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Winter January 10, 2017

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The dynamics of demotivation and remotivation among Korean high school EFL students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated factors influencing the demotivation and remotivation of Korean high school EFL students. Sixty-four grade 11 students were asked to draw a graph mapping their changes in English learning motivation from kindergarten to high school. From these, the data of 15 students who showed a decline in motivation and 13 students who showed a decline followed by an increase in motivation were chosen for further participation. These participants were asked to state the reasons for their motivational changes in response to an open-ended questionnaire, after which follow-up interviews were conducted. The results revealed that the majority of the participants became most demotivated in junior high school, mainly due to external factors, such as ineffective teaching methods, learning difficulty, and social pressure. However, 13 learners also experienced noticeable remotivation due to both external and internal factors. Major external remotivation factors included changes in study methods and inspiration from classmates, whereas the main internal factors were increased awareness of the necessity of English for the future, experiences of success, and interest in English culture. Based on these findings, pedagogical implications are provided.

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1. Introduction

Motivation is a crucial factor in second language (L2) learning. It has been considered one of the factors with the greatest influence on an individual’s success in L2 learning, and previous studies have shown that less motivated students are less likely to succeed in their L2 learning (Dörnyei, 1994, 2005, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Gardner, 2007; Lasagabaster, Doiz, & Sierra, 2014). For this reason, as Kikuchi (2015) states, both L2 researchers and teachers have recently begun to pay attention to demotivation, that is, to “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 143), and to remotivation, which is the “process of recovering motivation after losing it” (Falout, 2012, p. 3).

In the setting of English as a foreign language (EFL), students tend to be particularly vulnerable to demotivation. Studies conducted among EFL learners have shown that they experience demotivation mainly due to the requirement to learn English as a compulsory subject (e.g., Hasegawa, 2004; Kikuchi, 2015 among Japanese learners; Trang & Baldauf, 2007 among Vietnamese learners). Korean students have also been found to experience such demotivation in EFL classrooms (Kim, 2011,
2012; Kim & Kim, 2016). Over the past few decades, the Korean Ministry of Education has reformed English education in schools several times in an effort to encourage the use of a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2011). However, in reality, English language teaching in many EFL classes remains dominated by a grammar-translation approach and students’ language learning is oriented toward preparing for college entrance exams or standardized English tests, focusing on receptive skills or translation skills (Cho, 2004; Yook, 2010). Such exam-oriented practice or study may be demotivating for students as well as teachers. Studies conducted among Korean college students (e.g., Kim, 2015; Yeo, 2014) have revealed that the conflict between students’ desire to use English for communication and their immediate need to achieve good test scores is the main demotivating factor. However, few studies have thus far focused on demotivation among high school students; furthermore, few studies have addressed both demotivators and remotivators within the same sample. A number of studies have simply implied that high school students in South Korea (henceforth Korea) seem to become relatively easily demotivated or remotivated because of the high pressure caused by college entrance exams and their excessive sensitivity to test scores (e.g., Cho & Chung, 2014; Kim, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2016; Kim & Ma, 2013; Ma & Cho, 2014).

Given this, this study aims to find the main factors of demotivation and remotivation, focusing on high school EFL students, unlike those of previous studies which focused on the tertiary education level (e.g., Jung, 2011; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Miura, 2010). The findings of the present study will provide insight into the ups and downs of students’ motivation in the high school EFL setting, and thus widen our understanding of L2 learners’ motivational dynamics from learners’ personal retrospective perspective. The research questions for the present study were as follows:

1. What are the salient demotivating factors among Korean high school EFL students?
2. What are the salient remotivating factors among Korean high school EFL students?

2. Literature review

2.1. Research on demotivation

Research on demotivation originated within the context of English as a second language (ESL). An early study by Gorham and Christophel (1992) categorized motivators and demotivators among college ESL students, presenting an interesting contrast, in that the students attributed motivation to their individual intrinsic characteristics, but demotivation to teacher-induced, extrinsic phenomena, such as inferior organization of teaching material and a boring, nonchalant approach. Similarly, Ushioda (2001) found from interviews with college students in Ireland that students attributed positive L2 outcomes to their personal ability or other internal factors, but blamed external factors for their lack of success, such as particular teaching methods and learning tasks.

In addition to research in ESL contexts, demotivation has recently become a recurring topic in EFL contexts. Dörnyei (1998) interviewed 50 Hungarian secondary school students who were studying either English or German as a foreign language, and identified nine types of demotivating factors. This research revealed the substantial influence of the compulsory nature of L2 studies, as well as teacher-related factors, on students’ demotivation. Other studies conducted in European EFL contexts include those of Ghenghesh (2010) and Muhonen (2004). The former considered the temporal dimension of EFL motivation among students at five grade levels (grades 6 to 10) to determine whether their motivation changed as they entered high school. The findings showed that EFL motivation decreased with age, and that the teacher was one of the main factors in decreasing students’ motivation. Muhonen (2004) also showed the teacher’s strong influence on students’ demotivation in a study conducted in a Finnish comprehensive school in which English had been a compulsory subject for several years. The findings of these studies emphasized that the teacher was indeed the most influential demotivating factor.

