Structural Relationship Between L2 Learning (De)motivation, Resilience, and L2 Proficiency Among Korean College Students

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Abstract The purpose of the study is to explore the structural relationships among second language (L2) proficiency and the constructs of L2 learners’ resilience, motivation, and demotivation. A total of 869 undergraduate students in South Korea participated in the study. The data were analyzed by means of factor analysis, correlations, and structural equation modeling (SEM). The factor analysis identified seven resilience factors (life satisfaction, sociability, communicative efficacy, self-composure, strategic competence, metacognitive adaptation, and realistic optimism), six motivation factors (ought-to L2 self, ideal L2 self, instrumental motivation, parental support, academic motivation, awareness of importance), and six demotivation factors (negative perception of English-speaking countries, compulsory EFL learning, perceived inappropriateness of textbooks or tasks, low self-esteem, unsupportive learning environment, unsupportive teachers). The SEM corroborated that resilience, L2 learning motivation, and L2 learning demotivation contribute to L2 proficiency. L2 learning demotivation had more explanatory power for L2 proficiency than did L2 learning motivation. Resilience had both a direct and an indirect effect on L2 proficiency via L2 learning demotivation. The findings suggest that teachers should equip learners with strategies to manage adversity in L2 learning.

Keywords Resilience • Demotivation • Motivation • L2 proficiency • English as a foreign language

Introduction

In the field of L2 learning, the role of motivation in learners’ second language (L2) achievement has been widely discussed (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2013; Gardner 2001, 2010). However, in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), the compulsory nature of the academic context has been identified as a major demotivator, causing learners to lose interest in their L2 learning (Kikuchi 2013; Sakai and Kikuchi 2009). The dynamic interplay between motivation and demotivation implies that the influences on L2 learning go beyond mere motivation and demotivation per se (Kikuchi 2015), involving the maintenance of L2 learners’ interest in learning the L2 across a range of educational contexts.

One approach to recovering learners’ interest in learning an L2, the role of resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity, has begun to enjoy academic attention (Martin and Marsh 2009; Oxford et al. 2007). The concept of resilience was first introduced in the field of psychiatry for helping those struggling with chronic diseases (Cicchetti 2010; Connor and Davidson 2003). In the process of learning a language, learners are expected to deal with various difficulties, such as undesirable scores and failure in communication. Particularly for EFL learners who may not see the immediate benefits of English learning in their daily lives, adroit management of such difficulties is an important task they need to perform in order to achieve their desired level of L2 proficiency. Such may be the case for university students in South Korea (henceforth Korea).
attending mandatory English classes as a requirement for graduation, who are assigned to a class without regard for their personal preferences or their level of L2 learning motivation and L2 proficiency.

Although the notion of resilience seems important in terms of its role in EFL learning, it has not been widely adopted or discussed in the research field. Studies on resilience in the context of L2 learning are in a nascent stage (Oxford 2016), and there is a need to evaluate the theoretical validity of the construct across large numbers of participants. Furthermore, the dynamics of resilience, L2 learning motivation, and L2 learning demotivation call for studies to investigate their structural relationships. In light of previous studies focusing on secondary school students (Kim and Kim 2017; Kim and Lee 2014), expanding the scope of study to university students may shed light on the role of resilience in learners’ L2 learning motivation, L2 learning demotivation, and L2 proficiency.

To this end, the present study aimed to identify the factors that construct L2 learning motivation, L2 learning demotivation, and resilience. In addition, the structural relationships among these constructs and L2 proficiency were examined by means of structural equation modeling (SEM).

**Literature Review**

**L2 Learning Motivation**

In previous studies, various efforts were made to conceptualize L2 learning motivation (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2013; Gardner 2010; Kormos et al. 2011). One approach is that of Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 motivational self-system. The main assumption of this system is that learners put effort into learning an L2 in order to decrease the gap between their current status and their desired future self. Within this system, there are two self-images, namely the ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self. The ideal L2 self refers to the individual’s aspirations related to L2 learning, such as becoming a competent member of an L2 community by attaining a high level of L2 proficiency. The ought-to L2 self reflects one’s sense of duty and/or anxieties regarding language learning. Empirical studies have shown support for the positive role of the ideal L2 self in L2 learners’ learning behavior (Kormos et al. 2011) and L2 proficiency (Lamb 2012).

