RESEARCH ARTICLE

ENGLISH-MAJOR STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF DEMOTIVATING FACTORS IN LEARNING READING.

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Manuscript Info	Abstract
	Reading has been considered as an indispensable skill in helping students develop their minds as well as language competence. However, a number of students who major in English at Vietnamese colleges have not found learning reading appropriately motivated or even felt demotivated. This paper therefore reports on demotivating factors perceived by English major students in their reading classes. Using a descriptive design, a 38-item questionnaire was undertaken with 115 students who were major in applied English studies. The items were classified into four clusters of demotivating factors: teachers' negative feedback, learners, reading materials, and instruction. The findings indicate that two clusters related to teacher's negative feedback and learners were found to be the most influential.

Introduction:-
Reading has played a crucial role in overall development in language skills and even in academic success for decades (e.g., Grabe, 1991, 2009; Nuttall, 1996). In keeping up with the global integration and intercultural understanding, educational polices in Viet Nam have highlighted the importance of students' foreign language abilities, namely reading that better prepares them for the practical skills to respond to their professional needs (B.H. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2017) or to generate knowledge through conducting research (V. N. Nguyen & Vu, 2015). Reading skills, therefore, are essential to students' future jobs and academic success. However, it is noticeable that many teachers in Vietnamese colleges have to deal with the lack of motivation posed by students in their reading classes, and that few studies have been conducted in unraveling potential causes of this phenomenon. This paper therefore provides insights into the factors perceived by students as hindering them from their reading learning at a Vietnamese college. The research question that guided the study reported in this paper was, "What factors do students perceive as demotivating ones in their reading learning?"

The literature on demotivation as well as demotivating factors will be summarized and then clarified for this study.

Demotivation:-
While several studies have shown that motivation is a deciding factor in successful language learning, there is a paucity of research into demotivation or demotivating factors in foreign or second language learning settings (e.g., Al-Khairy, 2013; Alavinia & Sehat, 2012). Therefore, it is important to consider the factors that may demotivate students' learning process. Dörnyei (2001) defines demotivation as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an ongoing action" (p.143). This view suggests that the notion of demotivation is grounded on external factors influencing learners' language acquisition or achievements in a negative way. Dörnyei (2001) also indicate three types of demotives such as powerful distractions, gradual loss of

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interest, and internal process of deliberation without any specific external trigger. However, not all researchers concur with Dörnyei's view. For example, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) attribute demotivation to internal factors such as students' lack of self-confidence and negative attitudes towards foreign language learning. Likewise, Falout, Elwood and Hood (2009) claim that learners and reactive factors influence more their motivation to learn in the long run than does external learning environment. In particular, these authors further address that demotivation can "influence the learners' attitudes and behaviors, degrade classroom group dynamics and teacher's motivation, and result in long-term and widespread negative learning outcomes" (p.403). From this perspective, once students are demotivated, the expected learning achievement fails, and this would in turn lead to amotivation (Kaivanpanah & Ghasemi, 2011).

It is therefore essential to distinguish demotivation from amotivation. Dörnyei (2001) indicates that while demotivation refers to 'diminished motivation', amotivation concerns with 'the total loss of motivation.' According to him, a demotivated student refers to someone whose interests in learning have been diminished because of specific demotives. Amotivated learner, meanwhile, lacks motivation caused by recognizing "there is no point in me pursuing this". Dörnyei (2001) also mentions that the long-term impact of negative motives on students may lead to amotivation. Therefore, it is important for teachers to take demotivating factors into account in order to promote students' motivation.

Demotivating factors:-
There are a number of perspectives on demotivating factors with regard to language learning in the literature. Gorham and Christophel (1992) and Oxford (1998) indicate demotives related to teacher's roles in relation to dissatisfaction of grading and assignment, their emotion and attitude toward the subject area, materials, teaching styles, the nature of the classroom activities, and teacher-student relationship. Likewise, Dörnyei (2001) and Muhomen (2004) claim that demotivating factors are organized into five main categories: teacher, learning materials, learner characteristics, school environment and learner's attitudes towards English. Among them, teacher-related factors such as teaching method, style, teacher-learner relationship, and commitment were found to have a direct impact on learners' demotivation. From such negative impacts, teachers could promote student learning by avoiding demotivating factors (Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009).

Studies specific to English as a foreign language (EFL) learners have shown that demotivation is attributable to the teacher. This is evidenced by learning English in Hungary (Dörnyei, 1998), in Japan (Falout & Falout, 2005), in Vietnam (Tran & Baldauf, 2007), in Korea (Kim, 2011a, 2011b), and learning French in Ireland (Ushioda, 1998). A research conducted by Tran and Baldauf (2007) at a Vietnamese university of economics indicate 15 categories classified into internal and external demotivating factors. Their findings reveal that the internal attributions like attitudes towards English, experiences of failure or lack of success and self-esteem account for 36% whereas the external demotives that include teacher-related factors, learning environment, and other factors account for 64% of the total demotivating encounters.

