

A Comparative Study of EFL Learners' De-Motivation and Re-Motivation Processes in Distance vs. Regular Education Systems

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Abstract: *One of the main challenges of distance education system is the student's retention and persistence at the university and maintaining their motivation. When English language learning as one of the compulsory courses of almost all the majors comes into scene, the situation becomes more acute. The purpose of the present survey is to study the de-motivational factors among distance education learners of EFL and compare them against those who study at the regular systems. Another purpose of this study is to examine the coping processes that EFL learners use for re-motivation. To these ends, the Falout's EFL re-motivation questionnaire was used to elicit: 1) the antecedent conditions of the learners, 2) de-motivational experiences, and 3) coping processes used by EFL learners for re-motivation. Participants were 150 EFL learners majoring in humanities of whom 65 students were passing their English courses at Isfahan University (at its regular classrooms) and 85 are from Payam Noor University (as distance education system). The results of this study indicate that, under equal proficiency level, Dis and Reg EFL students are not so much different in terms of the general Antecedent Conditions of Learner, but something that makes them different is the de-motivational experiences and the time when this de-motivation has crept into their language learning. Findings also, indicate that Dis learners have a considerable degree of discrepancy between their learning experiences (actual self) and their coping potential (ought self) and this can be one of the reasons for their failure in learning English.*

Key Words: *Adaptive coping processes, Antecedent conditions of learner, Mal-adaptive coping processes, Self-discrepancy theory*

Introduction

In Payam Noor University, the English courses for Non-English majors often bring about a kind of stressful situations for most of the learners and, in almost all the fields of study, a high percentage of students fails in these courses. Since this education system is highly test-based and the students, in most of the cases, do not have any functional purposes to pursue in English outside their academic context, the high rate of failure in English courses certainly has a negative effect on students' motivation and makes them not to engage purposefully in their language learning processes. On the other hand, the high stakes of the midterm and final exams in this situation produce high levels of anxiety which in the long run, will change to the involuntary nervous reactions and chronic stress. Under such conditions, the learners' coping processes can prevent anxiety to have any harmful effect on the learning outcomes. But, developing such a

processes, either adaptive or maladaptive, is strongly affected by the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, on the one hand, and previous experiences, current self-perceptions, and future expectations, on the other hand (Falout, 2012).

The present study aims to examine the de-motivational factors and the developmental coping processes in the undergraduate EFL students in Payam Noor University, as an example of a distance learning situation, and compare them with the de-motivational and re-motivational processes in regular education system, in this case, Isfahan University. Proficiency level was controlled, because Falout et al. (2009) have already found a positive correlation between affective states and English proficiency outcomes. The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. In what ways do the low proficiency EFL learners' de-motivational experiences differ in distance and regular education systems?
2. In what ways do the low proficiency EFL learners' developmental coping processes differ in distance and regular education systems?

Review of the Related Literature

The research conducted on motivation in the area of second language acquisition has now entered a stage which is called "Socio-dynamic phase" by Dornyei and Ushioda (2011). In this stage, motivation is defined as a complex construct interwoven with many different factors such as: 1) the relationship between learners' individual, internal psychological processes and the wider contexts of their learning environments; 2) the interplay of what learners want to and ideally might become which is affected by their current experiences and learning environment; and 3) past learning experiences (cited by Falout, 2012).

According to Falout (2012), motivation is flexible and fluctuating, hence so complex. Much research has been conducted on de-motivation or the decline of motivation in the context of foreign language learning. The results of these studies showed that the main reason for de-motivation is mostly the traditional teaching methodologies like grammar-translation approach (Murphy et al., 2009; Falout et al., 2009; Kikuchi, 2009) which are based on memorizing the list of vocabulary items and grammar rules and, also, the large number of high- and low-stakes tests which are all considered as the common de-motivators (Kikuchi, 2009; Murphy et al., 2009).

But, in addition to the external de-motivators, the internal and psychological stimulus may play a role in reducing the motivation. For example, lack of the intrinsic motivation can reduce other types of motivation including extrinsic motivation. When language learners lose their motivation, they may react with maladaptive behaviors such as sleeping in class, inattention to the teacher, and refusing to study, and these behaviors, in turn, complicate the motivational problems. Falout et al.'s (2009) study showed that the low level of self-confidence along with learners' self denigration during the learning process lead to the lower levels of motivation and proficiency in

the long term. These negative effects can change if students will be willing to react to de-motivation with some motivating tasks such as watching TV or listening to music which make them enjoy the English language. These findings suggest that the reasons for de-motivation and the learners' coping strategies can affect the motivation and the learning outcomes in different ways.

