*English Language & Literature Teaching,* Vol. 22, No. 1 Spring 2016

# EFL Learning Demotivation in the Korean Context: Similarities and Differences across School Levels*

**Kim, Tae-Young****
Chung-Ang University
**Kim, Youngmi*****
Chung-Ang University

**Kim, Tae-Young & Kim, Youngmi (2016). EFL learning demotivation in the Korean context: Similarities and differences across school levels. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 22*(1), 135-156.**

By analyzing 19 South Korean-based demotivation studies, the current paper examined the factors affecting English as a foreign language (EFL) learning demotivation at different school levels. We categorized the studies according to whether they addressed students in the elementary, junior high, high school, or university level. A comparison of the different school levels revealed two common demotivation factors: (1) English learning difficulty and (2) teacher-related factors. More specifically, English learning difficulty relates to students' struggles with grammar and vocabulary, whereas teacher-related factors involve the teachers' behavior and teaching styles. Furthermore, students' English proficiency and experience in private education influenced their EFL learning demotivation differently. Changes in the learning environment and goals also affected learners' demotivation. It was noted that across the school contexts, learners attributed their English learning difficulties to various sources, which explains how each learner experiences demotivation differently. The findings indicate the importance of remotivation and developing a robust framework to analyze EFL learning demotivation.

**[School Level/EFL learning/Learner Age/Demotivation/ Remotivation,
학교수준/EFL학습/학습자연령/탈동기/재동기]**

* This research was supported by the Chung-Ang University Research Scholarship Grants in 2016.
** First Author, *** Second Author

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since Gardner and Lambert raised the issue of second language (L2) learning motivation in 1959, L2 learning motivation has been explored through different frameworks for over 50 years (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009; Gardner, 2001). However, despite the substantial theoretical attention and empirical efforts to define L2 learning motivation, demotivation has recently been investigated in the EFL context. As motivation is a dynamic process (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), demotivation is also a negative dynamic process that can "pull learners down" (Kikuchi, 2015, p. 4). According to Kikuchi (2015), numerous demotivators exist and can reduce learner engagement in the learning process. More specifically, demotivators can range from internal factors (e.g., lack of self-confidence) to external ones (e.g., teachers, teaching methods). When learning English is unrelated to their real life, EFL students who do not have specific learning goals are particularly susceptible to demotivators.

Despite how many EFL countries make English a compulsory academic subject, students rarely have opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom (Y.-K. Kim & T.-Y. Kim, 2013). Given that EFL students are exposed to English mostly in the classroom, schools themselves may become demotivators. Furthermore, each school level has its own emphasis in their curriculum and assessment. Thus, as learners advance through the various school levels, they experience several changes to their English education. Changes in the learning context and students' ability to interpret their surroundings can influence learners' demotivating process differently.

In previous studies, EFL learning demotivators and the demotivation process have been analyzed with different age groups, but little effort was made to investigate how various school levels affect student demotivation. More specifically, as they move up in the education system, students experience changes in their schools' EFL goals; learners also undergo cognitive changes in their ability to evaluate their surroundings and themselves. In this situation, we can assume that EFL learning demotivation differs according to the school level, but this has not been systematically investigated in previous studies. Language learning is a long process, so it is important to help learners sustain their motivation to learn. Although motivation can decrease as they advance through the education system, it is still unclear how and what demotivates students at each school level. When we can better understand the dominant demotivators at specific school levels and how students' transition to the subsequent level affect their demotivation, we can help EFL students maintain their motivation more effectively. This study thus analyzed previous research conducted in South Korea (henceforth, Korea) on EFL learning demotivation according to school levels.

The two research questions of this study are as follows.

1) What are the distinctive features of EFL learning demotivation at each school level in Korea?
2) What are the similarities and differences in EFL learning demotivation across school levels in Korea?

## II. METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The purpose of this study is to identify dominant EFL demotivators found at specific school levels in Korea. We therefore began by collecting studies conducted with Korean participants who were attending different school levels. These studies were identified through extensive analysis of databases like ERIC, Google Scholar, and ProQuest. The keywords used for this search were "EFL demotivation," "English learning motivation," "English learning motivation in Korea," "Korean students' English learning motivation," "Korean students' English learning demotivation," and "English learning demotivation in Korea." Given the purpose of comparing each school level in Korea, studies not specifying participants' school level were excluded in the analysis. For example, studies using data obtained from office workers or from elderly learners were not included in the analysis. In addition, cross-national studies were excluded. A total of 19 studies was ultimately selected for analysis.

As one focus of this study is to identify unique demotivators found at each school level, the studies were classified into four groups according to the participants' school level: (a) elementary school (n=3), (b) junior high school (n=3), (c) high school (n=4), and (d) university (n=9). Synthesizing previous studies investigating learner affective factors, K. J. Kim (2014a) used similar categories, but the current research focuses on demotivation only. When the participants were on more than one school level, the study was classified using the higher school level; this allowed us to have a more holistic comparative analysis of each school level. Furthermore, when a study's focus was for participants to reflect on a completed learning experiment, the study was classified based on the participants' school level at the time of their reflections. For example, if a longitudinal study asked university students to reflect on their experiences during their junior high experimental class, we classified this study as 'university level.'

