



RESEARCH PAPER

A Scoping Review of L2 Demotivation Research in Pakistan: Trends, Factors, and Gaps (1995–2025)

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ABSTRACT

The current review examines the temporal, methodological, contextual and thematic trends in research on demotivation in second language acquisition (SLA) in Pakistan over the past three decades. In Pakistan, English is the predominant language of instruction, official correspondence and social mobility. It is imperative to understand the causes and effects of learner demotivation in this domain. After a thorough search of major academic databases, the studies on L2 demotivation in Pakistani context were reviewed and data charted. The analysis reveals a gradual increase in interest in the subject after 2010, with a dominant focus on higher education contexts and frequent use of qualitative methods, largely overlooking younger learners, longitudinal methodologies and intervention-based investigations. Teacher-related factors, examination pressure, learning environment, and socio-cultural constraints were identified as significant demotivators. This review underscores the necessity for research on L2 demotivation in Pakistan that is more context-sensitive, theoretically informed, and methodologically diverse.

KEYWORDS L2 Demotivation, Pakistan, Scoping Review, Meta-analysis

Introduction

Motivation serves as a crucial factor in learning a second language (L2). Previous literature on the subject mainly focused on the development of motivation and its key factors, whereas current literature has shifted its focus to the influence of the feeling of demotivation and factors that cause barriers or stop an individual's motivation towards learning. Demotivation is more than a feeling of a lack of energy and passion to learn. It consists of many factors that are related to an individual or external environment that adversely affect students' perception, learning patterns, and engagement in learning.

The English language is different and complicated in its role in the Pakistani context. Usually, it is acquired as a second language because it is highly required in schools and universities for instructing students and staff to meet international standards. Simultaneously, it plays a major role in gaining success on an academic and professional level. Even with its significance, many students and even staff members face problems and struggle to become skilled in speaking and writing the English language. It may result in worry, stress, and demotivation to learn. This issue directed the attention of researchers towards the influential role of demotivation in efficient learning of the English Language.

Over the last thirty years, many studies have been published regarding second language (L2) demotivation in different academic settings. However, those studies have different aims, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks. Consequently, previous literature was lacking in a detailed scoping evaluation to comprehensively analyze this

subject area, recognize and the gap. This research aims to give a detailed assessment of research on L2 demotivation in students in Pakistan, from the year of 1995 to 2025. The study aims to a) evaluate how publication style and theme changed from 1995 to 2025, (b) recognize usual factors that hinder publication, (c) analyze the most suitable research methods used, and (d) suggest dimensions for future research.

Literature Review

Over the past 30 years, the development has been evident in studies on L2 demotivation in Pakistan. It also highlights modifications in the subject of applied linguistics globally, as well as specific hurdles faced by academia. As a scoping review, the current research doesn't aim to assess the efficacy of individual studies; on the contrary, it aims to evaluate how demotivation research has developed over time, including in its focus, conditions, factors and methods. Correspondingly, the literature available on the subject is searched to develop patterns aligned to the research questions regarding publication trends, research background, methods used, and ongoing demotivation factors.

Previous research, from the mid-1900s to the beginning of the 2000s, didn't formally describe the feeling of demotivation as a separate construct. However, those investigations mentioned different diverse experiences of learning that actually develop later definitions of demotivation of a second language. Researchers who were involved in studies related to English Language learning during that time period emphasized the negative attitude of learners regarding learning English, anxiety, low self-esteem, and avoidance, which often contribute to many socio-economic and policy-related influences on the individual and community level (Mansoor, 1999; Rahman, 2002, 2005). English was usually presented as a language that works as a barrier in communication, worsening the educational system, and increasing differences in the educational systems, ultimately developing worry, anxiety, and detachment among learners from the government sector and in people who belong to rural areas (Coleman, 2005; Coleman & Capstick, 2005).

Naturalistic observation of classrooms at that time highlighted that teachers' instructional methods reduced students' interest in participation, learning, and memorizing, as it was a more teacher-centered style of giving instructions, and also lowered the grades of students in exams (Shamim, 2003; Shamim & Tribble, 2005; Siddiqui, 2005). The local educational system was going through many problems on a structural level, such as high enrollment in classes, a lack of resources, and untrained teachers, which ultimately affected the motivation of learners and involvement in studies (Haider, 2005; Warsi, 2004). However, those studies didn't clearly formulate demotivation frameworks; they gave important contextual awareness regarding initial indicators of demotivation in students, thus addressing research question 4 by recognizing organizational and intellectual demotivators.