Re-motivati

According to Falout (2012), re-motivation means bringing back the motivation after it has been lost, a process by which the motivation becomes online from an already off-line state (Ushioda, 1998, p. 86). The process of losing motivation, and then, regaining it in a long run without losing it completely is called maintaining motivation. Working on the Irish French learners, Ushioda (2001) identified four motivational strategies for shorter term applications and four mindsets for longer term application for the purpose of re-motivating and maintaining the motivation during its fluctuation periods. The motivational strategies include: 1) focusing on stimulus or pressures, for example, by travelling to France or participating in a test; 2) focusing on foreign language courses through purposeful self-regulation techniques; 3) effort to disentangle oneself temporarily from the difficulties of foreign language learning which helps the learners connect with enjoyable aspects of the foreign language; and 4) talking with others about the motivational problems both inside and outside the class and even self –talking. The mindsets which guide the motivation include: 1) enhancing the personal self-perceptions or relating the positive learning outcomes in foreign language learning to the personal abilities, such as effort; 2) relating the negative learning outcomes in foreign language learning to the temporary and changeable aspects such as lack of effort; 3) not relating the negative emotional experiences and de-motivators to the foreign language learning and relating them, instead, to the factors which are not under the control of the individual learner, such as the shortcomings or institution demands; and 4) believing in the fact that each person can self-motivate through resourcefulness and initiative (i.e., believing in the person's agency for self-regulating the motivation) (Falout, 2012).

Technical English courses in Distance education: why de-motivation?

In Payam Noor university, as the largest distance education University of Iran, the English courses for non-English majors are taught in three different levels: General English, semi-technical, and technical (the last two are called technical English 1 and 2 in the curriculum). Unfortunately, the comparison between the students' technical English and general English scores obtained from the final exams show that, despite the relative achievement of the students in General English courses, technical courses are often among the courses with a high rate of failure, and students usually express their sense of dissatisfaction from their levels of

achievement. Moreover, they cannot use their language knowledge for more advanced academic purposes after their graduation. It comes as no surprise that these issues affect both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation negatively. If we add the educational conditions of the distance education (for example, a few attendance sessions for the courses, lack of opportunity for the students' interaction and collaborative learning, higher ages of the students, engagement with job-related issues which wastes the mental potentials of the learners, and etc), we see that in such a system, it's a challenging task for the students to maintain their motivation or re-motivate themselves. But, the main reason for the negative attitudes to foreign language learning among adult working population has been best described by Falout et al.:

For many students, learning English entails a lifelong study without much practical use. Some professionals who score high enough may be promoted to a position that brings opportunities to actually use English. But to acquire the proficiency necessary for scoring well, learners need to stay motivated by proactively coping with compulsory nature and disconnected practices of the English educational- economic system. (2008, 2009)

So far, the research conducted on coping procedures all have emphasized the direct and explicit teaching of the coping techniques for academic difficulties and the use of potential resources for positive coping (i.e., development of adaptive regulatory processes for stressful conditions in the past, present and future on personal and interpersonal manners) in classroom environment (Skinner and Wellborn, 1997). Of these processes one can refer to the positive or adaptive patterns such as continuing effort, soliciting and volunteering help, controlling negative thoughts, making positive self-statements, building self-efficacy, and coping through social modeling. Some of the negative and maladaptive patterns include self-blame, anxiety, absenteeism, and helplessness. Skinner and Wellborn also pointed out that this type of learning can bring about some learning outcomes both in short term and long term.

Coping and Adaptive Processes

Coping has been usually defined as "interactions between the person and the demand or context" (e.g., Folkman & Lazarus, 1985, cited by Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). Under this definition, what peoples do in dealing with stressors are called "ways of coping" which include the actions like problem-solving, support seeking, or escaping. Recently, however, it has been argued that in any definition of coping, one should go beyond a set of actions; coping strategies and processes are, in fact, "particular set of responses to stress which improve the fit between an organism and its environment when the demands on the organism exceed its resources" (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). Following this argument, Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) propose a dozen of higher-order coping families (see table 1) as overarching categories of processes which cover most of the lower-order ways of coping already introduced in the literature. Table 1 shows the link between coping and adaptive processes.

