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# Korean elementary school students' English learning demotivation: a comparative survey study

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**Abstract** This study explores Korean elementary school students' decreased motivation for English learning by analyzing the questionnaire data obtained from 6,301 students in a large city in South Korea. The students' school grades and their prior experience in private institutes were considered as the major factors behind the decrease in their motivation. There was a statistically significant and consistent decrease in the students' satisfaction with their English learning experience; expectation of ultimate success in English; and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation and integrative/instrumental motivation. Prior experience in attending private institutes had a substantial impact on the students' motivation. Those who attended private institutes (*hakwons*) exhibited higher levels of instrumental and intrinsic motivation. However, in terms of other motivational constructs of integrative and extrinsic (parental, academic) motivation, private instruction had a negligible or negative impact. By comparing the results with those of Lamb (2007), the present study proposes that Korean students should be made to internalize the beneficial role played by English so that their English learning motivation can be maintained.

**Keywords** English learning motivation · Demotivation · Possible L2 self · Satisfaction · Expectation · Private institution

This paper analyzes Korean elementary school students' gradual decrease in English learning motivation (demotivation)<sup>1</sup> using quantitative questionnaire data collected from a large city in Korea. This paper focuses on the students' motivational strengths from Grades 3–6 and explores the effects of their prior experience in private instruction on their motivation. By investigating two groups of students (one that attended private institutions—*hakwons*—for extra schooling and another that did not), the study examines the relationship between private English instruction and various sub-components of the students' motivation.

## EFL instruction in Korean elementary schools

English as a foreign language (EFL)<sup>2</sup> teaching was first introduced in 1997 to elementary schools in Korea. Students in Grades 3 and 4 were given English instruction for one class hour (i.e., 40 minutes) a week, whereas those in Grades 5 and 6, two class hours a week. Kwon (2005) showed that English proficiency among Korean high school students increased and attributed the increase to the early English exposure among elementary school students. However, although many studies have reported the beneficial effects of teaching English at the primary level (e.g., Lee 2004; Park et al. 2007), few studies have examined the

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<sup>1</sup> One of the reviewers commented that the term *demotivation* is not typically used in English. However, this paper, following Dörnyei (2001, 2005), defines demotivation as a gradual decrease in motivation and uses the term consistently.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, EFL refers to English as a foreign language, and ESL means English as a second language. In addition, L2 is used as a general term indicating both second and foreign languages.

motivational and emotional aspects of learning a foreign language at this level.

The recent social pressure surrounding early English instruction indicates the need for an in-depth analysis of students' demotivation. Because a majority of Korean parents have recognized the importance of English, private English institutes have been very popular in Korea, and private English education fees in Korea have accounted for the largest portion of the total expenditure on private education (Korea National Statistical Office [KNSO] 2008).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, English is being introduced to students in public schools at increasingly lower grade levels (even below Grade 3). For example, Park et al. (2007) reported that 74% of elementary school students had already acquired basic English skills by either Grade 1 or 2. Son et al. (2008) estimated that approximately 80% of Korean kindergartens teach English, and Park et al. (2007) found that 87.2% of Korean parents with children in kindergarten had children who were enrolled in or had been enrolled in kindergartens teaching English.

Such enthusiasm for early English education in Korea may result in two possible outcomes. On the one hand, if elementary school students are exposed to private English instruction as well as to their formal English learning in public schools, they may become less interested in English lessons, which may lead to their demotivation. On the other hand, if the students can gain substantial knowledge of English through private English instruction, their self-confidence and efficacy with respect to English may increase. Kim (1999) found that learning English prior to school lessons enhanced elementary school students' intrinsic motivation. However, as a decade has passed since his study, the present study revisits the motivational dimensions underlying English learning among elementary school students in Korea.

## Review of literature

In general, prior research addressing early English exposure has not considered the motivational dimensions underlying English learning among young language learners. For example, although Lee (2004) included a couple of emotional effects of English instruction on elementary school students, he did not investigate the motivational dimension. According to Lee (2004, pp. 30–33), the negative consequences of primary English education

were the expansion of private education, overly submissive cultural attitudes, and an excessive study load for elementary school students. Kim (1999) is a notable exception. By analyzing questionnaire data collected from 1,500 elementary school students and 500 elementary school teachers, he found that prior private English learning (in *hakwons*) positively affected students' self-confidence, positive attitude, intrinsic motivation, and integrative motivation but that their interest in English, curiosity about English literacy, and extrinsic motivation were not significantly related to prior private English learning.