From the time period of 2006 to 2015, studies on L2 demotivation in Pakistan have gone through many changes and modifications, marked by a considerable alignment with globally advanced theoretical models. Developing on the pioneering work of Dörnyei (Dörnyei, 2009) and Sakai and Kikuchi (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), researchers progressively examined factors that are specific to the classroom setting that are involved in decreasing motivation, like negative comments by the teachers and classmates, fear of being judged after making errors, overload syllabus, and lack of opportunities to communicate (Mehmood, 2012; Nawaz & Shah, 2015; Riaz, 2015). Simultaneously, research during this time started to focus more clearly on students' decreasing interest and effort, especially in

college and university settings in late adolescence and early adulthood (Pathan, 2010; Haider & Fang, 2014).

Moreover, a remarkable shift has been observed in methodology during this era, marked by a heightened use of qualitative and mixed methods procedures to assess students' attitudes and experiences (Jabeen, 2015; Siddique, 2014). In studies, anxiousness emerged as a frequent theme commonly associated with teachers' actions and evaluation methods to intensify demotivation in students (Abbas & Iqbal, 2011; Zafar, 2015). These researches manifest the increasing importance of the higher education settings, and the growth of more diverse and advanced research methods.

After 2016, the concept of L2 demotivation became well defined and methodically studied in an organized manner in Pakistan. During this time period, research clearly utilized the concept of demotivation and used it for developing a theoretical frameworks to point out and categorize elements of demotivation. Factors related to teachers consistently come up as the most important demotivators. Discouraging behavior, lack of teaching skills, dependency on grammar-translation procedures, and the use of discouraging words in the classroom were recognized as factors (Ali & Pathan, 2017; Akram et al., 2021). Furthermore, the burden because of curriculum and evaluation methods, specifically high-weightage assessments and overloaded curriculum, was commonly reported as a reason for demotivation at various educational stages (Talpur et al., 2021; Rubbani, 2021).

Recent literature has further increased the scope of research on L2 demotivation by merging students' internal and psychological constructs to provide a more holistic view. Quantitative research methods have found the relationship between demotivation and constructs such as academic toughness, personality traits, and language learner anxiety, showing that demotivation is a fluid concept impacted by the interaction of individual and environmental factors (Pathan et al., 2020; Zafar & Mehmood, 2021). Moreover, Qualitative methods have given a more comprehensive understanding of students' experiences, emphasizing recurring themes such as the fear of judgment, frequent academic disappointments, and low emotional and social support as common factors that discourage students (Muhammad & Khalid, 2019; Naeem et al., 2023).

Remarkably, even if most of the studies have emphasized the university settings, emerging research has begun to identify demotivation among school and college setting, suggesting that feelings of demotivation are evident throughout the academic journey instead of being fixed to a particular stage (Shehzadi et al., 2024; Farooqi, 2025). In contrast, the current scoping review's results show a dearth of longitudinal and intervention-based research, thus inhibiting a holistic understanding of the temporal dimension of demotivation and the effectiveness of instructional or policy-based planning for its decline.

The existing literature, in its extensiveness, shows an apparent change from hinted descriptions of students' academic disengagement to clear and direct theoretically-informed assessments of second language demotivation. Concurrently, it uncovers enduring shortcomings related to the educational system, research methods, and cultural and environmental variability. These visible patterns ultimately shape the method and research questions of the current research, thereby emphasizing the requirement of an organized scoping review to outline existing evidence and develop research priorities for future research.

Material and Methods

Research Design

The current study was conducted with scoping review methodology to research on L2 demotivation in the Pakistani context over the time period of past thirty years. Scoping reviews are specifically appropriate for evaluating the scope, range, and type of research procedure within a subject area, especially when the literature is diverse in terms of its methodology, environments, and theoretical framework (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Peters et al., 2020). Given the dispersed and developing nature of research on second language demotivation in Pakistan, a scoping review was more suitable than a systematic review or meta-analysis.