For each school level, EFL learning demotivation factors were identified, and the influences of individual differences were discussed be comparing different learner groups. Studies investigating changes in a certain period were separately categorized. In addition,

commonalities and differences between the learner groups were explored.

## III. EFL DEMOTIVATION ACROSS SCHOOL LEVELS

### 1. Elementary School Students' Demotivation in EFL Learning

In EFL countries like Korea, many children start to learn English through private institutions around age five or six; the lessons include activities to increase their interest in English and to help them learn basic conversation expressions (Lee, 2009). English education officially starts in grade three and emphasizes communication skills (as specified by the 7th National Curriculum in Korea implemented from 1997). Compared to public education, private education has a wider range of education types, which ranges from native English-speaking teachers instructing speaking skills to private tutoring (Park, 2012). Depending on the type and duration of private education learners receive, their English proficiency may vary widely even before beginning their public English education. This English proficiency gap among learners was identified as one of the demotivating factors, which will be discussed later.

#### 1) Demotivating Factors: The Influence of Social Expectation

To identify EFL demotivating factors at the elementary school level, J. Lee and C.-H. Lee (2011) surveyed 170 Korean elementary school students in the fifth and sixth grades. Their survey questions were based on previous studies on demotivating factors, and eight factors were subsequently derived from the results: (a) teachers' personality and teaching style, (b) classroom environment, (c) reduced motivation and interest, (d) characteristics of the class, (e) difficulty of learning English, (f) negative attitudes towards the L2, (g) attitude of group members, and (h) grades and test scores. Among these factors, reduced motivation and interest, difficulty of learning English, and characteristics of the class were the most dominant sources of demotivation.

In J. Lee and C.-H. Lee's (2011) study, the participants reported that difficulty of learning English and demotivating characteristics of English classes resulted from learning grammar and memorizing vocabulary. Additionally, students thought the workload (i.e., homework and amount of vocabulary to memorize) was heavy, which caused them to lose motivation and interest in learning English. This suggests that reduced motivation may be the result of student demotivation, rather than its cause as discussed in Y.-K. Kim and T.-Y. Kim (2013).

However, J. Lee and C.-H. Lee's (2011) study needs to be interpreted with caution

because their participants attended a private school. This means that the curriculum and participants' backgrounds may differ from those attending public elementary schools. In addition, over 80% of the participants had studied English for more than five years. As the participants were in fifth or sixth grade, this means the students started learning English at age five or six in private institutions.

T.-Y. Kim and H.-S. Seo's (2012) study suggested socioeconomic variables' influence on young learners' EFL learning demotivation. In this study, 10 English teachers participated in semi-structured interviews, where they indicated young learners may be demotivated when they are unable to meet societal expectation for becoming proficient in English. Due to this expectation on students' English proficiency, learners enroll in cram schools as public English education may not be enough for them to become proficient English users. When they enroll in these cram schools, in some cases the students cannot understand what they learn, which may generate students' negative perception of English learning. Both J. Lee and C.-H. Lee's (2011) and T.-Y. Kim and H.-S. Seo's (2012) studies implied that social expectations for high English proficiency influence learners' perception of English learning; this ultimately causes student demotivation at an early stage.

2) Comparison of Learner Groups: Decreasing Intrinsic Motivation on the Low Proficient Learners

In addition to identifying demotivating factors, the current researchers explored the differences among learner groups as each demotivating factor may not have equal regulating power. We hoped to identify the individual characteristics that increased students' susceptibility to demotivation. English proficiency was one of the criteria used to categorize learners into groups. In J. Lee and C.-H. Lee's (2011) study, seven $6^{th}$ grade private elementary school students participated in a semi-structured interview. Based on an in-house placement test, two students each were selected from the high and intermediate proficiency groups, while three were selected from the low proficiency group. The interview questions were based on Kikuchi's (2009) study conducted in Japan.

The results indicated that low proficiency (LP) students tended to experience demotivating factors more strongly than their high proficiency (HP) peers. LP students also more strongly experienced reduced motivation and interest, as well as negative attitudes toward L2. Moreover, the LP students were more sensitive to their grades as compared to the HP students. It can be assumed that unsuccessful results would have a greater effect on LP learners, and they would be subsequently demotivated. An interesting point regarding the interview results was that the participants did not mention teacher-related issues as demotivating factors. This may be explained by the traditional, hierarchical Korean culture, where young learners avoid explicitly criticizing their teachers in front of adults.

In addition to learners' proficiency, age was employed as another criterion to categorize EFL students. In T.-Y. Kim's (2011) study, Korean elementary school students in grade three to six completed a questionnaire survey designed to identify motivational trends in their English learning. The results showed that as they advanced through school grades, students' intrinsic motivation decreased. Table 1 briefly summarizes the demotivation studies on the elementary school level.

**TABLE 1**

**Findings on the Elementary School Level**

| Author(s) (Year) | Participants | Methods | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| Finding demotivating factors | | | |
| J. Lee & C.-H. Lee (2011) | 170 S | Quan | Difficulty in learning English / Heavy workload |
| | | Qual | LP: more demotivated compared to high proficiency |
| T.-Y. Kim & H.-S Seo (2012) | 6,301 S / 17 T | Mixed | Influence of social expectation |
| Tracking changes | | | |
| T.-Y. Kim (2011) | 6,301 S | Quan | Decreased motivation through grades / Influence of private education |

*Note.* S=students, T= Teachers, Quan=Quantitative, Qual=Qualitative.

