

## Remotivation Strategies for Korean Male High School Students' English Learning\*

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Kim, Tae-Young and Ji-Young Kim. 2018. Remotivation strategies for Korean male high school students' English learning. *Korean Journal of English Language and Linguistics* 18-1, 50-77. This study examines the EFL learning remotivation components for male Korean high school students who showed improvement from a state of EFL learning demotivation and low in-house English test scores. The participants were four male second-year high school students who had been remotivated in EFL learning and enhanced low English test scores in junior high school. To explore the experiences specific to EFL learning remotivation, this study adopted a qualitative approach. The participants completed open-ended questionnaires and took part in a series of semistructured interviews, one for the preliminary study and two for the main study. The results revealed two remotivation components: instrumental motivation to obtain admission to a university and competitive motivation with peers. The components, motivated behavior and self-efficacy, enhanced English proficiency. Thus, when EFL learning motivated behavior related to remotivation components is strengthened, it increases English proficiency, enabling students to experience a high level of self-efficacy, which in turn helps maintain higher English proficiency. This qualitative research implies that EFL learners' perception of remotivation components is a key determinant of L2 proficiency when combined with their motivated behavior and self-efficacy.

**Keywords:** EFL learning remotivation strategies, changes in EFL learning motivation, high school students, qualitative inquiry

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## 1. Introduction

English as a foreign language (EFL) learning in South Korea (henceforth Korea) has played a crucial role in society for ensuring academic development and successful careers. The social contexts in Korea have led people to focus more on how to improve English proficiency (Park 2009). Moreover, in the early stages of EFL learning in junior high and high schools, English proficiency depends on students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivational components (Lee 2002).

Students experience motivational changes caused by internal components such as their emotions and personality traits, as well as external components such as teachers, peers, and coursework (Atkinson 2014, Dörnyei 2009a, Kikuchi 2015). L2 learning motivation fluctuates between the state of demotivation and remotivation due to various factors in the L2 learning context (Dörnyei 2001a, Song and Kim 2017). When experiencing L2 learning demotivation, students gradually lose their interest in L2 learning due to either internal and external reasons (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2013, Kikuchi 2015). However, they become interested again in L2 learning in state of remotivation (Falout 2012). In the EFL curricula of public education, motivation changes in students, especially junior high and high school students, should be recognized in order to implement effective strategies for enhancing their English proficiency. As students start junior high school, their motivation in EFL learning declines (Kikuchi 2013); this continues through high school (Kang 2014, Kim 2012a) because the competitive atmosphere makes them feel stressed about preparing for university admission. Nevertheless, students in Korea tend to think that EFL learning is necessary for getting a better grade and entering a high-ranking university (Park 2009). When high school students consider English useful for their future jobs, they could overcome their EFL learning demotivation and achieve a higher level of EFL learning motivation (Song and Kim 2017).

Against this backdrop, to raise proficiency and motivation in EFL learning, it

is necessary to observe changes in the dynamic relationship between EFL learning motivation and English proficiency by tracking the EFL learning experience of Korean high school students. Therefore, this study examined four high school students who showed improvements from low EFL learning motivation and low English test scores in junior high school. Interviews with EFL learners provide knowledge of their specific experiences, providing insight into their learning processes (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015).

This study focused on male students, taking account of challenges male students face in educational context. Previous studies (e.g., Kim and Kim 2011) have shown that male students in secondary school in Korea exhibit a lower level of EFL-learning motivation compared with their female counterparts. In addition, boys exhibited less adaptive attitudes in learning contexts due to 'disengagement-oriented strategies' (Bonneville-Roussy et al. 2017).

