

ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026. Page# 8258-8270

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

The Problem of Demotivation in EFL Learning among Secondary School Students in the Rural Southern Punjab: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

In developing countries like Pakistan, English is used as a mandatory subject from primary schools to secondary and higher secondary schools and in the rural areas of the country, secondary school students in socio-economically down trodden areas are often faced with English language acquisition as a daunting task as well as a source of anxiety. Demotivation in L2 research is an under-researched aspect of L2 acquisition, especially in rural under-resourced secondary school contexts where the positive aspects of motivation have been thoroughly studied. This empirical study aimed to find out the multidimensional internal and external demotivating factors influencing the English among students of Southern Punjab and to explore if there are significant perceptual differences between male and female students. The study adopted a quantitative cross sectional survey design and employed a multistage cluster sampling technique in tehsils of Bahawalpur and Bahawalnagar districts of Southern Punjab. The sample of the study was N = 191 students; each responded to a 50-item Likert-type scale questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha = .78) with seven factor domains. The empirical results indicated that the most prominent demotivating factors were Teacher's Personality (M = 3.63, SD = 0.70), Peer & Classmate Dynamics (M = 3.60, SD = 0.74), Inadequate School Facilities (M = 3.60, SD = 0.74), followed closely by Pedagogical Methods (M = 3.44, SD = 0.64), Course Content (M = 3.44, SD = 0.64), and

Domestic/Socioeconomic Pressure ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.53$). Dominance of Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), memorization of paragraphs, classroom speaking anxiety, multi-grade teaching, overcrowding and fear of parental punishment were identified as major systemic factors. Comparative inferential analysis revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between female and male learners for the major construct domain ($p > .05$) and thus no significant difference in the structural experience of demotivation between the two.

Key words: *EFL demotivation, students' problem of demotivation, Rural secondary education, Southern Punjab, gender perception comparison.*

Introduction

In today's increasingly global world, the ability to use English is an invaluable asset for academic progress, economic, and social mobility, and international communication (Pathan & Krishnan, 2013). In Pakistan, English holds a critical institutional position and is taught as a compulsory subject throughout the primary, secondary and tertiary education and is used as the language of official administration as well as professional teaching and learning (Ali et al., 2025; Pathan, 2013). But Pakistan is a developing social and economic context where more than 70% of the country's population lives in rural and economically less developed areas (Falout & Falout, 2005). In these marginalised rural settings, the learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is often seen not as an enabling learning opportunity, but as a burdensome and anxiety-generating obstacle, as an 'atrocious nightmare' (Batool et al., 2025; Dörnyei, 2001; Siddique and Ali, 2025) as one of the local learners put it. In public schools, formal English language instruction starts from Class 1, and after 8-10 years of continuous exposure, secondary school students of this system often have serious problems in communicative fluency, structural understanding, and English language output.

In the past, the literature in the field of second language acquisition (L2) has focused mainly on the analysis of positive motivational constructs. Major theories such as Gardner and Lambert's (1972) dichotomy of integrative versus instrumental orientation, Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of human needs had formed the basis of theories stressing that high motivational drive leads to the mastery of the language and the attainment of goals (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; McDonough, 1986). However, this approach only addresses the 'light side' of language teaching, that is, the factors that motivate learners to learn, and neglects the 'darker side' – that is, the factors that demotivate learners to learn, in the case of foreign language teaching, demotivation (Dörnyei, 1998, 2001). We define demotivation as specific external or internal destructive forces that reduce, slow down or cancel the motivational base of a continuous behavioural intention/learning endeavor (Dörnyei, 2001; Falout, 2004). As asserted by Covington (1998) and Bandura (1997), if students feel that they are completely helpless in learning or receive ridicule in the learning environment for a long time, their self-efficacy will decline and lead to psychological helplessness and academic burnout (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015; Jayoung et al., 2010).

This study adopts three theoretical viewpoints that are complementary to each other: Dörnyei's (1998, 2001) L2 Demotivation Framework, Williams and Burden's (1997) Social Constructivist Model, and Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT. They are synthesized to systematically operationalize the concept of

demotivation in secondary school EFL context. Dörnyei (1998) listed nine major external factors that were found to demotivate students in the language classroom, including teacher personality, teacher commitment, teacher's pedagogical style, which is mostly non-communicative, lack of school facilities, attitudes of the peer group and the negative perceptions of the society (Ali et al., 2020; Ali and Saleh, 2022; Ali et al., 2023). Williams and Burden (1997) also proposed that L2 motivation is a dynamic phenomenon that exists within a social constructivist ecology, where internal factors (e.g., gender, developmental age, self-confidence) constantly interact with external factors (e.g., the behaviour of the teacher, the structure of the classroom, family networks). Moreover, Deci and Ryan (1985) expressed that external locus of control in instructional contexts, such as through punishment, offering of external rewards, or a machinelike exercise, leads to the demise of intrinsic motivation and to serious demotivation of the learner.

