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Demotivators and Remotivation Strategies in L2 Learning: A Case Study of Korean EFL Students

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The study discussed advanced-level Korean high school EFL learners’ demotivation and remotivation strategies in English learning. Demotivation refers to specific external forces that reduce or harm motivation; remotivation is the process of recovering the reduced motivation. Although both are common in L2 learning, only a few studies address this issue. Using the survey data of 130 participants, the study identified eight demotivating factors through factor analysis. The first factor, negative attitude toward English, indicates that even high school students felt demotivated because of the sheer difficulty of studying English. Descriptive statistics revealed that a negative attitude toward the English-speaking community was not a strong demotivator, which indicated that students possessed Machiavellian motivation. Correlation and regression analysis suggested that no demotivator had a significant negative relationship with English scores; rather, the ways students perceived the demotivators were more important. Eight remotivation strategies were identified: among those, “Keep thinking about the social importance of English” was the most often mentioned one. These results suggested the need for further qualitative, systemic research on remotivators and for training programs for practicing remotivation strategies.

[demotivation/remotivation/Korean high school students/English learning motivation, 탈동기/재동기/한국 고등학생/영어학습동기]

* Tae-Young Kim: first author, Miso Kim: second author
I. Introduction

What motivates learners to study a second language (L2)? This question has been investigated for more than six decades (e.g., Hyun & Kim, 2013; Kim, 2006a; Kim & Kim, 2011), since Gardner and Lambert (1959) opened up the discussion on motivation. Next, what reduces learners’ motivation, and what re–stimulates the students’ lost motivation? Compared to the first question, these questions have not attracted much attention, with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Falout, 2012; Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009; Falout, Murphey, Fukuda, & Trovela, 2013; Jung, 2011). Even a very motivated learner may lose motivation after undergoing a series of difficulties in studying an L2. The demotivated learner may resume learning after recovering from the difficulties or finding new reasons to study the L2. As shortly illustrated, motivation is not a linear and fixed process. It has its own vicissitudes in the long journey of language learning.

Over the course of language learning, it is all too often found that students lose their initial interest in English or fall into a state of total amotivation. To address this issue, many researchers, particularly those in East Asian countries (e.g., Falout, 2012; Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009; Kikuchi, 2009; Kim, 2011; Kim & Lee, 2013a, 2013b; Kim & Seo, 2012; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), are now paying increasing attention to students’ gradual loss of motivation to learn English.

This study examines demotivators and remotivation strategies among Korean students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), using both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Given that L2 learning involves considerable time and effort, the causes of demotivation and strategies to recover from demotivation are crucial for success. Therefore, the empirical study looks into what demotivates Korean learners and what strategies they employ to remotivate themselves. More specifically, the study investigates the following three research questions:

1) What are the demotivators of advanced Korean EFL high school students?
2) What are the relationships between the demotivators and English scores?
3) What strategies do advanced Korean EFL high school students use to remotivate themselves?
II. Literature Review

To date, a variety of scholars have defined motivation. From Gardner’s (1988) perspective, integrative orientation, which means the aspiration to be integrated into the L2 community, is more effective for L2 learning than instrumental orientation, the utilitarian purposes to learn an L2. Deci and Ryan (1985) developed a theory of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, while dividing extrinsic motivation in four levels depending on the control of the learner. Because cognitive psychologists had been actively researching human motivation for some time, Oxford and Shearin (1994) called for the expansion of L2 motivational research by borrowing theories of motivation from cognitive psychology, suggesting need theories, expectancy–value theories, equity theories, and others. Ushioda (1998, 2012) also called for looking beyond a social–psychological perspective and using a cognitive framework to investigate L2 learners’ motivation. The cognitive framework considered the patterns of thinking and belief that underlie learners’ motivational activity, unlike the social–psychological perspective, which reduced motivation to one of learners’ affective variables associated with their social contexts. Another research direction focused on the process of motivation. Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) proposed a process model of L2 motivation, which distinguished pre-actional, actional, and post-actional phases of motivation. In recent years, L2 motivation has been understood as the desire among learners to achieve ideal L2 selves (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009), identities (Norton, 2013), and the result of complex dynamic systems (Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2014).

Although theoretical discussions on L2 motivation have yielded numerous meaningful findings, demotivated students have received relatively little attention. Demotivated students, who have already lost motivation, are expected to become motivated once again after winning over the factor which triggered demotivation. To help out the demotivated students in need of recovery, demotivation has to receive separate attention, rather than lumping it with motivation. In this regard, the following sections define the concepts of demotivation and remotivation and summarize previous studies on demotivation and remotivation in Korea.
1. The Concepts of Demotivation and Remotivation

Since L2 learning involves high levels of difficulty, demotivation continues to be an important field of study (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Demotivation, however, is not a direct antonym of motivation. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011, p. 139), demotivation involves “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action.” Demotivating factors do not include powerful distractions, gradual loss of interest over time, or realization of the heavy costs of learning English.