In addition to one’s internal self-system, the cognitive process of transforming goals into behaviors has also received academic attention. Higgins (1998) suggested self-regulatory theory, involving two types of regulation: promotion and prevention. Promotion-focused individuals are more sensitive to the potential positive outcomes of L2 learning, whereas those with prevention-focused regulation are more concerned about avoiding adversity that may result from not learning the L2. For example, if a learner continues L2 learning mainly due to apprehension about failing to meet his or her parents’ expectations, the learner’s behavior is influenced by prevention-focused regulation. Empirical studies have confirmed the positive role of promotion-focused regulation in L2 proficiency (Taguchi et al. 2009).

Parental involvement has also been discussed as a construct in L2 learning motivation (Csizér and Kormos 2009; Dika and Singh 2002; Kormos et al. 2011). L2 learners may receive support and encouragement from their parents, who regard L2 learning as important, irrespective of whether or not they themselves can speak the L2. Help from parents may exert both direct and indirect impacts on learners’ L2 learning.

In the Korean context, Kim and Lee (2014) conducted a study among secondary school students, incorporating all the L2 learning motivational components discussed above: the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, promotion-focused, prevention-focused instrumentality, and parental involvement. In general, junior high school students had significantly higher L2 motivation compared to high school students in terms of ideal and ought-to L2 selves, influence of family members, and promotion-focused regulation. Among junior high school students, the ideal L2 self was the most dominant factor in L2 learning motivation. In contrast, promotion-focused regulation was the most dominant factor among high school students.

**L2 Learning Demotivation**

In the EFL context, where English is learned as an academic subject, students’ interest in learning another language has continued to decline, from elementary to high school (Kikuchi 2013; Kim 2012b; Pintrich 2003; Sakai and Kikuchi 2009). Recently, the concept of demotivation has been discussed in the EFL context, where it may be difficult to see directly the out-of-class benefits of learning a language (Kikuchi 2015; Song and Kim 2017).

Previous studies on L2 learning demotivation have focused on identifying demotivating factors (Falout et al. 2009). One source of L2 learning demotivation originates within learners. Learners’ attributional factors, including low levels of self-esteem, a lack of self-confidence, and feelings of inferiority in comparison to classmates, have been identified as dominant demotivating factors (Falout et al. 2009; Sakai and Kikuchi 2009; Trang and Baldauf 2007). Studies carried out among university students have shown that an individual’s negative self-evaluation, based on evidence of self-denigration or a lack of self-confidence, can be demotivating (Jung 2011). The learners’ previous
experience of failure or lack of improvement was identified as a source of individual demotivation (Trang and Baldauf 2007).

An individual’s learning experience and the influence of socioeducational factors on it has also been widely discussed as a demotivating factor on the individual level. This encompasses instructor-related elements, such as instructors’ teaching methods (e.g., grammar-based or teacher-centered) and instructors’ misbehaviors (e.g., severe criticism of student) (Falout et al. 2009; Sakai and Kikuchi 2009). Textbooks focusing on grammar and unsupportive learning environments have also been discussed as demotivating factors (Kikuchi 2015). University-level students identified their teachers’ harsh criticism of learner errors (Kikuchi 2015) and exam-oriented instruction without meaningful classroom interactions (Jung 2011) as additional demotivating factors.

Resilience

Resilience is a psychological mechanism by which one adapts to circumstances despite adversity (Luthar et al. 2000). It refers to an individual’s mental power to overcome stress and deal with difficulties in a positive, constructive manner. Those with resilience can bounce back when faced with difficulties. Previous studies have focused on what constructs resilience, and it has been found to encompass subcomponents ranging from psychological factors to social relationships (Masten et al. 2011; Shin et al. 2009).