Understanding which components encourage EFL male learners to maintain EFL learning motivation and high English test scores is useful to improve low state of motivation and English test scores. The current paper is an exploratory investigation toward the remotivation components in EFL learning by adopting a series of qualitative interview methods. The following research questions were addressed:

- 1) What are the remotivation components in EFL learning perceived by Korean high school students?
- 2) What components induce Korean EFL high school students to activate remotivation, resulting in improved regular in-house English test scores?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Process of L2 Learning Motivation**

Given that motivation is a psychological construct, it is necessary to examine

relevant discussions from a sociopsychological perspective first. Motivation is derived from psychological contexts and social interactions amid individuals, inducing them to achieve their own goals (Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson, Loftus and Wagenaar 2009). In the field of education, motivation as a form of conscious and intentional human learning is a crucial component of academic performance and achievement (Brophy 2010, Ushioda 2013). Second language (L2) learning motivation exhibits fluctuation and complexity depending on each learner's specific learning experiences, and it substantially affects L2 learning behaviors (Atkinson 2014, Dörnyei 2009b, 2014, Kikuchi and Sakai 2009). Dörnyei (2001a, 2009b) indicated that motivational fluctuations occur in an interplay between internal and external components.

Likewise, Atkinson (2014) described a sociocognitive approach integrating mind, body, and the world into L2 learning development. This approach emphasizes the dynamic and multifaceted interactions between internal and external components in EFL learning. The internal processing of emotions and cognition is associated with learners, and external components are related to social influences and interactions. When combined, such components interact with the learning environment and affect L2 learning motivation (Ushioda 2009). When learning an L2, learners undergo feelings of frustration, anxiousness, fulfillment, and satisfaction, by either completing tasks or interacting with others (Ehrman and Dörnyei 1998). Learners receive supportive feedback from teachers and peers while using available materials, which positively affect their English learning motivation. Thus, diverse internal and contextual components including educational contexts, learner personality traits, and cognitive ability influence learning effectiveness and change the motivations for L2 learning (Dörnyei 2009a, MacWhinney 2001).

## **2.2 Components of EFL Learning Remotivation**

In EFL learning studies, some researchers have focused particularly on demotivation components, which are the negative forces that render learners reluctant to learn EFL (Falout, Elwood and Hood 2009, Kikuchi 2015, Kikuchi

and Sakai 2009, Trang and Baldauf 2007). Demotivation is defined as “various negative influences that cancel out existing motivation” (Dörnyei 2001b, p. 142). Previous studies have explored the demotivators in EFL learning in order to prevent decreasing motivation. Moreover, researchers have believed that such studies may facilitate finding ways to recover motivation (Falout 2012, Falout et al. 2009, Kikuchi 2015, Kikuchi and Sakai 2009, Trang and Baldauf 2007).

Moreover, researchers have gradually focused on not only demotivation but also remotivation. Falout defined remotivation as “a process of recovering motivation after losing it” (2012, p. 3). From this perspective, researchers have sought remotivational strategies for motivating learners to study an L2 (Carpenter, Falout, Fukuda, Trovela and Murphy 2009, Dörnyei 2001a, Falout 2012, Hamada 2014, Jung 2011).

As students start junior high school, their motivation in EFL learning tends to decline (Kikuchi 2013, Kim and Lee 2013, Song and Kim 2017); this trend continues through high school (Kang 2014, Kim 2012a) because the competitive atmosphere makes them feel stressed from preparing for university entrance. Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) investigated high school experiences of 112 university students. They identified five primary external demotivation factors: teachers' competence and teaching style, course books, school facilities, test scores, and communicative methods.