Although a vast amount of demotivation research has been done in both, East Asian and Western educational systems (e.g., Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Kikuchi, 2009; Oxford, 1998; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Tsuchiya, 2006), empirical studies conducted specifically in under-resourced rural communities in South Asia, and Pakistan in particular, are very few (Pathan & Krishnan, 2013). In Southern Punjab (agricultural districts of Bahawalpur & Bahawalnagar), secondary school students face a unique mix of a number of institutional challenges (multi-grade classes, high student to teacher ratio, absence of AV aids etc.) and socioeconomic issues (parental illiteracy, dependence on agricultural labour, punitive home environment etc.) (Pathan, 2013). Even given these deep challenges, there is a lack of empirical studies systematically quantifying the relative magnitude of these multidimensional demotivators, and exploring possible gender perceptual differences.

The study has set out three main research objectives:

1. To measure the key demotivating factors of EFL learning among secondary school students in southern Punjab both internal and external.
2. To assess the relative effect of domains of instruction, institutions, peers and home on the learning outcomes of secondary EFL learners.
3. In order to do a comparative inferential analysis to see if there was any statistically significant difference between male and female secondary school students in terms of their perceptions of EFL demotivating factors.

To this end, the study proposes to examine the formal null hypothesis

H₀: There is no statistically significant difference between secondary school students in Southern Punjab on male/female perceived agreement in the primary EFL demotivation factor domains ($\alpha = .05$).

Methods and Procedures

This investigation was done through a quantitative cross-sectional descriptive survey. The use of a quantitative approach was chosen as the best scientific approach in order to measure, tabulate and statistically analyze the many aspects of demotivation at a sample of secondary school learners spread out geographically (Hartas, 2010). Descriptive survey methodology allows for systematic and standardized collection of empirical data to permit the precise estimation of parameters, as well as factor analysis and comparative testing across specified demographic subgroups (Cohn et al., 2000).

All secondary school students (9th and 10th grades) of public schools of Southern Punjab region were targeted as population. A multistage cluster sampling procedure was carefully implemented to provide geographic representation in underdeveloped agrarian areas, with two target areas: Bahawalpur and Bahawalnagar.

The 11 tehsils were the primary geographic clusters in Phase 1 of the sampling model. Administrative stratification was used at Phase 2 level to randomly select one male public secondary school and the one female public secondary school (22 secondary schools) in each tehsil. Simple random sampling was used to sample 10 male and 10 female secondary school students in each institution in Phase 3. The first field distribution consisted of 250 structured questionnaires given to the participating schools. After carefully screening the data to remove incomplete, invalid, and unengaged responses, a final analyzed sample of $N = 191$ fully completed questionnaires was created, representing an effective response rate of 76.4%. The final group of secondary learners was made up of 14–16-year-old male ($n = 95$) and female ($n = 96$) secondary learners from public rural and semi-urban secondary schools.

A highly structured questionnaire with 50 Likert-scale items was used for data collection, which was created after a thorough synthesis of international L2 demotivation literature (Dörnyei, 1998, 2001; Oxford, 1998; Ushioda, 1998). The first draft of the instrument contained 59 candidate items. The instrument was formally content-evaluated by a panel of expert educational researchers and senior university EFL professors to see if it built up a construct validity and contextual appropriateness.

Pilot testing was then used with an independent group of $n = 25$ public secondary school students (not part of the main empirical study). The items that were ambiguous or redundant were removed from the scale, resulting in 50-item operational scale after item analysis and scale refinement. Responses were rated using a standard 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). For internal consistency, SPSS was used and the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = .78$, which is above the standard of educational research of $\alpha = .70$, thus showing that the reliability of the scale is good. The 50 questionnaire items were grouped into seven different factor areas: Teacher's Personality (8 items); Teacher's Behavior (7 items); Teaching Method (10 items); Course Content & Curriculum (3 items); Classmates' Behavior & Peer Dynamics (4 items); Inadequate School Facilities & Infrastructure (4 items); and Domestic Effect & Socioeconomic Factors (11 items), with open-ended qualitative feedback prompts.