The studies stated earlier were based on psychometrically oriented motivational theories such as Gardner's (1985, 2001) socio-educational model or Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory. Although these theories shed insightful light on the acquisition of a second language (L2), an "education-friendly" motivational theory (Dörnyei 2001, 2005) is still needed. For this critical appraisal, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) introduced a new construct, the L2 motivational self-system, which reconceptualizes the previous concepts of integrativeness and instrumentality in L2 learning (Gardner 1985, 2001). Developing Markus and Nurius' (1986) notion of *possible selves*, Dörnyei (2009, p. 11) defined the notion as "the individual's ideas of what they *might* become, what they *would like* to become, and what they are *afraid of* becoming" (emphasis in original) and argued that "possible selves act as future self-guides, reflecting a dynamic, forward-pointing conception that can explain how someone is moved from the present toward the future" (p. 11).

Dörnyei (2005, 2009) further distinguished two types of possible selves: an ideal L2 self and an ought-to L2 self. The former means the desired future image of the learners themselves and the latter is related to the externally imposed future image. For example, an L2 learner may want to learn English to be a diplomat. Conventionally, this has been categorized as the instance of instrumental orientation because foreign language learning is a means to a higher end (i.e., becoming a diplomat). However, Dörnyei (2005) proposed that what is important is the learner's aspiration to become a desirable future self. The future self-image (e.g., a diplomat) may be externally imposed by the learner's parents or influential authority figures, but if the learner does not fully appreciate or internalize the value of becoming a diplomat, this image may not have the potential for the learner to make a variety of efforts to learn English. On the other hand, even if the image may be initially imposed by other persons, as long as the learner internalizes the value of the future image, this can function as a powerful motivator for English learning. The former case, where the learner does not appreciate the externally imposed self-image, is related to an ought-to L2 self. The latter, which highlights the internalization of the self-image

<sup>3</sup> Korea National Statistical Office [KNSO] (2008) reported that 88.8% of elementary school students in Korea received private instruction through sources such as private institute instruction, private tutoring, and self-study materials combined with regular visits from a private tutor and that English was the most preferred subject among all the subjects covered in private instruction.

that initially originated from an external source, is the manifestation of an ideal L2 self. In sum, Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) ideal L2 self highlights the internalized self-image, and the ought-to L2 self focuses on the less internalized self-image imposed by others.

In the field of EFL research, Lamb (2007) tried to link Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) possible L2 selves with Indonesian junior high school students' motivation. Although previous studies have focused mainly on cross-sectional aspects of L2 learning motivation, Lamb longitudinally investigated the same participants over a period of 20 months, considering four existing concepts of L2 learning motivation: Gardner's (1985, 2001) instrumentality and integrativeness and Ryan and Deci (2000; see also Deci and Ryan 1985) intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Lamb found that the students' instrumentality and extrinsic motivation coming from parental pressure and from academic success increased but that integrativeness and intrinsic motivation to learn English decreased. Explaining this difference in motivational constructs found among the students, he argued that the English mass media, which the students could easily find in their daily lives, and the authority figures such as parents and school teachers provided a meaningful scaffold to the students for creating and maintaining their possible L2 selves in English. Because the positive possible L2 self was not directly related to the enjoyment of L2 learning per se, a decrease in intrinsic motivation followed after 20 months of Lamb's investigation. Integrativeness, originally defined over five decades ago as "the willingness to be like valued members of the language community" (Gardner and Lambert 1959, p. 133), may not capture the notion of English as an international language (McKay 2002). As indicated in other studies questioning the validity of integrative L2 learning motivation (e.g., Dörnyei et al. 2006; Lamb 2004; Warden and Lin 2000), in this era of globalization, it seems difficult to reach any sort of consensus on Gardner's integrativeness. Thus, the decrease in Indonesian students' integrativeness can be understood from this perspective.

Another study using Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) concepts of ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self is Kim (2009). Using monthly semi-structured interviews, he investigated two Korean ESL students' motivation. At a superficial level, both students emphasized the potential merits of learning English as an international language, but the longitudinal interview data indicated that the students' English learning goals and English communities differed qualitatively. Only the student whose life goal was closely linked to English learning and whose L2 communities upheld his English study demonstrated the ideal L2 self and eventually completed English learning in a successful manner. The other student, who expressed his ought-to L2 self, failed to maintain his initial L2 learning motivation. Interestingly,

from the beginning of the study, both students expressed strong needs to learn English to secure a better job in the future. However, only the student who made efforts to make his life conditions facilitative to English learning and who verbalized concrete, manageable learning goals was successful in the learning process. The other student, whose life was not aligned to English learning, was not successful, although he mentioned a similar need for English learning.