Table 1
Phase 1: Early / Foundational Phase (1995–2005)

| No. | Author(s) | Year | Context/ Level | Focus Related to Demotivation |
|-----|--------------------|------|-----------------|---|
| 1 | Mansoor, S. | 1999 | Hr. education | Attitudinal problems toward English learning |
| 2 | Rahman, T. | 2002 | National | English as a gatekeeping language is causing learner alienation |
| 3 | Shamim, F. | 2003 | School /college | Classroom practices discourage learner participation |
| 4 | Warsi, J. | 2004 | University | Learners' negative perceptions of English instruction |
| 5 | Coleman, H. | 2005 | University | English as medium of Instruction |
| 6 | Khan, H. A. | 2005 | Secondary | Examination pressure and fear of failure |
| 7 | Malik, S. R. | 2005 | College | Anxiety and lack of confidence |
| 8 | Shamim & Tribble | 2005 | Public schools | Large classes and teacher-centered pedagogy |
| 9 | Rahman, T. | 2005 | National | Socio-economic barriers to English learning |
| 10 | Abbas, F. | 2005 | University | Dissatisfaction with the English curriculum |
| 11 | Haider, G. | 2005 | University | Difficulties leading to disengagement |
| 12 | Siddiqui, S. | 2005 | Secondary | Rote learning as a discouraging practice |
| 13 | Coleman & Capstick | 2005 | Policy | English-medium pressure and learner stress |
| 14 | Mahboob, A. | 2005 | Hr. education | Identity conflict and resistance to English |
| 15 | Warsi & Farooq | 2005 | College | Fear of speaking English |

An extensive search was conducted on different educational databases, such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus-indexed journals, and local Pakistani education journals. Terms that were searched included combinations of “*demotivation, motivation, English language learning, L2, Pakistan, learner attitudes, and language anxiety*”. Reference lists of relevant articles were also manually screened to point out additional studies.

A predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria was set. Only those studies were included that focused on English as a second or foreign language and have been conducted in Pakistani context. The studies explored demotivation directly or indirectly (e.g., low motivation, disengagement in classroom settings) and are published in the year between 1995 and 2025. There was no bar on the type of methodology or research design. These were left open. Those studies were excluded that were not conducted in Pakistan and focused only on motivation without interlinking with demotivation-related concepts. They were only just opinions and lacked empirical evidence or an analytical base.

Table 2
Phase 2: Transitional / Emerging Demotivation Research (2006–2015)

| No. | Author(s) | Year | Level | Focus |
|-----|---------------|------|------------|--|
| 01 | Pathan, Z. H. | 2010 | University | Learners' loss of interest in English |
| 02 | Abbas, F. & | 2011 | Secondary | Anxiety and disengagement in ESL |
| 03 | Mehmood, T. | 2012 | College | Exam-oriented teaching as a demotivator |
| 04 | Rahman, T. | 2013 | National | English-related frustration among learners |

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|----|-----------------|------|-----------------|---|
| 05 | Haider & Fang | 2014 | University | Learner resistance and classroom pressure |
| 06 | Siddique, A. R. | 2014 | Secondary | Curriculum overload and demotivation |
| 07 | Nawaz & Shah | 2015 | College | Negative feedback and fear of mistakes |
| 08 | Mahboob & Elyas | 2015 | College/Univers | Structural demotivators in ELT |
| 09 | Jabeen, F. | 2015 | College | Lack of communicative practice |
| 10 | Zafar, S. | 2015 | University | Anxiety as a demotivating factor |
| 11 | Riaz, M. | 2015 | Secondary | Teacher dominance and learner silence |
| 12 | Khan & Rahman | 2015 | College | English as an academic burden |
| 13 | Ali, S. | 2015 | University | Learners' disengagement narratives |