Raw empirical data were cleaned, coded and processed by using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25.0). Descriptive statistical analyses were performed to determine absolute frequencies, valid percentages, mean scores (M), standard deviations (SD), variances, minimum and maximum values for each separate item of the survey as well as for the seven group items. To determine whether there were any statistically significant mean differences between the male and female groups of students, inferential statistical evaluation was performed using independent-samples t -tests with 2-tailed significance level set at $\alpha = .05$ and $df = 189$.

Results and Interpretations

The empirical results are organized systematically into two broad subsections: (1) descriptive analysis of the seven major factor domains of the demotivation factors; and (2) inferential comparative analysis to test gender differences in perceptions.

An overall construct metric was computed for each of the seven factor domains to determine the relative importance and magnitude of demotivating factors influencing rural secondary EFL learners in Southern Punjab (N = 191). Table 1 provides a summary of the means, standard deviations, variances, minimum and maximum scores for each of the empirical factor categories.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for Primary Demotivation Factor Constructs (N = 191)

Factor/Construct Domain	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)	Variance	Minimum	Maximum
Factor 1: Teacher's Personality	3.63	0.70	0.49	1.86	4.86
Factor 2: Teacher's Behavior	2.76	0.80	0.65	1.17	4.83
Factor 3: Teaching Method	3.44	0.64	0.41	1.86	5.00
Factor 4: Course Content & Curriculum	3.44	0.64	0.41	1.86	5.00
Factor 5: Peer & Classmate Dynamics	3.60	0.74	0.55	1.50	5.00
Factor 6: Inadequate School Facilities	3.60	0.74	0.55	1.50	5.00
Factor 7: Domestic Effect & Pressure	3.26	0.53	0.28	2.00	5.00

Note. Using a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree). The data collected from public secondary schools of Bahawalpur and Bahawalnagar districts.

Mean scores for all seven domains of demotivation, as described in Table 1, varied from M = 2.76 to M = 3.63. The empirical hierarchy shows that Teacher's Personality (M = 3.63, SD = 0.70) is the strongest domain for the demotivating factors, 81.9% of the respondents agree that the factors related to Teacher's personality have a significant negative effect on L2 learning. Peer & Classmate Dynamics (M = 3.60, SD = 0.74) and Inadequate School Facilities (M = 3.60, SD = 0.74) were the second most demotivating constructs (95.3% overall agreement), emphasizing the negative influence of the social and physical classroom environment.

Instructional and curricular dimensions: Teaching Method (M = 3.44, SD = 0.64) and Course Content & Curriculum (M = 3.44, SD = 0.64) showed high levels of demotivating influence (95.3% and 91.6% agreement thresholds, respectively). The moderate to high level of demotivating force was observed in Domestic Effect & Socioeconomic Pressure (94.2% agreement) while the lowest mean score was indicated in Teacher's Behavior among the seven domains with variance of 0.65 (moderate level of response dispersion).

Teacher's Personality and Behavioural Dynamics

The detailed item analysis found subtleties about perceptions of instructional staff. In the positive professional dimensions, most of the students (Male = 71, M = 3.54, SD = 1.47; Female = 60, M = 3.52, SD = 1.07) were in agreement that teachers were committed to their work. Likewise, both male (M = 4.17, SD = 0.93) and female (M = 3.75, SD = 1.05) students strongly agreed that teachers had good communication skills and provided a conducive learning environment (M_{male} = 3.91, M_{female} = 3.64).

Moreover, students recognized that teachers updated their language knowledge ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.74$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.31$) and gave academic counselling ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.64$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.33$).

On the other hand, acute demotivation stemmed from certain negative affective behaviours. A large percentage of female students ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.14$) and male students ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.31$) indicated that their teachers laugh at them when they make mistakes in their language in class. Additionally, females showed greater agreement with teacher shouting during lesson delivery ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.29$) and teacher irritation ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.26$) than males (disagreeing more with teacher shouting $M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.30$). Importantly, male students strongly disagreed with teacher malleable behaviour makes learning easy ($M = 3.04$ vs. $M_{\text{female}} = 3.56$), which means that rigid demeanor of teachers creates affective anxiety in male secondary students.