Discussions of demotivation often include considerations of remotivation and amotivation. Remotivation is “the process of recovering motivation after losing it” (Falout, 2012, p. 3). While demotivation and remotivation assume that a certain level of motivation existed before, amotivation refers to a state where any kind of motivation is not present. Amotivation is “the state of lacking an intention to act” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 61), caused by not assigning value to the activity or not feeling competent to do the activity.

Demotivation research has been a major topic in Japan. Falout, Elwood, and Hood (2009) found nine factors in demotivation, which they grouped into external conditions, learner–internal conditions, and reactive behaviors to past demotivating experiences. Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) identified test scores as one of the demotivating factors for Japanese high school students, especially for students with low initial motivation. The focus on grammar and test scores has been identified as a major demotivating factors in a qualitative analysis (Kikuchi, 2009), revealing that high–stakes exams and grammar–translation approaches reduce Japanese students’ motivation. Demotivation studies in the Japanese context identified teacher factors; however, these factors were not significantly related with English proficiency (Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009) or were not dominant among Japanese learners (Hamada, 2008, 2011; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009).

Finally, how do demotivated students regain their motivation? Falout (2012) and Falout, Murphey, Fukuda, and Trovela (2013) examined Japanese learners’ remotivation process by applying the concept of antecedent conditions of the learner. The concept refers to “the mixture of internal conditions including perceptions of experiences, self-confidence, and self-concept” (Falout, 2012, p. 6). These two studies indicated that learners who perceive past experiences positively
are able to regain motivation in a faster and more productive way.

2. Demotivation and Remotivation Research in Korea

Demotivation has been understood in two ways: 1) demotivation as a novel/distinctive construct, and 2) demotivation as a decrease in motivational intensity (Kim & Kim, 2013). In Korea, demotivation has been conceptualized more as latter, and research has focused on investigating changes in motivation as students grow up. Studies published in Korea mainly investigate motivation and demotivation across different age groups. First of all, quantitative analysis of Grade 3-6 elementary students’ motivation has revealed that the students’ motivation gradually decreased as they advanced to higher grades, partly because of the gap between their current English proficiency and their internalized perception of the importance of English (Kim, 2011; Kim & Seo, 2012). The other study on junior high students found that low-achieving students were more demotivated by the mandatory study of English than the advanced students were (Choi & Kim, 2013). Another study that looked at both junior high and high school students’ demotivation reported that the participants mainly displayed particular dissatisfaction with English classes and grading methods, while the difficulty of English in itself was most demotivating (Kim, 2009). Lastly, college students identified lack of meaningful purpose to study English, little experience of improvement and success, and low self-determination as the major demotivating factors (Kim, 2015).

However, once demotivated by these factors, Korean students remotivated themselves after realizing the social value of studying English. For instance, Jung (2011) used five multiple-choice questions to gauge remotivating factors, which asked what motivated students to be interested in studying English again after losing motivation. Jung found that getting good scores on English tests and being aware of the social and instrumental value of English were the frequent remotivating factors. Ma and Cho (2014), using the same questionnaire items, identified that grading and assessment for English exams accounted for 20.6% of remotivating factors external to the learner, and that awareness of raising English proficiency to get a job accounted for 41.3% of remotivating factors internal to the learner. Internal remotivation was more influential than external remotivation,
suggesting that the students’ strong desire to improve English and get internal rewards was stronger than external motives.

The present study examines demotivation and remotivation from a retrospective point of view. The participants are college students who have been admitted to the Department of English Education at a private university in Seoul, Korea. Despite their admission success, they may have been discouraged by a number of demotivating factors while attending high school, and then recovered from demotivation using various remotivation strategies. By retrospectively asking students about their demotivating factors and remotivation strategies, this study can find out what demotivators successful learners encountered, and how they coped with demotivation constructively.

III. Research Method

1. Participants

This study purposefully used the dataset compiled by Department of English education in a private university. It analyzed their demotivators and remotivation strategies in high school retrospectively, for the purposes of (1) investigating what demotivators the relatively successful learners had experienced in high school, and (2) what remotivation strategies could keep them on track again despite the demotivators. The study chose to investigate their demotivation and remotivation in high schools because the three-year high school period is particularly characterized by the increased social and academic importance to study English (Kim, 2010b).