In terms of the central role of the teacher, further research findings are available in relation to Asian contexts, in which a teacher-centered teaching method remains dominant. Kikuchi (2009) found through interviews and a survey among Japanese high school EFL students that their demotivation was mainly connected to the traditional teacher-centered approach. Furthermore, Trang and Baldauf (2007) showed that the largest source of demotivation among Vietnamese EFL learners was their teachers’ teaching methods. However, other researchers have reported contrasting findings. In Sakai and Kikuchi’s (2009) study, in which questionnaires were completed by high school EFL students in Japan, teachers’ competence and teaching styles were not particularly strong demotivators in comparison to other factors. Sahragard and Alimorad’s (2013) research showed a similar result. They identified seven demotivating factors among Iranian high school EFL students and found that the demotivation caused by teachers’ incompetence and inappropriate teaching styles was not as strong as that caused by other factors, such as L2 learning curriculum or a lack of interest in English. As for other demotivating factors, Falout, Elwood, and Hood (2009) reported a greater influence of affective regulation on learning outcomes depending on proficiency level. In their study, learners’ internal and reactive factors were shown to correlate more with long-term learning outcomes than did the external learning environment. This suggested that beginning and less-proficient learners had less control over their affective states in coping with demotivating experiences, whereas highly proficient learners displayed more frequent self-regulating behaviors when faced with difficulties in learning English.
2.2. Research on remotivation

Some of the studies mentioned above also identified several strategies for renewing lost motivation or maintaining motivation in the face of difficulties. For example, Ushioda (2001) identified four strategies, namely focusing on incentives, using goal-oriented self-regulation, seeking temporary relief, and talking about difficulties with others to remain motivated as a group. Both Trang and Baldauf (2007) and Cho (2014) emphasized the importance of students’ awareness of the English language and their determination to succeed in ensuring remotivation.

Recently, Falout (2012) investigated the remotivation processes of EFL learners in terms of how well learners control their affect toward and behaviors around learning English. He collected data among Japanese university students, comparing learners with a positive self-concept regarding EFL to those with a negative self-concept. The findings indicated that the development of adaptive coping processes in learning was critical for self-confidence and subsequent English proficiency. Specifically, the students who reacted to demotivation with negotiation and problem solving from the outset tended to create more positive learning experiences for themselves. Moreover, learners with positive self-concepts used their social networks more for both motivational and remotivational support. Daif-Allah and Alsamani (2014) tested the effectiveness of a range of academic and administrative approaches designed to enhance the EFL acquisition of Saudi students in a preparatory year program (e.g., reduction of class size, weekly quizzes, and extracurricular activities). The results indicated that the strategies were sufficiently successful to restore students’ initial motivation.

Research regarding the reasons why EFL learners lose interest in studying English and how their motivation may be enhanced has been briefly reviewed above. However, there remains little research that has addressed demotivating and remotivating factors in a comprehensive manner, particularly among high school students in EFL settings. This study aimed to broaden our understanding of L2 motivational change, firstly by identifying factors that discourage high school students from learning EFL, and secondly by examining factors that remotivate them.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

This study was conducted in a high school for college-bound students located in the Gyeonggi province in Korea, where the first author worked as an English teacher. All 64 initial participants were grade 11 EFL students who had taken English as a compulsory subject since grade 3 in elementary school. Compared to other areas in the same province, the academic performance in this area is relatively low (Paju Times, 2011). The high schools in the area are graded in terms of students’ academic ability levels, and the admission to a high school is mainly determined by applicants’ level of academic performance during their junior high school years. All participants in this study stated that they had chosen this particular high school because it does not require high academic scores for admission, unlike the case of higher-level schools such as foreign language high schools across Korea.

The participants were all following general science courses for their career paths, implying that their main interest was not learning English, but studying maths and science. They were taught English for five hours per week, but due to their heavy study load for maths and science, they spent little extracurricular time on learning English.

3.2. Data collection

Sixty-four students volunteered to take part in the research. In order to investigate longitudinal changes in EFL learning motivation, all were first asked to draw a motivational timeline graph showing their retrospective motivational change in English learning. Jung (2011) demonstrated the usefulness of such graphs in charting students’ motivational change from kindergarten to college. This study likewise used such motivational graphs to investigate participants’ longitudinal motivational change in learning English from kindergarten to high school. The reliability of the graphs for this purpose was estimated by requesting 59 non-participating students to draw their motivational change graphs twice with a four-week interval. The correlation between the two graphs was found to be high ($r = 0.733$) at the level of $p = 0.01$, suggesting that the use of such retrospective graphs is highly reliable.