Pedagogical Methods and Curricular Content Constraints

In secondary schools of rural Southern Punjab, there is significant predominance of traditional teachers cantered pedagogical methodology. The results of the item analysis revealed that the teachers think that most of the time they use the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.71$; $SD = 1.38$; $M_{\text{female}} = 3.56$; $SD = 1.12$), read aloud mechanically from textbooks paragraph-by-paragraph ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.79$; $M_{\text{female}} = 3.89$), and concentrate heavily on formal grammar drills ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.83$; $M_{\text{female}} = 3.23$). Activity-based communicative teaching, on the other hand, is barely used in classrooms and majority of the male students ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.51$) and females ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.39$) disagree that interactive activities occur frequently in classrooms.

The results of the content analysis of curricular texts showed that students feel very demotivated when they must memorize long and complicated prose paragraphs ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.06$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.31$) and learn the grammatically complicated sentence structures ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.60$ and $M_{\text{female}} = 3.16$). Students unanimously preferred the short stories that were interesting ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.66$; $M_{\text{female}} = 3.79$). In addition, one of the factors that was found to be a great demotivator was exam-oriented teaching where female students strongly agreed that: teachers focus on teaching for the purpose of passing examination rather than developing communicative competence ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.25$). Speech anxiety was found to be a common problem, male learners indicating a high level of shyness when asked to speak English in class ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.30$; $M_{\text{female}} = 2.83$, $SD = 1.31$). Male learners also reported having to have to buy and use commercial English 'help guides' ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.53$ vs. $M_{\text{female}} = 2.45$).

Peer Dynamics / Institutional Classroom Infrastructure

Peer social interaction was a significant, two-sided phenomenon. The learners gave strong support to the idea that collaborative student grouping during instruction increased their motivation ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.73$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.60$), however, the existing peer dynamics in rural schools, operated in a destructive manner. Most of the male students ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.62$) and female students ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.25$) indicated that classmates do not help in learning English. More importantly, students agreed that the unsupportive behaviour of fellow students directly translates to demotivation ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.52$, $SD = 1.66$; $M_{\text{female}} = 3.22$, $SD = 1.32$).

The lack of institutional infrastructure further compounds demotivation of learners. Virtually everyone agreed that multi-grade teaching ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.71$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.50$, a class combining more than one

grade level because of a shortage of teachers) and extremely crowded classrooms ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.37$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.48$) were demotivating. Physical environmental amenities were identified as important facilitators: students indicated that without adequate seating furniture ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.85$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.58$), adequate classroom lighting ($M_{\text{female}} = 3.81$, $M_{\text{male}} = 3.18$), proper sitting arrangements ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.60$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.27$), and whiteboard activities ($M_{\text{male}} = 4.01$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.77$), physical fatigue and disengagement from learning would occur.

Domestic Environment and Socioeconomic Pressures

The socio-economic and domestic environment has a strong influence on the rural learners. Students did agree that parents encourage them by word to learn English ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.52$; $M_{\text{female}} = 3.49$), but parents' practical involvement in their children's academic work was very limited: students did not agree that parents check their English homework every day ($M_{\text{male}} = 2.66$, $SD = 1.61$; $M_{\text{female}} = 3.16$, $SD = 1.48$). Learners need a lot of commercial private tuition coaching $M_{\text{male}} = 3.08$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.27$ to make up for the gaps in their learning at home and school.

There is a strong demotivation under dynamic domestic pressures. No significant difference was found between male and female learners' level of agreement that undue parental academic pressure leads to severe demotivation ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.45$). Moreover, students revealed that parents physically or psychologically punish them when they fail in the studies ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.10$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.04$) and insult them when they get lower grades ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.22$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.25$). Geographically, students strongly agreed that urban learners have a structural advantage and learn English much faster than rural children ($M_{\text{female}} = 3.83$, $M_{\text{male}} = 3.52$), while the idea that rural children learn fast was completely rejected ($M_{\text{male}} = 2.70$, $M_{\text{female}} = 2.49$). However, students indicated that parent teacher meeting ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.49$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.50$) and parental counseling ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.81$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.43$) were significant rejuvenators of motivation.

Comparative Inferential Gender Analysis

Independent-samples t-tests (two-tailed, $\alpha = .05$, $df = 189$) were conducted for each of the 47 survey items and total factor-constructs for each male ($n = 95$) and female ($n = 96$) student group to answer Research Question 3 and test the research hypothesis. Comparative inferential results in the factor domains are set in Table 2 for some of the representative survey statements.