As shown in Kim's (2009) study, students who create an ought-to L2 self that does not sufficiently internalize the need for English learning may lack the genuine English learning motivation needed for sustained learning efforts during the lengthy L2 learning process. Given this, Korean elementary school students' English learning (de)motivation can be reanalyzed from the perspective of possible L2 selves.

In sum, the importance of EFL is widely recognized in Korean society, and thus, the social pressure placed on students to learn English, even before they begin learning it in public schools, has rapidly increased. Considering the current prevalence of private English instruction in Korea, two research questions are addressed:

1. What are the motivational changes in English learning among Korean elementary school students from Grades 3 to 6?
2. How does private English instruction affect the students' motivational characteristics?

## Method

To investigate the longitudinal changes in English learning motivation among Korean elementary school students, data were collected through questionnaires in a major city in Korea in the fall semester of 2008. The city consisted of five school districts: South, North, East, West, and Island. According to the city's educational statistics, among the five school districts, the East district outperformed the others in terms of National Scholastic Ability Test (NSAT) scores in 2009. The East district was followed by the North and West districts. Since the Island district did not permit easy access to high-quality education, its NSAT score was the lowest. In terms of student enrollment in private institutes, the East district had the highest enrollment rate, and its average tuition was higher than that of most other districts (IMCOE 2010), indicating that, on average, the socio-economic status of the students in the East district was higher than that of those in the other four school districts. Because it was assumed that the socio-educational context in different school districts could influence the students' motivation, the data were collected in all five school districts.

**Table 1** Enrollment in private institutes by school district

	Number of students attending a private institute	Number of students not attending a private institute	Total number of students
East school district	1,182 (86.09%)	191 (13.91%)	1,373
West school district	1,132 (79.38%)	294 (20.62%)	1,426
North school district	1,892 (82.26%)	408 (17.74%)	2,300
South school district	804 (78.82%)	216 (21.18%)	1,020
Island school district	147 (80.77%)	35 (19.23%)	182
Total	5,157 (81.84%)	1,144 (18.16%)	6,301

Percentage is in parentheses

## Participants

The participants were 6,301 elementary school students in Grades 3–6 ( $n$  of Grade 3 = 1,640;  $n$  of Grade 4 = 1,633;  $n$  of Grade 5 = 1,436;  $n$  of Grade 6 = 1,592) and attended the city's 30 public schools.<sup>4</sup> Under Korea's existing education system, English is first introduced in Grade 3 (student age: 9). However, for the reasons stated earlier, large numbers of students attend private institutes (*hak-wons*) even before Grade 3. In the present study, 81.8% of the students responded that they were receiving or had received private instruction, leaving only 18.2% with no prior experience. The data showed that the students in the Island district also attended private institutes ( $n = 147$ ) and that the percentage of attendance (80.77%) was not statistically different from that of the entire population. Table 1 shows the demographics of the students.

## Materials

### Questionnaire

The items for the questionnaire were drawn from Lamb's (2007) closed questionnaire items, and the questionnaire was refined through a pilot study. The participants in the pilot study included 34 elementary school students belonging to a single class in one of the five school districts; a total of 15 items were administered over a 20-min period. Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency, showed that 3 of the 15 items negatively affected the overall consistency; the 3 items were deleted, leaving 12 questionnaire items for the main study. The wording and diction of these items were further modified through a series of consultations with experienced elementary school teachers, students, and parents. Because of the students' age, attention span, and level of cognitive development, the

questionnaire items needed to be short and simple. Each of the 12 items inquired different aspects of English learning motivation. Because one purpose of this study is to identify the effect of private instruction on English learning motivation, the students' expectation of future success was divided into two categories: public English instruction and private English instruction. The 12 items were as follows:

- 1) Satisfaction with their progress in English (Items 1, 4, and 5),
- 2) Expectation of ultimate success in English (Items 2 and 3),
- 3) Perceived importance of English (Item 6),
- 4) Relative importance of English compared to other school subjects (Item 7),
- 5) Instrumental motivation (Item 8),
- 6) Intrinsic motivation (Item 9),
- 7) Integrative motivation (Item 10),
- 8) Extrinsic motivation (parental influence) (Item 11), and
- 9) Extrinsic motivation (academic influence) (Item 12).