## 2. Junior High School Students' Demotivation in EFL Learning

When students enter junior high school, they experience personal changes at an individual level and encounter new teaching methods. On the individual level, they enter the adolescence stage, which entails both physical and psychological changes. In this period, junior high school students go through the identity formation process (Harmer, 2007). In the classroom, textbooks contain increasingly complex sentence structures, and the teachers begin to explain grammar (K. J. Kim, 2014b). The existing variation in learners' proficiency already identified at elementary school level becomes more severe, and learners are able to observe this gap in the results of regular in-house placement tests. With these changes, junior high school students may experience demotivation differently from elementary school students. The next section describes demotivation studies conducted with junior high school students.

### 1) Demotivating Factors: Difficulty of Learning English Coming from Language Features

In Korea, K. J. Kim (2014b) identified demotivating factors among junior high school

students. A total of 318 junior high school students participated in the study, and they completed a questionnaire survey based on the ones used in previous studies (K. J. Kim, 2012). Six demotivation categories were measured: (a) dissatisfaction with teachers' teaching styles, (b) difficulty of English learning, (c) dissatisfaction with English lessons, (d) dissatisfaction with English grades, (e) lack of motivation or interest in learning English, and (f) inadequate learning environment. The student responses showed that difficulty in learning English (e.g., understanding complex English sentences and grammar) was the most dominant demotivating factor for junior high school students.

Lack of motivation or interest in learning English was identified as a source of student demotivation. In this category, having lost interest in the learning purposes, having no specific English learning goals, and having lost interest in English learning were included as questionnaire items to identify factors demotivating the students. Learners may be demotivated when they do not have specific learning goals. However, as discussed in Y.-K. Kim and T.-Y. Kim (2013), lack of motivation or interest in learning English can be the result of demotivation, rather than the cause. To avoid any confusion, this category was later renamed *lack of meaningful purpose* (S. Kim, 2015).

In K. J. Kim's (2014b) study, 32 teachers also completed the questionnaires to identify factors in EFL learners' demotivation. The average scores of the teachers were higher than learners' scores in all six demotivation categories. For example, the teachers' responses differed from the students' regarding the learning environment's influence. The teachers identified inadequate learning environments (e.g., classrooms with many students) as the main demotivating factor; lessons tend to be more teacher-centered when there are more than 30 students in a class. It is difficult to teach large groups communicatively, so learners subsequently have fewer chances to develop their communicative skills.

2) Comparison of Learner Groups: Different Attribution to the Demotivators

To investigate whether individual differences influence demotivating factors, the current researchers employed English proficiency and ages as the criteria, which were also used to categorize elementary school learners (see previous section). In addition, socio-cultural background was also employed as a criterion; this enabled us to address issues related to student demotivation more comprehensively.

K. J. Kim (2009a) compared high proficiency learners to low proficiency learners by administrating a questionnaire survey to 220 Korean junior high school students. Students' in-house placement test scores determined their proficiency level. The results indicated that LP learners tended to attribute their demotivation to the difficulty of English learning (e.g., understanding grammar). In contrast, the HP learners identified translation-like characteristic of their English classes as the dominant source of demotivation. LP learners

also tended to attribute the source of demotivation to their level of comprehension. However, HP learners suggested that their learning environment was the prime source of demotivation.

In addition to English proficiency and age, socio-cultural background was considered in the investigation of EFL demotivation. S. H. Choi, S. A. Kim, and Y. J. Park (2013) analyzed whether students' residence and private education experience affected EFL learning demotivation. In the study, 264 students in urban and rural areas completed a questionnaire. The results suggested that demotivation was not influenced by where a student lived, but was instead related to the duration students spent in private education. Students who received over four years of private education had lower self-confidence in English as compared to those who only received two to four years of private education. This shows that a longer period of private education does not guarantee a higher level of confidence, a variable related to high English proficiency. Table 2 shows summaries on EFL demotivation studies on junior high school level.

**TABLE 2**

**Findings on the Junior High School Level**

| Author(s) (Year) | Participants | Methods | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| Finding demotivating factors | | | |
| K. J. Kim (2014b) | 318 S | Quan | Lack of motivation & interest in learning English |
| | 32 T | Qual | Inadequate learning environments |
| Comparing learner groups | | | |
| K. J. Kim (2009a) | 220 S | Quan | HP: demotivated due to teaching style<br>LP: demotivated due to level of comprehension |
| S. H. Choi et al. (2013) | 264 S | Quan | Longer private education not related to self-confidence |

*Note.* S=students, T=Teachers, Quan=Quantitative, Qual=Qualitative.

## 3. High School Students' Demotivation in EFL Learning

High school EFL students may consider English as an important academic subject because it is included in the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), a Korean-based high-stakes test administered annually. Preparation for the test may be the focus of students' English lessons, so it may be difficult for learners to develop communication skills. Learners are also exposed to a large amount of knowledge in each class, and they may not fully understand the details of the content. In this setting, LP learners may encounter more problems than their HP counterparts. As a result, the gap in students' English proficiency

level may increase further; some students may even give up learning English, thinking that they cannot close the gap. The following section discusses general EFL learning demotivating factors found in high school students and describes the relation between individual differences and demotivating factors.