Table 1. Higher –order families of coping and adaptive processes (adapted from Skinner & Zimmer Gembeck, 2007, p. 126)

Adaptive	Family of coping	Problem-solving Strategizing Instrumental action Planning	Information seeking Reading Observation Asking others	Self-reliance Emotion regulation Behavior regulation Emotional expression Emotion approach	Support-seeking Contact-seeking Comfort-seeking Instrumental aid Social referencing	Accommodation Distraction Cognitive restructuring Minimization Acceptance	Negotiation Bargaining Persuasion Priority-setting
	Family function in adaptive processes	Adjust actions to be effective	Find additional contingencies	Protect available social resources	Use available social resources	Flexibly adjust preferences to options	Find new options
	Also implied	Watch and learn Mastery Efficacy	Curiosity Interest	Tend and befriend Pride	Proximity-seeking Yearning Other alliance	Pick and choose Secondary control	Compromise
Maladaptive	Family of coping	Helplessness Confusion Cognitive interference Cognitive exhaustion	Escape Behavioral avoidance Mental withdrawal Denial Wishful thinking	Delegation Maladaptive help seeking Complaining Whining Self-pity	Social isolation Social withdrawal Concealment Avoiding others	Submission Rumination Rigid preservation Intrusive thoughts	Opposition Other-blame Projection Aggression
	Family function in adaptive	Find limits of actions	Escape noncontingent environment	Find limits of resources	Withdraw from unsupportive contact	Give up preferences	Remove constraints

	proces s						
	Also imple d	Guilt Helpless ness	Drop and roll Flight Fear	Self-pity Shame	Duck and cover Freeze Sadness	Disgust Rigid perseverance	Stand and fight Anger Defiance

Methodology

This study was conducted as a survey in which data obtained from the questionnaire were first coded and then were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS.

Participants

104 undergraduate students from Payam Noor University (as distance education system) and 96 undergraduate students from Isfahan University (in its regular programs) constituted the population of the present study. These students were studying in psychology, education and theology and Islamic sciences and all took the course Technical English 1 in the given education semester. To ensure homogeneity of the students in terms of their English proficiency, an OPT (Oxford Placement Test) was given at the beginning of the semester through which 98 students with lower intermediate level of proficiency were selected to take part in the survey. They were both male and female with average age of 24.

Instruments

The first Instrument used in this study was Oxford Placement Test (quick placement test, version 1) which was used to homogenize the participants. It was constituted of 25 items testing language use and 35 items in cloze tests. The reliability of the test was checked using Cronbach's Alpha. It was reported to be at an appropriate level with $\alpha=0.81$.

Another instrument used here was EFL Re-motivation questionnaire (see Appendix A) taken from Falout (2012). This questionnaire is comprised of 17 items. The first 5 items (a-e) which are in the format of a 6-point Likert scale tap the students' Antecedent Conditions of Learning (ACL); the next six open ended questions (f - k) have students report on their own "expectations and motivational struggles" while they were learning English before entering the University in junior high school or high school; the last six questions (l - q) which are again open- ended, ask students about their coping processes they were engaged in while they underwent a kind of demotivation and tried to re-motivate.

To code the participants' responses to the open ended questions, Falout et al.'s (2009) demotivational factors (for item k) and Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck's (2007) framework of coping and adaptive processes (for the last 6 questions) were adopted (see the next section).

Data collection and Analysis

First, before the actual survey, participants in distance (Dis) or regular (Reg) system were homogenized so that all of them were lower intermediate EFL learners. Then, based on the students' answers to the first 5 items, participants in each group of Dis or Reg were divided into two groups: those with positive ACL and those with negative ACL. The grouping of the students was based on their average scores in each item in the way that those who scored below 3.50 for a particular item were categorized as the group with negative ACL and those who scored above 3.50 were grouped as the students with positive ACL. Tables 2 and 3 below show the descriptive statistics for the five items (a – e) for Dis and Reg respectively.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for Likert items a – e for categorizing the Dis group into negative and positive ACL