As shown earlier, the first four items addressed the students' perceptions regarding English, whereas the five items from Items 8 to 12 reflected motivational constructs. For the items on motivation, two dominant motivational theories were considered: Gardner's (1985, 2001) concepts of instrumentality (Item 8: *English is important because I need it for my career*) and integrativeness (Item 10: *English is important because it helps me to meet foreigners and learn about other countries*) and Ryan and Deci's (2000) intrinsic motivation (Item 9: *English is important because I enjoy learning English*) and extrinsic motivation (Items 11: *English is important because my parents encourage me to learn English* and Item 12: *English is important because it is a compulsory school subject*) (see "Appendix").

Given the cognitive development of Korean elementary school students, overly complicated items or the highly differentiated Likert scale was considered inappropriate. Therefore, as shown in "Appendix", a 3-point Likert scale was used: 1 ("disagree"), 2 ("somewhat agree"), and 3

<sup>4</sup> Korea Education Development Institute [KEDI] (2002) reported that 98.6% of elementary schools in Korea were either national or public and that the remainder (only 1.4%) were private.

("agree"). Because of the participants' literacy level and relatively limited English proficiency, the questionnaire was written in Korean, the students' first language. Cronbach's alpha was .768, suggesting good internal consistency and indicating that all the items were related to similar psychological traits.

### Analyses

To identify the motivational changes across school grades, a series of non-parametric tests were conducted because the students' response to each item did not constitute a normal distribution and because the Likert scale did not assume an equal distance between the response choices. Therefore, the Kruskal–Wallis test was conducted to measure the effect of the students' school grades on their English learning motivation, and the Mann–Whitney test was performed to identify the influence of private instruction on the students' motivation. SPSS version 13.0 was used, and the Alpha set was .05.

### Findings

#### General trends in Korean elementary school students' motivation

The overall trends in English learning motivation among Korean elementary school students are now discussed. The students' motivation, their satisfaction with their progress in English, and their expectation of future success in English all showed a consistent decrease as they advanced to a higher school grade. As shown in Table 2, the means of the students' response to each item all indicated a gradual decrease (except Item 7). The means of the students' expectation of ultimate success in English and their current satisfaction with English learning experience were higher in private institutes ( $m = 2.26$  and  $2.80$ , respectively) than in public school ( $m = 2.01$  and  $2.33$ ). In terms of their English learning motivation, both instrumental motivation and integrative motivation were strong ( $m = 2.35$  and  $2.32$ , respectively), whereas constructs on intrinsic, extrinsic (parental), and extrinsic (academic) motivation were relatively weak ( $m = 1.95$ ,  $1.75$ , and  $1.71$ ).

The Kruskal–Wallis test indicated significant changes from positive to negative responses to each item as the students advanced to a higher school grade. Compared with other motivational constructs, the decline in the students' intrinsic motivation ( $\chi^2 = 410.181$ ) was the sharpest. This indicates that the initial interest in learning a foreign language in Grade 3 diminished substantially. The decrease in the students' satisfaction with English learning experience in public schools (Item 4,  $\chi^2 = 436.648$ ) is noteworthy. This

reflects their growing dissatisfaction with public English education and is related to the decrease in their expectation of ultimate success in English through public school education (Item 2,  $\chi^2 = 394.135$ ). As shown in Item 7 in Table 2, English was perceived as more important than other subjects (i.e., slightly skewed toward *more important*) (Grade 3 = 2.29; Grade 4 = 2.20; Grade 5 = 2.21; Grade 6 = 2.21). Thus, there was a discrepancy between the students' perceived importance of English learning in school and their actual satisfaction and motivation. In sum, Korean elementary school students were increasingly dissatisfied with the quality of both public and private English education, and their motivational constructs consistently decreased.

#### The effect of private instruction

Studies by the Korea National Statistical Office (KNSO) (2008, 2009) found that those students who received private instruction showed higher levels of scholastic achievement in school subjects. The Korea National Statistical Office (KNSO) (2009) reported that the expenditure on private English education showed an 11% increase in 2008. The report also indicated that the more the parents earned (monthly income), the more they spent on private instruction. However, although the report showed significant positive correlations between students' experience in private instruction and scholastic achievement, it largely ignored their motivational constructs.

Despite a paucity of prior research on the interrelationship between English learning motivation and private instruction, Kim (1999) compared the motivation of two groups of elementary school students: (1) students who received private English instruction and (2) those who did not. He found that the private instruction group demonstrated a higher level of intrinsic motivation and integrative motivation, but the two groups did not differ with respect to their extrinsic motivation. However, as stated earlier, this study was conducted a decade ago in 1999. At that time, English had been a mandatory subject in Korean elementary schools for only 3 years. Thus, the results of the study should be revisited. In this regard, the questionnaire items were calculated differently based on the two student groups. A series of Mann–Whitney tests were conducted to identify the effect of private instruction on students' motivation, expectation, and satisfaction.