### 1) Demotivating Factors: A lack of Confidence and Concerns on the Cognitive Understanding

K. J. Kim (2012) conducted a similar study that analyzed demotivating factors among 385 high school students in Korea. The students completed a set of questionnaires that were created based on Sakai and Kikuchi (2009). The data analysis revealed six demotivating factors: (a) difficulty of English learning, (b) teachers' teaching styles, (c) dissatisfaction with English lessons and the grading system, (d) inadequate learning contents, (e) lack of motivation and interest in learning English, and (f) inadequate learning environment. The learners in K. J. Kim's (2009a, 2009b) study were also concerned with whether they understood the lessons. This shows that high school learners consider English learning to be a cognitive activity.

In order to examine whether this pattern of decreasing motivation was found in other age groups, T.-Y. Kim (2012) included participants in a wider range of grades (i.e., grades 3 to 12) in his questionnaire survey. The results indicated that the decreasing pattern found among elementary school students indeed extended to high school students. Demotivation positively correlated with the amount of instrumentality, family influence, and the burden EFL learners experienced in studying English. Because the causal relations among these factors were not investigated, it is difficult to claim that instrumentality and family directly cause demotivation. However, the study suggests that demotivation should be analyzed multi-dimensionally by including agents beyond the classroom setting.

### 2) Comparing Learner Groups: High School Students Complaining about the Grading System

Learners tend to attribute their demotivation to the learning environment and broader system. This tendency is found in studies comparing junior high and high school students (K. J. Kim, 2009b; T.-Y. Kim & H.-S. Lee, 2014); these studies found that high school students experienced demotivation more strongly when they were dissatisfied with their English classes and the grading system. As high school students are preparing for the CSAT, they may be sensitive to grading systems and feel dissatisfied with exam-oriented lessons. The influence of high-stakes testing is stronger among high school learners, as will be discussed in detail in the discussion section on high school students. Table 3 summarizes

findings on high school level.

**TABLE 3**

**Findings on the High School Level**

| Author(s) (Year) | Participants | Methods | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| Finding demotivating factors | | | |
| K. J. Kim (2012) | 385 H | Quan | Difficulty of English learning / Dissatisfaction with teaching & grading system |
| Comparing learner groups | | | |
| T.-Y. Kim (2012) | 1,012 E / 1,155 J / 665 H | Quan | Decreased motivation through school levels |
| K. J. Kim (2009b) | 220 J / 187 H | Quan | H: less satisfied with lessons and grades |
| T.-Y. Kim & H.-S. Lee (2014) | 474 J / 678 H | Quan | H: more demotivated |

*Note.* E=elementary school students, J=junior high school students, H=high school students, Quan=Quantitative.

## 4. University Students' Demotivation in EFL Learning

For four years in college, depending on their undergraduate major and division, students are exposed to different learning environments with diverse learning goals and tasks. Freshmen and sometimes sophomore students may take compulsory English courses led by native English-speaking instructors. They also try to develop speaking skills to travel abroad or participate in international programs (J. Hwang, 2013). However, juniors and seniors start to focus on obtaining high scores on English tests such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) to apply for jobs. For this reason, job-related motivation occurs at this stage regardless of their academic majors (C.-E. Kim, 2015). As university students experience transitions in their language learning environment and goals, diverse studies have been conducted with university students compared to other age groups.

In the following section, the studies on general demotivating factors in university students' learning will be presented first, followed by the study results comparing learner groups. It should be noted that the researchers were working at the university, so it must have been easy for them to recruit university students as participants.

1) The Impact of Learning Experience: Exam-oriented Lessons and Lack of Confidence

University students generally have studied English for at least 10 years, which is long enough to construct their attitudes towards learning English. To understand how their previous learning experiences influence their current English learning demotivation, researchers asked university students to report their previous experiences.

S. K. Jung (2011) conducted a retrospective study with 125 students, and exam-oriented lessons that lack meaningful communicative interaction was identified as a main demotivator for students. In addition, students were also demotivated by their lack of confidence in English.

J. H. Ma and Y. Cho (2014) aimed to identify demotivating factors found in students' previous learning experiences. Their questionnaire was based on Falout, Elwood, and Hood (2009). A recall essay was added in order to identify emerging factors. A total of 160 Korean university students participated in the study. As shown in Japanese demotivation studies (Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009; Kikuchi, 2009), the students stated that the grammar-heavy teaching method was the dominant demotivation factor.

In addition to the teaching method, J. H. Ma and Y. Cho's (2014) participants reported that low self-confidence and self-denigration were demotivation factors, as confirmed in Falout, Elwood, and Hood (2009). Even though both factors were found in Japanese and Korean learners, the dominant factor differed between countries. Korean learners indicated that low self-confidence was the dominant demotivating factor. They experienced demotivation when they felt inferior to their classmates or when their test results were unsatisfactory. In contrast, for Japanese learners, the dominant factor of demotivation was the self-denigration related to self-blame. This difference can be explained by the competitive motivation among Korean peers, as discussed in T.-Y. Kim (2006, 2010).