Table 3
Phase 3: Explicit Demotivation Research (2016–2025)

| No. | Author(s) | Year | Context / Level | Method / Focus |
|-----|-------------------|------|-----------------|--|
| 01 | Ali & Pathan | 2017 | College | Qualitative – demotivating factors |
| 02 | Muhammad & Khalid | 2019 | University | Learners' voices on demotivation |
| 03 | Pathan et al. | 2020 | University | Demotivation, resilience & personality |
| 04 | Haseeb & Akhtar | 2020 | Secondary | Quantitative demotivation scale |
| 05 | Akram et al. | 2021 | Secondary | Demotivational teacher language |
| 06 | Talpur et al. | 2021 | College | Survey of demotivating factors |
| 07 | Rubbani | 2021 | College | Male learners' demotivation |
| 08 | Zafar & Mehmood | 2021 | University | Anxiety–demotivation link |
| 09 | Naeem et al. | 2023 | College | Qualitative demotivators |
| 10 | Ali et al. | 2023 | University | Motivation–demotivation comparison |
| 11 | Shehzadi et al. | 2024 | School– | Mixed-methods demotivation study |
| 12 | Pathan et al. | 2025 | Multi-level | Dynamic demotivation patterns |
| 13 | Pathan et al. | 2025 | College | Personality traits & demotivation |
| 14 | Pathan et al. | 2025 | College | Qualitative “darker side” inquiry |
| 15 | Farooqi et al. | 2025 | Secondary | Dissatisfaction & demotivation |

Data Charting and Analysis

Selected studies were arranged according to their year of publication, level of education, research methodology, method of data collection, and explanation of factors of demotivation. A descriptive-analytical approach was used to integrate findings and identify patterns over the past thirty years. Instead of evaluating the quality of methodology, the focus of analysis was on surveying trends and consistencies in themes. Aligned with the objectives of a current scoping review, show a decade-wise arrangement of L2 demotivation-related research in Pakistan. The early phase (1995–2005) highlights attitudinal and structural barriers, while the transitional phase (2006–2015) marked a shift toward classroom setting demotivators. Clear, theory-based demotivation research has come out mainly after 2016.

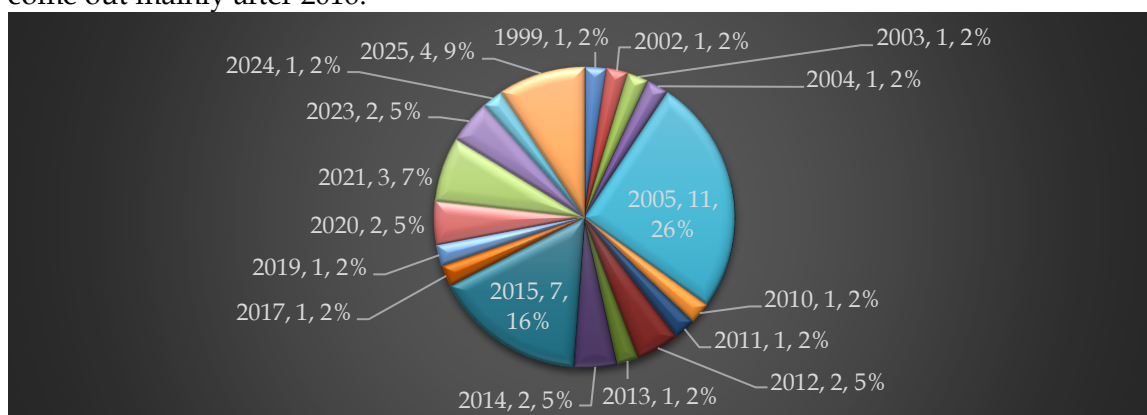


Figure 1 L2 Demotivation across 30 Years

Results and Discussion

The results depict a moderate but irregular growth in research on second Language demotivation in the Pakistani context.

Temporal Trends in L2 Demotivation Research

Research published in years between 1995 and 2005 fundamentally discussed the construct of demotivation indirectly by highlighting the negative perception, anxiety, and organizational limitations in the English language educational system. During the years 2006 to 2015, research started to directly focus on demotivators related to the classroom setting, though the concept of demotivation was still not clearly defined. From 2016 onwards, there was a significant development in theory and empirical-based studies clearly paying attention on L2 demotivation.

Educational Contexts and Learner Populations

Most research was conducted at the tertiary level, specifically in government sector universities. Fewer studies assessed learners at the college level, and a limited but growing body of research focused on students at the school level. Rural and under-valued settings were underrepresented, with more concentration of studies on urban organizations. This shows a contextual disparity in the existing literature.