Adversity as transient has been discussed as a crucial element of resilience (Cicchetti 2010). When an individual interprets a difficulty as passing and has a positive view of the future, he or she stands a chance of overcoming the adversity. Perseverance, the tendency to remain on a task and ultimately resolve it, is another component constituting resilience (Maddi 1999). Self-control is also discussed as a subcomponent contributing to an individual’s resilience (Martin and Marsh 2009; Shin et al. 2009). Beyond the individual psychological system, relationships with others and communicative skills have also been widely acknowledged as important components of resilience (Olsson et al. 2003). When individuals communicate and have stable and positive relationships with others, they can share their difficulties and find appropriate social support, which can assist in overcoming difficulties.

As the subconstructs of resilience in education have been investigated, the influence of resilience on specific academic disciplines has begun to gain academic attention. A small number of studies have investigated the relationship between various individual differences such as L2 learning motivation (Kim 2012b; Lamb 2012), L2 learning demotivation (Hu 2011; Kim 2012a), resilience (Kim and Kim 2017; Kim and Lee 2014), and L2 learning proficiency. For instance, a structural model using Korean high school students has suggested that demotivating factors, such having difficulty with L2 learning and lacking interest, have a direct and indirect influence on L2 achievement, as measured by in-house scores (Kim 2012a). A dynamic relationship between L2 learning motivation and demotivation has also been suggested (Sakai and Kikuchi 2009). Furthermore, the influence of resilience on L2 learning motivation and demotivation has been explored in Kim and Lee’s (2014) study. A regression analysis carried out during this study of Korean secondary school students indicated that resilience might influence L2 learning motivation and demotivation.

However, few studies have tried to investigate the complex relationship between L2 learning motivation, demotivation, resilience, and L2 proficiency through a more systematic approach. Most previous studies have employed regression analysis (e.g., Hu 2011; Kim and Lee 2014); a few have carried out structural equation modeling (e.g., Kim 2012a). Given the dynamic interplay among L2 learning motivation, demotivation, resilience, and L2 proficiency, a more structured and comprehensive approach is clearly needed. It is possible to achieve this by using structural equation modeling (SEM) to investigate the various relationships (Plonsky 2015). The current study will therefore investigate the structural relationship among them using SEM. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the subcomponents of L2 learning motivation, L2 learning demotivation, and resilience?
2. What are the structural relationships among L2 learning motivation, L2 learning demotivation, resilience, and English proficiency among university-level EFL learners?
Method

The L2 Learning Context in Korea

In the Korean educational system, high schools and universities approach English learning in different ways. The main reason for a high school student to study English is to get good grades and earn a place at a prestigious university (Jung 2011). When learning English, high school students focus more on grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, in preparation for the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT). They take English classes as a part of their mandatory curriculum and tend to become competitive. For university students, the purpose of learning English is to increase practical English skills for international communications, which most companies require (Park 2011; Shin 2016). They have a keen interest in gaining high scores on standardized English tests, such as TOEIC and TOEFL, in order to find a good job (Park 2009).

Participants

A total of 869 undergraduate EFL students on two campuses belonging to the same university participated in this research. The campuses were located in the urban areas of Seoul and Gyeonggi Province, in the vicinity of Seoul, Korea. The main campus of the university in Seoul had higher academic admission standards for students. The academic standards required for admission to the Gyeonggi campus were in the middle and lower range, in comparison with the Seoul campus.

The selection of these two campuses enabled us to explore participants with various levels of L2 proficiency. At both campuses, the participants were enrolled in mandatory English conversation classes taught by native English speakers. As for gender distribution, 367 students were male (42.7%) and 492 were female (57.3%). Ten participants did not report their gender. Of the 869 participants, 93% were 19-year-old freshmen; the average age was 19.22 years.

Data Collection and Analysis

After obtaining IRB approval, data collection for this study took place in September 2016, at the beginning of a new undergraduate semester. In order to recruit participants, we contacted the instructors in charge of 41 mandatory EFL classes on the two university campuses. We explained the purpose of the study to both instructors and students and obtained permission to collect data by means of a questionnaire distributed among 964 students. They were also informed that they could opt out of the study at any time, and for any reason. Of these, 95 returned questionnaires with blank items or the same answer to each item. These were excluded from the analysis, leaving the 869 participants as stated above.

