Demotivating Factors and Self-Perceived Communicative Confidence in Arabic Language Learning: A Self-Determination and Expectancy Value Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how demotivating classroom factors impact self-perceived communicative confidence (SPCC) among Malaysian university learners of Arabic. Quantitative data from 145 undergraduates revealed that unengaging class characteristics (e.g. monotonous, exam-centric instruction) and the experience of difficulty with Arabic were the strongest demotivators, while lecturer behaviour was rated as least demotivating. Overall demotivation correlated negatively with SPCC ($r \approx -.30$, $p < .001$). A multiple regression analysis identified the class environment (e.g. large class size, lack of interaction) as a significant negative predictor of SPCC ($\beta = -.25$, $p = .02$), whereas surprisingly the class characteristics factor positively predicted SPCC ($\beta = +.34$, $p < .001$). This counterintuitive finding suggests that higher-confidence students felt demotivated by under-stimulation in class. These results are interpreted through the lenses of Self-Determination Theory (psychological need thwarting) and Expectancy-Value Theory (lowered success expectancies). The findings underscore the need for differentiated student-centred approaches—including technology-integrated and confidence-building strategies—to sustain motivation and communicative confidence in Arabic. A new framework for understanding demotivation–confidence dynamics is proposed, and practical pedagogical interventions for Arabic language teaching are discussed.

Keywords: demotivation; self-perceived communicative competence (SPCC); Arabic language learning; motivation; class environment; differentiated instruction

INTRODUCTION

Learning a new language requires sustained motivation, and conversely, demotivation—the loss of motivation—can severely hinder progress (Dörnyei, 2001; Ushioda, 1998). In second language acquisition (SLA) research, demotivation has been defined as a "barrier that impedes and retards" language learning, with negative impacts on learners' attitudes, classroom dynamics, and outcomes (Chambers, 1993; Kikuchi, 2015). While motivation has been extensively studied, the "dark side" of motivation—factors that demotivate learners—remains less explored, especially in languages other than English. One important learner outcome linked to motivation is self-perceived communicative confidence (SPCC), or the student's self-appraisal of their ability to communicate in the target language. SPCC is closely related to constructs like linguistic self-confidence and willingness to communicate in a second language (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Prior work suggests that when learners feel confident in using the language, they are more likely to engage in communication and practice, which in turn improves proficiency (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Conversely, demotivating experiences can erode learners' confidence, creating a vicious cycle of withdrawal and stagnation in language development (Peng & Woodrow, 2010).

Arabic as a foreign language provides a unique context to explore these questions. In Malaysia, Arabic is usually learnt for religious, academic or career reasons, but many learners struggle to stay motivated (Aladdin, 2012).

Educators often observe that students are reluctant to engage in Arabic communication despite initial interest (e.g. to understand religious texts or to connect to Arabic culture). Possible reasons for this include the perceived difficulty of Arabic writing and grammar, unappealing teaching methods and a lack of immediate relevance to daily life (Moskovsky & Alrabai, 2009). These factors can undermine learners' sense of competence or the value they place on learning Arabic, thus weakening motivation. Recent qualitative research in Islamic schools has found that monotonous, memorization-heavy teaching and minimal communicative exercises lead to students becoming bored and demotivated (Alrabai, 2014). Students in such contexts report fear of punitive teaching methods and a conflict of values when they see no practical use of Arabic, leading to loss of motivation (Sugita & Takeuchi, 2010). Such findings emphasise how demotivation can result from unmet psychological needs (e.g. feeling controlled or incompetent) and a low expectation of meaningful reward (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Despite the growing interest in L2 learners' demotivation (Dörnyei, 2001; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), the relationship between demotivating factors and learners' communicative confidence has rarely been quantified, especially in Arabic learners. In a recent study conducted in Malaysia on English as a second language, students' SPCC was found to be negatively associated with their overall demotivation level (Kamarudin et al., 2021), implying that as demotivation increases, confidence in using the L2 decreases. However, it is unclear whether the same pattern holds for Arabic, which differs from English in terms of linguistic distance and cultural status. In addition, different types of demotivating factors (e.g. teacher behaviour, classroom environment, difficulty of content) might have different effects on learner confidence. Understanding these nuanced relationships is important because it can identify leverage points for interventions - for example, whether improving the relationship between teachers and students compared to adapting the teaching material would be more effective in boosting students' confidence in Arabic.