To draw their graphs, participants were asked to indicate the age at which they started to learn English and to indicate their motivation level for each year until the present. They were then asked to draw a graph connecting the motivation index for each period. Fig. 1 shows an example graph of a remotivated participant’s motivational change, which shows that this participant regarded learning English as neither interesting nor boring (0) during kindergarten and elementary school, reporting the lowest motivation (−1) in grade 1 of junior high school, and an increasing pattern of motivation as of grade 2 of junior high school. In the case of the demotivated participant, he/she showed no rising motivational pattern, remaining at the same motivational level.

Among the graphs of the 64 participants, those of 28 who showed motivational change were divided into two groups, namely a demotivation and a remotivation group. Fifteen participants showing either a consistently decreasing motivational pattern or a decreasing pattern followed by no motivational change were categorized into the demotivation group, and 13 participants showing a decline in motivation followed by a consistently increasing pattern of motivation were categorized into the remotivation group. Those who showed no motivational change in their graphs were not assigned to either group.
The background information on the participants in each group, in terms of age of onset of English learning and proficiency level, is presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, 87% of participants in the demotivation group started learning English in elementary school, and 13% in kindergarten. According to their scores in the in-house mid-term exam taken immediately before data collection, most participants, with one exception, possessed medium or low proficiency, which may reflect their demotivation in learning English. On the other hand, in the remotivation group, more participants started learning English from kindergarten (54% of this group vs. 13% of the demotivation group), and there were more participants with high proficiency (54% vs. 7%) and fewer with low proficiency (15% vs. 60%).

The 28 participants in the demotivation and remotivation groups then completed an open-ended questionnaire in Korean exploring factors related to their motivational change. The 15 participants in the demotivation group completed the questionnaire given in Appendix A, while the 13 participants in the remotivation group completed that given in Appendix B. The questionnaire items were developed on the basis of the demotivating factors listed by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), with some minor revisions, and were used to assess both demotivation and remotivation. The factors are as follows: 1) teacher-related elements (personality, teaching methods, competence, commitments); 2) school facilities (class size, multimedia, English lab); 3) participants’ past experience; 4) changes in English studying methods; 5) negative attitudes toward the English language or community; 6) the compulsory nature of English study in high school; 7) the attitudes of other students in the class; 8) the textbooks used; and 9) miscellaneous factors.

Following questionnaire completion, interviews of 10–20 min were conducted in Korean with 23 of the 28 participants (11 from the demotivation group and 12 from the remotivation group) to obtain further information. The interviews were based on the relevant participants’ responses to the questionnaire, and thus took the form of semi-structured interviews, allowing both the participant and the interviewer to focus on the topic and questionnaire items (Kim, 2006a; Seidman, 2012). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The five participants who were not available for the interviews due to their busy schedules supplied written data, answering questions identical to those used in the interviews. To ensure anonymity, all names were deleted and each participant was assigned a number for data analysis.

3.3. Data analysis

The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. First, the graphs of the 64 participants were amalgamated by calculating the average motivation for each period across all participants to show the general pattern of motivational change. Following this, the 28 graphs of the motivational change of the participants were separated into the two groups described above. Next, to gain a deeper understanding of the factors in demotivation and remotivation, the answers to the open-ended questionnaire and the interview transcripts were read several times iteratively (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the

<p>| Table 1 |
| The background of the two groups (N = 28). |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Demotivation group n = 15(%)</th>
<th>Remotivation group n = 13(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of onset of English learning</td>
<td>Kindergarten: 2 (13%)</td>
<td>7 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary: 13 (87%)</td>
<td>6 (46%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proficiency</td>
<td>High: 1(7%)</td>
<td>7 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle: 5 (33%)</td>
<td>4 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low: 9 (60%)</td>
<td>2 (15%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* High = 81–100, Middle = 51–80, Low = 0–50 scores in the in-house mid-term exam.
iterative reading, the data were broken into chunks, which were then compared and contrasted so as to categorize them according to the above-mentioned classification based on Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011). Following this categorization, various categories were deleted, adapted, or merged, and where necessary, new categories were added based on what participants had mentioned. In particular, factors internal to the learner, which were not included by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), were added to the list. The complete list is presented in Table 2, and consists of five main categories with several subcategories. In terms of the main categories, “L2 learning environment” entails learners’ perceptions of external factors, such as the instructor, school facilities, classmates, other subject/activity matters, study methods, textbooks, and curriculum. The “Attribution” category includes learners’ over-confidence or lack of confidence, their experience of success or failure related to studying English, and their strong or weak willpower to put their study plans into action. The “Social and parental influence” category entails learners’ perceptions of social pressure and parental influence concerning their English study. The category “L2 and its culture” involves internal factors affecting English learning motivation, including learners’ attitudes toward English-speaking countries and interest in the L2 culture. Finally, the category “Necessity of English” emerged from the data. In Kim and Lee’s (2013a,b) previous research, it was emphasized that learners’ perceptions determine a motivation-related episode or factor as either motivating or demotivating. Based on this line of research, we categorized a factor in a category as demotivating if it was perceived by participants to have a negative effect, and the same factor as remotivating if it contributed to regained motivation. The frequency for each category was calculated to determine which factors were mentioned most often as demotivating or remotivating by participants.