The dataset consisted of questionnaire responses by 130 anonymous undergraduate students in the department. All participants of the dataset were majoring in English education; 56 (43.1%) responses were collected from 100-level first year courses, and the other 74 (56.9%) responses were from 200- and 300-level courses. Thirty five (26.9%) participants were male, 94 (72.3%) participants were female, and 1 participant did not specify his or her gender (0.8%). The mean of the participants’ reported English score in high school was 91.35 (SD = 6.61) out of 100, and the mean of the participants’ College Scholastic
Ability Test (CSAT) was 93.95 (SD = 4.84) out of 100. The demographic data show that the participants were advanced students when they were in high school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
<th>Summary of Participant Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Courses</td>
<td>100-level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 130

2. Data Collection Method

The questionnaire retrospectively asked about the participants’ experience of demotivation in high school. It consisted of three major sections: basic profiles, demotivating factors, and remotivating factors. The first section asked for the participants’ age, gender, English scores in high school, CSAT score, private education experience, and the helpfulness of their high school English classes. Items in the second section asked about demotivating factors using a 5-point Likert scale. The items were adopted from Choi & Kim (2013), who developed the items by referring to previous studies on demotivation (e.g., Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kikuchi, 2009; Kim, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009) and investigated junior high students’ demotivating factors. As the present research retrospectively examines successful English learners’ demotivating factors, the items in the questionnaire were changed to the past tense. After the initial analysis of internal consistency, eight items that lower its consistency were removed from the original questionnaire, leaving 32 items. All 32 items were entered into the factor analysis, and the result indicated that factor loadings of three items were below 0.4 (see “demotivating factors” section). As a result, 29 items were used in this study. Cronbach’s Alpha of each factor calculated after the initial internal consistency analysis and factor analysis is presented in Table 3. All items on demotivation factors can be found in Appendix. Because of the limited number of previous studies on remotivation, the third section on remotivation was written in an open-ended format, using the following prompt: “Please specify what strategies you used in order to study English diligently, when you hated to study English.”
3. Data Analysis

The study used quantitative analysis methods to address the first and second research questions, and qualitative exploratory analysis to answer the third research one. Quantitative methods were adopted for demotivators because they have been extensively analyzed by questionnaires and quantitative methods to date (cf. Choi & Kim, 2013; Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009; Kikuchi, 2009; Kim, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009); however, the remotivation strategies are not yet systematically reported and quantified in previous literature. Therefore, the study used exploratory, open-ended questionnaire items to examine the remotivation strategies.

The first and second parts of the questionnaire were analyzed by statistical methods to extract demotivators and their relationships with English scores. The third section, an open-ended question on remotivation, contained qualitative data and thus was analyzed by iterative readings and frequency analysis.

For the quantitative data, SPSS 21.0 was used throughout the data analysis. First, factor analysis was performed to extract the factors that demotivated the students. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all extracted factors to investigate the mean and standard deviation of each factor. The relationships among the extracted factors and English scores were examined by a Pearson–product moment correlation analysis and a sequential regression analysis.

For the open-ended questionnaire responses, all answers were converted into electronic format first. The authors read the responses iteratively to identify recurring themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After a series of reading, the researchers agreed on nine categories of remotivation strategies, and classified the responses into the categories. The frequency of responses in each category was also calculated. The questionnaire was the only data source of the remotivation strategies, since the goal was more on identifying broad remotivation strategies used by 130 students, rather than examining a few students’ remotivation strategies in-depth from multiple perspectives.
IV. Results And Discussion

1. Demotivating Factors

First, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to identify the students’ demotivating factors. All 32 items were entered into analysis, and three items with factor loadings below 0.4 were removed because the sample size of the study is relatively small (Sheskin, 2004). Finally, 29 items were entered for the main analysis.

Table 2 shows the factor analysis results for the demotivating factors. A Varimax orthogonal rotation was employed in this study. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin index was 0.78, showing that multicollinearity did not exist in this analysis. The cumulative eigenvalue was 67.548, indicating that approximately 67.55% of the total variance was attributable to the extracted factors.