Items	Negative ACL				Positive ACL			
	mean	SD	skewness	kurtosis	mean	SD	skewness	kurtosis
a	3.02	0.89	-.12	-.09	4.71	0.73	-.02	-.65
b	2.2	1.14	0.58	-.71	3.92	1.2	-.37	-.2
c	2.63	1.17	0.25	-.71	4.63	0.96	-.92	1.2
d	2.80	1.05	-.1	-.54	4.55	0.7	-.11	-.69
e	1.65	0.68	0.53	-.83	4.24	1.1	-.2	0.00

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for Likert items a – e for categorizing the Reg group into negative and positive ACL

Items	Negative ACL				Positive ACL			
	mean	SD	skewness	kurtosis	mean	SD	skewness	kurtosis
a	3	0.85	0.1	-.07	4.9	0.72	-.01	-.62
b	1.98	0.95	0.49	-.68	4	1.3	-.35	-.1
c	2.43	1.17	0.24	-.66	4.71	0.86	-.95	-.99
d	2.39	0.98	-.98	-.46	4.71	0.8	-.98	-.63
e	1.04	0.63	-.12	-.67	4.25	1	-.5	0.00

As it is clear from the mean scores for Dis and Reg groups, students in both education systems are not significantly different in terms of the positivity and negativity of their ACLs.

Answering the first research question

In the second set of questions (items f - k), which are related to the de-motivational experiences of the students, the item i asks the students about the occurrence of de-motivation in the years before entering the university, either in junior high school (JHS) or high school (HS) and item k

asks about the reasons for this de-motivation. Tables 4 and 5 show the results of coding and comparison.

Table 4. Comparison of the students' de-motivational experiences across ACL groups in Reg and Dis systems

ACL		Have you had experiences to lose or decrease your motivation to study English?		If "yes", when did it happen?	
		Yes	No	JHS	HS
Negative	Dis	69%	31%	60%	40%
	Reg	53%	47%	58%	42%
Positive	Dis	51%	49%	62%	38%
	Reg	48%	52%	49%	51%

Although a relatively similar pattern is observed among different groups as to occurrence of de-motivation, but the difference between the percentages reported in the table 4 is worth examining at some points. One point at which the difference is significant is among distance education students, between those who are negative in their ACL and those who are positive. In negative group, 69% reported that they have had de-motivational experiences in the past, while this percentage has reduced to 51% among positive students. Such a difference is not observed among regular education students where the percentages of students who have or have not had de-motivational experiences were approximately equal in both positive and negative ACL groups. With regard to the grade in which students started to be de-motivated in learning English, the most significant difference is between distance students who are negative and regular students who are positive, with most of students in the former group starting to feel de-motivation earlier in their studies than the students in the latter group where a greater number of students started to be de-motivated in their high school rather than in junior high school.

Table 5. The students' reasons for de-motivation across different groups

ACL		What happened to lower your motivation?				
		Teacher personality	Pedagogy (grammar-translation)	Self-confidence	Course level	Other
Negative	Dis	20%	30%	41%	6%	3%
	Reg	25%	27%	38%	7%	3%
Positive	Dis	18%	35%	31%	12%	4%
	Reg	26%	40%	11%	18%	5%

As mentioned before, in analyzing the students' answers to the item k, the categories introduced by Falout et al. (2009) for de-motivational factors have been used. As it is clear from table 5, the

most significant differences are reported under self-confidence factor, where the percentage of students who reported the low self-confidence as the main reason for de-motivation is significantly higher in Dis students with negative ACL than Reg students with positive ACL. This is while, for the latter group, the de-motivational factor is teaching methodology, that is, grammar translation. In term of teacher personality, also, it can be observed that Dis students, in general, showed lower percentages than Reg students.

Answering the second research question

The second research question asks about the coping processes that students undergo to deal with de-motivation and try to re-motivate. To answer this question, the students' responses to the last 6 items in the questionnaire were coded and analyzed. For the sake of brevity, in this part, only students with negative ACL were included in the comparison. The figures 1 to 6 below show the differences between Dis and Reg students with negative ACL in terms of the different types of adaptive and maladaptive processes they prefer for coping with de-motivation. The types of processes have been taken from Zimmer-Gembeck's (2007).