The participants in the studies described above were enrolled in compulsory English classes at universities. However, EFL demotivation can appear differently in students who voluntarily enroll in English classes. To investigate this, S. Kim (2015) conducted a study with 29 university students enrolled in non-mandatory classes such as TOEIC or intensive English learning programs. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with individuals or pairs of learners. The interview questions asked the learners about their previous English learning experience and current difficulties. Three demotivating factors emerged: (a) lack of meaningful purpose, (b) lack of improvement and experiences of success, and (c) lack of self-determination. More specifically, the students experienced conflict between their desire to learn English communicative skills and their actual learning purpose such as applying for a job; this proved to be these students' main demotivating factor. Compared to those in a mandatory class, the participants in S. Kim's study did not voice dissatisfaction in teaching methods. It was found that the opportunity to

choose an English lesson may influence the specific subcomponents of EFL learning demotivation.

2) Suggesting a Framework

Even though previous researchers studied demotivating factors among Korean university students, no universal framework was established. To develop this framework, S. L. Yeo and J. B. Lee (2015) collected essays from university students and instructors describing their previous English learning and teaching experience. Based on the essays, they wrote a questionnaire that was then administrated to 225 university students in Korea. The analysis identified four demotivation categories: (a) learner-related factors (e.g., the difficulty of learning English, negative attitudes towards learning English), (b) teacher-related factors (e.g., inappropriate feedback, teachers' competence related to knowledge, and pronunciation), (c) teaching methods (e.g., focusing on reading rather than speaking), and (d) learning environment (e.g., lack of meaningful purpose in learning English, lack of opportunities to speak English outside the classroom). It may be worthwhile to construct a standard demotivation framework, and further empirical research is needed to evaluate the validity of the framework.

3) Comparison of Learner Groups: LP More Susceptible to Teacher Behavior

In Korea, proficiency was used to categorize learners (Y.-A. Cho & H. Y. Chung, 2014). A total of 103 university students were categorized into HP and LP groups based on their TOEIC scores. They answered survey questions based on Falout, Elwood, and Hood's (2009) study. In this study, demotivating factors were classified into two categories: (a) external conditions of the learning environment (e.g., teacher immediacy, grammar-translation) and (b) internal conditions of the learner (e.g., low self-confidence, self-denigration). The results indicated that the two learning groups displayed significant differences in terms of external and internal demotivation factors.

Regarding external elements, inappropriate learning materials and difficulties in understanding lessons are more influential demotivation factors for LP learners. Teacher-related factors were also noteworthy external demotivators. Both student groups reported that the teaching method was the most dominant factor in EFL learning demotivation. However, LP learners more sensitive to their teachers' behavior than HP learners were.

This finding is in contrast to the results of both S. M. Lee and S.-H. Kim (2014) and S. Kim (2015), suggesting teachers' diminishing role in university students' demotivation. It can be assumed that the LP learners were more negatively affected by their teachers' behaviors. LP learners may be more dependent on their instructors because they are just

starting to learn English. In addition to the learning environment, LP learners experience self-denigration and low self-esteem more than their HP counterparts, which can aggravate their demotivation. This result is in accordance with studies conducted with high school learners (Hamada & Kito, 2008; K. J. Kim, 2012).

M.-Y. Shin (2013) investigated differences in self-efficacy between those who experienced an increase in their test score and those who did not. To analyze this issue, a set of questionnaire surveys was administrated to 166 university students in Korea. The results indicated that both groups showed interest in the external rewards that high test scores would bring. However, students who saw an increase in their test score were more likely to be sensitive to external rewards than those who did not see an increase. It can therefore be assumed that the extent external aspects were internalized could play a key role in student motivation and demotivation.

The interpretation of evaluation results also influenced learner demotivation, as suggested by K. J. Kim (2009a, 2009b, 2012). When learners have low scores on a test and recognize that they have failed in English learning, they may become demotivated. However, some learners are stimulated by low scores and subsequently put greater effort into learning English. One explanation for this observation relates to students' level of internalizing the importance of English learning. If students value English learning more than the difficulties they experience, they would put more effort into their learning. However, if they do not see the value of learning, students may be discouraged by poor test results and become demotivated. This shows that a causal link may exist between the degree of internalization of the external value of learning English and demotivation among university students.

4) Changes in Demotivation within a Semester

There have been longitudinal studies on EFL learning demotivation. J. Hwang (2013) investigated changes in motivation and demotivating factors with 158 first-year university students taking a compulsory English course; this was a reading course taught by a Korean instructor. The participants completed two sets of questionnaires on changes in their motivation and demotivating factors. Nine of the students participated in a semi-structured interview. The results indicated that their intrinsic motivation increased over the course. The results also confirmed that self-denigration and low self-confidence, which were related to negative attitude toward English constructed through previous experience, were sources of demotivation. This is in line with the previous discussion (Y.-A. Cho & H. Y. Chung, 2014; J. H. Ma & Y. Cho, 2014).

5) Changes in Demotivation Including College Level

Rather than focusing on changes in one semester, T.-Y. Kim and Y.-J. Lee (2013) qualitatively investigated demotivation changes resulting from previous learning experience by using recall essays. One significant demotivating factor at the college level was related to learners' classmates. Learners felt demotivated when they perceived their classmates to have higher levels of English proficiency than they did. It is important to note that the participants in this study could be classified as high proficiency speakers. Further studies needs to be conducted to explore the regulating power of peer pressure in LP groups.