Eight factors were extracted from the analysis. The eight identified factors were: 1) negative attitude toward English learning; 2) negative attitude toward the English-speaking community; 3) lack of self-confidence; 4) mismatch between learners’ level and learning content; 5) compulsory nature of English learning; 6) distractions in English classes; 7) loss of interest in English; and 8) inappropriate learning environment.

| TABLE 2  |
| Factor Analysis of the Advanced Korean EFL High School Students’ Demotivation |
| Items | Factors |
|       | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  |
| 28    | .794 |
| 19    | .779 |
| 3     | .692 |
| 20    | .636 |
| 29    | .462 |
| 10    | .803 |
| 22    | .768 |
| 30    | .696 |
| 5     | .681 |
| 16    | .812 |
| 11    | .808 |
|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 15         | .621    |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| 9          | .581    |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| 14         | .540    |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| 6          |         | .856    |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| 7          |         |         | .831    |         |         |         |         |         |
| 24         |         |         |         | .598    |         |         |         |         |
| 18         |         |         |         | .541    |         |         |         |         |
| 23         |         |         |         |         | .652    |         |         |         |
| 21         |         |         |         |         | .558    |         |         |         |
| 27         |         |         |         |         | .557    |         |         |         |
| 17         |         |         |         |         |         | .439    |         |         |
| 13         |         |         |         |         |         | .668    |         |         |
| 8          |         |         |         |         |         | .652    |         |         |
| 12         |         |         |         |         |         | .643    |         |         |
| 2          |         |         |         |         |         |         | .752    |         |
| 4          |         |         |         |         |         |         | .686    |         |
| 1          |         |         |         |         |         |         |         | .854    |
| 26         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         | .489    |

Note. Extraction method: principal component analysis

The first factor, which accounted for approximately 11.18% of all variances, represents learners’ negative attitude toward English learning. The items belonging to this factor include dislike of and difficulty with learning spellings, pronunciations, words, and the grammar of English. This factor suggests that even advanced students are often demotivated by the required level of English in high school. The second factor refers to an unfavorable attitude toward English-speaking countries and people, such as not wanting to go to English-speaking countries or have a foreign friend. Lack of self-confidence is caused by peer pressure, anxiety about speaking English in front of others, and extremely difficult activities in English classes. The fourth factor, mismatch between learners’ level and learning content, refers to the discrepancy between learners’ current English proficiency level and the provided lessons. The fifth factor is linked to the demanding pressure to study English without clear goals. The sixth factor, distractions in English classes, involves distractions and difficulties in the study environment. The seventh factor indicates participants’ loss of interest in studying English and desire to study less than before. Gradual loss
of interest caused by natural exhaustion is not necessarily a demotivating factor according to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011); however, the items which consisted this factor did not assume natural exhaustion, because they indicated special causes for demotivation, including boring class instructions and too many English class hours in their school timetables. The last factor, inappropriate learning environment, represents the dislike of the number and levels of classmates.

The factor analysis result did not indicate the English teacher’s influence on demotivation. In Choi and Kim’s (2013) study on junior high students’ demotivation, a teacher factor was identified as a salient factor; however, other studies in Asian contexts did not reveal a teacher factor as a demotivator (cf. Hamada, 2011; Kim, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). Kim (2009) attributed the result to the Korean cultural tendency to respect and trust teachers’ teaching style and behavior. Confucianism teaches students to respect kings, fathers, and teachers to the same degree, and “self-cultivation through learning and practice is highly valued” (Shin & Crookes, 2005, p. 102). Confucianism is no longer the sole dominant ideology in Korea, but its ideas and values seem to remain and affect the students’ attribution of their demotivation.

Table 3 summarizes the mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach’s Alpha of each extracted factor. The mean for inappropriate learning environment is the highest, followed by mismatch between learners’ level and learning content. Meanwhile, negative attitude toward the English-speaking community has the lowest mean and standard deviation among the eight factors. These results show that the participants were dissatisfied with environmental factors, such as the number of classmates in a class, proficiency-based class divisions, and the level of provided lessons and textbooks, whereas the dislike of English-speaking people and culture was not a main demotivator. Cronbach’s Alpha values are all higher than 0.5, and thus considered acceptable, as indicated in Nunnally (1967) and Davis (1964, as cited in Peterson (1994)).
In Choi and Kim’s (2013) study, advanced-level junior high school students perceived the compulsory nature of English learning as less demotivating than low-achieving students did. The participants of this study, who were mostly advanced students in high school, also perceived this factor as moderately demotivating (M = 2.456). The compulsory nature of English applies to all students in both junior high and high schools in Korea, as English is one of the major school subjects. This may increase the “ought-to English self,” which refers to “the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). Individual perceptions of this forced English learning, however, could vary widely. Although an initial ought-to L2 self was created by instrumental goals and externally driven needs, it could develop into an ideal L2 self, which represents the ideal state of learners achievable by studying the L2, by internalizing goals and participating in meaningful L2 learning contexts (Kim, 2010a). Summarizing the results of Choi and Kim’s (2013) study and this study, advanced students are more likely to internalize their goals and participate in learning contexts than low-achieving students are.