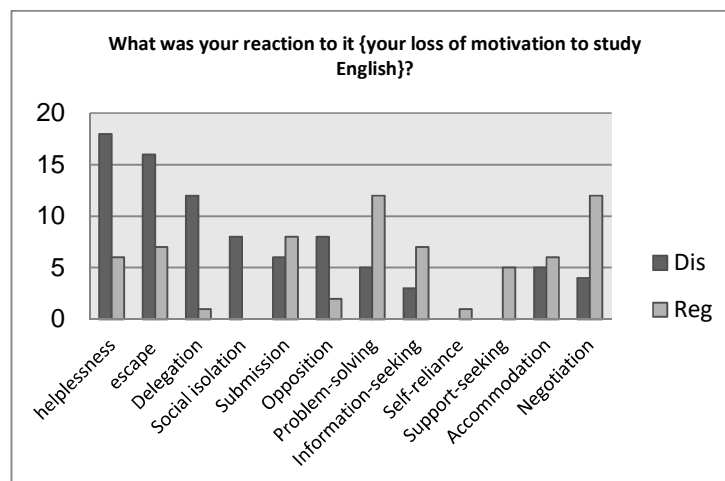


Figure 1. Reflexive Coping processes

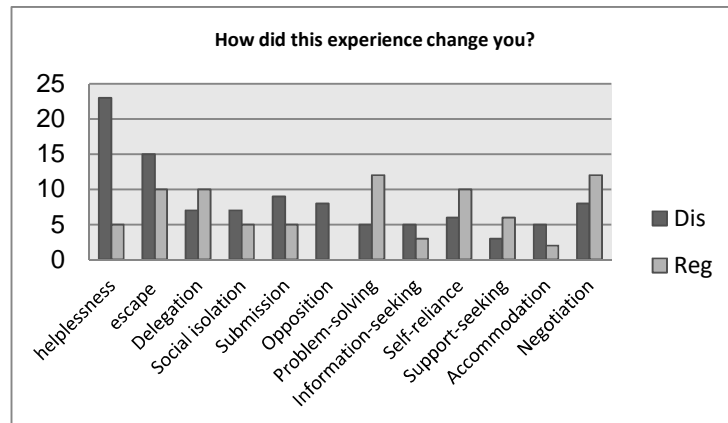


Figure 2. Short-term coping processes

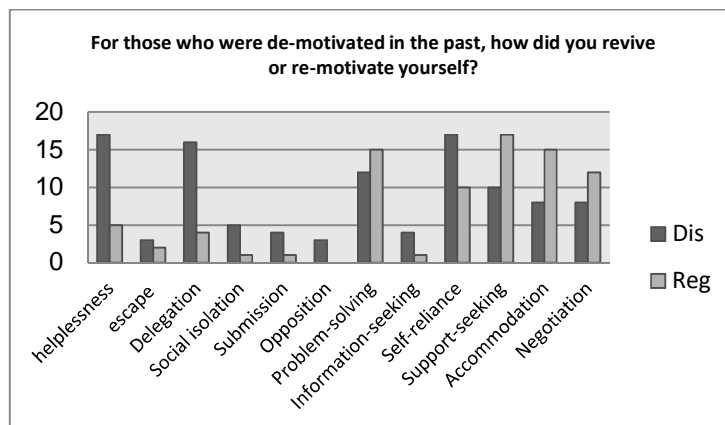


Figure 3. Long-term coping processes

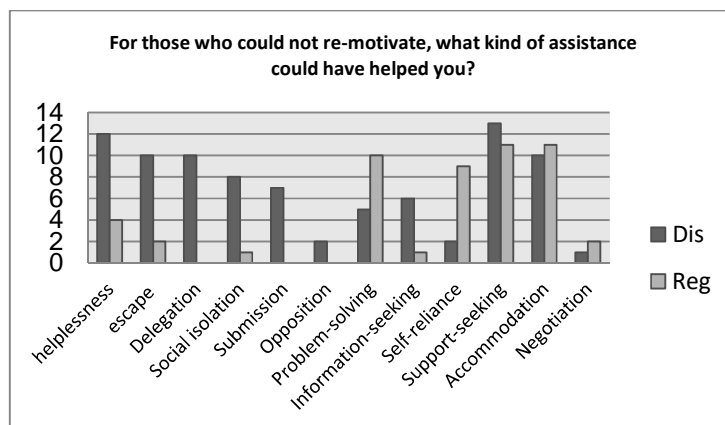


Figure 4. Retrospective coping potential

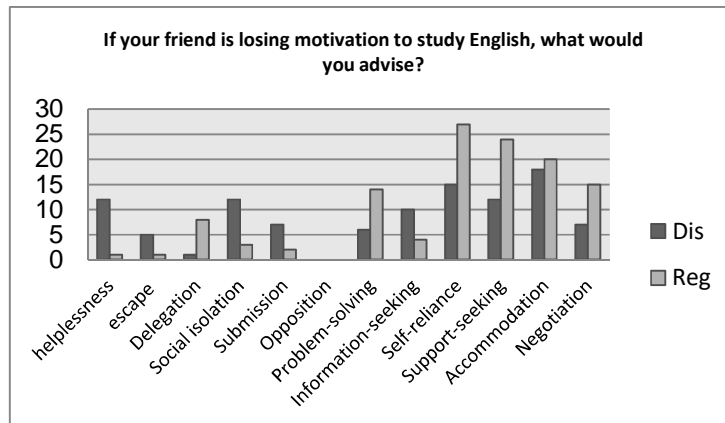


Figure 5. Social coping potential

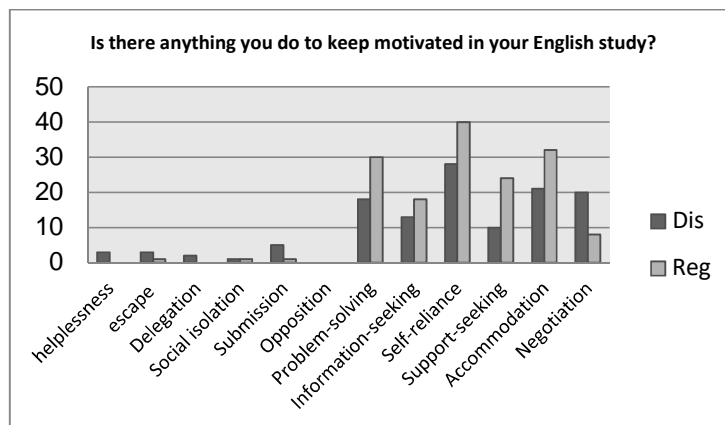


Figure 6. Present and future coping potential

As it is clear from figure 1, Dis EFL learners mostly show maladaptive strategies in reaction to de-motivation. They usually feel helplessness and try to escape the de-motivational situation; this is while regular EFL engage in negotiation or try to solve the problem.

As to the effects of de-motivation on students' short-term coping processes, figure 2 shows a much more level distribution of adaptive and maladaptive processes among Dis and Reg. With the exception of helplessness which is again a short-term strategy mostly selected by Dis learners, other strategies are adapted to a relatively same extent by Dis and Reg.

But, in a long-run, figure 3 shows that even Dis students recourse to the adaptive strategies for re-motivation. Although they report that they feel helplessness and try to delegate, at the same time, they want to solve the problems or even negotiate in coping with de-motivation. Something which is interesting here is the degree of self-reliance in Dis students which is higher than the degree of the same strategy in Reg students.

In answering the question: "what kind of assistance could have helped you to re-motivate?", again, there is a significant difference between Dis and Reg as to the selection of maladaptive and adaptive processes. Reg students are not maladaptive, in contrast to the Dis students who think that nothing can help them except delegation, social isolation or even submission and opposition. Of course, among adaptive processes, Dis students think that support seeking could have helped them. Another significant difference is the degree of self-reliance; where Reg students believe in self-reliance more than the Dis students.

Figure 5 is where Dis and Reg take a relatively same position as to adaptive and maladaptive strategies. They almost unanimously believe that adaptive processes are better in coping with de-motivation, and again self-reliance is the strategy that is thought to be the best one.

Present and future coping potential (figure 6) are again similar to social coping potential, in that, both Reg and Dis learners acknowledge that the adaptive strategies, and in this case mostly self-reliance, are helpful in keeping motivation.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that, under equal proficiency level, Dis and Reg EFL students are not so much different in terms of the general Antecedent Conditions of Learner, but something that makes them different is the de-motivational experiences and the time when this de-motivation has crept into their language learning.