As shown in Table 3,<sup>5</sup> the two student groups' expectation of public and private English education differed. The students who experienced learning English at a private

<sup>5</sup> In Table 3, Cohen's  $d$  for effect size is provided. Although most numbers of Cohen's  $d$  present fairly small effect sizes, given the large number of participants in the study, the power to reject Type II errors is viewed sufficient enough (Howell 2007).

**Table 2** Reported levels of motivation by school grade

Item #	Total [ <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )]	Grade ( <i>N</i> = 6,301)				Kruskal–Wallis test	
		Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Chi-square	Significance (2-tailed)
Item 1: Satisfaction with progress in English thus far (1 = not satisfied; 2 = satisfied; 3 = very satisfied)	2.06 (.63)	2.23 (.62)	2.13 (.62)	2.01 (.60)	1.86 (.60)	323.243	.000
Item 2: Expectation of ultimate success in English in public school (1 = not confident; 2 = reasonably confident; 3 = very confident)	2.01 (.68)	2.23 (.67)	2.09 (.66)	1.91 (.66)	1.80 (.67)	394.135	.000
Item 3: Expectation of ultimate success in English in private institute (1 = not confident; 2 = reasonably confident; 3 = very confident)	2.26 (.71)	2.35 (.74)	2.30 (.71)	2.23 (.71)	2.14 (.69)	82.803	.000
Item 4: Satisfaction with English learning experience in public school (1 = not satisfied; 2 = satisfied; 3 = very satisfied)	2.33 (.63)	2.54 (.60)	2.40 (.62)	2.24 (.63)	2.12 (.61)	436.648	.000
Item 5: Satisfaction with English learning experience in private institute* (1 = not satisfied; 2 = satisfied; 3 = very satisfied; 4 = did not attend private institute)	2.54 (.63)	2.62 (.60)	2.59 (.63)	2.54 (.65)	2.48 (.64)	75.453	.000
Item 6: Perceived importance of English learning (1 = not important; 2 = important; 3 = very important)	2.39 (.63)	2.51 (.57)	2.36 (.61)	2.35 (.66)	2.33 (.65)	71.055	.000
Item 7: Relative importance of English compared with other school subjects (1 = less important; 2 = same; 3 = more important)	2.23 (.60)	2.29 (.55)	2.20 (.59)	2.21 (.62)	2.21 (.62)	22.502	.000
Reasons for importance (1 = not important; 2 = important; 3 = very important)							
Item 8: Because I need it for my career in the future (instrumental)	2.35 (.64)	2.43 (.79)	2.37 (.63)	2.35 (.66)	2.27 (.64)	42.481	.000
Item 9: Because I enjoy learning English (intrinsic)	1.95 (.70)	2.19 (.68)	2.01 (.67)	1.85 (.70)	1.72 (.66)	410.181	.000
Item 10: Because I want to meet foreigners & learn more about other countries (integrative)	2.32 (.65)	2.48 (.62)	2.38 (.63)	2.24 (.67)	2.17 (.81)	232.998	.000
Item 11: Because my parents encourage me to learn English (extrinsic—parental)	1.75 (.73)	1.88 (.77)	1.73 (.73)	1.69 (.71)	1.69 (.69)	57.267	.000
Item 12: Because English is a compulsory school subject (extrinsic—academic)	1.71 (.69)	1.89 (.72)	1.71 (.68)	1.62 (.66)	1.59 (.65)	176.358	.000

SD is in parentheses

\* Students who checked “4” among the choices were excluded

institute had lower expectations of ultimate success in English learning in public school than those without such experience, although the difference was non-significant. A similar trend was observed for Item 4, which addressed the students’ satisfaction with English learning experience in public school ( $m = 2.31$  for the students with private education vs.  $m = 2.41$  for those without). However, the mean of Item 3, which addressed the students’ expectation of ultimate success in English learning through private education, showed contradictory results. The students with private education had significantly higher expectations of private instruction than those without ( $m = 2.33$  vs.  $m = 1.89$ , respectively).

## Discussion

The results showed a gradual decrease in English learning motivation among the respondents. The students’

expectation of ultimate success in English learning and their satisfaction with English learning for both public and private education showed a decreasing trend. Prior experience in private instruction influenced the students’ motivation, expectation, and satisfaction. In general, compared with the students without experience in private instruction, those with such experience were more motivated, and their satisfaction with their progress in English learning was significantly higher.