Hamada (2014) examined 336 Japanese high school students and identified five main factors that remotivate junior high and high school students who are demotivated to learn EFL in a competitive educational atmosphere: teacher's sensitivity, students' positive feelings, English usage, traditional teaching style, and goal orientation. Ma and Cho (2014) investigated demotivating and remotivating factors in Korean EFL contexts through a qualitative method. They collected retrospective essays on EFL learning from Korean university students. Their findings suggested that the enhanced value of learning EFL as an internal factor and the need to raise English test scores as an external factor helped students to be remotivated to learn English. Kim and Kim (2017) analyzed retrospective data on high school demotivators and remotivators from

130 university students using questionnaires. They revealed that while the dominant demotivating factor was 'difficulty of learning English', which had a negative effect on English test scores, the students were remotivated by the 'importance of English scores for university admission'

Most EFL learning demotivation and remotivation studies have used Likert-scale or open-ended questions to analyze the factors that affect demotivation and remotivation. Motivation is a psychological and cognitive component which fluctuates. In order to study motivational change, qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews addressing participants' learning experiences would be appropriate (Dörnyei 2001b, Han and Ha 2006, Kim 2010b, 2012b). Based on previous studies, this study aims to investigate the experience of EFL learning remotivation of male students through interview analysis.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were four male second-year high school students from Gyeonggi-do, Korea (in the vicinity of Seoul). The researchers recruited the participants demonstrating higher English test scores in high school than in junior high school. All four students not only attended the same junior high and high schools but also lived in the same neighborhood. The high school they attended focused on preparing students for college entrance. For the purpose, its students generally aimed to acquire academic skills for university entrance. They came from households where both parents worked, and each had a sibling. They had been attending a private institute, or *hagwon*, for five years from junior high school to the present. This study adopted homogeneous samples of individuals based on purposeful sampling procedures, in which participants share specific experiences (Creswell 2013). Because it is

necessary to examine data from samples that have a similar background within a narrow band in order to provide a meaningful analysis of a particular case (Duff 2008), only the participants sharing a similar academic background and socioeconomic status were selected.

In the context of junior high and high school curricula, the EFL classes that the participants attended were based mostly on textbooks. In both junior high and high schools, they took an in-house test twice every semester. The in-house English test, administered by relative evaluation, was mainly an evaluation of English grammar and reading comprehension. Other than regular tests, they were assigned group projects and individual English tasks for assessing their English proficiency in both junior high and high schools.

### **3.2. Instruments**

Before the main study, a preliminary interview was conducted to explore the participants' lifelong EFL learning (see Table 1). In the first part of the preliminary interview, the participants drew a graph of their EFL motivational changes and wrote the reasons for high and low motivation in the graph (see Figure 1 in the result section). In the second part of the preliminary interview, they provided their English in-house test scores and explained how they prepared for English exams throughout junior high and high schools.

Given the complexities of the subject, this research conducted qualitative research analysis through two preliminary interview sessions. One session involved an interview focusing on EFL learning motivation, and the other session entailed an interview on English exams. After the preliminary interviews, the main study followed, in which two sessions of semi-structured interviews were conducted (see Appendix for the sample interview questions). The main interview questions were developed by referring to Falout (2012), Kim (2006), Lamb (2007), and Ushioda (2001) while taking the preliminary interview into consideration. The first session of the main interview involved investigating the EFL learning atmosphere at school (eight questions) and the participants' EFL learning motivation (nine questions). The participants were

asked to answer the questions twice, once respectively for their junior high and high school experiences. The questions regarding EFL learning motivation asked about their experiences influencing their EFL learning motivation. The second session of the main interview focused on their in-house English test, investigating the components that affected English test scores (nine questions) and how the participants prepared for English tests (17 questions). The two sessions, making up the main portion of the study, explored participants' specific experiences of EFL learning motivation and their in-house English test scores.

### 3.3. Data Collection

Data collection was comprised of four steps. Table 1 presents each step including the methods, elapsed questionnaire and interview times, study periods, and the contents of collected data.