To date, there have been few studies that have analysed Arabic language learning from the perspective of psycholinguistic theory and motivational psychology. The current study fills two gaps: (1) the lack of empirical data on demotivating factors specific to Arabic as a foreign language in the university context, and (2) the need for a deeper theoretical consideration of how demotivating experiences can thwart basic psychological needs or lower expectations of success and thus affect communicative confidence. By integrating Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) into the analysis, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of why certain factors in the classroom demotivate learners and how this demotivation translates into decreased confidence in Arabic language use.

Building on the above, the study was guided by the following questions: (1) What are the prominent demotivating factors perceived by Malaysian university students in their Arabic language classes? (2) To what extent is each demotivating factor associated with students' self-perceived communicative confidence in Arabic? We hypothesized that most demotivating factors would show significant negative correlations with SPCC, consistent with prior findings in other L2 contexts. However, we also anticipated the possibility of more complex patterns (e.g. some factors having counterintuitive effects on confidence) that would require theoretical explanation. By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to both theory and practice: theoretically, by framing the demotivation–confidence link within SDT and EVT, and practically, by suggesting targeted interventions to reduce demotivation and bolster learner confidence in Arabic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on demotivation in second language learning has highlighted how classroom factors can undermine learner engagement. Early work (Dörnyei, 2001; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009) identified teacher behaviour, class characteristics, materials, environment, and difficulty as common sources of demotivation. Recent studies emphasize affective dimensions, showing that boredom and lack of enjoyment correlate with reduced willingness to communicate (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Kruk et al., 2022).

In the Arabic language context, demotivation has been widely observed. Alrabai (2014) and Aladdin (2012) documented challenges such as memorization-heavy methods, exam-focused curricula, and limited opportunities for communicative practice. Qualitative studies in Indonesian boarding schools further showed that highly

traditional Arabic instruction left students feeling restricted and demotivated due to lack of autonomy (Sugita & Takeuchi, 2010). In Malaysia, cultural norms of respecting teachers often reduce reported teacher-related demotivation, with students instead emphasizing materials and classroom environment (Kamarudin et al., 2021).

Self-perceived communicative confidence (SPCC) has been linked with motivation and willingness to communicate in L2 learning (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Studies in Malaysian universities (Kamarudin et al., 2021) show that higher demotivation correlates with lower SPCC, yet nuanced patterns exist. Some learners with higher SPCC may report boredom due to under-challenging instruction, echoing the underchallenge theory (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009).

Overall, the literature suggests that while demotivation universally reduces learner engagement, its manifestations depend on context, pedagogy, and learner characteristics. However, few studies have explicitly integrated psycholinguistic frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) or Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) into Arabic learning research. This study addresses that gap by examining how demotivators in Arabic classrooms relate to SPCC, and by interpreting these dynamics through SDT and EVT lenses.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). SDT frames demotivators as thwarting needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, while EVT interprets them as lowering learners' expectations of success and the value of learning Arabic. These frameworks guide the interpretation of demotivating experiences in relation to SPCC.

In the specific context of learning Arabic, we can assign known demotivators to SDT needs. Harsh, unsympathetic or overly strict behaviour from the teacher can hurt the sense of belonging in the class, making students feel anxious or alienated. An intimidating teacher can even instill fear, which was identified as a demotivator in a study on Arabic learning. Monotonous or rigid teaching methods – focusing only on rote memorization of grammar rules, for example – can affect students' autonomy by preventing them from learning in a self-directed and varied way. For example, a qualitative study in an Indonesian boarding school found that a very traditional, memorisation-focused Arabic class gave students the feeling that they had no freedom in their learning and demotivated them. An inappropriate class environment (e.g. overcrowded classes, lack of opportunities to speak) can also undermine connectedness and competence. When students cannot interact or receive feedback, they do not feel connected or develop a sense of mastery (Silviyanti et. al, 2024). Another factor aligned with SDT is loss of interest, which is often due to the learning experience not fulfilling students' intrinsic needs for stimulation or growth. In terms of SDT, students lose the intrinsic motivation that comes from interest and curiosity when instruction is not optimally challenging or fun.

SDT provides a useful lens through which to interpret our findings: If a particular demotivating factor correlates strongly with a low SPCC, this likely indicates which psychological need is being thwarted. For example, if the experience of difficulty (perceiving Arabic as too difficult) emerges as a top demotivator, this can be seen as a competence-thwarting condition – students feel frustrated by material that exceeds their current ability, which in turn lowers their perceived competence (confidence) in using the language. If classroom monotony or lack of interaction is a chief complaint, this suggests an environment that stifles autonomy and connectedness - students may not feel personally involved or have a sense of community, leading to withdrawal. In the discussion, we will return to these interpretations and use SDT to explain how demotivators and SPCC are related as cause and effect (e.g., difficulty → frustration → decreased perception of competence).