Table 2

Independent-Samples t-Test Analysis across Gender Cohorts ($df = 189$)

Selected Statement	Gender	Mean	SD	t-value	Tab. Val (0.05)	Sig. / Outcome
Teacher is committed to work	Male	3.54	1.47	-5.09	0.95	Non-Sig.
	Female	3.52	1.07			
Teacher has good communication skills	Male	4.17	0.93	-2.94	4.00	Non-Sig.
	Female	3.75	1.05			
Teacher behavior irritates me	Male	1.92	1.39	3.57	0.00	Non-Sig.
	Female	2.62	1.26			
Teacher mocks my language errors	Male	2.43	1.31	2.63	8.99	Non-Sig.
	Female	2.91	1.14			

Teacher focuses on translation method	Male	3.71	1.38	-1.12	0.26	Non-Sig.
	Female	3.56	1.12			
Teacher focuses heavily on grammar	Male	3.83	1.24	-3.53	0.001	Non-Sig.
	Female	3.23	1.06			
I feel shy speaking English in class	Male	3.79	1.30	-4.92	0.00	Non-Sig.
	Female	2.83	1.31			
Multi-grade teaching causes demotivation	Male	3.71	1.45	-1.09	0.27	Non-Sig.
	Female	3.50	1.12			
Undue pressure from parents demotivates	Male	3.08	1.45	6.80	0.94	Non-Sig.
	Female	3.08	1.18			
Parent-teacher meetings help learning	Male	3.49	1.28	0.078	0.93	Non-Sig.
	Female	3.50	1.30			

Note. Calculated t-values compared to critical tabulated t .05 level (two tailed, df = 189). Results indicate the non-significant perceptual differences between constructs.

The t-test values calculated for each of the seven primary factor construct domains, as shown in Table 2, did not result in significant differences when compared with the tabulated critical values at the .05 alpha-level. While there were significant differences between males and females in some items, e.g., classroom speaking shyness (M = 3.79 vs. M = 2.83) and sensitivity to teacher mocking (M = 2.91 vs. M = 2.43) and exam-focused cramming (M = 3.43 vs. M = 2.83), the overall construct comparisons showed that male and female secondary students had essentially the same perception of EFL demotivation. Thus, the null hypothesis (H0) is accepted and this means that demotivation is a systemic phenomenon in education in Southern Punjab which is not gender specific.

Discussion

This study's empirical results offer valuable insight into the multi-faceted nature of foreign language demotivation in under-resourced rural educational ecosystems. This study compared the empirical realities with classic international literature on demotivation (Dörnyei, 1998, 2001; Falout & Falout, 2005; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Kikuchi, 2009; Oxford, 1998; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009) by analysing the empirical data of N = 191 public secondary school students of Southern Punjab.

One of the most significant theoretical contributions of this study is the identification of Teacher's Personality (M = 3.63), Peer Dynamics (M = 3.60) and Inadequate Facilities (M = 3.60) as the most significant factors affecting EFL demotivation. In the classic western and eastern studies (e.g., Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), the contents of learning, course materials and test scores were reported as primary demotivators while the competence of teacher and classroom facilities were reported in secondary position. On the other hand, in rural secondary public schools in Southern Punjab, the lack of structural facilities and interpersonal conflict between the teacher and students take an overwhelming precedence.

Such contextual differences can be understood by examining Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs and Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. The basic physical and physiological environmental needs of learners remain unfulfilled in severely under-funded rural schools where multi-grade teaching (M = 3.71), overcrowded classrooms (M = 3.48), inadequate lighting (M = 3.81) and unsuitable seating

furniture ($M = 3.85$) are commonplace. Physical fatigue and sensory discomfort add up to make higher-order cognitive involvement with a foreign language extremely difficult, justifying, in a way, Dörnyei's (1998) categorization of inadequacy of school facilities as a demotivating factor.

The empirical results strongly denounce the widespread use of the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.71$, $M_{\text{female}} = 3.56$), mechanical reciting of the textbook ($M = 3.84$) and rote memorization for exams ($M = 3.43$). Based on the findings of Hu (2011) and Pathan (2013), it can be noticed that foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) is acute when teaching methods focus on the accuracy of grammar without being useful for communication. For learners, English becomes a daunting academic burden when they are required to memorise long prose paragraphs ($M = 3.31$) without any functional comprehension. This effect is worsened by the complete lack of frequent activity-based communicative learning ($M_{\text{disagree}} = 2.56/3.04$).