The results share both similarities and differences with those of Lamb’s (2007) Indonesian study. Lamb investigated Indonesian junior high school students’ English learning motivation over a 20-month period by employing questionnaires and interviews. He found that there was a significant drop in the students’ satisfaction with their progress in English learning and that their expectation of ultimate success in English learning decreased. These results are consistent with those of the present study. However, in terms of motivational changes, Lamb’s results

**Table 3** Reported levels of motivation by private instruction experience

Item #	Mean (SD) (N = 6,301)		Mann-Whiney test		Cohen's <i>d</i> for effect size
	Students with private education	Students without private education	<i>z</i> -Value	Significance (2-tailed)	
Item 1: Satisfaction with progress in English thus far (1 = not satisfied; 2 = satisfied; 3 = very satisfied)	2.08 (SD = .63) (n = 5,148)	2.00 (.60) (n = 1,063)	-3.540	.000	.12
Item 2: Expectation of ultimate success in English in public school (1 = not confident; 2 = reasonably confident; 3 = very confident)	2.01 (.68) (n = 5,130)	2.03 (.67) (n = 1,057)	-.812	.417	-.03
Item 3: Expectation of ultimate success in English in private institute (1 = not confident; 2 = reasonably confident; 3 = very confident)	2.33 (.69) (n = 5,131)	1.89 (.71) (n = 1,042)	-18.050	.000	.64
Item 4: Satisfaction with English learning experience in public school (1 = not satisfied; 2 = satisfied; 3 = very satisfied)	2.31 (.64) (n = 5,118)	2.41 (.61) (n = 1,056)	-4.548	.000	-.16
Item 6: Perceived importance of English learning (1 = not important; 2 = important; 3 = very important)	2.40 (.63) (n = 5,140)	2.33 (.61) (n = 1,055)	-3.497	.000	.11
Item 7: Relative importance of English compared with other school subjects (1 = less important; 2 = same; 3 = more important)	2.23 (.60) (n = 5,139)	2.19 (.60) (n = 1,065)	-1.860	.063	.06
Reasons for importance (1 = not important; 2 = important; 3 = very important)					
Item 8: Because I need it for my career in the future (instrumental)	2.36 (.64) (n = 5,125)	2.30 (.66) (n = 1,053)	-2.671	.008	.09
Item 9: Because I enjoy learning English (intrinsic)	1.96 (.70) (n = 5,129)	1.91 (.70) (n = 1,055)	-2.079	.038	.07
Item 10: Because I want to meet foreigners & learn more about other countries (integrative)	2.32 (.65) (n = 5,140)	2.29 (.66) (n = 1,057)	-1.523	.128	.05
Item 11: Because my parents encourage me to learn English (extrinsic—parental)	1.75 (.73) (n = 5,139)	1.74 (.73) (n = 1,062)	-.341	.733	.01
Item 12: Because English is a compulsory school subject (extrinsic—academic)	1.69 (.69) (n = 5,150)	1.78 (.68) (n = 1,063)	-4.052	.000	-.13

*n* denotes the number of students responding to each item



differ from those of this study. In Lamb's study, both instrumental and extrinsic (academic) motivation showed a significant increase over the 20-month period, whereas intrinsic motivation showed a significant decrease. Lamb, in interpreting the discrepant motivational trajectories, argued that the increase in instrumental and extrinsic motivation reflected the constant exposure to "powerful discourses promoting the English language" (p. 772). Mass media (e.g., English magazines, cartoons, Western songs, news, and movies) and authority figures (e.g., parents and teachers) strengthen the prevailing social discourse on English as an international language; English is considered as a social ladder to the realization of personal life dreams. In this context, Indonesian junior high school students adopted the above externally imposed future image of a confident English speaker. Lamb concluded that the increase in instrumental and extrinsic (academic) motivation was a reflection of the students' possible selves (Dörnyei 2005) having external origin.

In contrast to Lamb's (2007) findings, the Korean elementary students investigated here showed a decrease in all motivational constructs; their instrumental, intrinsic, integrative, and extrinsic motivation all showed a significant decrease. Given that the social context in which most members of Korean society share the pervasive belief in the importance of learning English and that the English mass media in Korea is equally as well equipped as those in Indonesia, the results of the present study require different interpretations. The question then is why the Korean elementary school students' instrumental and extrinsic (academic) motivation, along with other motivational constructs, decreased?