In language learning, the expectation of success is closely linked to self-efficacy and perceived progress. A factor such as "experiences of difficulty" directly undermines expectations: if students are constantly struggling with Arabic vocabulary, pronunciation or grammar, they begin to expect failure rather than success. Repeated failure or lack of noticeable improvement sends the message "I'm not good at this language" and demotivates the student through loss of confidence in ultimate success. This dynamic is consistent with the notion of low self-efficacy as a demotivator. Indeed, previous research has sometimes identified "lack of self-confidence" as an internal demotivating factor (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Kim & Seo, 2012). In our context, we hypothesise that students

who find Arabic extremely difficult will not only feel demotivated but also report lower SPCC as they do not expect to communicate successfully in this language.

On the other side of EVT, value relates to a student's goals, interests, and perceived usefulness of Arabic. If a learner does not see value in mastering Arabic, motivation can decline even if they think they could succeed. External pressures (like curriculum requirements) might keep them studying, but without personal value, their engagement and confidence in using the language will be limited. Demotivators that reflect a lack of value include negative attitudes toward the language/culture or mismatches with learners' goals. For example, a student who only studies Arabic because it is compulsory, but who has no interest in using it in real life, may feel "demotivated by value conflict"– they do not identify with the "ideal L2 self" of an Arabic user. In such cases, loss of interest and declining motivation go hand in hand with low SPCC; the student is unlikely to invest effort in speaking practice or feel confident, because in their mind the language is not worth the effort. Conversely, those who highly value Arabic (for integrative or instrumental reasons) may remain motivated and confident despite obstacles.

EVT also helps explain counterintuitive findings. One possible outcome in this study (as previewed in the results) is that students who already have high confidence might report being demotivated by certain class factors. How could confidence relate to more demotivation? EVT would suggest looking at value: high-SPCC students might value improvement and challenge; if the class is too easy or not enriching (low value for them), they could actually feel demotivated by boredom. This scenario is an illustration of what has been termed "underchallenge" – when capable students experience lowered expectancy of learning anything new or diminished value in tasks that are too basic. The Underchallenge Hypothesis (e.g., Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009) posits that learners can be demotivated by insufficient cognitive or linguistic stimulation. In such cases, the usual negative correlation between demotivation and confidence might reverse for specific factors: confident students might be the ones expressing demotivation with unchallenging class characteristics. Our theoretical framework therefore accommodates a potential bidirectional relationship between confidence and demotivation – not only can low confidence lead to demotivation, but high confidence can also lead to feeling "demotivated by boredom" in an unstimulating environment.

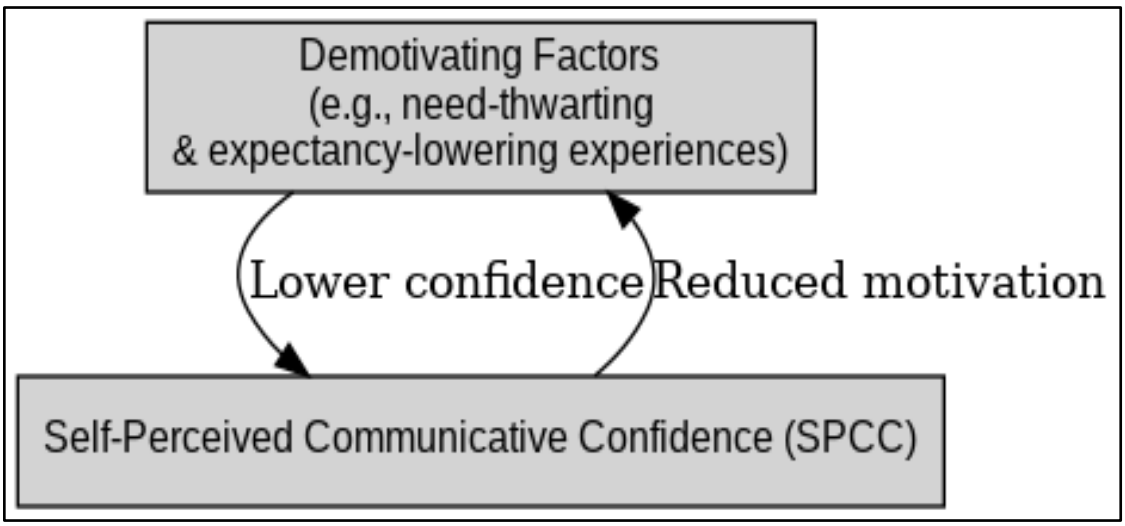

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the relationship between demotivating factors and self-perceived communicative confidence (SPCC).