S. M. Lee and S.-H. Kim (2014) sought to describe the factors of demotivation based on the learners' voices. A total of 183 nursing major students in Korea wrote autobiographic essays on their experiences of English learning from elementary school to college. The results showed that teacher-related factors were the most frequent source of demotivation in junior high and high school, but learners did not experience the teachers' influence strongly at the college level. Instead, they indicated that they were dissatisfied with the teaching methods. This may be related to the insufficient amount of meaningful communication with native instructors in class and thus, insufficient exposure to authentic English input was identified as the prime source of demotivation. Other EFL learning demotivating factors were the burden of studying other subjects and negative attitudes toward English formulated through previous learning experience. Table 4 includes summary findings on university level.

**TABLE 4**

**Findings on the University Level**

| Author(s) (Year) | Participants | Methods | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| Demotivating factors found in previous learning experience | | | |
| S. K. Jung (2011) | 200 S | Quan | The influence of exam-oriented lessons / Low confidence in L2 |
| J. H. Ma & Y. Cho (2014) | 160 S | Mixed | Teaching method / Self-confidence / Self-denigration |
| S. M. Lee & S.-H. Kim (2014) | 183 S | Qual | High school: teacher / University: learning environment |
| S. Kim (2015) | 29 S | Qual | Lack of meaningful purpose / Lack of improvement and success experiences / Lack of self-determination |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Suggesting a framework | | | |
| S. L. Yeo & J. B. Lee (2015) | 225 S | Quan | Learner-related / Teacher-related / Teaching methods / Learning environment |
| Comparing learner groups | | | |
| Y.-A. Cho & H. Y. Chung (2014) | 105 S | Quan | LP: feel demotivated due to inappropriate learning materials and difficulties in understanding |
| M.-Y. Shin (2013) | 166 S | Quan | Progress group: sensitive to rewards |
| Changes in demotivation within a semester | | | |
| J. Hwang (2013) | 158 S | Quan | Dominant demotivators: self-denigration and lack of self-confidence |
| Changes in demotivation including college level | | | |
| T.-Y. Kim & Y.-J. Lee (2013) | 75 S | Qual | Dominant influence of peer pressure at the college level |

*Note.* S=students, Quan=quantitative, Qual=qualitative.

## IV. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN EFL LEARNING DEMOTIVATION ACROSS SCHOOL LEVELS

This study synthesized previous studies on EFL learning demotivation and identified the influence of age-related conditions. In this section, similarities between school levels will be analyzed first. Distinctive features found at specific school levels will also be discussed. Students in elementary to high school listed the difficulty of learning English, such as memorizing vocabulary and understanding complex grammar explanations, as their main demotivating factors (K. J. Kim, 2012, 2014b; J. Lee & C.-H. Lee, 2011). Studies indicated that individual learner differences (e.g., English proficiency, private education) can have an impact on the degree of student demotivation (Y.-A. Cho & H. Y. Chung, 2014; S. H. Choi, S. A. Kim, & Y. J. Park, 2013).

The role of teachers and teaching styles were also identified as demotivating factors even though previous studies used different terminology to investigate teachers' influence on learner demotivation (e.g., teaching styles, teaching methods, and teacher competence). Teachers' verbal expressions and teacher-centered teaching styles were identified as a source of demotivation. However, elementary students did not explicitly point out teachers as demotivating factors in interviews (J. Lee & C.-H. Lee, 2011). When university students reflected on their previous English learning experiences (T.-Y. Kim & Y.-J. Lee, 2013), the

research findings suggest that it is difficult to ignore the role of teachers in learners' EFL learning demotivation, particularly in the early stages of L2 learning. Young learners may not have explicitly mentioned teachers as a demotivating factor due to the influence of Korea's Confucian-based hierarchal culture (Ho, 1994). Aside from the commonalities across most school levels, there were some distinctive features found only in specific school groups. Elementary school students experienced demotivation from social expectations of English proficiency and private education (J. Lee & C.-H. Lee, 2011). Junior high school students reported that they experienced demotivation due to the difficulty of learning English (K. J. Kim, 2014b). The role of in-house assessment is also hard to ignore as one of the demotivators affecting learners at this school level. High proficiency learners' negative attitudes toward the teaching methods imply that these learners have begun evaluating their surroundings. Evaluation of students' surroundings can be a sign of cognitive development, so it may be important to explain the purpose of classroom tasks and exams to the learners more clearly.

Note that high school learners began worrying whether they understood the lessons (K. J. Kim, 2012); this result was also found in Japan (Hamada & Kito, 2008). More specifically, these students experienced demotivation when they could not understand the lessons. Lessons focused on college entrance tests and were cognitively demanding. In this situation, LP students could not reach a full understanding and therefore lost interest in learning English. This widened students' proficiency gap and affected students' English learning experiences from that point onwards. This implies that external conditions are not the sole source of demotivation. When we think about demotivated high school learners, it is easy to assume that the burden from a high-stakes test can demotivate learners. However, the underlying structure of demotivation is much more complicated. It is hard to ignore the role of high-stakes exams have on learners' demotivation, but these exams are not a direct source of demotivation. The impact of cognitive and affective aspects related to students' lesson and tests were much more substantial.

When the source of demotivation originates from learners' internal aspect, it is not easy to remotivate them. If the demotivator exists outside of the learner, the problem can be more easily rectified by amending such external conditions. For example, if learners do not want to study English due to CSAT, they can restart to learn English when they go to universities. Thus, external demotivator to the learners can sometimes be resolved easily, whereas internal aspects of learners do not seem so easily resolved. It is hard to remotivate learners as they have spent a lot of time perceiving themselves as unsuccessful learners. When learners lack of belief in themselves, it can be related to their lack of self-determination (S. Kim, 2015).