In a study conducted with Japanese high school learners, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) indicate six demotivating factors: learning contents and materials, lack of interest (intrinsic motivation), test scores, teacher's competence and teaching style, inadequate school facilities, and class environment. Of the six demotives, the first three were found to be the most influential sources of demotivation (learner-related) while inadequate school facilities were the least (Hassaskhah, Zafarghandi, & Fazeli, 2015). However, teacher-related factors were not found to have a strong influence compared to learning content and materials or test scores which were considered as the two most remarkable demotives among participants.

Ullah and Fatema (2013) carried out a study on 46 respondents (both teachers and students) from different departments of private and public universities in Bangladesh. The findings from mixed methods study analysis claim 10 sources of demotivation: (1) lack of vocabulary and knowledge of structure, (2) lack of teacher's training and improper reading strategies, (3) authentic reading materials, (4) non-contextual and less interesting materials, (5) difficult and lengthy reading passages, (6) stressful class environment, (7) boring reading activities, (8) negative feedback by teachers, (9) exam-oriented study, (10) unchanging question patterns and testing system. Of the ten, the most salient ones were lack of teacher's training, non-contextual and less interesting, and difficult reading passages. Although various demotivating factors have been identified with regard to different contexts and different levels of language education, it was noted that there have not been many studies on demotives, and particularly in reading skills from the perspectives of English-major students within the Vietnamese context. This paper therefore provides

insights into the influence of demotivating factors on students majoring in English in reading classes at a Vietnamese college.

Setting and Participants:-
At a college in the Mekong Delta, one hundred and fifteen students (28 males, 87 females) majoring in Applied English studies were invited to participate in the study. Their age range is from 18 to 21. All participants had just graduated from high schools where English was a compulsory subject and there was no gap-year before they entered this institution.

Reading was a required subject for five consecutive semesters during their three academic years. Its primary aim was to improve students' reading ability as well as language knowledge that would be essential to deal with various types of documents in their lifelong learning or prepare for their future job requirements. In reading classes, students were required to practice different strategies (e.g., skimming, scanning, guessing meaning of words through context) or reading skills assigned in textbooks focusing on academic topics which were found quite challenging for freshmen. In addition, these participating students were arranged in mixed-ability classes of 45 to 55 students. However, it was observed that many students were not keen on learning reading skills due to lack of attention, boredom, or neglect of participating in class activities, thereby cutting back on the reading efficiency.

Research Design:-
A quantitative descriptive design was used in this study to explore students' perceptions about the factors as demotivating in their learning reading. The rationale for this choice was to gain participants' perspectives towards their real life context and allow for the exploration of the relationships among individuals (Yin, 2011). The data collected in the wider study included a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with six first-year majored students and four teachers in English Department at the college where this study was conducted. For this paper, the data discussed is mainly drawn from the thirty-eight item questionnaire referred to as sixteen demotivating factors which are classified into four clusters: (1) negative feedback from the teacher, (2) learners themselves, (3) reading materials, and (4) instruction. Demotivating factors related to *negative feedback* involves three items classified into two constructs: lack of feedback on reading strategies and provision of negative feedback on learner's reading progress. Demotives of *learners themselves* include unawareness of reading importance, insufficient topical background knowledge, lack of self-efficacy, the inability of language, and performance goals for reading learning. With regard to *reading materials*, the items concern inappropriate level of difficulty, lack of diversity of exercises, uninteresting contents, and unattractive graphic or format features. The *instruction* factor includes items of inadequate strategic direction, insufficient communicative activities, unclear explanations, unfriendly teaching styles, and lack of peer collaboration. Students were asked to indicate their responses to the statements in the questionnaire by choosing one of the five alternatives. The questionnaire items are scored from 1 to 5 on Likert scale (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The questionnaire was initially designed in English and then administered in Vietnamese in order to make its meaning clear as well as put respondents at ease.

The questionnaire was piloted to 24 first-year students who were randomly selected among those who had similar background with the participants of the current study. The Cronbach's alpha of .79 indicates the reliability of the questionnaire.

Findings:-
The following section presents the findings from the study focusing on students' perceptions of the demotivating factors in reading learning. Analysis of the questionnaire reveals that the most demotivating factor was the negative feedback from the teacher. The learners and reading materials were found to be the second and third demotives. The least demotivating one was instruction. Table 1 below presents students' responses to clusters of demotivating factors.