In summary, Figure 1 illustrates the study's conceptual framework. We posit that demotivating factors, through the mechanisms of psychological need frustration (SDT) and lowered success expectations or value (EVT), contribute to lower SPCC in learners. At the same time, learners with low SPCC may be less resilient against demotivating setbacks (and highly confident learners might become demotivated if under stimulated), suggesting a potential cyclical interaction between demotivation and confidence. This theoretical grounding guided our research design and will inform our interpretation of the results. Guided by these theoretical frameworks, we

employed a quantitative design to examine how specific demotivators impact SPCC. The methodology is detailed next.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 145 undergraduates (mean age ≈ 20) enrolled in Arabic language courses at a large Malaysian public university participated. Most were native Malay speakers, with English as a second language and Arabic as a third, learned in an academic setting. About 76% were female, reflecting typical gender patterns in regional language classes. All had at least one semester of university Arabic and some prior exposure from secondary school, though communicative experience was generally limited. Self-rated proficiency was mostly beginner to lower-intermediate. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and anonymity assured.

Data were collected using a self-report questionnaire with two main sections: (1) Demotivating Factors and (2) Self-Perceived Communicative Confidence (SPCC). For Demotivating Factors, Kikuchi's (2011) L2 demotivation scale was adapted for Arabic and Malaysian contexts with expert review and pilot testing. Six subscales (30 items total) measured: teacher behaviour, class environment, class materials, class characteristics, experience of difficulty, and loss of interest. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). SPCC was adapted from McCroskey and McCroskey's (1988) scale, covering 12 situations in and out of class (e.g., conversing with peers, asking questions, giving presentations). Confidence was rated from 0% (not confident) to 100% (completely confident). Prior to analysis, both instruments were reviewed for content validity by two Arabic educators and piloted with small groups for clarity. Subscale reliabilities for Demotivating Factors ranged from $\alpha = .85$ to .92 (overall $\alpha = .95$); SPCC showed high reliability ($\alpha = .94$).

Data collection took place near the semester's end, ensuring participants had sufficient exposure to their current course. Surveys were administered online during class with instructor permission. Anonymity and the absence of grading consequences were emphasized to reduce social desirability bias. All present students completed the survey (100% response rate). Data were screened for inattentive responses and analyzed; exploratory factor analysis supported the intended six-factor model.

Data Analysis

We used IBM SPSS (Version 27) for statistical analysis. First, descriptive statistics were computed for all key variables: means and standard deviations for each demotivator subscale and for SPCC. This provided an overview of which demotivating factors were most salient in this cohort. Next, we examined bivariate correlations (Pearson's r) among all demotivation factors and SPCC. This correlation matrix (see Appendix B) allowed us to see the initial relationships between each specific demotivator and communicative confidence, addressing our primary research question. We paid special attention to the direction and significance of these correlations (with $p < .05$ as the significance threshold, and a Bonferroni adjustment when considering multiple tests). As a rule of thumb, we interpret r magnitudes as small (~0.10), medium (~0.30), and large (~0.50) effects (Cohen, 1988).

To delve deeper, we conducted a multiple regression analysis with SPCC as the criterion (dependent variable) and the set of demotivator subscale values as predictors (entered simultaneously). This analysis shows which factors have unique predictive power when controlling for the other factors. Before running the regression, we checked the assumptions: SPCC scores were approximately normally distributed (slightly left-skewed but within an acceptable range according to normality tests), and scatter plots showed linear relationships with each predictor. The multicollinearity diagnostics (VIF values) were all below 2.5, suggesting that although the demotivators are related to some extent (as expected), each of them contributes some independent variance. The regression model was assessed for its overall fit (R^2 and adjusted R^2) and the significance of each predictor (using standardised β coefficients, t-tests for each β and 95% confidence intervals). We also calculated effect sizes for the regression: R^2 is itself an effect size indicating the proportion of variance in SPCC explained by the group of demotivators. We report the adjusted R^2 to obtain an unbiased estimate given our sample size. Additionally, for

significant predictors, we interpret their β in context and note semi-partial correlations (to indicate a unique contribution).

