1.83%), as well as the aids and materials the teachers used in the classroom (n=13//7.93%).

The fact that almost half of the participants (n= 14, out of 30) mentioned the teacher`s authoritarian attitude in the classroom (n=3) and lack of autonomy offered to students (n=11) enhances the idea that learners had to cope with a teacher-centred approach to classroom activity. Characteristics of attitude were complemented with characteristics of the teaching style chosen by the teacher.

Learners felt they were deprived of autonomy in the classroom, especially when they were not allowed to take decisions, to answer freely and especially when practice was scarce (n=5):

She could have come up with sentences that sounded out of this world just to make us practice it.

Moreover, one of the participants mentions the fact that the teacher had a conceited attitude in class and demotivated the learners by making them feel as if they had all lacked the necessary competencies for the English class.

...he was a very conceited person, always looking down on his students, thinking we could not understand the subtlety of his words.

Instances in which the teacher proved to offer unequal support and encouragement to learners (n=7) constituted a demotivating factor that participants to the study mentioned in quite a large number.

I always felt less encouraged by the teacher, as compared to some other colleagues of mine ... she didn't often tell me "Very good" "Well done" or "You've made progress", although I made efforts to learn; sometimes, very big efforts... I would have liked to hear that more often...

These instances co-occurred with the teacher's defective, discouraging way of making corrections by means of sarcasm and put-downs (n=2). The teacher's lack of enthusiasm for teaching (n=3) manifested in his always sitting down at the teacher's desk and promoting boring mechanical and repetitive exercises:

My English teacher from high school was a very boring person, she just used to sit down at the desk, gave us a text to read and translate into Romanian and that was all.

It is well known that teachers' enthusiasm comes from the passion for their job (and this has a positive effect on their daily activities in the classroom) and it is stirred by the interest which they show towards the learners and the teaching process). We can easily notice – as participants mentioned - that the teacher's attitude does not only demotivate learners in a short run, but it can also bring important changes in their attitude and decisions for their future. One participant stated it clearly that even his career was influenced by the experiences he passed through in class:

...every French class was annoying and disappointing because the teacher was not interested in making us eagerly desirous to learn French. The result was the expected one: I decided to study English at the university whereas my deficiency in speaking French has always troubled me.

The teacher's lack of enthusiasm found its expression in class characteristics. Four participants mentioned lack of attractiveness of classroom lessons/activities (n=4), a thing that brought

boredom among the learners, while other instances (n=2) reported the teacher's use of inflectional organizational structures, that triggered the same consequences:

Nothing attractive, funny or interesting; the same routine every day...

... the lessons were not attractive...I was often bored...

Participants to the study identified the least motivating teaching methods and techniques applied by the teacher: few explanations and learning by heart (n=12). These techniques contributed to boring lessons, as well as to the learners' transformation into robots – a thing that reminded them of their other courses in which creativity and imagination was not valued:

Our teacher would make us repeat words aloud, in a choir-like manner, nothing was written on the blackboard, and no explanation was ever given to us. We acted like little robots; the English language was more like Physics or Applied Technology to most of us.

Sometimes, methods seemed to be not adapted to the students' age or needs (n=5); that brought a sense of futility and made them wish they had had their minds put to work harder and according to their power of understanding and of inductive, deductive or abductive reasoning.

I remember we were required to draw many things such as school objects, fruit and vegetables and others, and then write the French word underneath each of them. It did not make much sense to me why I had to draw so much. I was not very skilled, nor fond of drawing, so I considered the "exercise" quite useless and frustrating when I put in a balance how much French I learnt and how much time I wasted on drawing all that. It seemed more reasonable to me to have some other sort of simple tasks such as listing, matching, putting under the right heading, something to put our mind to work.

Excessive use of just one method – the translation method (n=4) was also felt as demotivating; classes were boring, repetitive in techniques and atmosphere and the learners' feelings developed accordingly:

She used to ask us translate almost every single word (class after class); I was really fed up with that.

Participants to the study also signalled excessive teaching of grammar as something that made them feel tired, bored and even nervous. Although they admitted that knowledge of grammar is important in the process of learning a foreign language, they could not cope with the excessive

theory that was offered to them (n=4). Their descriptions of how things went on in the classroom, in this respect, made us easily understand that grammar was taught in a teacher-oriented way, which made much use of a presentation-practice-production method. In the same time, the teachers gave too much attention to form rather than meaning; they insisted on knowledge of rules and they made little connection with other aspects of communicative practices:

I never liked grammar lessons as the teacher insisted on our knowledge of rules...rules, rules...it was too much.

What is interesting in this aspect, is the fact that participants to the study, teachers of English themselves, analysed the situations, in consequence, mentioning the way in which they would have done things differently:

The teacher asked us to memorize grammar rules, while it would have been more interesting and helpful to offer us comprehensible input and much more practice of the respective rules; to have asked us to use the language forms in close to real life communicative situations.

Learners expected that aids and materials used in the classroom should be attractive, challenging and adapted to their age. Instead, they mentioned that few materials were used in class (n=7); they were not always attractive (n=4) or authentic (n=2).

The materials were poor and rigid.

Many of the demotivating factors that participants to the study identified in their narratives referred to the school system. Imposition of one foreign language learning (as part of the system requirements), with learners having no other option, was ranked first (n=5); they felt it as a powerful extrinsic pressure (rendered by the modal “had to”):

I always felt that I learnt French because I had to, not because I liked it.

Lack of textbooks, a past and still present issue in many schools (especially at the beginning of the school year), deprived many learners of the joy and right of learning the foreign language in good conditions. Participants (n=4) mentioned this aspect, more or less explicitly; here are some of their thoughts:

I remember that, at the beginning of the school year, we had to do without textbooks and it was quite difficult for us to study properly.