Instrument

The questionnaire distributed among the participants was composed of four sections, targeting (1) L2 learning motivation, (2) L2 learning demotivation, (3) resilience, and (4) personal information, such as age, gender, academic major, and English proficiency. Except for the items in the personal information section, all items required a response on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaires were written in Korean, the participants’ first language (see Online Resource 1 for a translation of sample questions).

The first section targeted the five components of L2 learning motivation (ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, promotion, prevention, and family influence) by means of 39 items (Dörnyei 2009; Higgins 1998; Kim 2012a, b). The second section of the questionnaire targeted L2 learning demotivation (Dörnyei 2009; Taguchi et al. 2009). A total of 24 items covered negative influences from an instructor, inappropriate learning environments and materials, negative attitudes toward the target language and community, and the mandatory nature of L2 learning. The 27 items measuring resilience, in the third section of the questionnaire, were based on the work of Shin et al. (2009).

To measure L2 proficiency, participants were asked to give their CSAT scores. The test consists of a total of 45 multiple-choice questions, which include 17 listening comprehension questions and 28 reading comprehension questions. The test is considered a comprehensive and reliable measurement of students’ English proficiency before they are admitted to university (Kim 2015). Moreover, the survey was conducted during the first English class these students took in university, as a part of their mandatory curriculum. For this reason, this study used students’ CSAT scores to measure their English proficiency.

Data Analysis

The present study employed three methods of data analysis to identify factors in L2 learning motivation, demotivation, and resilience, and to reveal the structural relationships among the constructs of each. First, to address the research question regarding the constructs of L2 learning motivation, demotivation, and resilience, an Oblimin exploratory factor analysis was conducted by using the SPSS version 23.0. The internal reliability of each variable was also tested. To address the second research question, related to
structural relationships among the variables, correlation analysis between L2 learning motivation, L2 learning demotivation, and resilience was conducted as a first step. Initially, in order to verify the conceptual independence of L2 learning motivation, demotivation, and resilience, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out, using AMOS version 23.0. Subsequently, the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted in order to construct an adequate model. SEM enables the analysis of interrelated dependence among the constructs of L2 learning motivation, demotivation, and resilience, while also representing the variables that make up these constructs (Plonsky 2015). This research uses SEM to illustrate the complex and multiple relationships among the constructs and variables.

Results

Factors in L2 Learning Motivation

A total of 39 items in the questionnaire targeted L2 learning motivation. Factor analysis revealed six factors in L2 learning motivation, accounting for 61.45% of variance (see Online Resource 2 for detailed information). The factors were: (1) *ought-to L2 self* (15 items), learning English for external reasons, such as getting high scores or recognition from parents; (2) *ideal L2 self* (seven items), the expectation to speak English fluently in the future; (3) *instrumental motivation* (seven items), the expectation to obtain a better job with L2 skills; (4) *parental support* (five items), parental encouragement to study EFL; (5) *academic challenge* (two items), using English as a tool to investigate academic concerns; and (6) *awareness of importance* (three items), awareness of how important EFL learning is. It should be noted that the “academic challenge” factor (α = .53) did not reach a reliability coefficient of .60; it thus presented relatively low internal consistency (Dörnyei 2007). (see Online Resource 2 for detailed information)

Factors in L2 Learning Demotivation

In order to identify factors in L2 learning demotivation experienced by these undergraduate EFL learners, data from 24 items underwent factor analysis, identifying six factors in L2 demotivation, accounting for 60.86% of variance: (1) *compulsory EFL learning* (five items), unwillingness to learn EFL; (2) *negative perception of English-speaking countries* (four items), dislike of English-speaking countries or people; (3) *unsupportive learning environment* (three items), interruptions from other students or the learning context; (4) *perceived inappropriateness of textbooks or tasks* (four items), a sense of boredom and difficulties with EFL classes or textbooks; (5) *low self-esteem* (five items), a sense of anxiety, lack of confidence, or uneasiness during EFL classes; and (6) *unsupportive teachers* (three items), unclear or difficult explanations from instructors. (see Online Resource 3 for detailed information)