2. The Relationships between Demotivating Factors and English Scores

First of all, a Pearson product–moment correlation was performed to examine the relations among the eight extracted variables. Table 4 shows that all
demotivation factors are highly interrelated. Out of 28 pairs of factors, 24 pairs showed statistical significance. The high interconnectedness may mean that demotivators do not stand alone, but tend to present themselves in conjunction with other demotivators.

**TABLE 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation between Demotivating Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 130$ * means significant at $p<.05$ level, ** means significant at $p<.01$ level

The same analysis was performed to examine the interrelationships among the demotivating factors and English scores. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 5. Among the eight factors, two factors have a positive significant relationship with English scores. Although three factors in the table are negatively correlated with English scores, they do not bear statistical significance. The identified demotivators in this study do not have meaningful negative relationships with English scores.

**TABLE 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation of Demotivating Factors and English Scores</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 130$, * means significant at $p<.05$ level
To examine the causal relationship between the demotivators and English scores, a sequential regression analysis was performed, with the eight demotivators as independent variables and English score as the dependent variable. Following the results of a standard regression analysis, independent variables were entered in the order of significance. The variance inflation factor (VIF) ranged from 1.525 to 2.094. Tolerance ranged from 0.478 to 0.717. The numbers show that multicollinearity did not exist in this model.

Regression analysis indicated that, except for the negative attitude toward English learning, the identified demotivators did not have a causal relationship with English scores. Negative attitude toward English learning positively predicted English scores, indicating that this demotivator did not necessarily cause low English scores.

Generally, it might be expected that demotivators cause demotivation, and demotivation negatively affects English proficiency. In the case of low-level students, this might be true, as they are more easily affected by demotivators than advanced students are (Choi & Kim, 2013). However, advanced students are hardly influenced by the eight identified demotivators, since seven out of eight identified demotivators failed to predict English scores. This finding indicates that advanced students may be more resilient to demotivators than low-achieving students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6</th>
<th>Sequential Regression Analysis for Variables Explaining English Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Negative attitude toward English learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Negative attitude toward the English-speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lack of self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mismatch between learners’ level and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Compulsory nature of English learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Distractions in English classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Loss of interest in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Inappropriate learning environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 130$, * means significant at $p<.05$ level

Going a step further, the fact that negative attitude toward English learning positively predicted English score may mean the advanced students showed
Machiavellian motivation (Ellis, 1997, p. 75), the aspiration to study the L2 although the learner does not have a favorable attitude toward the language or even wants to “manipulate and overcome the people of the target language.” This term was coined to refer to Mexican women’s aspiration to study English despite their negative attitude toward America (Oller, Baca, & Vigil, 1977). The advanced students may have motivated themselves in the same way as the women did, because the passion for achieving their own goals by attaining sufficient English scores may outweigh their negative attitudes toward English learning. Taking the results of Table 4 into consideration, perhaps the participants’ internalized goals, which require them to study English and participate in English–learning activities, may have caused their English test scores to be unaffected by demotivators.

This result could be related to the motivational characteristics of Korean high school EFL students. Previous factor analysis of Korean high school students’ motivation has indicated that competitive and instrumental motivation are the two most important factors among seven extracted factors (Kim, 2006b, 2010b). Indeed, Korean high school students are faced with intense competition to get high scores on English tests so that they can be admitted to privileged universities (Park, 2009). The fact that their English scores are only slightly affected by the demotivators may be attributable to increased competition among high school students for privileged university admission. Even if demotivators are omnipresent, the advanced learners cannot afford to react to them.

Another explanation to the result may be the role of demotivators for creating the best learning environment. Where motivation is concerned, the best learning environment may not be completely distraction-free; rather, a reasonable amount of demotivators could create conducive tension. One example is the Yerkes–Dodson Law in psychology, which stated that distractions such as stress, noise, and anxiety do not necessarily diminish task performance if provided at an optimal level (Deshpande & Kawane, 1982; Van Gemmert & Van Galen, 1997). Regarding L2 (de)motivation, Oyserman and Markus (1990, p. 113) emphasize the balance between expected possible selves and feared ones to maximize motivational intensity. They state that “a positive expected self will be a stronger motivational resource, and maximally effective, when it is linked with a representation of what could happen if the desired state is not realized.” Referring to the discussion of possible selves, Dörnyei (2009, p. 29) integrated the notion of
the feared self into the ought-to L2 self, “the attributes that one believes one  
ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes”  
(italics in original) in learning an L2. In this study, the participants may have  
endeavored to avoid demotivators and their subsequent negative influence on  
English proficiency, out of the desire to avoid their feared selves.