Item 6 provides a clue: the perceived importance of English. As shown in Table 2, Item 6 showed a significant drop ( $\chi^2 = 71.055$ , sig. = .000). As the students advanced to a higher school grade, they placed less weight on the importance of English learning. This contradicts the result of Lamb's (2007) research, which reported an *increase* for the same questionnaire item. From the perspective of Dörnyei (2005, 2009), Lamb's result (i.e., an increase in the perceived importance of English learning) might have been due to the students' favorable visualization of their possible English-speaking selves. This is because the questionnaire item focuses on students' subjective perception of the importance of English; if students consider English, as a subject in either public or private instruction, as meaningful, they will evaluate the item positively. Thus, a positive response to the item reflects the internalization of the dominant social discourse on English as an international language. As stated earlier, the importance of English learning has been instilled and reinforced by mass media and authority figures and even by national and provincial governments in Korea (McKay 2009). The

respondents of the present study, if they had realized and internalized the importance of English, would have responded positively to Item 6 because they had been exposed ever the increasing emphasis on the benefits of English learning.

However, as shown in Table 2, the results were inconsistent with the expectation. The students did not value the importance of English as they advanced to a higher school grade, suggesting that they could not visualize their English-speaking selves favorably. Dörnyei (2005) argued that possible L2 selves provide the guiding force necessary for L2 learning motivation. The lack of possible L2 selves may only remain in the realm of a naïve aspiration to achieve a remote learning goal. In such occasions, even though students may reach a tacit agreement on the benefits of learning English, their motivational maintenance may be at risk without seeing a positive possible self after or during the phase of English learning.

The effects of private instruction shown in Table 3 focus our attention on Item 6. The students with private instruction experience placed significantly higher weight on the importance of English learning than those without. This suggests that by being physically present at a private institute, the student may have more opportunities to learn about the importance of learning English. For example, by exchanging their opinions on English learning with their peers, the students attending private institutes may be exposed to more channels through which their belief in the efficacy of English learning can be strengthened, which may allow them to better portray their possible L2 selves.

However, the result for Item 6 in Table 3 should not be interpreted as evidence for the favorable effect of private instruction. In fact, Tables 2 and 3 suggest a very different explanation. The issue here is Korean elementary school students' internalization of the dominant social discourse on English as an international language. In Table 2, the students placed less weight on the importance of English as they advanced to a higher school grade. As shown in Table 2, the effects of private instruction on the students' motivation did not overcome their increasingly unfavorable view toward the importance of English learning. This suggests that even though those students attending private institutions may have more opportunities to ponder the benefits of English learning than those who do not, such opportunities may not lead to a more favorable view of English learning unless the students receiving private instruction make proactive efforts to develop positive possible L2 selves. In other words, private instruction cannot be a self-sufficient condition for the maintenance of L2 learning motivation.

As shown in Table 3, there was a close relationship between the Korean elementary school students' perceived importance of English and their motivation. Except for

Item 12 (extrinsic—academic motivation), the students who received private instruction showed a higher level of L2 motivation than those who did not. The private instruction group showed greater instrumental and intrinsic motivation than the public instruction group. Note that the Mann–Whitney tests showed no statistical difference between the two groups' integrative motivation and extrinsic motivation (parental influence). In other words, even though Table 3 demonstrates that the students with private instruction had greater English learning motivation, private instruction had a substantial effect on only instrumental and intrinsic motivation. Private instruction did not have a noticeable impact on integrative and extrinsic (parental) motivation. Noteworthy is that the students with no prior private instruction had significantly higher extrinsic (academic) motivation than their counterparts; this result has not been reported in prior research.

Moreover, the students' prior experience in private instruction had different effects on the motivational constructs. As shown in Table 3, the private instruction group exhibited significantly higher instrumental motivation than their counterparts ( $z$ -value =  $-2.671$ ,  $p = .008$ ), whereas neither the integrative nor the extrinsic (parental, academic) motivation of the two groups was significantly different. On intrinsic motivation, the effect of private instruction was inconclusive ( $z$ -value =  $-2.079$ ,  $p = .038$ ) because we could not reject the null hypothesis at a more conservative level (i.e.,  $p < .01$ ). Furthermore, as shown in Table 3, the students with no prior private instruction had significantly higher extrinsic (academic) motivation than their counterparts. This suggests that students' experience in private instruction may negatively affect their academic motivation.

Thus, although private instruction influences students' possible L2 selves and their motivation, it has a direct impact only on instrumental motivation and a limited impact on intrinsic motivation.

### Implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research

Korean elementary school students' early start on English is closely associated with the widespread belief in Korean society in the usefulness of English for future success (Kim 2009, 2010). That is, English, as an international language, can be instrumental in achieving future success (e.g., initial job placement, promotion, and academic credentials). Superficially, this may constitute a condition conducive for instrumental orientation (Gardner 1985, 1988, 2001). The results of the present study, however, indicate that the students' instrumentality, along with the other motivational constructs, decreased over time. This suggests the importance of internalizing the necessity of English learning, not

the external social contexts emphasizing the beneficial role of English. Students' creation of possible L2 selves is directly related to their motivational maintenance. This study provides solid evidence that the key to maintaining/increasing EFL learning motivation is not the prevailing social discourse on English as an international language and the expenditure on private English education but each EFL learner's personal sense of the importance and meaning of English learning. This means that students need time to critically evaluate their English learning so that they can connect their learning to their own unique life situation; this should eventually enhance their sense of possible L2 selves.

To promote the creation of possible L2 selves among students, English teachers in Korea can, for example, allot 5–10 minutes at the end of each class for peer discussion on the importance of learning English. During the discussion, by linking what they have learned on a specific day in the classroom to what they are interested in or consider important in life, students can enhance their awareness of the importance of English learning and connect it to their lives and future. Another viable alternative is to have students keep an English learning diary or journal. Depending on students' school grade or their current cognitive level, the diary can be drawings of English-related objects/concepts important to them or memos summarizing what they have learned and its relevance to their daily lives and future.

The aforementioned suggestions for practitioners are theoretically grounded in recent findings on the role of verbalization in cognitive development (Ericsson and Simon 1998; Smagorinsky 1998; Swain 2006), which emphasizes the positive effects of speaking (e.g., peer collaborative discussion) or writing (e.g., English learning diary or memo) on thought. Because language does not simply reflect our thinking but mediates and contributes to our cognitive development (Swain 2006), English teachers can enhance students' EFL learning motivation by providing them with the opportunity to critically recall their English learning and link it to their personal life.

Despite the aforementioned practical implications, this study has the following limitations. First, the questionnaire used in the study may not be appropriate for young language learners (Zentner and Renaud 2007) in that the questionnaire may be beyond elementary school students' level of cognitive development. In this regard, the present study needs to be reinforced by triangulating data such as focus group interviews (Morgan 2002). Second, instead of investigating the same population's motivational changes over a period of time, the present research adopted a quasi-longitudinal design, which means that we could only infer the participants' annual changes in motivation from the data collected simultaneously from students in four different school grades.

Therefore, future research is warranted to make a series of in-depth inquiries into the nature of demotivation among Korean elementary school students. Theoretically, the relationship between L2 selves and L2 motivation needs to be further explored. Although Kim (2009) investigated the theoretical linkage between English learning motivation and possible selves, the locale of his research was not EFL but ESL, and he also did not employ pre-puberty subjects. Methodologically, we need to use in-depth interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that decrease students' English learning motivation. Moreover, a longitudinal (not quasi-longitudinal) study of students' motivational changes is warranted. Following the same cohort of children in Grades 3 through 6 in both private institutes and public schools may provide further insights into when and why changes in students' English learning motivation occur.

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## Appendix: Survey of elementary school students' EFL learning motivation

1. Are you satisfied with your progress in English thus far?  
① not satisfied      ②satisfied      ③very satisfied
2. Do you think you can eventually speak English fluently and understand it well if you learn English through a public school?  
① not confident      ②reasonably confident      ③confident
3. Do you think you can speak English fluently and understand it well if you learn English through a private institute?  
① not confident      ②reasonably confident      ③confident
4. Are you satisfied with the English learning experience provided by the public school you attend?  
① not satisfied      ②satisfied      ③very satisfied
5. Are you satisfied with the English learning experience provided by the private institute you attend/attended?  
① not satisfied      ②satisfied      ③very satisfied      ④I did not attend a private institute
6. How important is English to you?  
① not important      ②important      ③very important
7. How important do you think English is compared to other school subjects?  
① less important      ②same      ③more important
8. English is important because I need it for my career in the future.  
① disagree      ②agree      ③strongly agree
9. English is important because I enjoy learning English.  
① disagree      ②agree      ③strongly agree
10. English is important because it helps me meet foreigners and learn about other countries.  
① disagree      ②agree      ③strongly agree
11. English is important because my parents encourage me to learn English.  
① disagree      ②agree      ③strongly agree
12. English is important because it is a compulsory school subject.  
① disagree      ②agree      ③strongly agree

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