To ensure coding reliability, a doctoral student majoring in English education was recruited to code the entire data set already coded by the first author. Inter-coder reliability was approximately 90%, and the data coded inconsistently were discussed and adjusted to attain 100% agreement.

4. Results

In this section, the quantitative results are presented first, reflecting the general motivational patterns of the two groups and the timing of changes. Following this, the two research questions are addressed by presenting the salient demotivating and remotivating factors in turn, based on the findings of the open-ended questionnaires and interviews.

4.1. Differences in general patterns between the two groups

As shown in Fig. 2, there was considerable individual variation among the 64 graphs. To obtain a general idea of how participants’ motivation changed over time, the data were combined for each period and means were calculated. Based on these means, a graph showing the general pattern of all 64 participants was drawn (see Fig. 3). As seen in Fig. 3, participants generally displayed positive motivation up to elementary school, and began to lose their interest in learning English after entering junior high school. The participants’ motivation kept decreasing until grade 1 of high school, and then rose slightly in grade 2 of high school.

Of the 64 participants’ graphs, those that displayed a noticeable decrease in or regaining of motivation were selected for the demotivation and remotivation groups, respectively, as described above. Considering the wide range of motivational fluctuation in Fig. 2, it seems reasonable that many of the participants experienced both rises and falls in motivation throughout the given period, rather than only rises or only falls. However, for the purposes of this study, participants were allocated to the two groups based on their general motivation patterns. The graphs of the demotivation group showed mainly positive motivation when starting to learn English and fell consistently toward demotivation, as shown in Fig. 4. The averaged

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>L2 Learning Environment</td>
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<td>Instructor’s personality</td>
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<td>Classmates</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other subject/activity matters</td>
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<td>Study method</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Textbooks</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Over-/Lack of) Confidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Success/Failure experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Strong/Weak willpower</td>
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<td>Attribution</td>
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<td>Social &amp; Parental Influence</td>
<td>Social pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>L2 &amp; Its Culture</td>
<td>Attitudes toward English-speaking countries</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interest in L2 culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Necessity of English</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
pattern for this group reflects this phenomenon clearly (see Fig. 5). In kindergarten, they reported that their motivation was highest, but this fell consistently as time went by.

The patterns of motivational change in the remotivation group were not as clear as those in the demotivation group. There was wider variation across individuals (see Fig. 6), with few periods in which most of the participants’ motivation rose or dropped simultaneously. In addition, unlike the demotivation group, not all participants in the remotivation group started from a point of high motivation. Nevertheless, the averaged pattern was drawn to get an idea of the general tendency of
remotivational change, as seen in Fig. 7. In general, these participants’ motivation fell in junior high school and started to rise again after they entered high school.

In addition to the general patterns of motivational change, the timing of changes was also investigated for each of the two groups. Table 3 shows that a total of 73% of the participants in the demotivation group lost their motivation before they finished grade 1 of junior high school, which was relatively early. However, for the remotivation group, the demotivation phase occurred later, and 46% of participants in this group reported that they experienced demotivation in grade 3 of junior high school. In addition, this demotivated phase was overcome by many participants in this group in grades 1 and 2 in high school (77% in total).

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4.2. Demotivating factors for the two groups

The data from the open-ended questionnaires and interviews were analyzed to identify demotivating factors and the number of participants in each group who mentioned each category. If one participant mentioned a certain category more than once, it was counted as only one instance. The results are presented in Table 4, with each category explained in detail in the same order as in Table 2.

Table 4 shows that, similar to the findings of previous studies (e.g., Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Ushioda, 2001), the participants from both groups in this study tended to attribute their demotivation mainly to the learning environment, particularly to learning content, textbooks, instructors’ teaching methods, and their own changed study methods. Most of the participants (11 in the demotivation group and seven in the remotivation group) reported that changes in learning content, from a focus on speaking in elementary school to a focus on grammar and reading comprehension in junior high school, caused substantial difficulties. One participant even expressed regret that teachers did not teach English speaking in junior high school. Many participants (10 in the demotivation group and five in the remotivation group) also complained about the textbooks used, mentioning uninteresting reading texts, poor organization, and insufficient provision of supplementary learning materials. These issues had reportedly made English an unstimulating and difficult subject for many participants, in comparison to other subjects.