At the university level, investment value was identified as a distinctive feature. University students have to complete requirements for their major in addition to studying

English, so they must carefully evaluate the value English offers them. If they do not appreciate the importance of English learning, they are demotivated to study it. In other words, recognizing the importance of learning English and valuing improvements in one's English proficiency are crucial for preemptively protecting students against demotivation at the college level. Table 5 shows distinctive features found in the specific school level.

**TABLE 5**

**Dominant Demotivating Factors on Each School Level**

| Elementary school | Junior high school | High school | University |
|---|---|---|---|
| - Reduced motivation and interest<br>- Teaching methods focusing words and grammar<br>- Social expectations for high English proficiency | - Difficulty in learning language features<br>- Lack of motivation or interest | - Difficulty of English learning<br>- Lack of motivation and interest | - Lack of confidence<br>- Lack of meaningful purpose<br>- Lack of improvement and experiences of success<br>- Lack of self-determination |

When learners start to learn English again and experience progress, it can be a source of remotivation (S. K. Jung, 2011). LP learners particularly need more sensitive care to be remotivated. As LP learners experience demotivation earlier than HP learners, these students would have spent many years constructing their negative perception of English learning and of themselves. The lack of confidence has been constructed for a long time, so it is hard to change immediately. By having successful experiences, these students' perception of English learning and of themselves can be changed. It is therefore recommended that lessons should be designed carefully to change students' perception of English learning and to remotivate them. Providing authentic opportunities to use English in the classroom setting can be another strategy to remotivate learners, given that they are demotivated due to insufficient opportunities to use English in class (S. K. Jung, 2011).

## V. CONCLUSION

This study shows that Korean EFL learners experience different patterns of demotivation as they advance through school levels. Social expectations on their English level influence their early English learning experiences. When they fail to achieve the expected proficiency levels, students experience cognitive and affective discouragement. These negative perceptions of English learning and of the learner themselves have been constructed through repeated failure experience, and they become a stubborn obstacle for

remotivating the learners.

Even though this study investigated the general trends of EFL learning demotivation in Korea, the number of studies included in this study is limited to generalize the results. In addition, each study used different framework to analyze demotivation, so it may be hard to compare the results directly. Despite these limitations, it may be valuable for showing how previous learning experiences can affect EFL learning demotivation, so practitioners in this teaching context can more holistically understand their learners.

The suggestions for future studies are as follows. First, a longitudinal study will be ideal to track learners' changes through various school levels. Alternatively, reflective methods can be used with more diverse participants to identify distinctive features at different school levels and can help draw a bigger picture of demotivation. The results from this meta-analysis reveal that there are distinctive demotivators at each school level and learners differently react to the demotivators based on their previous learning experience. However, more empirical studies are needed to clarify the trajectory of demotivation. Furthermore, as reflections are limited by the participants' memory, tracking students' cognitive development can provide a more objective evaluation on their learning experience.

For the data collection method, a mixed-methods approach is required. Most studies follow the quantitative or qualitative approach, so the findings were limited in terms of depth and comprehensiveness. When we eclectically combine qualitative and quantitative approaches, we will be able to obtain a more systematic understanding of various phenomena related to EFL learning demotivation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). For example, in order to capture the dynamic voices from L2 education stakeholders, a series of interviews can be conducted with learners, instructors, or parents.

Furthermore, more cross-national studies of different learning and socio-cultural settings can help determine whether these findings in the EFL setting are applicable to different contexts. Building on such cross-national studies, a comprehensive framework can be constructed, and research on demotivation can be developed thereon. In the macro framework, it is suggested to include time-aspect in order to demonstrate EFL learning demotivation as a dynamic process. As suggested in the previous studies, demotivation is not static but fluctuates because of its interaction with other factors surrounding each L2 learner (T.-Y. Kim, 2012; T.-Y. Kim & H.-S. Seo, 2012). As these fluctuations depend on EFL stakeholders (i.e., learners, teachers, parents), stakeholders need to be aware of various demotivators in order to appropriately address them.

## REFERENCES

*Cho, Y.-A., & Chung, H. Y. (2014). Demotivation and remotivation affecting L2 English learning of Korean college students. *The 21st Century Association of English Language and Literature, 27*(2), 387-408.

*Choi, S. H., Kim, S. A., & Park, Y. J. (2013). An analysis of English learning demotivators for middle school students. *Studies in Foreign Language Education, 27*(1), 233-260.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 motivational self system. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 9-42). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2011). *Teaching and researching motivation* (2nd ed.). Harlow, UK: Longman.

Falout, J., Elwood, J., & Hood, M. (2009). Demotivation: Affective states and learning outcomes. *System, 37*, 403-417.

Gardner, R. C. (2001). Correlation, causation, motivation, and second language acquisition. *Canadian Psychology, 41*(1), 10-24.

Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1959). Motivational variables in second-language acquisition. *Canadian Journal of Psychology, 13*(4), 266-272.

Hamada, Y., & Kito, K. (2008). Demotivation in Japanese high schools. In K. Bradford Watts, T. Muller, & M. Swanson (Eds.), *JALT 2007 conference proceedings* (pp. 168-178). Tokyo: JALT.

Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (3rd ed.). Harlow, UK: Pearson.

Ho, D. Y. (1994). Cognitive socialization in Confucian heritage cultures. In P. M. Greenfield & R. R. Cocking (Eds.), *Cross-cultural roots of minority child development* (pp. 285-313). New York: Psychology Press.

*Hwang, J. (2013). A case study of motivation types and motivation changes in the college EFL classroom. *Journal of the Korea English Education Society, 12*(1), 97-121.

*Jung, S. K. (2011). Demotivating and remotivating factors in learning English: A case of low level college students. *English Teaching, 66*(2), 47-72.

Kikuchi, K. (2009). Listening to our learners' voices: What demotivates Japanese high school students? *Language Teaching Research*, *13*(4), 453-471.

Kikuchi, K. (2015). *Demotivation in second language acquisition: Insights from Japan.*

Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Kim, C.-E. (2015). Korean EFL learners' perceptions of learning motivation. *English Language and Literature Teaching, 21*(3), 45-64.

*Kim, K. J. (2009a). Demotivating factors in secondary English education. *English Teaching, 64*(4), 249-267.

*Kim, K. J. (2009b). A comparative analysis of demotivation in secondary English classes. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 15*(4), 75-94.

*Kim, K. J. (2012). A structural relationship between demotivational factors and English achievement for high school students. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 18*(4), 71-92.

Kim, K. J. (2014a). Studies on learners' cognitive and affective factors in EFL education. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 20*(1), 261-285.

*Kim, K. J. (2014b). A structural model of demotivational factors affecting English achievement for middle school students. *Journal of the Korea English Education Society, 13*(3), 41-59.

*Kim, S. (2015). Demotivation and L2 motivational self of Korean college students. *English Teaching, 70*(1), 29-55.

Kim, T.-Y. (2006). Motivation and attitudes toward foreign language learning as socio-politically mediated constructs: The case of Korean high school students. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 3*(2), 165-192.

Kim, T.-Y. (2010). Socio-political influences on EFL motivation and attitudes: Comparative surveys of Korean high school students. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 11*(2), 211-222.

*Kim, T.-Y. (2011). Korean elementary school students' English learning demotivation: A comparative survey study. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 12*, 1-11.

*Kim, T.-Y. (2012). The L2 motivational self system of Korean EFL students: Cross-grade survey analysis. *English Teaching, 67*(1), 29-56.

*Kim, T.-Y., & Lee, H.-S. (2014). Korean junior high and high school students' English learning motivation, demotivation, resilience, and English proficiency. *The Journal of Foreign Studies, 29*(3), 11-41.

*Kim, T.-Y., & Lee, Y.-J. (2013). Constructs of Korean graduate students' English learning motivation, demotivation, and remotivation through analyzing retrospective essays. *The Sociolinguistic Journal of Korea, 21*(1), 27-47.

*Kim. T.-Y., & Seo, H.-S. (2012). Elementary school students' foreign language learning demotivation: A mixed methods study of Korean EFL students. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 21*(1), 160- 171.

Kim, Y.-K., & Kim, T.-Y. (2013). English learning demotivation studies in the EFL contexts: State of the art. *Modern English Education, 14*(1), 71-102.

Lee, B.-C. (2009). Comparative study on kindergarten and elementary English curriculum. *Modern Studies in English Language & Literature, 53*(4), 89-115.

*Lee, J., & Lee, C.-H. (2011). Demotivating factors in learning English for elementary school students. *Primary English Education, 17*(1), 327-356.

*Lee, S. M., & Kim, S.-H. (2014). Factors affecting Korean college students` motivation and demotivation in learning English. *The Journal of Linguistic Science, 68*, 287-312.

*Ma, J. H., & Cho, Y. (2014). The analysis of demotivators and remotivators for Korean L2 English learners. *Studies in English Language & Literature, 40*(2), 137-161.

Park, E.-S. (2012). A case study of elementary students' English learning experience in private education. *Modern Studies in English Language & Literature, 56*(2), 87-105.

Sakai, H., & Kikuchi, K. (2009). An analysis of demotivators in the EFL classroom. *System, 37*(1), 57-69.

*Shin, M.-Y. (2013). Aspects of motivation and self- efficacy depending on academic performances in TOEIC. *Journal of the English Language and Literature, 55*(4), 303-330.

*Yeo, S. L., & Lee, J. B. (2015). Developing a scale through research on demotivation factors in college students` learning English. *Journal of the English Language and Literature, 59*(1), 211-231.

References marked with an asterisk (*) indicate studies included in the analysis.

**Examples in: English**
**Applicable Languages: English**
**Applicable Levels: Elementary /Secondary/ University levels**

Tae-Young Kim
Dept. of English Education
Chung-Ang University
Heukseok-ro 84 Dongjak-gu
Seoul 06974, South Korea
Tel: 02-820-5392
Email: tykim@cau.ac.kr

Youngmi Kim
Dept. of English Education
Chung-Ang University
Heukseok-ro 84 Dongjak-gu
Seoul 06974, South Korea
Tel: 02-820-5391
Email: ymkim209@gmail.com

Received in January 15th, 2016
Reviewed in February 26th, 2016
Revised version received in March 5th, 2016