



Investigating demotivation factors of Esp learners during covid-19 pandemic: A mixed-method study

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Demotivation factors of ESP students need to be analyzed, so that teachers and researchers can provide better approaches to teach them, especially during the time of trial, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the present study aims to analyze demotivation factors of a group of ESP learners during Covid-19 pandemic. In order to obtain its data, the present study applies a sequential explanatory method. A set of questionnaires were distributed to 48 respondents and semi-structured interviews were conducted to five respondents. The results show that the most salient factors which demotivate the respondents are teachers' competence and teaching styles as well as inadequate school facilities. On the other hand, lack of intrinsic motivation is shown to be the least salient demotivation factor. The results of present study suggest that the respondents seemed to be demotivated because teaching styles and learning materials are perceived as unsuitable for their needs to improve their English skills and future careers as engineers. In addition, online learning was perceived by the respondents as less ideals to teach English despite their intrinsic motivation to learn English for their personal as well as career gains in the future. Possible solutions are also discussed in the present study.

Keywords: English for specific purposes, demotivation, language learning, mixed-method.

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INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 pandemic has brought challenges for language teachers and students. The pandemic has increased stress levels among language students and teachers as well as decreased their focus ([Hartshorn & McMurry, 2021](#); [Wang et al., 2020](#)). It has been anticipated that physical distancing and pervasive feelings of anxiety toward Covid-19 may lead to low academic performance ([Sintema, 2020](#)), anxiety towards health ([Rundle et al., 2020](#)) and unfavorable interruptions to exams ([Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020](#)). Similar challenge was also faced by ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teachers and students as they had to resort to online learning and teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic ([Iswati, 2021](#)). It can be said that both teachers and students were severely affected by Covid-19 pandemic.

With regard to teaching and learning during Covid-19 pandemic, investigating demotivation factors on ESP students may support better needs analysis. Numerous studies show that Covid-19 pandemic may lead to students' demotivation among EFL learners ([Adara & Najmuddin, 2020](#); [Adara & Puspahaty, 2021](#); [Elmas & Öztüfekçi, 2021](#)).

Similar phenomenon may happen in ESP classes during Covid-19 pandemic. It is because numerous problems arising from online learning such as lack of internet connection, a lack of teachers' competence for online teaching and poor control over students' knowledge acquisition (Avsheniuk et al., 2021) might impact how students respond to the materials, possibly leading to students' demotivation. As ESP classes are designed to respond to the needs of learners and avoid demotivation factors (Zoghi & Far, 2014), identifying factors which influence students' demotivation seems important because it will provide deeper information on how to create more suitable approaches or materials for ESP students.

In regards to the points mentioned in the above paragraph, several studies have attempted to investigate demotivation factors. For example, in the Indonesian context, a study by Adara (2018) investigates demotivating factors of a group of EFL learners at a university in Indonesia, while Adara et al. (2019) investigate the differences in demotivation factors of two groups of EFL learners. In the Iranian context, Pazoki & Alemi (2019) examine the perceptions of students and teachers from various engineering departments to gain insight into the elements that motivate the students learn technical English in ESP subjects. While Pazoki & Alemi (2019) focus on the motivating factors, the current research specifically investigates demotivating factors that affect engineering students to learn ESP, especially during the era of Covid-19 pandemic.

Demotivation refers to gradual absence of motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). Although it has been mistaken with another concept called amotivation, demotivation is different from amotivation. While amotivation is defined as the condition of lacking the intention to continue an activity due to the inability to see the merits of that activity (Kojima, 2021), demotivation is learners' gradual diminution of positive attitudes, motivation and actions toward language learning (Adara & Puspahaty, 2021). Therefore, demotivation refers to the diminution of positive traits toward the activity while amotivation is a total loss of motivation. As the opposite of motivation, demotivation might lead to negative consequences. While a motivated student strives hard to acquire the target language, a demotivated student can lose their interest in language learning (Adara, 2018). In addition, demotivated students might affect their peers negatively (Tanaka, 2017) and affect students' performance in language assessment (Hu, 2011). Thus, investigating demotivation can inform teachers or researchers on how to reduce or avoid demotivation and help the effective language learning process (Adara & Najmuddin, 2020; Ghadirzadeh et al. 2013; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). The above points show the urgency to investigate demotivation.

Numerous factors have been considered as the causes of demotivation, making it imperative to add more diverse groups of learners as the subjects of study. Course books, inadequate school facilities, test scores, non-communicative teaching methods, as well as teachers' competence and teaching are listed as few demotivating factors of a group of learners in Japan (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009).