In terms of instructor-related factors, as found in research conducted in other Asian contexts (e.g., Kikuchi, 2009; Trang & Baldauf, 2007), many participants (seven in the demotivation group and 10 in the remotivation group) mentioned problematic teaching methods, and only a few mentioned aspects of teachers’ personalities, such as a lack of understanding of students and being too strict. Many participants reported that most of their English classes in junior high school were excessively teacher-centered and exam-focused. Teachers usually explained words and grammatical rules, and then translated text into Korean without providing sufficient opportunities for student participation. Furthermore, teachers frequently forced students to memorize what they needed to learn for the sake of exams, sometimes without checking students’ understanding in an appropriate manner. These reported teaching styles differed greatly from the way in which participants had studied English in elementary school, causing many of them to become bored and to lose interest in English. Consider in this regard the following excerpt from one such participant:

In elementary school, it was fun to speak English with a native English speaker. But in junior high school, teachers just showed some examples without our understanding. They just said that we had to memorize the text, and then gave us the quiz. I could not understand why I had to memorize it, and I couldn’t memorize the whole thing. (Participant #6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Demotivation Group(n = 15)</th>
<th>Remotivation Group(n = 13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L2 Learning Environment</td>
<td>Instructor’s teaching method</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor’s personality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School facilities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Classmates</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other subject/activity matters</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study method</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content (Curriculum)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution</td>
<td>(Over-/Lack of) Confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2 &amp; Its Culture</td>
<td>Social pressure</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n in each cell refers to the number of participants who mentioned each category.
Some participants (five in each group) also mentioned their study methods as a demotivating factor. As teachers emphasized memorization, students had to change their study methods in order to follow their teachers’ advice. Such students attempted to memorize every English word and grammatical structure in a text without fully understanding the text. However, the real dilemma appeared to be that participants’ test scores increased substantially when they memorized whole texts, and decreased if they did not. Thus, even though most participants reported disliking memorization, they felt they were at an impasse, and had no other choice if they wished to achieve good test scores; if they refused to follow this study method, their scores as well as their motivation would decrease. This feeling is captured in the following excerpt:

In junior high school, I once memorized the whole text. When I did, I could solve all the grammar questions in the exam. My scores soared. This method was effective. However, the next time, I couldn’t do it this way because it was too difficult. It took so much time, so I gave it up. Since then, I haven’t memorized the text. Instead, I tried to understand the grammar and the reading passage, but it was not effective. For the test score, memorization seems to be better, but I don’t want to do it because it is so difficult. (Participant #8)

With regard to other environmental factors, some participants mentioned the influence of classmates and school facilities. One in the demotivation group said that she had wanted to study maths when other classmates studied maths, even though she knew she had to focus more on studying English. Others reported that they were often frustrated when feeling that they could not catch up with other classmates or when feeling they were inferior to other classmates in English. Regarding school facilities, the large class sizes and the lack of multimedia availability were mentioned as problems.

In addition to the environmental factors, some participants attributed their low motivation to themselves. As in the case of Falout et al. (2009), who reported a substantial influence of affective regulation on learning outcomes, the participants’ perceptions of their learning experiences had the greatest influence on their motivation out of the three attribution factors. Six participants in the demotivation group and eight in the remotivation group reported that experiences of both success and failure negatively influenced their motivation. When their test scores were high, they were happy with their results and proud of themselves, whereas they felt inferior to others if their scores were low. In either case, however, their interest and motivation decreased. Furthermore, for some participants, failure to gain entry to a foreign language high school, perceived by them to be a superior type of high school, and errors made in exams, also led to a loss of motivation. These perceptions are reflected in the following excerpts:

Last year I got 100 points [a perfect score]. I was too proud of myself. In the mid-term of the second semester, it was 100 points. In the next final exam, I failed. I studied, but not enough. I was too jubilant. (Participant #9)

I studied in high school, but the score did not go up. I lost my interest. Despite having little interest, I did study. But I was not rewarded for my effort. So my interest kept falling down. (Participant #6)

In junior high school days, my English scores were always over 90 [out of 100]. It was not bad. But what I wanted was to get 100 points. Since I put much effort into studying, I expected no errors or mistakes, but very often, I had one error. I lost interest. (Participants #21)

Table 4 also shows that participants’ perception of social pressure was an important factor influencing motivation. More than half of the participants from each group in this study reported feeling considerable social pressure regarding English learning and suggested that this stress was too great to be helpful, leading them to gradually drift away from English. In the remotivation group, five participants expressed their strong dislike of enforced English study, and three reported that they could not understand why English education was emphasized more than Korean education in South Korea. One participant even reported feeling that good English proficiency was compulsory for social success, and he disliked this idea.