Factors in Resilience

The results of factor analysis with the data from the 27 questionnaire items on resilience identified seven factors, accounting for 58.5% of variance. The factors were: (1) *life satisfaction* (six items), a sense of life satisfaction and gratitude in general; (2) *self-composure* (four items), a sense of control over negative feelings; (3) *communicative efficacy* (four items), a sense of sympathy for other people; (4) *sociability* (three items), stable relationships with friends; (5) *metacognitive adaptation* (four items), the tendency to try to solve problems strategically; (6) *strategic competence* (three items), effective communication skills; and (7) *realistic optimism* (three items), an attitude believing in the positive outcomes of efforts. (see Online Resource 4 for detailed information)

Correlation Analysis Among L2 Learning Motivation, Demotivation, and Resilience

As a first step in investigating the structural relationships among the variables, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted for L2 proficiency and the factors identified in L2 learning motivation, demotivation, and resilience (see Table 1). Significant positive correlations were observed between L2 learning motivation and resilience factors. However, the ought-to L2 self and parental support showed significantly negative correlations with three resilience factors. As for the relationship between L2 learning demotivation and resilience, the L2 learning demotivation factors showed significant negative associations with the resilience factors, with the exception of unsupportive teachers.

Regarding the relationship between L2 learning motivation and demotivation, the ideal L2 self was significantly correlated with most of the L2 learning demotivation factors. L2 proficiency showed a significant correlation with six factors in resilience, three factors in L2 learning motivation, and five factors in L2 learning demotivation.

Proposed Structural Model

In order to verify the conceptual differences between the constructs, a CFA was conducted as an initial step; it provided an acceptable model fit: $\chi^2(df) = 906$ (72), $p < .001$, TLI = .92, CFI = .93, and RMSEA = .06. This
Table 1  Associations between resilience, L2 learning motivation, L2 learning demotivation, and proficiency

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Proficiency

R1 life satisfaction, R2 self-composure, R3 communicative efficacy, R4 sociability, R5 metacognitive adaptation, R6 strategic competence, R7 realistic optimism, M1 ought-to L2 self, M2 ideal L2 self, M3 instrumental motivation, M4 parental support, M5 academic challenge, M6 awareness of importance, D1 compulsory EFL learning, D2 negative perception of English-speaking country, D3 unsupportive learning environment, D4 perceived inappropriateness of textbooks or tasks, D5 low self-esteem, D6 unsupportive teachers

N = 869, * p < .05, ** p < .01
result confirmed that L2 learning motivation, demotivation, and resilience were independent, distinctive psychological constructs. As the second step in determining the structural relationships among L2 learning motivation, demotivation, resilience, and proficiency, an initial model was suggested based on previous studies of relationships between these variables and on the results of the correlation analysis. To use the maximum likelihood method, multivariate normality was examined using skewness and kurtosis values to meet the data requirement. Ockey and Choi (2015) have stated that skewness cannot exceed the absolute value of three and kurtosis cannot exceed the absolute value of ten. According to these requirements, the levels were satisfied with skewness $=-1.90$ and kurtosis $=5.71$.

The initial model started with general resilience, which influences L2 learning motivation and demotivation (Kim and Kim 2017), before focusing specifically on L2 learning. The influence of L2 learning motivation and demotivation on L2 proficiency has been identified in previous studies (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2013; Lamb 2012).

In the hypothesized initial model, the factors of L2 learning motivation, demotivation, and resilience were addressed using three questions, each with the highest factor loading value (Mulaik and Millsap 2000). Analyzing the same number of items for each factor enables a systematic analysis to be carried out, as each factor has equal weight. (see Online Resource 5)

In’nami and Koizumi (2011) cite the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) as the most useful and appropriate indices for language learning research. In general, TLI and CFI values larger than .95 as well as RMSEA values less than .06 are considered as criteria for an acceptable model (Ockey and Choi 2015). However, this model suggested a poor fit: $\chi^2(df) = 1473.46(166)$, $p < .001$, $TLI = .63$; $CFI = .68$; $RMSEA = .10$.