In addition, learning content materials are suggested as demotivation factors in another study toward a group of EFL learners in Japan (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). Furthermore, Sahragard & Ansaripour (2014) found economic problems and future pessimism as the most salient demotivation factors of a group of EFL learners in Iran. Besides the aforementioned factors above, lack of opportunities to practice English, lack of interests in English, learning material selection and lack of exposure to the target language are shown to be the demotivation factors (Javed, 2021). It can be said that each study has found diverse causes of demotivation, depending on the subjects and setting of respective study. It is why investigating diverse groups of learners seems imperative (Molavi & Biria, 2013) because it can equip researchers and educators with needed knowledge to deal with demotivation.

Considering the importance of the role of demotivation in affecting students' eagerness to learn as described above, in the the present study, we aim to fill the void by investigating demotivation factors of a group of ESP learners in engineering fields during the time of Covid-19 pandemic. To meet the aim of this research, the following research question was formulated:

What factors affect the demotivation of ESP learners from the engineering departments during the time of Covid-19 pandemic?

METHODS

The present section discusses research approaches used in the present study. In order to provide a thorough analysis for the discussions, the present study employs the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2009), which is also known as an equal-status mixed-method (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The sequential explanatory design is 'the collection and analysis of quantitative data in a first phase of research followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in a second phase that builds on the results of the initial quantitative results' (p. 194). This type of method has been successfully employed by motivation researchers to uncover phenomena that cannot be revealed using a single method only (cf. Farid and Lamb, 2020; Lamb, 2007; Lamb, 2011). In this sense, qualitative data is used subsequently for interpreting and clarifying the results of quantitative data analysis (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017).

The present study uses an adapted version of Sakai & Kikuchi's (2009) questionnaire, which was administered to the respondents. In order to ensure the reliability of questionnaires, a pilot study was performed prior to data collection.

The result of the pilot study shows that tests for Cronbach's alpha value was of $>0,75$ for all scales, and this was in accordance with [Larson-Hall \(2010\)](#), who suggests that the appropriate alpha value to determine the internal consistency reliability should be 0.70-0.80. The questionnaire consists of 12 items and were administered through Google Forms. The sampling approach is a convenience sampling. Data gathered from the questionnaire was inputed into and analyzed using SPSS 23.

Meanwhile, Learning Content and Materials as well as Test Scores were similar in their saliency ($M=2.27$). A lower mean value was obtained for the scale Lack of Intrinsic Motivation ($M=2.19$), which is shown to be the least salient demotivation factor.

Table 1. Demotivating factors affecting engineering students' motivation to learn ESP

Demotivational Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Learning Content and Materials	2.27	765
Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles	2.33	633
Inadequate School Facilities	2.31	689
Lack of Intrinsic Motivation	2.19	0.79
Test Scores	2.27	961

Semi-structured interviews were also used in the present study. They were conducted to five respondents. Before the interviews, each respondent signed an ethics form which informs them that the information given by them would only be used for research purposes and their identities would not be divulged. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted online through WhatsApp video call. The interviews lasted around 10 to 15 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the Indonesian language and translated to English for helping the analysis. Qualitative data would be analyzed using a coding method in which interview results would be transcribed and categorized into several categories related to the present study.

The respondents of the present study are 48 engineering students from a private university in Bekasi, Indonesia. The respondents' age range is from 18 to 20 years old. Each respondent has signed an ethics form which explains that data they shared would only be used for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the current study, and the findings will be critically discussed. Findings from the questionnaire will be presented first, and this will be followed by findings from the interview, which are subsequently discussed. Table 1 below shows the findings obtained from the questionnaire. The findings imply that generally the five reasons are perceived by the students as their demotivating factors to learn ESP. A closer look at the data indicates that there are slight differences in how participants perceive the demotivation factors. Teachers' Competence and Teaching Styles ($M=2.33$) and Inadequate School Facilities ($M=2.31$) are shown to be the most salient demotivation factors.

In order to provide a better understanding of the quantitative findings above, the following sections present findings from the qualitative phase, and then a detailed, holistic, and critical discussion of findings is presented.

(a) Teachers' competence and teaching styles

The results of the present study suggest that teachers' competence and teaching styles are shown to be the most salient demotivation factor. The following comments from the respondents provide more information on why teachers' competence and teaching styles can demotivate students:

"I feel demotivated when I am being too focused on my mistakes or being compared with my classmates [by teachers]. I feel too focused on mistakes I made so that's why I feel demotivated when being compared with other students. [Instead of giving solutions,] teachers make me down." (Student C)

"Teaching style [which was too focused on] the lessons [can be demotivating] because I used to ask about things outside of our lessons such as vocabulary used by the foreigners, formal or informal language [but the lecturer didn't answer]" (Student D)

"Teachers and teaching styles [are demotivating]. [In addition, we are demotivated by an English lecturer] who used to be absent in online meetings multiple times due to the pandemic. (Student E)

The above comments show that teachers' inability to show to the classes due to the pandemic and unsupportive teaching styles can demotivate students. In addition, teachers' unsupportive behavior may be one of the causes of demotivation based on one of the above comments.