Although this is not a formal hypothesis, we conducted exploratory analyses to test for possible moderators. Gender differences were tested with independent-samples t-tests, but there were no significant effects on SPCC or demotivation (females had slightly higher SPCC). Prior ability (self-rated or exam grades) showed a modest correlation with SPCC, so we ran a post-hoc hierarchical regression controlling for ability; the pattern of significant demotivation predictors remained unchanged. These checks suggest that our results are robust, although the focus remains on the theoretical links between demotivation and confidence.

All significance tests were two-tailed tests. Where applicable, we followed APA guidelines in reporting statistics, including exact p-values (or $p < .001$ if very small), and we report effect size metrics (such as r, R^2, or Cohen's d if relevant) to facilitate interpretation of practical significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summary of Descriptive, Correlation and Regression Analysis

Descriptive results indicated that experience of difficulty ($M \approx 5.1/7$) and class characteristics—monotonous, exam-focused instruction ($M \approx 5.0/7$)—were the most prominent demotivating factors for Malaysian undergraduates learning Arabic. Lecturer behaviour was the least demotivating factor ($M \approx 3.0/7$). Class environment, class materials, and loss of interest scored in the moderate range. Self-perceived communicative confidence (SPCC) was relatively low overall ($M \approx 45/100$), with wide variation among students.

Correlation analyses showed that most demotivating factors—difficulty, class environment, class materials, and loss of interest—were significantly and negatively associated with SPCC ($r \approx –.22$ to $–.35$, $p < .01$). The exception was class characteristics, which showed a small but significant positive correlation with SPCC ($r \approx +.20$, $p < .01$), suggesting that higher-confidence students tended to be demotivated by under-challenging, monotonous classes. Lecturer behaviour was not significantly correlated with SPCC.

Multiple regression analysis ($R^2 = .22$, $p < .001$) identified class environment as a significant negative predictor of SPCC ($\beta = –.25$, $p = .018$), while class characteristics was a significant positive predictor ($\beta = +.34$, $p < .001$). Other factors were non-significant when controlling for these variables. These findings indicate that a poor classroom environment uniquely undermines communicative confidence, whereas perceptions of monotonous instruction may reflect an underchallenge effect among more proficient learners.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with hypotheses, most demotivators correlated negatively with SPCC; however, class characteristics showed a positive association—a counterintuitive pattern we interpret through SDT/EVT.

This study investigated how demotivating classroom factors impact SPCC in Malaysian university Arabic learners, through the integrated lenses of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT). Consistent with prior research, most demotivators—experience of difficulty, poor class environment, materials, and loss of interest—showed significant negative correlations with SPCC (*r* ≈ -.22 to -.35). These relationships align with dual psychological pathways: SDT explains difficulty as thwarting competence needs, breeding frustration and eroding confidence, while unsupportive environments (e.g., overcrowded classes) compromise relatedness/autonomy, limiting safe speaking practice. EVT further clarifies that difficulty lowers success expectancies, and loss of interest diminishes task value, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of disengagement and declining confidence. Notably, class environment emerged as a unique negative predictor of SPCC ($\beta = -.25$), underscoring the critical role of interactive settings.

Counterintuitively, monotonous / exam focused instruction ("Class Characteristics") correlated positively with SPCC (*r* ≈ +.20) and predicted higher confidence ($\beta = +.34$). This paradox reflects underchallenge (Sakai &

Kikuchi, 2009): high-SPCC learners (likely more proficient) perceived classes as insufficiently stimulating, reporting demotivation due to boredom despite their confidence. EVT elucidates this as a collapse in value (repetitive tasks) and expectancy of learning (material too easy). This bifurcation—where struggling students lose motivation with confidence, while advanced peers lose motivation without losing confidence—highlights a critical pitfall in mixed-ability classrooms.

Unexpectedly, lecturer behaviour was the least cited demotivator and unrelated to SPCC, potentially reflecting cultural norms (e.g., respect for authority suppressing criticism) or systemic factors (e.g., exam-driven syllabi overshadowing teacher-specific issues). The findings collectively reveal a cyclical dynamic: demotivation and low SPCC mutually reinforce withdrawal from practice, perpetuating stagnation. To disrupt this cycle, we propose targeted interventions: (1) differentiated instruction (enrichment for advanced learners, scaffolding for beginners); (2) communicative task variety (role-plays, projects) to combat monotony; (3) creating opportunities for low-stakes, personalized practice to build competence and autonomy; and (4) micro-success designs to incrementally build confidence. These strategies address the core demotivators while leveraging SDT/EVT principles to sustain both motivation and communicative growth.