I wish I had had a textbook to read from...it would have been more interesting and attractive...

The fact that the school system in Romania implies the existence of (too) large classes (about thirty learners - or more - in one class) was perceived as a demotivating factor by participants (n=4), as they considered they had few opportunities to be individually active during the foreign language classes. More exactly, they reported few opportunities to establish contact with the teacher or to receive more attention from him/her – some aspects that seemed very important for those who felt less motivated or who had difficulty in learning. Therefore, they perceived their work was not effective – a thing which brought a certain degree of demotivation.

Another demotivating factor was the frequent changing of teachers (sometimes many of them being unqualified ones, with little or no teaching experience).

Then, in the sixth grade, our French teacher left for France and I, and all my mates, felt 'naked'. For a while, we had classes with the librarian, then another teacher came, but it was not the same. French lost its flavour.

Sadly, the English classes at my elementary school were not as challenging as they ought to have been.

The time when they started to study one foreign language (as compared to another one), seemed to have had its impact on learners, as well. It was the case of French, coming after they had started to learn English (which seemed easier to them).

Or, perhaps because starting to learn it (only) two years later than I had started to learn English, it seemed to me that I would never get to know French as well as I knew English.

Participants to the study also mentioned some other demotivating factors. The most-mentioned one was their lack of opportunities of meeting native speakers, as well as other foreigners/English-speaking people (out of class) (n=12), so that they could practise their English/French abilities under various circumstances (triggering authentic contexts, different pronunciations, intonations, registers etc.). Participants mentioned this demotivating factor, but they did not take into consideration the fact that they were learning the new language (English or French) as a foreign (EFL; FFL) and not as a second language and this does not involve regular interaction with natives – as learning takes place in formal classroom settings - , as opposed to

learners involved in ESL (English as a second language) who have more opportunities of such interactions (Pae, 2008).

Whenever having the opportunity to travel abroad and be exposed to situations/be engaged into face-to-face communicative situations with natives (although there were just a few instances of the kind) (n=2), participants to the study noticed differences between the language taught in school and the one used by natives/in authentic circumstances. More exactly, participants to the study mentioned their difficulty in understanding those people. This finds an explanation in the fact that in school, generally speaking, the pragmatic aspect of the language was (very) little insisted upon or even ignored by teachers and learning of the foreign language was limited to textbook forms:

I felt embarrassed, as the French I had been taught was not exactly the same with its spoken variant.

Lack of external stimuli – coming from the people around: family, friends, TV programmes, magazines (n=4) - that is, others than the teacher and the school system - was perceived as a demotivating factor.

I wish my mother had encouraged me more...

I don't know why, but French did not sound too attractive, at least at that time. Perhaps because there were no cartoons in French?

4. Discussions and conclusions

The study enhances the idea that there exist varieties of factors that can demotivate learners and this is a major problem in the process of foreign language learning. The participants to the study, through accounts of their own foreign language experiences, gave us the possibility to draw the conclusion that both internal and external factors influenced their “journey” through the process of learning foreign languages. Our analysis of these narrative accounts identified 46 instances of demotivating learning situations based on internal demotivating factors and 118 ones, based on external demotivating factors.

The exploratory approach brought into focus two large groups of factors (internal and external ones), each of them with a large number of subcategories. The greatest number of instances related to demotivating factors were linked to the teacher and the school system (n=100 – out of

164 instances identified in the teachers' narrative accounts -). This is quite good "food for thought" for teachers and it stands in their power and efforts to change things for the better.

The findings brought us the satisfaction of having chosen teachers, as participants to our study, as these findings may raise their awareness of the role they have to play in the classroom so that they could have efficient lessons, motivated students and good results in the foreign language learning process. The condition for that, in our opinion, is that teachers should self-reflect upon three things:

- 1) what demotivated me as a learner of the foreign language in school?;
- 2) do my students face the same problems as I did (when I was a learner) while I am teaching them?;
- 3) what can I do in order to help my students stay motivated during the lessons I teach?

At the same time, during our analysis of the teachers' narrative accounts, we could notice the accuracy with which most participants recalled both facts and feelings. As for the large number of explicit accounts of feelings, they may find an explanation in the fact that all participants were female teachers and, it is known that women are more inclined (than men are) to disclose feelings experienced in different situations. We think that findings linked to this aspect might help teachers understand their students better and, at the same time, understand how their feelings and attitudes can influence their learning objectives and performance.

We are aware of certain limitation of our study. First, we have in view the limited number of participants (n=30). This might make one draw the conclusion that findings are not applicable to larger numbers of teachers and their accounts. We consider that 30 participants is a relevant number and that outcomes of the study would not have been much more different, considering that the demotivating factors we identified are quite the same reported by studies in which larger numbers of learners were involved (Dörnyei, 1998; Oxford, 1998; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012; Trang & Baldauf Jr, 2007).

Second, our analysis could definitely be more relevant if followed by a discussion with our participants, as a post-writing activity, in which our findings could be compared with their own identifications, through their own accounts analysis, of the demotivating factors that acted upon their foreign language learning process. This could better establish their degree of awareness towards the problem under discussion and, consequently, they could come up with solutions of solving the problem of demotivation and re-motivation of their own learners in the language class whenever they (in their quality of teachers) sense that such a problem exists. More precisely, it

would be interesting to identify their solutions for diminishing the percentage we identified for the teacher as a demotivating factor (50% - with regard to the teacher's teaching style, the strategies, methods and techniques he/she used in the language class, as well as the aids and materials used during the lessons). Therefore, as these things need to be more explicitly addressed, we shall continue the present study.

Third, considering that we deliberately tried to identify only the demotivating factors that participants mentioned they encountered in the school context, a further study on the demotivating factors outside school context could bring a better understanding of the problem under discussion.

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