For this reason, the hypothesized model presented in Online Resource 5 was modified to one in which the direct path between resilience and L2 learning motivation, as well as five factors (sociability for resilience, ought-to L2 self and academic motivation for L2 learning motivation, and negative perception of English-speaking countries and unsupportive teachers for L2 learning demotivation) were removed. The reasons for such modification of the model were as follows:

1. The removal of the L2 learning motivation variables, “Ideal L2 self” (M2) and “Academic motivation” (M5): The purpose of learning English is to get a secure job, which is an instrumental purpose. Given that Korean job seekers are now facing their worst job prospects ever (KSIS 2017), it seems difficult for them to create ideal L2 self-images, or to sustain academic motivation.
2. The removal of the L2 learning demotivation variables, “Negative perception” (D2) and “Unsupportive teachers” (D6): Korean university students consider interacting with native speakers of English to be an ideal opportunity to improve practical English skills; these students may continuously search for ways to communicate with native speakers by visiting English-speaking countries (Cho 2015). Given this, it seems unlikely that a negative perception of English-speaking countries and the unsupportive L2 teacher could be one of the variables in L2 learning demotivation.
3. The removal of the influence factor of resilience from L2 learning motivation: Resilience did not significantly predict L2 learning motivation: $\beta = .00$, $p > .05$. Resilience is more often related to recovering from adversity (Cicchetti 2010; Luthar et al. 2000), which means that this construct is more closely related to L2 learning demotivation or remotivation than to L2 learning motivation per se.
4. The removal of the resilience variable “Sociability” (R4): In the Korean educational context, in which competitiveness is encouraged as a way of attaining higher test scores and better jobs (Park 2009), students put more emphasis on their own personal growth than on mutual cooperation. For this reason, sociability may be seen as a distraction rather than as an aid to learning.

To sum up, the direct path between L2 learning motivation and resilience, as well as several factors in these constructs were removed in order to enhance the model fit based on the theoretical considerations explained above. Figure 1 presents the final model showing structural relations among L2 learning motivation, demotivation, resilience, and L2 proficiency.

By modifying the hypothesized model shown (see Online Resource 5), the model fit indices of that in Fig. 1 became acceptable, indicating that the model was plausible: $\chi^2(df) = 157.29(84)$, $p < .001$, $TLI = .91$; $CFI = .93$; $RMSEA = .05$ (see Table 2).

The SEM analysis reveals that resilience had a significantly direct effect on L2 learning demotivation ($\beta = -.26$, $p < .05$) and L2 proficiency ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$). L2 learning demotivation was directly linked to proficiency ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .05$). That is, resilience had a significantly direct contribution to L2 proficiency, as well as an indirect contribution through demotivation ($\beta = .06$, $p < .05$). However, in the case of the indirect effect of resilience ($\beta = .06$, $p < .05$) on proficiency, the regression coefficient was less than the direct effect ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$). In other words, resilience had a more significant direct than indirect effect on proficiency. L2 learning
motivation, demotivation, and resilience together explained approximately 10% ($R^2 = .10$) of proficiency, indicating that these factors systematically contribute to L2 proficiency.