3. Remotivation Strategies

The questionnaire used in this study asked about the students’ remotivation  
strategies using an open-ended format. Among the 130 participants, 127  
participants responded, giving 152 strategies overall. They were asked to provide  
responses of a few sentences in Korean. The excerpts below are short responses  
selected to describe different kinds of remotivation strategies shown in Figure 1,  
translated by the authors of this study. After iterative readings influenced by  
Miles and Huberman (1994), nine categories emerged from their responses. The  
frequency analysis of each strategy is summarized in Figure 1.

![Diagram showing frequency of remotivation strategies]

Note. $N = 152$

**FIGURE 1**

Frequency of Remotivation Strategies
1) Thinking about the Importance of English Score

According to Figure 1, the participants remotivated themselves most by thinking about the importance of their English scores. Note that English scores are highly important for high school students, and the main reason for regaining their motivation is to get excellent scores on English tests. The following excerpts show the students’ remotivation strategy of thinking about the importance of English scores:

[Excerpt 1] Student #6: Whenever I hated studying English, I kept reminding myself that English is very important for college admission, and then I studied harder.

[Excerpt 2] Student #53: I lost motivation to study English whenever I got low scores on tests. But I kept speaking to myself that I need English scores to be admitted to the Department of English education in this university.

This remotivation strategy is typical of instrumental orientation (Gardner, 1988) and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which reflect the students’ desire to be admitted to prestigious universities by means of outstanding English scores. In addition, competitive motivation (Kim, 2006b, 2010b) is manifested in the participants’ responses. Although they have been diversified recently, university admission decisions are still largely dependent on the CSAT score in Korea, and English is one of the most important subjects on the test. Since university admission decisions are highly competitive, the participants may have been thinking about the key role of English for admission in order to motivate themselves. The frequency of this strategy indicates that the role of the CSAT is a powerful motivator and remotivator for high school students.

On the other side of coin, test scores are one of the strong demotivators among Korean students as well. Test scores have been extracted as a demotivator in both Japanese and Korean contexts (Jung, 2011; Kikuchi, 2009; Lee & Lee, 2011; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), where English is spoken as a foreign language and it has a great deal of power over university entrance. Kim and Lee (2013a, 2013b), by
analyzing autobiographic essays of English learning, showed that a single factor
could become a motivator or demotivator, depending on individual participants’
perceptions. For instance, a test score was a motivator for students who saw it as
an important pathway to success. Even though they got demotivated once because
of low scores, they remotivated to study further to achieve better scores. The
present study indicates that a test score can function as a motivator, demotivator,
and also as a remotivator.

2) Watching Interesting English Media

In Excerpts 3 and 4, the participants reported that they watch interesting
English media to regain motivation to study. The media provide a break from
studying English for exam-oriented and competitive reasons, and they stimulate
renewed interest in English. The strategy may suggest that integrating various
media would arouse students’ motivation when they are demotivated. These
reports may be of particular interest to Computer-Assisted Language Learning
(CALL) scholars who intend to integrate media in English teaching.

[Excerpt 3] Student #28: I was tired of English grammar, vocabulary,
and reading lessons in high schools. But I used some visual media
such as English movies, news, radio, and reading materials like
entertainment articles and magazines. My interest in studying
English increased a lot more than before.

[Excerpt 4] Student #106: I lost interest in studying English at times
when I got lower scores on tests, but I could regain my
confidence in English by watching interesting American soap
operas without Korean subtitles and discovering myself
understanding the episodes without translation.

3) Changing the Study Method and Habit

Some students tried adopting different study methods to overcome demotivation.
Students #87 and #89 reported how they changed their study strategies to
overcome demotivation. Their study strategies varied extremely; however, the remotivation strategy suggests the importance of developing and teaching study strategies that fit individual students' learning styles.

[Excerpt 5] Student #87: When I lost interest and got bored, I tried to invent a new strategy. I summarized my notes again and read them as if I were learning them for the first time. As for vocabulary, I ripped out a notebook page, wrote some words on that, and then threw it away when I memorized them all.

[Excerpt 6] Student #89: I hated learning English when I tried to memorize all the textbooks. At those times, I reviewed each question on the English test from the perspectives of teachers and test developers.