Students' perceptions of demotivating factors:-
Table 1:- Students' perceptions of four clusters

Clusters	Mean	SD
Negative feedback	3.91	.57
Learners	3.47	.33
Reading materials	3.38	.34
Instruction	3.33	.45

As shown in Table 1, the descriptive analysis reveals that the mean scores of students' perceptions of four clusters of demotivating factors are above 3 (ranging from 3.33 to 3.91). This result indicates that the items were considered as strongly demotivating. Negative feedback from teachers was viewed as the most demotivating (M=3.91), whereas instruction was perceived as the least demotivating one (M=3.33).

Table 2:- Demotivating factors related to negative feedback

Demotivating factors	Mean	SD
Lack of feedback on reading strategy	4.29	.59
Negative feedback to students' reading progress	3.72	.68

Table 2 shows the difference in students' perceptions towards two demotivating factors related to negative feedback from the teacher. The mean score of the lack of feedback on reading strategy was higher than 4.0 (M=4.29), while that of negative feedback to students' reading learning progress was lower than 4.0 (M=3.72). The results reveal that students thought that lack of feedback on reading strategy from the teacher was the most influential demotivating factor that reduces their reading achievement.

Table 3:- Demotivating factors related to learners

Demotivating factors	Mean	SD
Inability of language use	3.65	.57
Lack of self-efficacy	3.58	.90
Insufficient topical knowledge	3.56	.51
Unawareness of reading importance	3.43	.48
Performance goal	3.20	.68

As presented in Table 3, the mean scores of all five factors were above than 3.0, indicating that students considered these factors as high demotivating. However, inability of language use (M=3.65) was perceived as the most outstanding factor while recognizing the performance goal (M=3.20) was seen as the least influential one.

Table 4:- Demotivating factors related to reading materials

Demotivating factors	Mean	SD
Unattractive graphic or format features	4.04	.77
Level of difficulty	3.39	.68
Uninteresting contents	3.37	.37
Lack of diversity of exercises	2.77	.97

Table 4 shows that the mean scores of the first three factors were relative high (M=4.04; M=3.39; M=3.37), except the lack of diversity of exercises (M=2.77), which was the lowest. Thus, the most demotivating factor was the reading texts with unattractive graphic or format, followed by level of difficulty and uninteresting contents of the reading. However, lack of diversity of exercises was not perceived as highly demotivating.

Table 5:- Demotivating factors related to instruction

Demotivating factors	Mean	SD
Lack of peer collaboration	3.67	.75
Inadequate strategy direction	3.40	.53
unfriendly teaching style	3.38	1.27
unclear explanations	3.13	.60
Lack of communicative activities	2.73	.98

As can be seen in Table 5, the mean scores of most factors related to instruction were above 3.0. However, the mean score of lack of communicative activities (*M*=2.73) was lower than 3.0. Therefore, it can be concluded that the items that have the strong demotivating effects on reading instruction in the classroom practices included peer collaboration, inadequate strategy, teaching styles and unclear explanations. However, communicative activities were perceived as not demotivating.

Discussion:-

Analysis from the questionnaire identified four categories of demotivating factors such as negative feedback from the teacher, learners, reading materials, and instruction, as influencing students' learning reading. Such findings support the studies by Gorham and Christophel (1992), Oxford (1998), Muhomen (2004), Sakai and Kikuchi (2009), and Hassaskhah, Zafarghandi and Fazeli (2015), who claim that these demotivating factors could hinder student motivation from learning a second or foreign language and that the most influential ones were related to the teacher. In particular, there is evidence to support the claim that two-thirds of demotivating factors that hinder students' language learning proficiency were teacher-related (Christophel and Gorham, 1995; Gorham and Christophel, 1992; Hu, 2011). It is therefore such claims suggest the role of language teachers plays in identifying what can motivate or demotivate students to learn throughout their teaching practices.

On the whole, the *negative feedback* from teachers was found as the most dominant category, while the least concerned was instruction. Students attributed their demotivation to lack of feedback on reading strategies on the part of the teacher and negative feedback to their reading progress. It can be concluded that students in this study perceived the strong need for having teacher feedback in their reading process. The findings of this study are consistent with that of Ullah and Fatema (2013) who imply the important role the teacher plays in motivating students to learn by giving feedback to their performance. However, these authors pointed out that without giving feedback to students on reading strategies could lead them to become more demotivated than does provide negative feedback on their reading progress. This perception may be due to the fact that students were not likely to frequently implement the strategies provided by the teacher while reading in the target language. It is likely that during learning reading, students were influenced by using the bottom-up strategy to learn new words in isolation, instead of integrating different strategies into figuring out the ideas embedded in a particular context. As feedback may influence student behaviors and their future performance (e.g., Brozo and Flynt, 2008; Konold, Miller, and Konold, 2004; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), one way to enhance student learning is to provide them with appropriate, positive and timely feedback as a motivating tool.