**Table 2** Parameter estimates of the structural model

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**Discussion**

The present study aims to investigate the constructs of L2 learning motivation, demotivation, and resilience by employing a quantitative approach. In order to determine the structural relationships between L2 learning motivation, demotivation, and resilience, the variables in each construct were finalized by excluding some factors. L2 learning motivation was found to consist of six subcomponents: the ought-to L2 self, the ideal L2 self, instrumental motivation, parental support, academic challenge, and awareness of importance. L2 learning demotivation was found to incorporate six component parts: a negative perception of English-speaking countries, compulsory EFL learning, the perceived inappropriateness of textbooks or tasks, low self-esteem, an unsupportive learning environment, and unsupportive teachers. For resilience, the following seven constructs were identified: life satisfaction, sociability, communicative efficacy, self-composure, strategic competence, metacognitive adaptation, and realistic optimism.
In the revised SEM model, it is noteworthy that the factors of L2 learning motivation and demotivation are mainly instrumental. These results suggest that university students have different motivational profiles than the secondary school students who participated in Kim and Lee’s (2014) and Kim and Kim’s (2017) studies. For the secondary school students, the ideal L2 self had a positive influence on L2 achievement. For university students, L2 achievement could only be explained by instrumental factors, such as future job prospects. One reason that university students have instrumental motivational profiles may be inferred from the current socioeconomic context in Korea, where most companies require standardized English scores when they recruit new employees; the youth unemployment rate rises record high (Kong 2016). Given that L2 scores provide a great advantage in the job market, recent research has shown that the competition for better L2 scores is intensifying (Park 2009). In this socioeducational context, college students start to feel burdened by the need to increase L2 proficiency in order to advance their future job prospects (Abelmann et al. 2009; Park 2011). The impact of current job prospects is reflected in the current study’s revised SEM model, which only includes instrumental factors of L2 learning motivation.

Regarding the structural relationships, L2 learning motivation, demotivation, and resilience explained 10% of L2 proficiency, which is higher than the 6% proposed impact of resilience on L2 proficiency (Kim and Kim 2017). It implies that a more comprehensive and structural approach is needed to investigate the influence of individual differences on L2 proficiency. Furthermore, resilience has a stronger impact on L2 learning demotivation than on L2 proficiency. Resilience exerts a direct and indirect influence on L2 proficiency, mediated by L2 learning demotivation. However, it did not have a direct influence on L2 learning motivation. Furthermore, demotivation has the strongest explanatory power for L2 proficiency, more than either resilience or L2 learning motivation. Considering the role of resilience, which helps individuals maintain their mental stamina despite adverse circumstances (Luthar et al. 2000), improving levels of resilience among L2 learners may alleviate L2 learning demotivation and allow them to increase their L2 proficiency. Furthermore, resilience and demotivation are negatively correlated, which means the role of resilience may alleviate L2 learning demotivation.

The SEM presenting the relationships among L2 learning motivation, demotivation, resilience, and L2 proficiency shows that for Korean college students who have recently passed a college entrance exam, the role of L2 learning demotivation ought to be carefully considered. Even compared with the positive influence of L2 learning motivation, the SEM demonstrates that these college students’ L2 learning demotivation exerted a stronger negative influence on their L2 proficiency. This implies that for Korean college students, rather than emphasizing the importance of L2 learning motivation, it may be more important to find ways to enhance their level of resilience, as this may reduce their L2 learning demotivation and ultimately increase their L2 proficiency.

**Limitations and Implications**

This study suffered certain limitations. First, the information on participants’ L2 proficiency was obtained via self-report on the questionnaires, and so was susceptible to subjectivity. Second, the participants were from students on two campuses in Seoul and Gyeonggi Province, which limits generalization of the findings on the constructs measured. In addition, the Cronbach’s alphas of several subcomponents of L2 learning motivation, demotivation, and resilience were not sufficiently high.

Despite these limitations, the present findings suggest certain practical implications. The structural relationships among L2 motivation, demotivation, and proficiency indicate that demotivation had a greater influence on proficiency than did L2 learning motivation. This implies that it may be more important for effective L2 learning to prevent or decrease L2 learning demotivation. One method by which learners may bounce back from a state of L2 learning demotivation is to teach them techniques to enhance their resilience in the L2 learning classroom. Learners equipped with effective strategies to critically recollect previous adversities and deal with them in the process of L2 learning may be less likely to fall prey to L2 learning demotivation. Furthermore, EFL instructors, particularly those at college level, ought to emphasize the value of learning English for authentic communication. Socioeducational changes also need to be made such that Korean companies use standardized English scores only to assess skills actually needed at the workplace, instead of using them as one of the general requirements for employment.

**References**