Several studies also found teachers' competence and teaching styles to be the most salient demotivation factor (cf. [Adara, 2018](#); Adara et al., Khouya, 20182019; Chong et al., 2019; [Farid and Lamb, 2020](#)). Unsuitable teaching styles are found to be one of the most significant reasons behind students' demotivation in the aforementioned studies. For instance, students may expect to learn English to communicate with native speakers or non-native speakers but teachers only focused on giving materials in front of the class and did not engage with students. A study by Kim et al (2018) shows that teachers' inability to deliver lessons in attractive manners to students can be demotivating for students. In regards to the present study, Student E commented:

"[Teachers need] to carry the materials in engaging and inspiring manners so that we would like to keep learning. [In addition], teachers need to deliver materials in a way that can be understood by students because incomprehensible teachers' presentations lessen students' motivation."

In this sense, teachers need to know the best approach to deliver their lessons. Furthermore, Student C said that teachers need to incorporate more practice in their classes so that the lessons would be less boring. It is why needs analysis is important. As teachers conduct needs analysis prior to the lessons, they can collect data on how students would want the lessons are delivered. Then, demotivation might be avoided because teachers will know a suitable teaching approach to teach students.

In addition, building rapport with students seems imperative to avoid demotivation. In regards to the present study, good rapports with students can be built through several strategies. First, teachers' teachers need to be committed to their schedules despite the external challenges because multiple class' cancellations may demotivate students. It is because teachers who are committed to teaching can give the same feelings to students ([Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013](#)) and improve students' motivation ([Çankaya, 2018](#)). Second, teachers need to refrain from comparing their students with each other in order to avoid demotivation. [Han et al \(2019\)](#) found that teachers' negative reaction to students' mistakes make students hesitant to practice English. Besides that, teachers' attitudes such as biased behavior, indifference and unintelligible teaching methods can aggravate students' demotivation ([Hassaskhah et al., 2015](#)). It can be said that teachers' behavior can affect students. It is why teachers should be aware of what they are doing in the class. The above points show measures can be taken by teachers to prevent or cope with students' demotivation.

(b) Inadequate school facilities

The findings of present study show inadequate school facilities as the second most salient demotivation factor. While [Kikuchi & Sakai's \(2009\)](#) study found inadequate school facilities as the least demotivating factor, numerous studies identified inadequate school facilities as the most salient demotivation factor ([Hassaskhah et al, 2014](#); Hirvonen, 2011; [Kikuchi, 2009](#)). The difference in saliency might be caused by the participants' contentment with their school facilities. In addition, [Meshkat & Hassani \(2012\)](#) argued that insufficient school facilities that did not match with learning contexts such as students' needs, learning topics, or else might make students feel like the lessons are a waste of time. Hence, if students are satisfied with their school facilities, they would be less demotivated with this factor ([Adara et al, 2019](#)). In this sense, students seem to be more motivated when their schools have provided suitable facilities for learning English such as computers, flashcards or else. Therefore, providing suitable school facilities may lessen students' demotivation.

(c) Learning content and materials

The third most salient demotivation factor found in the present study is learning content and materials. Several respondents also mentioned learning content and materials as demotivating. Following are their comments:

"In my opinion, in the 4.0 industry, teachers should not only focus on teaching [general English] lessons because students can get bored, [students] want to get new and useful [materials] for their future career. In my opinion, teachers should teach materials for our careers such as speaking or listening because my friends and I are usually weak in spoken communication." (Student D). According to the above comment, the respondent thought that materials suited with students' needs for their future careers and the development of their communicative skills can be motivating. On the other hand, unsuitable materials can be the sources of students' demotivation.

The findings of the present study are quite similar to [Alsamadani \(2017\)](#). A study of [Alsamadani \(2017\)](#) on needs analysis toward a group of engineering students in Iran shows that the existing ESP classes seem to focus more on receptive skills (reading and listening) while the respondents prefer to be taught communicative skills (speaking and writing).

Furthermore, Alsamadani (2017) recommends the integration of English skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) with subject or field-specific skills for engineering. In addition, needs analysis should be conducted regularly to suit the changing learners' needs. Related to the present study, Student B said that materials given to students should also cover basic English skills besides specific language skills for engineering so that the materials can be motivating. It is because most respondents think being able to communicate well in English can help their personal and professional lives. Being fluent in English allows students to communicate with people around the globe and get better chances to work abroad. It can be said that ESP for engineering students should not only center on providing materials related to the engineering field but also communicative skills so that students can communicate well using English.