With regard to demotives as *learners* themselves, of the five factors, inability of language use was perceived as the most outstanding. Other four factors such as lack of self-efficacy, insufficient topical knowledge, unawareness of reading importance, and performance goal were also identified as negatively influential in students' motivation in their learning reading process. This finding is in line with that of Falout and his colleagues (2009) who maintain that internal demotivating factors were related to students' language proficiency. In the same vein, the findings are supported by the literature indicating that students' learning success depends on how skills are designed and developed (Ullah and Fatema, 2013). The finding that students perceived the lack of self-efficacy, which is the second most demotivating factor that hinders their learning reading, concurs with several prior studies indicating the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and language skills (Bandura, 1997; Ghonsooly & Elahi, 2011; Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). In particular, Ghonsooly and Elahi (2011) found that EFL learners' reading achievement and their self-efficacy are closely related in ways that students who have a strong sense of self-efficacy tend to achieve higher scores in their reading, as noted by Taghinezhad, Dehbozorgi, and Esmaili (2015). Thus, self-efficacy beliefs are integral to teaching in relation to motivation and student learning (B. H. Nguyen, 2014) and such beliefs help students determine the endeavor they expend to attain their goals and the extent to which they persist in the face of challenges (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Or in other words, once students have strong sense of efficacy about reading, they are likely to become more motivated to engage in reading tasks.

With regard to *reading materials*, the findings indicate that students considered reading materials with unattractive graphic or format features as the most demotivating factors while lack of diversity of exercises was not perceived as a strong demotive. Other two factors such as inappropriate level of difficulty of reading passages and uninteresting contents were also identified as prominent demotivators. This finding reported here is consistent with the findings of several studies of other researchers in this area (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Hirvonen, 2010; Keblawi, 2006; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009) who claim that learning materials were the salient demotivating factor for several students and that materials were more demotivating for the less motivated students than for the more motivated ones, as

noted by Kaivanpanah and Ghasemi (2011). Seen from this view, the text with appropriate illustration, graphic and display features is likely to enhance student motivation, thereby allowing them to explore or implement reading skills or strategies in order to accomplish the reading tasks faster and more efficiently. As far as lack of diversity of exercises is concerned, this perception may be attributable to students' learning styles, purposes, and the nature of reading. It is therefore necessary to select reading materials, a wide array of tasks, and instructional approaches that meet students' interests and needs so as to enrich their learning (Ellis, 2003; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Harmer, 2007; Richards, 2006).

With respect to *instruction*, lack of peer collaboration was viewed to be the most outstanding factor. This finding supports the view that social collaboration during reading plays an important role in increasing learners' intrinsic motivation (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004). This learner-related perspective can be associated with the conception of cooperative learning that allows for optimal learning (Abdulahi, Hashim, & Kawo, 2017; Hinson, 2015; Johnson et al. 1994; Johnson et al, 1998; Kagan, 1994; Kagan & Kagan, 2009). Although teacher-related factors such as inadequate strategy direction, teachers' unfriendly styles and unclear explanations were considered demotivating factors, many students did not perceive lack of communicative activities as a strong factor hindering them from reading. A possible explanation is related to students' perception towards the nature of reading. In fact, reading is a receptive skill that students try to decipher the meaning of the discourse in which it is embedded and comprehension is then viewed as the primary goal of reading. As reading is normally a silent, internal and private process (Alderson, 2000; Walter, 2003), each individual reader possesses his or her own purposes and ways to process a text message.

Conclusion:-

The findings of this present study provide insights into how students perceived demotivating factors in EFL reading classes in a Vietnamese college. It gives rise to some pedagogical implications for teachers, curriculum designers, and policy makers. Firstly, it is indispensable for teachers of English to integrate a variety of reading tasks into their reading lessons that encourage students to familiarize themselves with lexical and grammatical knowledge, and this in turn can become more active and motivated to learn reading comprehension. Secondly, it is the role of the teacher who should provide students with not only opportunities to practice reading strategies in reading classes but also frequent feedback for student progress in their learning reading process. Thirdly, peer collaboration should be included to ensure students' self-confidence, particularly for less competent learners, is obtained. In order to achieve these purposes, it is curriculum developers who are to select reading materials with appropriate graphic or format features, level of difficulty and appealing contents. Fourthly, teachers should be provided opportunities to attend the professional development training courses or conferences to learn updated and innovative instructional approaches, discuss challenges while teaching reading, share ideas and expertise with other peers, and then more importantly tailor their teaching practices in order to involve or optimize student learning over time. The study has shown the value of exploring students' perceptions of demotivating factors influencing their reading classes, one of only a few studies in EFL learning context at tertiary levels. Thus, there is a need for conducting further research in a wider community into teachers' feedback and other factors that may influence students' motivation so as to enable them to know how to learn reading better.

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