Methodological Characteristics

The findings reveal that quantitative research design was used more frequently according to the literature, especially in recent years. Most researches commonly used interviews. Quantitative studies used questionnaires that were adapted from international scales of demotivation. Qualitative studies were lesser but provided richer information regarding learners' psychological and experiential domains of demotivation. Mixed-methods designs were relatively rare, and longitudinal or intervention-related studies were substantially absent. (see Table 1)

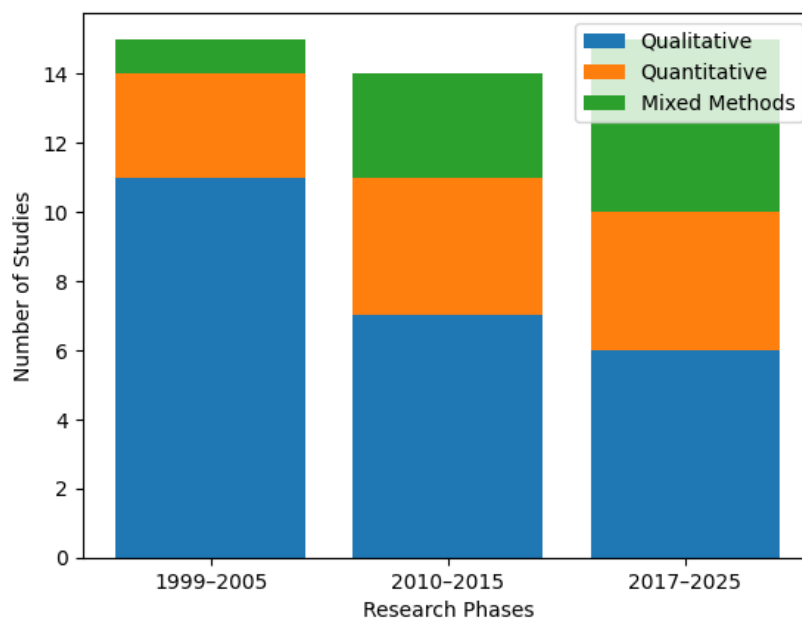


Figure 2 Methodological Trends in L2 Demotivation Research

Table 4
Aggregated Frequency Table

| Education Level | Qualitative | Quantitative | Mixed methods | Total |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|-------|
| College | 5 | 5 | 1 | 11 |
| College/University | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Comparative | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Higher education | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Multi-level | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| National | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Policy | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Public schools | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| School & college | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| School-University | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Secondary | 4 | 4 | 0 | 8 |
| University | 6 | 2 | 4 | 12 |

Table 5
Choice of Methods across Education Levels

| Education Level | Methodology | Method Type |
|--------------------|---|---------------|
| Higher education | Qualitative (interviews, case study) | Qualitative |
| National | Qualitative (policy analysis, discourse analysis) | Qualitative |
| School & college | Qualitative (classroom observation, interviews) | Qualitative |
| University | Qualitative (survey + interviews) | Qualitative |
| University | Qualitative (policy review, case study) | Qualitative |
| Secondary | Quantitative (survey/questionnaire) | Quantitative |
| College | Quantitative (survey-based study) | Quantitative |
| Public schools | Qualitative (classroom observation, case study) | Qualitative |
| National | Qualitative (policy + sociolinguistic analysis) | Qualitative |
| University | Mixed methods (survey + interviews) | Mixed methods |
| University | Qualitative (interviews, learner narratives) | Qualitative |
| Secondary | Qualitative (classroom study, observation) | Qualitative |
| Policy | Qualitative (policy analysis, reports) | Qualitative |
| Higher education | Qualitative (discourse analysis, interviews) | Qualitative |
| College | Quantitative (survey/questionnaire) | Quantitative |
| University | Qualitative (interviews, case study) | Qualitative |
| Secondary | Quantitative (survey/questionnaire) | Quantitative |
| College | Qualitative (interviews, classroom observation) | Qualitative |
| Comparative | Qualitative (comparative case study) | Qualitative |
| National | Qualitative (policy/discourse analysis) | Qualitative |
| University | Mixed methods (survey + interviews) | Mixed methods |
| Secondary | Qualitative (classroom-based study) | Qualitative |
| College | Quantitative (survey) | Quantitative |
| College/University | Qualitative (critical/policy analysis) | Qualitative |
| College | Qualitative (classroom observation, interviews) | Qualitative |
| University | Quantitative (survey-based study) | Quantitative |
| Secondary | Qualitative (classroom observation) | Qualitative |
| College | Mixed methods (survey + interviews) | Mixed methods |
| University | Qualitative (narrative inquiry, interviews) | Qualitative |
| University | Qualitative (interviews, narrative inquiry) | Qualitative |
| University | Mixed methods (survey + interviews) | Mixed methods |
| Secondary | Quantitative (scale development, survey) | Quantitative |
| Secondary | Qualitative (classroom discourse analysis) | Qualitative |
| College | Quantitative (survey/questionnaire) | Quantitative |
| College | Qualitative (case study, interviews) | Qualitative |
| University | Quantitative (correlational study) | Quantitative |
| College | Qualitative (interviews, thematic analysis) | Qualitative |
| University | Mixed methods (survey + interviews) | Mixed methods |