In answering the first research question, "In what ways do the low proficiency EFL learners' de-motivational experiences differ in Dis and Reg education systems?", results of analysis indicated that students in distance education showed some differences under positive and negative conditions while positive Reg students attributed their de-motivation to their past experiences to the same extent as negative Reg students do. On the other hand, negative Dis students reported their de-motivation to be more deeply grounded than positive Reg students; it means that they thought their de-motivation in learning English started when they had just taken their first English courses in formal education; while those with positive antecedent conditions of learners in Reg system, felt that they had had some degree of motivation when they started their first formal English courses at school, but gradually, they lost it as they passed their years of study in JHS and reached the HS, when they felt a kind of severe de-motivation in learning English. The results reported here, are in line with Graham (2006) who states that motivational maintenance is affected by learners' belief; Baundura (1977) also, pointed out that activities and settings are chosen based on the perceived self-efficacy and that coping efforts are influenced by "expectations of eventual success" (p. 194).

As to the reasons for de-motivation, those with negative Antecedent Conditions of Learner, either Reg or Dis, attributed their de-motivation more to the lack of self-confidence than teacher or pedagogy; in contrast, under positive Antecedent Conditions of Learner, both Dis and Reg

reported the type of pedagogy as the most de-motivational factor. Under this condition, a significant difference was also observed; Dis students thought that lack of self-confidence also contributed to their de-motivation, while in Reg students, external factors such as teacher personality were more important in de-motivating the students. In sum, in Dis students, de-motivation arises mostly from within, while in Reg students external factors lead to de-motivation. The results reported here for Dis EFL learners are relatively similar to Xiao & Hurd's (2010) findings, where interest in English was the top motivating factor followed by tutors, family, and then course materials and other students. 93.94% of participants in Xiao & Hurd's study put emphasis on persistence, confidence, and self-regulation as key factors for motivational maintenance in a distant learning context which is characterized by separation of teacher and student distance language learning.

In answering the second question, "in what ways do the low proficiency EFL learners' developmental coping processes differ in Dis and Reg education systems?", in the first three figures, which are related to the involuntary responses, reflexes to stresses just as or after they occur (Falout, 2012), both Reg and Dis learners show a wider distribution across adaptive and maladaptive processes, with Dis negative ACL learners thinking that they act mostly in maladaptive ways in response to de-motivation. The last three figures which are related to potential coping processes indicate that what Dis learners experience and think regarding the de-motivation are different; they believe that they take adaptive strategies more than they experience them. On the other hand, in Reg group, even though negative in their Antecedent Conditions, mal-adaptive thinking was not reported. This can be explained under Higgins (1987)'s self-discrepancy theory, where EFL learners' de-motivational experiences and potential coping processes can be attributed to their "actual self" and "ought self" respectively. Higgins believes that students tend to match their actual self with the acceptable ought self and if this match occurs, learning will be successful.

Conclusions and implications

The results of the present study showed that Dis learners show a considerable degree of discrepancy between their learning experiences (actual self) and their coping potential (ought self) and this can be one of the reasons for their failure in learning English. On the other hand, Hurd (2005) argues that "for Dis language learners, motivation, at least in the early stages, is largely intrinsic ". Therefore, if practitioners are going to enhance the quality of learning in this system, attempts should be made to help the learners (1) minimize the discrepancy between their perceptions of the experiences they have and their thinking about the processes they should undergo to cope with de-motivational factors; and (2) control the effects of intrinsic de-motivational factors by fostering the positive mindsets in learning English.

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Appendix A

EFL Re-motivation Questionnaire

Please think back to your English education from the beginning through now. Then answer the following questions.

(1 = Very much disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Slightly disagree | 4 = Slightly agree | 5 = Agree | 6 = Strongly agree)

- (a) I am confident in learning English now. 1 2 3 4 5 6
- (b) I like studying English now. 1 2 3 4 5 6
- (c) Even if English had not been a compulsory subject, I would have chosen to study it. 1 2 3 4 5 6
- (d) Learning English was an enjoyable activity. 1 2 3 4 5 6
- (e) After receiving grades for English tests, I thought I did well. 1 2 3 4 5 6
- (f) Before you began to study English, what did you imagine learning English would be like?
- (g) Did your first English class meet your expectations? Yes / No
- (h) If "No," how was it different from what you thought it would be?

- (i) Have you had experiences to lose or decrease your motivation to study English? Yes / No
- (j) If “Yes,” when did it happen?
- (k) What happened to lower your motivation?
- (l) What was your reaction to it?
- (m) How did this experience change you?
- (n) For those who were demotivated in the past, how did you revive or remotivate yourself?
- (o) For those who could not remotivate, what kind of assistance could have helped you?
- (p) If your friend is losing motivation to study English, what would you advise?
- (q) Is there anything you do to keep motivated in your English study?