LIMITATIONS

Although this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between demotivation and communicative confidence in Arabic learning, several limitations must be considered when interpreting the results. The cross-sectional design precludes causal conclusions, although theoretical models support a bidirectional relationship between demotivation and communicative confidence. Self-report data may underrepresent teacher-related demotivation due to cultural norms; future studies should triangulate with behavioural measures. Self-report data may be influenced by social desirability and subjective bias, emphasising the value of triangulation with interviews, observations or objective performance measures. The homogeneous, predominantly female Malaysian sample limits generalisability, and patterns may be different in other cultural or institutional contexts. Only classroom-based demotivators were analysed, excluding potential external and internal factors such as real-life usage opportunities or cultural attitudes. No direct measurement of language performance was undertaken, so the relationship with actual proficiency can only be implied. Although many of the results are not unique to Arabic, the particular characteristics of the language (script, diglossia, religious associations) may influence the results. Finally, the context of a single institution means that the results may reflect local curricula and teaching approaches rather than general trends.

CONCLUSION

This study provides the first empirical evidence that demotivation and SPCC operate in Arabic learning via SDT/EVT mechanisms, revealing the critical 'underchallenge' paradox in learners with high self-confidence. Drawing on self-determination theory and expectancy-value theory, the study proposed that demotivators in Arabic learning can be viewed as need-inhibiting or expectancy-reducing influences, which in turn negatively affect learners' confidence in communication. The findings largely support this framework: most demotivating factors in the classroom – particularly the difficulty of learning Arabic and an unsupportive classroom environment – were associated with lower communicative confidence. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that motivation and confidence in language learning are related, and extend them to the under-researched context of Arabic as a foreign language.

Crucially, we also uncovered a nuanced pattern where students with higher confidence reported demotivation in the face of less challenging, monotonous instruction, indicating an 'underchallenge" effect'. This suggests that a one-dimensional approach to motivation is not enough. Educators need to consider differentiated strategies to adequately challenge and engage all learners. The positive correlation between demotivation due to monotony in the classroom and SPCC shows that learners are not monolithic – some do not engage because the material is beyond their ability (leading to low confidence), while others do not engage because the material is below their ability (despite high confidence). A psycholinguistic perspective must take into account such individual differences and the dynamic interplay between the learner's affect and the difficulty of the input.

The integration of SDT and EVT proved fruitful in the interpretation of our data. Demotivating factors such as the experience of difficulty can be clearly linked to skill need, frustration and low expectation of success, which explains why they undermine confidence. Similarly, factors such as lack of interest or lack of relevance can be attributed to low value, which is one explanation for lower effort and less practise. At the same time, the SDT lens helped us to understand why the lecturer's behaviour, often highlighted elsewhere, did not appear here – perhaps because the need for connectedness was not significantly thwarted or because cultural norms suppressed this feedback. The EVT lens was particularly useful in explaining the phenomenon of underchallenge: When the expectation of learning something new is low (because the lessons are too easy), motivation decreases, even when language proficiency is relatively high.

From a theoretical perspective, this study emphasises the value of considering motivation and self-confidence together. SPCC can be both a result of sustained motivation and a mediator that influences whether motivation translates into actual communication. We argue for more research that builds bridges between motivational constructs (such as demotivation, attitudes, values) and communication-oriented constructs (such as SPCC, WTC, anxiety). In practise, a learner does not separate these constructs – their decision to raise their hand and speak Arabic in class probably depends on a mixture of self-confidence ("Do I think I can do it?"), motivation ("Do I want to do it?") and situational cues ("Is this class encouraging?"). By addressing demotivating factors, we essentially remove some barriers to the desire and courage to communicate.

Pedagogically, our findings lead to specific recommendations: Foster a supportive, engaging and autonomous classroom climate; provide optimal challenges for all ability levels; incorporate meaningful and enjoyable communicative activities; and promote student confidence through gradual approach and strategy training. Furthermore, creating structured opportunities for individualized practice and feedback outside the traditional classroom could help alleviate the sense of difficulty and provide variety, principles that are supported by our theoretical framework. Implementing these changes could not only improve students' motivation, but also their actual communicative skills in Arabic, as they will practise more willingly and frequently when they are confident and motivated.

Finally, while our findings suggest that strategies to increase engagement and autonomy are crucial, the specific effectiveness of interventions like technology-integrated learning (e.g., using AI tools for language practice) remains an open empirical question. Future experimental studies are needed to test the efficacy of such specific tools in addressing the demotivation and confidence gaps identified here.

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