**Table 1. Data Collection Process**

|  |                   |           |   |
|--|-------------------|-----------|---|
| 1. Introduction to the purpose and procedures of the study, with consent forms collected |                   |           |   |
| 2. Preliminary study   |                   |           |   |
| Method   | Time<br>(minutes) | Period    | Content                                     |
| Open-ended questions   | –                 | May 2-5   | Motivational changes and EFL<br>exam scores |
| Follow-up interviews   | 7-13              | May 6-8   |   |
| 3. Main interview question development   |                   |           |   |
| 4. Main study  |                   |           |   |
| Method   | Time<br>(minutes) | Period    | Content                                     |
| Semistructured interviews  | 42-47             | May 9-15  | EFL learning motivation                     |
| Semistructured interviews  | 49-74             | May 16-22 | EFL exam scores                             |

Before collecting data, the first author met with the participants to explain the purpose and procedures of this study, as well as to distribute a consent form regarding the use of their in-house scores and interviews for this study, which they signed. The researchers interviewed the four participants three times to achieve data saturation (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). This study



started by a preliminary interview for investigating their learning background and their motivational changes represented by graphs. The remaining main study sessions consisted of semistructured interviews for exploring their perspectives on the components that affected their EFL learning motivation and English in-house test scores.

As aforementioned, the data collected in the preliminary interview were used to review and modify the main interview questions before the preliminary interviews, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of participants' EFL learning experience by incorporating their background information. All the interviews were conducted at one of the researcher's office. The preliminary interviews took 7 to 13 minutes, the first main interviews lasted 42 to 47 minutes, and the second main interviews were 49 to 74 minutes long. All the interviews were conducted in Korean, the first language of both the researchers and the participants, and the data were translated into English to be presented in this study.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

After collecting the data, the interview recordings were first transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data totaled 149 pages, comprising 15 pages for the preliminary interview, 57 pages for the first main interviews, and 77 pages for the second main interviews. After transcribing the recorded data, the researchers highlighted the major sentences and expressions to find major themes (coding). Four themes were extracted from the transcribed data (categorization). The themes were interpreted according to their relationship to concepts from previous research. Finally, the verbatim excerpts were organized based on the four themes. Authors translated the excerpts originally written in Korean, their first language into English. Then, a doctoral student majoring in English education was asked to back-translate the English excerpts into Korean ones in order to guarantee the accuracy of data translation. Intersubjective consensus enhances the reliability of a study (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). To ensure the reliability of this study, the first author used

repeated readings of coding and categorization lists with another coder enrolled in a doctoral program at the authors' institution. The result of intercoder percentage of agreement of coding reached 100 percent. In addition, the second author reviewed coding and categorization and interpreted the data critically. Such analytical cross-validation can ensure the validity of a study (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). Lastly, the researchers showed the four organized themes and the related interview data to the participants and checked the accuracy of the contents. Creswell (2009) demonstrated that the credibility of a study is acquired by such member checking.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Preliminary Interview Results: Exploring EFL Learning Demotivation and English In-house Test Scores

Before the interview for exploring the components that enhance EFL learning motivation in the main study, the participants were asked to draw their own EFL learning motivational changes and were then interviewed to solicit their responses to the related questions. The data were used to understand how the participants recovered their EFL learning motivation. Figure 1 presents graphs of their motivational changes from elementary to high school, collected using the form originally used by Carpenter et al. (2009). The left column +3 to -3 referred to the EFL learning motivational level of the participants. They were asked to recall their EFL learning experience and draw the level of their motivational change from +3 to -3.

As shown in Figure 1 of EFL learning motivational changes, students A and B showed higher motivation than students C and D in elementary school. However, students A and B experienced sharp decreases in their motivation compared to students C and D in junior high school. Students A and B experienced more fluctuations in their motivations than students C and D.