4) Imagining an Ideal English Self

Imagining an ideal English self could help students regain motivation. Dörnyei (2009, p. 29) described the concept of the ideal L2 self as “the L2–specific facet of one’s ‘ideal self.’” According to Dörnyei, this is a strong motivator for students who endeavor to reduce the gap between their ideal L2 self and their current self-perception. Helping students create or fortify an ideal L2 self may be a meaningful way to remotivate discouraged learners.

[Excerpt 7] Student #54: To stimulate my motivation again, I intentionally sought Koreans who speak English like native speakers and imagined myself speaking English like they did. It was big inspiration to me.

[Excerpt 8] Student #121: I felt that learning English is a pathway to broader world. I imagined myself talking with foreigners in English without difficulties, so I studied harder.
5) Interest in Studying English

Some students tried to recall their initial interest in learning English, which made them rekindle their motivation when they reminded themselves of their original interest. In particular, studying English for enjoyment or recalling the memory of studying English for fun was helpful for remotivation. This remotivation strategy is notable in that the past experience of intrinsic motivation could reignite the students’ motivation, even after an extended period of time.

[Excerpt 9] Student #77: When I was young, I really loved English. I recalled that experience when I started to hate studying English.

[Excerpt 10] Student #129: I got bored to study English because the class was too test-oriented. Whenever I felt bored, I recalled studying English for fun in kindergarten and primary school and worked on pronunciation and conversation. That is how I could force myself again to study English.

6) Peer Influence

Peer pressure also remotivated the students. If the participants had graduated from foreign language high schools, their high school classmates’ English proficiency was very high. Student #75 in Excerpt 11 was demotivated because of this; however, this participant wisely interacted with classmates to recover from demotivation and improve her English proficiency.

[Excerpt 11] Student #75: All of my classmates were highly proficient in English because I majored in English at high school. Because of the gap between them and me, I hit a slump. However, I tried to get some help from them, and as a result, my proficiency and pronunciation got a lot better.
7) Teachers’ Influence

Teachers’ influence was one of the remotivators. Not only a school English teacher, but also lecturers in online English courses played a beneficial role in remotivating the students. This point suggests that online lecturers can have positive effects on students’ motivation without having face-to-face contact.

[Excerpt 12] Student #85: I was not fond of CSAT-oriented English classes in my high school. So I tried to speak with the native English teacher in my school as much as possible during breaks. In this way, I could practice real English in use and regain interest.

[Excerpt 13] Student #123: Once, I felt bored to study English and my proficiency also fell. At that time, I happened to subscribe to a series of English online lecture. The teacher delivered his lectures very passionately and joyfully. So I was able to regain interest in English, and I studied it much harder.

8) Reflecting on the Learning Progress

One of the strategies for remotivation was for participants to recall their past progress in English. As shown in Excerpt 14, when the participant became demotivated, he reflected upon his past experience being successful in English and regained the mental energy to study further.

[Excerpt 14] Student #88: I wanted to throw my English textbook away when I got lower scores and faced too many difficult things. At those times, I flipped through English vocabulary books I used in my junior high school days, thinking “these books are really easy right now, but they were so difficult at that time.” This feeling gave me a lot of relief and made me study harder.
9) Experience of Communication in English

Experience in authentic English communication was also pointed out as a remotivating factor. In an EFL setting, students have limited opportunity to interact in English, even though they study English in classrooms for a long time. A few students who found the communication interesting could utilize the experience to remotivate themselves. This remotivation strategy indicates the need to include more authentic communication opportunities in curriculums, as the live English used in authentic settings can revive motivation depressed by paper–and–pencil tests and textbooks.

[Excerpt 15] Student #41: I went to travel abroad and realized how widely English is spoken all over the world. So I was able to regain my interest and motivation.

[Excerpt 16] Student #56: I hated English because of grammar and vocabulary lessons in my elementary school, but it got better when I went abroad.

In sum, the qualitative analysis result summarizes remotivation strategies frequently adopted by relatively successful learners of English in high school years. It is notable that thinking about the importance of English score was the most prevalently adopted remotivation strategy, indicating the score–oriented aspect of English learning. Other strategies also shed light on how to remotivate demotivated learners better, such as watching interesting English media and adopting teaching methods based on students’ individual learning styles.

V. Summary and Suggestions

The present study identified what factors demotivate students and what kinds of strategies they use to remotivate themselves. In this study, 130 participants majoring in English Education were asked to reflect critically on their high school experience and complete a questionnaire on demotivation and remotivation in
learning English. The following paragraphs would summarize the results of the three research questions: (1) what are the demotivators of advanced Korean EFL high school students?; (2) What are the relationships between the demotivators and English scores?; (3) What strategies do advanced Korean EFL high school students use to remotivate themselves?