| | | |
|-------------------|---|---------------|
| School-University | Mixed methods (survey + interviews) | Mixed methods |
| Multi-level | Mixed methods (longitudinal approach) | Mixed methods |
| College | Quantitative (survey, statistical analysis) | Quantitative |
| College | Qualitative (in-depth interviews) | Qualitative |
| Secondary | Quantitative (survey-based study) | Quantitative |

Demotivating Factors

In order to develop a better understanding of the trends across the years, the themes were divided into clusters. The analysis of theme clusters reveals that demotivation among English language learners is influenced by a combination of emotional, pedagogical and socioeconomic factors. Anxiety and fear ($f = 6$) are the most frequent themes that results in demotivation. Anxiety and fear are incited due to fear of making mistakes, speaking anxiety and lack of confidence. Classroom practices ($f = 6$) are also another frequent theme. This high frequency theme depicts that L2 demotivation results due to teacher centered teaching, lack of interaction and boring or repetitive activities. Policy frameworks and Socioeconomic background ($f = 5$) are also significant external factors. Economic background and access to resources are strong demotivators. Teacher behavior ($f = 4$) is an important interpersonal factor. This cluster shows that strict or unsupportive teachers, lack of encouragement and negative feedback can be extremely demotivating. Issues related to learners internal mindset and identity ($f = 4$) also matter a lot. Learners' lack of interest in learning English, negative self-image and a low perceived value of learning are equally detrimental. Moderate themes such as curriculum issues and lack of practice and communication indicate concerns regarding outdated content and insufficient opportunities for practice. Finally exam pressure ($f = 2$), though least frequent, contributes to learner stress and shifts focus from meaningful learning to performance only. Overall, the findings show and reflect that demotivation is a multidimensional process requiring attention at emotional, instructional and systemic levels.

Table 6
Theme Clusters

| | Theme Cluster | Frequency |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Anxiety / Fear | 6 |
| 2 | Classroom Practices | 6 |
| 3 | Curriculum Issues | 3 |
| 4 | Policy / Socio-economic | 5 |
| 5 | Teacher Behavior | 4 |
| 6 | Identity / Attitude | 4 |
| 7 | Exam Pressure | 2 |
| 8 | Lack of Practice / Communication | 3 |

These findings align with established motivational theories in second language acquisition (SLA). The prevalence of anxiety among second language learners aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) which posits emotional barriers as strong demotivators. Dornyei's L2 Motivational Self System (Dornyei, 2009) also emphasizes the role of learning environment and teacher influence.