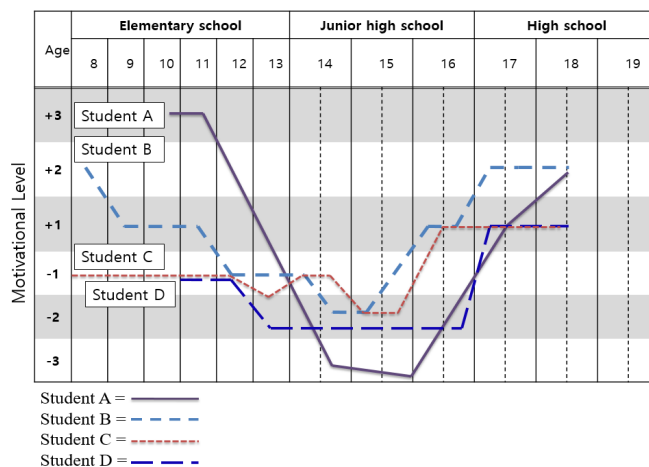


Figure 1. Participants' Changes in EFL Learning Motivation

In the interview about the reasons for their EFL learning demotivation, the four students found that EFL learning in junior high school is more difficult than that in elementary school. In addition, because they heavily relied on hagwons, they believed that they did not need to study English in class or for themselves. They mainly demonstrated EFL learning demotivation in junior high school because they did not know why they were studying English, and nobody explained it to them. In summary, the participants were passive in EFL learning for three main reasons: EFL learning difficulty, high reliance on a hagwons, and a lack of EFL learning objectives.

Table 2. English Exam Scores from Junior High to High School

|     | Junior High School |         |             |         |            |         | High School |         |             |         |
|-----|--------------------|---------|-------------|---------|------------|---------|-------------|---------|-------------|---------|
|     | First year         |         | Second year |         | Third year |         | First year  |         | Second year |         |
|     | 1st sem*           | 2nd sem | 1st sem     | 2nd sem | 1st sem    | 2nd sem | 1st sem     | 2nd sem | 1st sem     | 2nd sem |
| A** | 34                 | 32      | 31          | 34      | 29         | 79      | 82          | 81      | 88          | —       |
| B   | 65                 | 40      | 40          | 30      | 60         | 75      | 80          | 92      | 83          | —       |
| C   | 30                 | 30      | 20          | 25      | 30         | 35      | 50          | 35      | 45          | —       |
| D   | 55                 | 55      | 53          | 57      | 60         | 70      | 74          | 76      | 80          | —       |

Note. \* sem refers to semester; \*\* A, B, C, and D refer to the participants

In the next session of the preliminary interview, the participants were asked to write down their English test scores from junior high to the present. Table 2 lists their nine English midterm and final test scores. The four students showed low test scores by the second year of junior high school, but their scores rose from the third year. The scores of all participants were considerably higher in high school than in junior high school.

## 4.2. Remotivation Components in EFL Learning

### 4.2.1. Instrumental motivation: Setting a goal for EFL learning

The preliminary interview revealed that the participants were demotivated in EFL learning during junior high school, on the basis of their reported EFL motivation scores being below 0 in their graphs. One of the reasons the participants cited for their EFL demotivation was the lack of EFL learning objectives. However, in advancing toward high school, their desire to enter a university became stronger than before. Hence, they realized that their English test scores in high school were related to university admission and were therefore important. Excerpt 1 from the interview with student C depicts this realization:

<Excerpt 1>

Research (R): Why do you think English scores in high school are more important?

Student C (SC): High school is closely related to university [admission], but junior high school is not. I think I need to do well in high school and try to study. I used to play a lot [in junior high school].

Student C underscored the importance of EFL learning in high school for university admission. With the objective of entering a university, the students began to study harder in high school because their scores had become consequential. Student A experienced an increase in English test scores and realized that he could then go to college; that is, he could ponder an optimistic

future. In addition, student A had the objective of becoming a police officer, which strengthened his EFL learning motivation. This is presented in excerpt 2:

<Excerpt 2>

R: Why do you think you need to study English hard in high school?

S (A): I had a dream of becoming a police officer, which made me determined to study English.

R: How are the two [becoming a police officer and studying English] related?

S (A): Becoming a policeman is related to liberal arts. So, I need to focus more on the subjects of Korean and English.

R: Didn't you have any dreams in junior high school?