Other factors reported as decreasing motivation were less powerful than the factors mentioned above, with the exception of one factor, namely the necessity of English in the demotivation group. In this regard, the demotivation and remotivation groups showed a significant difference; unlike participants in the remotivation group, who rarely expressed negative feelings concerning the necessity of English, half the participants in the demotivation group reported negative feelings toward the value of English. Four participants in the demotivation group reported feeling that they might need English in the future, but as they had not yet decided their future career path, they were unsure how much this would apply. Two further participants reported that they regarded English as necessary only for exams but not for practical purposes, and one further participant agreed with the necessity of English for her career but did not like the study methods. The following excerpt is from a participant with high English proficiency, and shows that a high exam score did not necessarily imply high motivation, and he attributed this gap to unclear learning goals related to English:

I don’t have high motivation to study English. I hate it but have to memorize words. I don’t have any dream related to English. It’s a problem not to have any specific goal yet. My interest in English is not high because I don’t have a goal or dream. (Participant #5)

4.3. Remotivating factors

As stated above, participants in the demotivation group may well have experienced a measure of remotivation at any given point in their English learning. However, for the purposes of this paper, only those in the remotivation group were asked to
report on their experiences in terms of remotivation. Participants in the remotivation group reported being remotivated by both external and internal factors, as shown in Table 5, unlike many previous studies (e.g., Trang & Baldauf, 2007; Ushioda, 2001), which attributed learners’ remotivation mainly to internal factors.

As seen in Table 5, the learning environment was reported to contribute to participants’ remotivation, involving study methods, teaching methods, and the influence of classmates. Four of the seven participants who responded regarding the teaching method category preferred the grammar-centered teaching method and eight of the ten participants who responded regarding the study method category enjoyed focusing more on words and grammar in their English learning. These participants believed that analyzing words and sentence structures one by one provided them with systematic grammatical knowledge and improved their reading abilities, thereby increasing their motivation. Furthermore, the accumulation of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge meant that they no longer had to memorize whole texts for exams, which also contributed to their remotivation. Consider the following excerpt in this regard:

When in the second grade of junior high school, my grammar did not improve because I just memorized the sentence structure. But after I started to attend cram school, my English proficiency improved. Their teaching method was good. The teacher analyzed the grammar and structures line by line. It was an old style but when this knowledge was getting accumulated, at some point I got to understand new reading passages easily. (Participant #19)

Concerning the effect of classmates, participants in the remotivation group reported being stimulated by their friends when feeling the sense of rivalry, or felt fulfilled when asked to teach others. The following excerpts show that classmates had a positive influence on their studying English:

The feeling that only I did not know the things everyone else knew stimulated my inferiority and the sense of rivalry. It encouraged me to study. (Participant #23)

I feel accomplished when I teach what I know. It does not bother me. (Participant #21).

The effects of other aspects of the learning environment were also mentioned, but their influences were not as great as that of the factors reported above. Some participants expressed positive attitudes about the textbooks used, reporting their interesting and easy contents and useful learning expressions. Others pointed out that using multimedia and having a native English-speaking teacher raised their interest in class.

Regarding remotivation factors in other major categories, perceptions of the learning experience and the necessity of English, as well as interest in English culture, played significant roles in remotivating the participants in this group. Eight participants reported having regained their motivation after achieving high scores or winning a contest, and another, interestingly, was inspired by her failure in an exam. In addition, enjoyment of English-related cultural activities, such as listening to English pop songs and watching English movies, made half of the participants in this group excited about English, leading them to learn English by means of lyrics and movie lines.

However, the greatest remotivational driving force came from participants’ awareness of the necessity of English. This is in line with the findings of Trang and Baldauf (2007) and Cho (2014), which emphasized the importance of students’ awareness of the English language. Nine of the eleven participants reporting on this category stated that English was important for the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), but simultaneously admitted that English was essential for their future goals, as shown in the excerpt below. Two others reported that they needed to study English to communicate with foreigners or to complete the school curriculum.