The answer to the first research question, “What are the demotivators of advanced Korean EFL high school students?,” reveals that a negative attitude toward English was the first factor extracted among a total of eight demotivation factors, indicating that the difficulty of learning English can be demotivating even for advanced learners. Among the eight demotivating factors, the absence of teacher–related factors is particularly telling: advanced EFL high school students tend to attribute their demotivation to themselves, possibly because of the remnants of Confucian ideology, which respects kings, fathers, and teachers to the same degree. The advanced students tended to accept the compulsory nature of English learning, presumably because of the dominant role of English in university admission.

The second research question, “What are the relationships between the demotivators and English scores?” yields rather an optimistic result, in that demotivators did not negatively predict English scores. Demotivators alone are not causally linked to lower English scores - therefore, what matters is the students’ perception of demotivators rather than their mere existence. In addition, optimal experience of demotivators may be conducive to performance (Oller, Baca, & Vigil, 1977). The result indicates that demotivators per se are not necessarily detrimental to students’ achievement: rather, it suggests the students’ own strategy for coping with demotivators determines success in language learning.

The answer to the final research question, “What strategies do advanced Korean EFL high school students use to remotivate themselves?” can be summarized as follows. The study identified eight remotivation strategies that advanced students adopted: among them, the most frequently mentioned one was continuing to think about the importance of English scores for university admission and other instrumental purposes. It is notable that the substantial role of English scores on those important occasions can turn into a motivator, a demotivator, or a remotivation strategy, depending on how individual learners perceive it. Other multifarious remotivation strategies the participants reported lay
the ground for more systemic investigation.

For future research, ethnographic studies on remotivation will contribute to understanding the learners’ strategic responses to demotivators. To date, studies on remotivation are still rare (e.g., Falout, 2012; Falout, Murphey, Fukuda, & Trovela, 2013; Jung, 2011; Kim, 2015), and remotivation strategies were mainly examined by frequency analysis of a relatively small amount of data from an open-ended questionnaire. While the questionnaire method can collect various opinions from a relatively larger pool of participants, it is limited by the shallow depth of responses. In contrast, ethnographic and in-depth studies can closely inform how the learners cope with various demotivators they face in the course of long and time-consuming L2 learning. Such studies will also contribute to understanding motivators, demotivators, and remotivation strategies situated in the learners’ context from their own point of view.

References


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40(2), 137–161.


Macmillan.

**Appendix**

Questionnaire Items on Demotivation

1. Negative attitude toward English learning
   #28. I disliked English because of vocabulary memorization, reading, and grammar.
   #19. I felt it difficult when I had to understand and memorize new vocabulary and grammar.
   #3. I disliked learning English spelling and grammar.
   #20. I felt it difficult to learn and use English spelling and pronunciation.
   #29. The amount of mandatory homework and memorization was too much.

2. Negative attitude toward the English-speaking community
   #10. I hated and did not want to visit English-speaking countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom.
   #22. I did not want to make foreign friends.
   #30. I did not want to know about English-speaking countries or people.
   #5. I hated American or English-speaking people.

3. Lack of self-confidence
   #16. I hesitated to speak up in English classes because I was wary of my peers.
   #11. I lost self-confidence or was displeased by my friends whose English proficiency was either higher or lower than mine.
   #15. It was difficult to do the in-class activities, such as group tasks, conversation, and writing in English.
   #9. I lost self-confidence when English classes started.
   #14. It was hard to use or speak English because it was too complicated and difficult.

4. Mismatch between learners’ level and content
   #6. Textbooks and workbooks used in English classes were not appropriate for my level.
   #7. The English teacher did not consider my level.
   #24. The level of English in the textbook was either too easy or too difficult.
#18. The teacher’s level of English proficiency or pronunciation was not appropriate for my level.

5. Compulsory nature of English learning

#23. My peers were not helpful when I participated in English classes.
#21. I could not help but participate in English classes divided by English proficiency.
#27. I did not know the reason or purpose of learning English.
#17. The content of the textbook was too bored and too much.

6. Distractions in English classes

#13. In English classes, there were many distractions.
#8. Teaching methods and contents changed too frequently.
#12. The teacher’s explanation was too difficult and not essential.

7. Loss of interest in English

#2. English classes were not interesting and I lost interest in English.
#4. I wished to reduce the number of English classes per week.

8. Inappropriate learning environment

#1. English classes were not appropriately divided by proficiency.
#26. The number of students in an English class was too many and it was difficult to concentrate.

예시언어(Examples in): English
적용가능 언어(Applicable Language): English
적용가능 수준(Applicable Level): College

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