S (A): I didn't because my scores were very low.

Student A had realized that L2 learning is related to achieving his dream of becoming a police officer. As college admission approached, his dream job became more specific. The formation of his EFL learning objectives offset the lack of EFL learning objectives, thus enhancing EFL learning motivation from a state of demotivation in junior high school. This meant that the students now had a reason for EFL learning, resulting in a shift from demotivation to motivation in EFL learning.

#### 4.2.2. Competitive motivation: A peer's role as a competitor

All four participants recognized their peer's role as a competitor to motivate them. Students A and B explained how their peers affected their EFL learning by recalling the period of EFL learning motivation recovery. Student A's English test score stimulated student B's EFL learning:

<Excerpt 3>

S (B): He [student A] started studying English hard first and got a better score. I saw that and thought I can do it too. I could start to study English hard as well. At some point, my score was similar to his. That's when I wanted to beat him and I did. Then, I did not want him to beat me.

In the third year of junior high school, when student A took a private lesson, he experienced a rise in his English test scores and this affected student B. He was motivated in EFL learning and finally beat his competitor, student A. Student A experienced similar changes. Excerpt 4 shows his mindset at that time:

<Excerpt 4>

S (A): On the first high school test, I did well on the English exam. I was ranked 18th in my school. Then, he (student B) studied English very hard and beat me. I think that was when he became my rival.

<Excerpt 5>

S (A): He (student B) and I were at the same [low L2] level, but he and I raised our exam scores almost at the same time. So, I thought of him as my rival.

R: What are the criteria for deciding whether somebody is your rival?

S (A): The level, such as a score or grade, has to be similar to mine, and he should be physically near me.

Their peers' in-house English test scores served as the catalyst for their EFL learning. When student B learned about the improved score of student A, who originally had a low score similar to himself, this gave him the confidence that he could also get a higher English test score. Once Student B got a higher test score than that of student A, this became a cycle. Excerpt 3 from the interview with student B and excerpts 4 and 5 from the interview with student A indicate why they saw each other as competitors, not as collaborators.

Students C and D also considered peers who had an EFL level similar to theirs to be competitors.

<Excerpt 6>

R: Do you care about other friends' scores?

S (C): All my friends are competitors. Nowadays, one of my friends, who had not known the basics of English like me, got a good English score. I am at the bottom, but he was at the top

and it felt strange.

R: Why did it feel strange?

S (C): We spent free time together, but his score went up like that. I thought he had studied just about the same as me, but his score was better.

<Excerpt 7>

R: What do you think about someone with a similar [EFL] level to yours?

S (D): They should not do better than me.

R: Why?

S (D): Because they are my competitors. They are my friends and my competitors at the same time though.

As shown in the interview excerpts for students A, B, C, and D, the students considered their peer with a similar English levels to be competitors. The level of EFL learning motivation of students A and B gradually increased as they tried to beat each other.

### **4.3. Remotivating Components Enhancing English Proficiency**

#### **4.3.1. The intensity of motivated behavior in EFL learning: Unflagging persistence to overcome learning difficulty**

The difference between students A and B (who showed the largest increase in their English proficiency in high school from junior high school) and students C and D is the intensity of motivated behavior. Although all four participants' EFL learning motivation in high school was increased compared to that in junior high school, how the motivation appeared in practice was different. The EFL motivation of students A and B was closely connected to their motivated behavior, even when they found learning English to be difficult. Student B described his motivated behavior in EFL learning, as shown in excerpt 8:

<Excerpt 8>

S (B): The range of what the exam covers in high school is much more comprehensive than that in junior high school.

R: Does the extended scope of material mean your score would fall?

S (B): Yes, but I studied in high school. I didn't study in junior high school. That's the difference. If I had studied English like now, I must have gotten better scores anyway.

Student B had the willpower to study. This willpower became the key to achieving higher proficiency in high school. Student A pointed to his EFL learning motivation, especially instrumental motivation, as leading to motivated behavior.