### Table 5
Categorical remotivating factors from the remotivation group (n = 13).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Category</th>
<th>Minor Category</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L2 Learning Environment</td>
<td>Instructor’s teaching method</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor’s personality</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School facilities</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classmates</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other subject/activity matters</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study method</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content (Curriculum)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Over-/Lack of) Confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Success/Failure experience</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong/Weak willpower</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution</td>
<td>Social pressure</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental influence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social &amp; Parental Influence</td>
<td>Attitudes toward English-speaking countries</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in L2 culture</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2 &amp; Its Culture</td>
<td>Necessity of English</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Necessity of English    | Note. n in each cell refers to the number of participants who mentioned each category.
My dream is to work abroad as a nurse. English is necessary for that reason, not just for CSAT. I should study for CSAT, but ultimately, I want to go abroad. (Participant #24)

Participants in the remotivation group also revealed the role of a positive self-concept, mentioning confidence and a strong willpower to study English as remotivating factors. They were positive about the potential outcomes of their efforts, believing that if they tried harder, their scores and English abilities would improve. Lastly, the influence of parents affected some participants positively. Unlike their negative reactions to social pressure, they accepted the importance their parents placed on English and had readily begun to meet high parental expectations, as shown in the following excerpt:

Dad said I have to raise my English scores, so I will do so. (Participant #17)

5. Discussion

The results of this study showed that various factors were involved in participants’ loss of motivation in learning English. Similar patterns emerged in the demotivation and remotivation groups, despite differences in their age of onset of English learning and their proficiency. Participants in both groups generally started to lose their interest in English in junior high school, and external factors, such as teaching methods, change in study methods, uninteresting textbooks, difficulty with studying English, and a decrease in English scores, had a greater influence on their demotivation than internal factors. These findings are largely similar to those of previous studies. The central role of teaching methods in determining learners’ motivation has been reported by many researchers (e.g., Ghenghesh, 2010; Kikuchi, 2009; Ma & Cho, 2014; Muhonen, 2004; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013) and recently, several studies conducted in the Korean context have shown the influential effects of learning difficulty and grading systems on demotivation (e.g., Kim & Ma, 2013; Kim, 2012; Yeo, 2014).

However, the findings of the present study suggest additional reasons for EFL learners’ demotivation. With regard to pressure to study an L2, previous research reported only on the negative influence of an L2 as a compulsory subject (e.g., Cho & Chung, 2014; Hasegawa, 2004; Ma & Cho, 2014), whereas the present findings suggest that participants tended to perceive the requirement for EFL learning in a more sensitive light, and more negatively in relation to their future goals and social success. Half of the participants in the demotivation group rarely recognized the value of English learning for their future goals, and thus social pressure may have affected their motivation more strongly, even making them dislike English as a subject. These factors, together with the main external factors discussed above, may help to explain more fully why EFL students become demotivated.

As for remotivating factors, this study differed qualitatively from those reported in the literature, the latter having emphasized internal factors, such as students’ awareness of the usefulness of English and their desire to succeed (Cho, 2014; Jung, 2011; Trang & Baldauf, 2007). The results of the present study suggest that both external and internal factors play a substantial role in increasing EFL learners’ motivation. In addition to internal factors, external factors, such as teaching methods, study methods, test scores, and classmates played a substantial role in remotivating the present participants. In particular, study method was most effective when changes matched learners’ needs, and classmates were considered a source of inspiration. Some participants in this study admitted being remotivated by competition rather than by cooperating with classmates. This phenomenon has been mentioned as “competitive motivation” by Kim (2006b, 2010), who identified it as a specific social-psychological construct reflecting the fierceness of college entrance competition in Korean society.

Regarding internal factors, most of the remotivation participants (11 of the 13) were remotivated when their future goals were connected to studying English. This was in contrast to the demotivated participants, who had vague dreams for the future and doubted the necessity or usefulness of English, except with regard to exams. Of course, remotivated participants also exhibited a fear of failure in English exams or college entrance exams, but this was not the sole reason for their studying English. These perceptions were related to the concept of the possible self in the L2 motivational self system. According to Dörnyei (2005), the ideal L2 self (the L2-specific aspect of one’s ideal self) and the ought-to L2 self (the attributes a learner believes ought to be possessed to avoid possible negative outcomes) can become powerful motivators to learn an L2. In this study, participants’ awareness of the necessity of English to achieve their future goals played a role in terms of their ideal L2 selves, and their desire not to fail the CSAT played a role in terms of their ought-to L2 selves, both leading to remotivation. Furthermore, relating the notion of the ideal L2 self to the value of global English, Munezane (2013) claims that students’ visualization or imagination of themselves as speakers of global English, to deal effectively with international problems (ideal L2 selves), is necessary to enhance their motivation. Viewed from this perspective, the present participants’ imagination regarding the usefulness of English for their future jobs contributed to their remotivation.