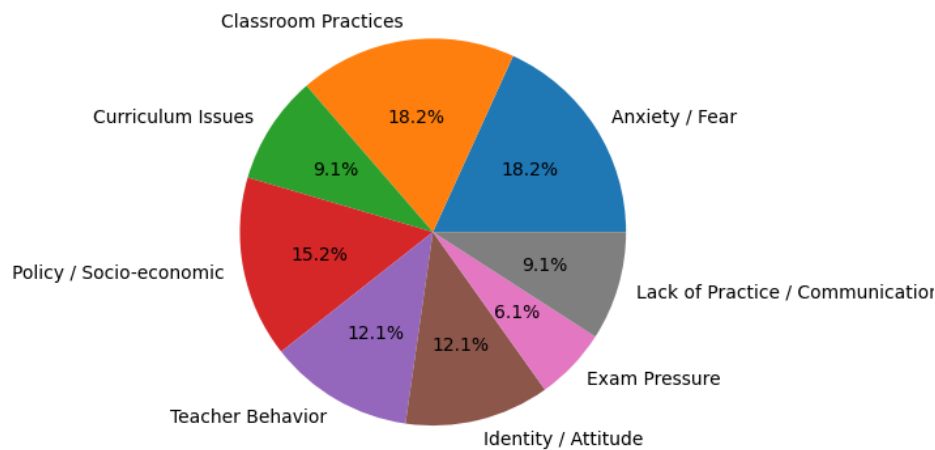


Figure 3 Distribution of Demotivation

Conclusion

The current study revealed a steady but irregular growth in research on L2 demotivation. Earlier studies had an indirect focus on learner difficulties, anxiety and structural issues in general terms. Recent studies clearly address demotivation as a distinct construct. Another important aspect is that the most studies are conducted in universities and tertiary institutions. This implies that there is a strong concentration on higher education contexts. There is a clear lack of research on L2 demotivation at school level. Similarly, rural and underprivileged contexts remain unexplored. With respect to methodology, qualitative methods were more frequent whereas quantitative and mixed methods remain limited. Longitudinal and intervention-based studies are rare rather largely absent.

Meta analysis brings forth factors of demotivation in SLA. Learner anxiety and classroom practices rank as the top demotivators. Following closely behind are the socio economic and policy related factors. Limited resources and unequal opportunities largely influence learner motivation. The study highlights the importance of teacher behaviour and lack of communication opportunities for the learners. Learner engagement was affected due to identity and attitudinal issues as well. Lack of interest and low perceived value of English largely contributed today's factors.

Recommendations

The study has significant theoretical and practical implications. The findings align with ground breaking L2 theories such as Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Zoltan Dornyei's L2 motivational self-system. The results confirm the demotivation is a multidimensional phenomenon involving emotional pedagogical and contextual factors.

Practical implications with regards to English language pedagogy and education are paramount. In the light of the findings, teachers should adopt learner centered and interactive teaching strategies to maintain motivation. Supportive feedback and positive teacher student relationship are essential. Curriculum designers should review and revise outdated materials. Curriculum breakdowns should include commutative tasks and real-life scenarios.

The study is likely to inform policy perspectives. Policymakers can improve access to resources especially in rural and disadvantaged areas. All the educational institutes

across the board including schools and universities should provide emotionally safe environments. The learning environment should be such that the learners don't feel anxiety and remain confident.

The study highlights important research gaps in L2 demotivation research at large and in Pakistani context in particular. It also urges the need for more studies at school level specially in primary and secondary classes. Lack of studies in rural, low income and marginalized learner populations requires greater attention. Future researchers should employ mixed methods and comparative research across provinces. Methodologically mixed methods, longitudinal and experimental designs should be employed. Comparative studies across provinces and public slash private institutions would broaden the understanding of L2 demotivation.

The current study has clearly demonstrated that L2 demotivation in Pakistan is shaped by accomplishing interaction of emotional, instructional and social factors. It is extremely important to address these issues. Research informed teaching practices, equitable policies and context sensitive research can significantly enhance English language learning outcomes.

The study puts forth a number of recommendations that inform on SLA practices, research on the subject and educational policies with respect to second language learning. The emphasis is on the conduction of more research at primary and secondary school levels. Exploration of demotivation in rural, low-income, and marginalized learner populations will add the much needed diversity. Use of mixed-methods, longitudinal, and experimental research designs in future studies is highly recommended. Comparative studies across provinces and public/private institutions will allow generalizability.

Curriculum development should pay heed to learner-centered and interactive teaching methods. Lack of group work, discussions, and communicative tasks demotivate learners. Classroom environment should be supportive and anxiety-free. Learners should feel confident to participate in class activities. Outdated and examination-oriented curricula should be revised to reduce undue stress on the learners. Inclusion of real-life communication tasks and practical language activities will add authenticity to the language learning process.

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