(d) Test scores

Although several studies note test scores as the most salient demotivation factor ([Adara et al., 2021](#); Çankaya, 2018; [Jomairi, 2011](#); [Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009](#)), the results of present study show that test scores as the second least demotivating factor. The results of the present study share similarity with other studies ([Adara, 2018](#); [Ahmad, 2021](#); [Krishnan & Pathan, 2017](#); [Soureshjani & Riahipour, 2012](#)). However, the respondents of interviews expressed that test scores can be demotivating for them. Student C said that test scores can demotivate him because he disliked being compared with his peers' performance. Furthermore, Student B said that test scores demotivated him and made him lazy to learn English. In regards to the pandemic situation, a study of [Adara & Najmudin \(2020\)](#) shows that their respondents are more demotivated with test scores after Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the chances of students getting demotivated with low test scores seem highly probable. The weight of evidence suggests that although test scores are not highly demotivating for the majority of respondents in the present study, some still seem to be affected by their performances in examinations.

Test scores can be demotivating because they affect learners' self-confidence. Thus, several measures need to be taken to prevent demotivation due to test scores. The findings of [Song & Kim \(2017\)](#) show that test scores may correlate with learners' self-confidence. As their respondents get low test scores or make mistakes during the exams, inferiority may take place, leading to demotivation. It can be said that some learners are demotivated with test scores as they feel less confidence when they get lower test scores compared with their classmates. In order to avoid students being demotivated with low test scores, teachers need to make students understand that low test scores do not correlate with failure in the English learning process ([Adara & Najmudin, 2020](#)).

In addition, the provision of effective study methods to handle the stress of exams can also be one of the solutions ([Song & Kim, 2017](#)). By doing the above measures, students may feel more confident with their learning progress and perform better in tests, preventing them from being demotivated due to low test scores. Such things seem to become more important during difficult times such as Covid-19 pandemic.

(e) Lack of intrinsic motivation

Lack of intrinsic motivation does not seem to be demotivating for the majority of the respondents of present study as the interview results suggest that they are aware of the benefits of mastering English for their future career and personal lives, making them more motivated to learn English. As they envision themselves as engineers who work in a global setting, the respondents want to be fluent in English as it may help them secure better jobs in national or international companies. In addition, English skills help them understand their lessons as books in their field are mostly available in English. In this sense, the respondents seem able to envision themselves mastering English and how they will use their skills for their future. [Dörnyei \(2014\)](#) postulates that the ideal L2 self represents one's ideal self as an L2 speaker who can motivate learners to study the target language better so that their language proficiency can match their expectation. Related to the present study, the respondents are well-aware of ideal selves that they want to achieve by learning English. It is why they seem to be intrinsically motivated to learn English.

Nevertheless, Covid-19 pandemic seems to affect their intrinsic motivation greatly. The interviews results suggest that the respondents cannot fully understand their English lessons because they cannot practice with their peers as it used to be before the pandemic. A study of [Adara & Najmudin \(2020\)](#) on the differences in demotivation factors after Covid-19 pandemic also shows online learning as one the most prevalent demotivation factors. In regards to online learning, several studies suggest that this teaching and learning approach has caused several negative effects such as screen fatigue, feeling isolated from peers, increased stress levels and demotivation ([Adara et al., 2021](#); [Fatima, 2020](#); [Syahputri et al., 2020](#); [YÜCE, 2022](#)). Such adverse effects may reduce learners' motivation. Therefore, it seems important for teachers to maintain learners' motivation during Covid-19 pandemic. One of measures which can be taken in ESP classes to avoid demotivation is regularly conducting needs analysis to suit the ever-changing needs of students during Covid-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to analyze demotivation factors of a group of engineering students in Bekasi, Indonesia. The present study used an explanatory sequential method by distributing a set of questionnaires adapted from [Sakai & Kikuchi \(2009\)](#) to 48 respondents and conducting semi-structured interviews to five respondents. The results of the present study showed that teachers' competence and teaching styles as well as inadequate school facilities become the most salient demotivation factors while lack of intrinsic motivation is shown to be the least demotivation factor.

Despite the measures taken to minimize the weaknesses, the present study is not without one. Firstly, the number of respondents can be considered as a small one and the results may not portray the whole population. Secondly, the length of study should be longer to analyze the effects of teaching during Covid-19 pandemic toward students' demotivation. Nevertheless, the present study may be a milestone for further studies.

Next studies should analyze the differences between demotivation factors in two groups of different foreign languages. In addition, the next study may examine a suitable teaching approach to ESP students, especially engineering students. The results may help more ESP students to get the best teaching approach to enhance their English skills.

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