Further support for connecting English use to future goals in order to motivate students comes from Kim (2015). These researchers used so-called “motivational languaging activities” (MLAs) to make EFL learners understand and internalize the meaning of EFL learning at a personal level. Through MLAs, learners reflected and verbalized the meaningfulness of EFL learning by writing opinions (written languaging) or discussing in groups (verbal languaging) after watching exemplary cases. Kim (2015) reported that the MLAs encouraged these learners to recognize the necessity of English and imagine their ideal L2 selves in the future, leading to their motivated L2 behavior. Such findings support those of the present paper, in which participants’ awareness of the usefulness or necessity of English for their own future goals was one of the powerful factors that ultimately facilitated their remotivation.
6. Summary and implications

This study explored factors that demotivated and remotivated Korean high school EFL students. Most participants reported experiencing a motivational decline when they entered junior high school, mainly due to external factors, such as the need for memorization, the nature of the teaching and learning, the difficulty of the learning content, and their declining test scores. In addition, when participants perceived the social pressure to learn English negatively and did not realize the necessity of EFL learning, their motivation was likely to decrease. However, when these factors were resolved, and particularly when participants began to regard English as necessary for their future goals, their motivation increased again. These substantial influences of social pressure and the perceived value of English on EFL demotivation and remotivation may have been exhibited more strongly among the participants in this study than among other EFL learners. Unlike college students, studied by many previous researchers, Korean high school students are in the most intensive stage of CSAT preparation and deeply involved in making decisions about their future career, and thus may be more sensitive to social pressures and arguments about the usefulness of English.

Despite the meaningful findings reported here, this study had certain limitations. Most importantly, the participants were limited in terms of number and background, preventing generalization of the findings. This research was conducted among relatively homogenous learners from a single high school. Thus, similar results may not necessarily be found among students from other locations with different preferences regarding English. Secondly, this study used an open-ended questionnaire and interviews for collecting qualitative data. The findings would be more convincing if complemented by other types of data, such as observation and personal documents.

The findings of this study suggest a number of pedagogical implications to prevent demotivation and increase motivation among EFL students. First, EFL students ought to be given continuous advice to help them find the most effective study methods for their individual learning preferences. This may reduce the stress caused by the high pressure of exams. Second, EFL students should be encouraged to imagine their future goals related to English use. By understanding why they need to study English and by personalizing its necessity, more positive attitudes may be developed. Third, EFL teachers need to be aware that systematic form-focused explanation, as well as fun and interesting activities, might be helpful for junior high and high school EFL students in the exam-centered context of Korea. Fourth, EFL textbook and curriculum developers ought to endeavor to present an appropriate study load, depending on students’ school grade. This may lower the study burden and allow more experiences of success, stimulating students’ motivation.

Acknowledgements

We thank three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on the early version of this paper.

Appendix A. Questionnaire for the demotivation group

The purpose of the following questions is to determine the factors that made you lose interest in English. Reflect on your previous learning experience, particularly from the time of starting to lose interest in learning English to the present. Refer to the graph you have drawn and try to answer the following questions in as much detail as possible.

1. When did you start to learn English and what was your main reason of learning it?
2. When you started to learn English for the first time, what made you think it was fun to learn?
3. Explain the influence of each of the following factors in terms of making you lose your interest in English:
   1. English teacher (personality, teaching method or style, etc.)
   2. School facilities (class size, multimedia, English lab, etc.)
   3. Successful or unsuccessful learning experiences (test scores, contests, etc.)
   4. Changes in study methods
   5. Negative attitudes toward English language or countries
   6. The compulsory nature of English study in high school
   7. The attitudes of other students in the class
   8. The textbooks used
   9. Miscellaneous factors

Appendix B. Questionnaire for the remotivation group

The purpose of the following questions is to determine the factors that made you lose and then regain interest in English. Reflect on your previous learning experience, particularly focusing on the times of losing interest in learning English and regaining your willingness to learn English. Refer to the graph you have drawn and try to answer the following questions in as much detail as possible.
When did you start to learn English and what was your main reason of learning it?
When you started to learn English for the first time, what made you think it was fun to learn?
Explain the influence of each of the following factors in terms of making you change your interest in English:

1) English teacher (personality, teaching method or style, etc.)
   - Why did it make you lose your interest in English?
   - How did it make you regain your interest in English?

2) School facilities (class size, multimedia, English lab, etc.)
   - Why did it make you lose your interest in English?
   - How did it make you regain your interest in English?

3) Successful or unsuccessful learning experiences (test scores, contests, etc.)
   - Why did it make you lose your interest in English?
   - How did it make you regain your interest in English?

4) Changes in study methods
   - Why did it make you lose your interest in English?
   - How did it make you regain your interest in English?

5) Negative attitudes toward English language or countries
   - Why did it make you lose your interest in English?
   - How did it make you regain your interest in English?

6) The compulsory nature of English study in high school
   - Why did it make you lose your interest in English?
   - How did it make you regain your interest in English?

7) The attitudes of other students in the class
   - Why did it make you lost your interest in English?
   - How did it make you regain your interest in English?

8) The textbooks used
   - Why did it make you lose your interest in English?
   - How did it make you regain your interest in English?

9) Miscellaneous factors
   - Why did it make you lose your interest in English?
   - How did it make you regain your interest in English?

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