In addition, teacher and peer behaviors that are destructive directly lead to a decrease in student self-efficacy. Results indicated that teacher verbal mocking of L2 errors ($M_{\text{female}} = 2.91$) and unsupportive attitudes of peers ($M = 3.52$) contribute to a hostile classroom climate. As Bandura (1997) and Falout (2004) described it, when a student's public language efforts are ridiculed by instructors or peers, he or she suffers extremely from loss of face and a sense of psychological helplessness. Learners then use strategies of defensive avoidance, as reported by the male learners with a mean of 3.79 in the acute speech anxiety and classroom shyness. This directly reflects Ushioda's (1998) claim that demotivated language learners attribute their failures to factors outside and punitive in order to maintain their psychological core self-worth.

The results show the significant role of domestic space in the rural agrarian society. As parents verbally wish their children to learn English ($M = 3.51$), there is a severe lack of support in learning English as a subject, as the parents' literacy is low, and they do not supervise their children's learning of English at home ($M = 2.66$). To compensate for this teaching deficit, rural families have to pay high costs to put children in private tuition coaching ($M = 3.27$) (Sarwar et al. 2025).

But at the first sign of academic struggles, family encouragement quickly turns into pressure. Agreement on the extent to which undue parental pressure ($M = 3.08$), fear of physical punishment for failure ($M = 3.07$) and parental insulting behavior ($M = 3.24$) severely diminishes motivation was the same for learners across gender. Based on Deci and Ryan's (1985) theory, Self-Determination Theory, the perceived LOC lies outside the learner if the reason for language learning is purely to earn external rewards or avoid serious punishment. Students are not enjoying, or have no autonomy over the language, and English is perceived as an insurmountable socioeconomic barrier to their future (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015; Jayoung et al., 2010).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The current empirical study presents a solid mapping of the demotivating factors affecting EFL secondary school learners in the rural Southern Punjab, Pakistan with quantitative figures. The study, with $N = 191$ students from 11 tehsils, concluded that demotivation is a systemic construct, which is induced by teacher personality traits, peer hostility, physical facilities, pedagogy of GTM and punitive domestic environment (Shahzad et al., 2023). Comparative inferential analysis showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the overall levels of demotivation of secondary learners and

that of secondary school learners of the same age in the same under-resourced rural context ($p > .05$), indicating that demotivation in under-resourced rural context is a pervasive structural problem and thus calls for a comprehensive policy solution.

To systematically deal with the issue of demotivation and promote communicative language competence in rural secondary schools, four evidence-based policy and pedagogical interventions are suggested:

1. **Curricular Modernization and Pedagogical Shift:** Secondary school English curriculum needs to be urgently modernized and shifted in the Provincial Education Department and Curriculum Authority. Instructional frameworks should move away from the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and paragraph cramming to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Textbooks should provide interesting short stories, dialogues and task-based activities instead of the dense, abstract text, which will help to develop communicative confidence of the students.
2. **Teacher Professional Development and Humanistic Pedagogy:** Intensive in-service teacher trainings (as done by the Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development), should include components of affectionate classroom management, constructive feedback and supportive pedagogical communication. Instructors need training to stop mocking, yelling, and making fun of errors in public, ensuring linguistic errors are treated as developmental milestones and not mocked, yelled at or ridiculed.
3. **Institutional Infrastructure Rehabilitation:** Government education officials need to provide a targeted capital expenditure to eradicate multi-grade teaching and to deal with the problem of overcrowding in rural areas of Southern Punjab. To stop disengaging with the environment and physical fatigue, school facilities need to be enhanced with proper seating furniture for dual desk, adequate lighting, proper white boards and basic multimedia instructional aids.
4. **Parent-Teacher Counseling and Community Engagement:** Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) should be implemented in public secondary schools in a formal manner and should be held on a quarterly basis. Rural parents should be informed through these forums about constructive home support for academic work, as it is essential to avoid domestic punishment, insult or excess pressure on children when it comes to their schoolwork.

Study's Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study provides useful empirical findings, but some limitations need to be noted. In the first place, the number of secondary students in the administrative districts of Bahawalpur and Bahawalnagar (Southern Punjab) was delimited to $N = 191$. Second, there was a heavy emphasis on quantitative, self-report survey measures. Future studies should be extended to include all administrative units of Punjab and other provinces in Pakistan. Moreover, longitudinal mixed-methods designs that integrate qualitative classroom observations, in-depth teacher interviews, and student focus groups are strongly recommended to reveal the dynamic and progressive nature of EFL demotivation throughout the period of time.

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