<Excerpt 9>

S (A): Even when I don't want [to study English], I keep writing English words [on a sheet of paper to memorize them.]

R: Oh. Your mind does one thing and your body does another?

S (A): I don't want to do it, but for some reason, I do it.

R: If you don't want to, you just don't do it.

S (A): I don't know. I don't have a choice. If I don't do it [i.e., study English], I will be doomed.

R: Why do you think that way?

S (A): Maybe not that bad. Well, it is important to get into a university.

Student A continued to learn English despite his dislike for English learning, because he thought that English test scores in high school were directly related to university admission. The EFL learning practices of students A and B in high school differed greatly from those in junior high school. They did not care about their own EFL learning in junior high school, but their EFL motivation recovered in high school because of the emergence of instrumental motivation and competitive motivation. The motivational recovery affected their behavior toward EFL learning. In contrast to the case of students A and B, the motivated behavior of students C and D, stemming from their weaker EFL learning motivation (Figure 1), was less intense. Excerpt 10 from the



interview with student C and excerpt 11 from the interview with student D exemplify their weak motivated behavior in EFL learning:

<Excerpt 10>

S (C): Other classmates go through their assignments quickly, while I get stuck. I suppose I feel overwhelmed by the pressure because it seems to take ages. So, I just give up.

<Excerpt 11>

R: Is there anything in particular that stimulates you?

S (D): Not really...stimulation? Maybe the idea that I can't get into a university.

R: How does that idea make you feel?

S (D): I think I should study.

R: So, do you study?

S (D): Yes, but it does not last long. I don't really get stimulated.

Student C also had instrumental motivation but lacked persistence when acting on his motivation. Likewise, Student D could not connect his motivation emerging during class and the desire to enter a university to motivated behavior.

In summary, the participants enhanced their EFL learning motivation in high school compared with that in junior high school. However, the intensity of their motivated behavior in EFL learning differed, according to their persistence in mitigating difficulty in EFL learning. This means that enhanced EFL learning motivation on its own does not lead to higher English test scores. When motivated behavior in EFL learning is involved, in-house English test scores improves significantly.

#### 4.3.2. Self-efficacy: Belief in the ability to attain higher English test scores

Demonstrating higher in-house English test scores in high school, students A and B developed self-efficacy; that is, they cultivated the belief that they could earn a better score on the following English exam. They both experienced a sense of achievement in the third year of junior high school that

enabled them to recognize the intrinsic pleasure of EFL learning and gave them the confidence to perform well on the next test. Excerpt 12 from the interview with student B demonstrates this belief:

<Excerpt 12>

S (B): As I had experienced going from a much lower score to a higher score, I realized that I could do it, which made me want to learn English as well as really want to continue getting good scores.

R: Was the experience of getting a higher score the trigger for you to change your mind?

S (B): Absolutely. Once I experienced the quantum leap in score, I realized I could do it.

Student B showed stronger self-confidence in EFL learning and the belief that he would earn better scores on the next exam. The experience gave him the desire to maintain his higher English test score. Even when EFL learning was tiring and stressful, he found it bearable to maintain his high English test score.

<Excerpt 13>

R: What did you think when you went from a lower score to a higher score?

S (A): I was happy and I wanted to raise the score more.

R: Even when you faced difficulties, did you think that way?

S (A): It was really hard, but I thought I should study English.

R: To get a good score?

S (A): Yes. When I got a good score, it made me happy. I was really happy, because I had been poor at English, but I tried and got a good score.

In summary, the first achievement was the trigger for self-efficacy, which prompted the participants to maintain their higher English test scores despite difficulty in EFL learning. Attaining higher English proficiency enabled students A and B to feel a sense of achievement and induced self-confidence and intrinsic pleasure from learning. The self-efficacy that resulted from the process affected their desire to maintain higher English test scores.

## 5. Discussion

The participants were demotivated in EFL learning during junior high school because of a lack of EFL learning objectives and difficulty in EFL learning. In this stage, they exhibited low English test scores. Kim's (2011) study on Korean educational contexts referred to an overreliance on private education at hagwons from early in elementary schools and the sense of pressure under compulsory EFL learning as demotivation components. In the socio-educational atmosphere of Korea, students are compelled to maintain high English proficiency to get into a university (Park 2009, Seth 2002). As presented in this study, as the participants' university admission approaches, they reinforce this specific goal and display substantial effort. This pressure acts as instrumental motivation and is transformed into a remotivation component in high school. Song and Kim (2017) revealed that both the ought-to L2 self and the ideal L2 self enhanced EFL learning motivation of high school students having experienced EFL demotivation during their junior high school years. They discovered that the ought-to L2 self and the ideal L2 self are related to university entrance. In relation to ought-to L2 self, students desire not to fail in College Scholastic Ability Test, leading to higher motivation. At the same time, recognition that EFL learning is useful for their future careers is related to the ideal L2 self.

In the current study, the participants regarded their peers as competitors, a phenomenon related to competitive motivation (Kim 2010a). In a classroom, a status hierarchy exists among students that compels some of them to strive for higher standing. Such a hierarchy causes both higher- and lower-standing students to experience dynamic feelings such as shame, frustration, or confidence. In particular, students try to outperform each other to avoid situations in which they feel shame or lose face (Ehrman and Dörnyei 1998). Kim (2010) introduced the concept of competitive motivation found in the Korean socio-educational context, in which students endeavor to be superior to their peers to ensure a higher ranking. This form of motivation stems from

excessive competition for admission into exclusive high-ranking universities. High school learners set a specific goal to achieve their dreams and enter their desired university through competition.

The remotivation components of EFL learning engendered varied levels of intensity of motivated behavior in the students. Kim (2012a) stated that a specific goal, motive, and sense of participation combine to function as L2 learning motivation. Caretakers' advice on the meaning of learning allows students to develop their motives into learning motivation. In other words, when students internalize the reasons for studying English, their L2 learning motivation and motivated behavior become enhanced, enabling them to achieve a high level of L2 proficiency. In this regard, the result of the current study was not different from Kim's (2012a) previous study. Depending on the degree of internalization of the reasons for learning EFL, students' exhibited different motivated behaviors.

Whether they displayed learning behavior, despite the difficulties they faced, affected their English proficiency. Once they attained higher proficiency, they felt self-efficacy in EFL learning, which enabled them to maintain their increased level of proficiency. As Schunk and Pajares (2002) stated, self-efficacy has been proven to play a critical role in students' learning achievement, and in the same vein, Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2007) and Song and Kim (2017) emphasized the importance of self-efficacy in EFL learning to face the inevitable challenges and make a steady recovery in EFL learning motivation.

As members of a society and culture, students continually interact with various external components, whether consciously or unconsciously. Through such interaction with the learners' surroundings, they can improve their learning ability. Each student interacts with external components at different levels, thus experiencing different effects and consequences in L2 learning (Sampson 2016). Dynamic relationships with external components allow students to develop a motivational mindset and offer them the opportunity to engage in EFL learning on their own accord (Dörnyei and Chan 2013). As presented in the current study, external remotivation components such as peers

or caretakers trigger EFL learning behavior and drive potential competence to improve English proficiency for students with low proficiency and demotivation in EFL learning.

Based on the findings of this study, EFL teachers should consider how to make learners with demotivation and low proficiency in EFL learning feel self-efficacy in class and connect their future goals with EFL learning. A possible practical application was suggested by Song and Kim (2017); “motivational languaging activities” need to be used in class in order to increase EFL learning motivation. Participating in these activities, learners can voluntarily interact with teachers and peers and discuss the meaningfulness of EFL learning and eventually enhance their level of EFL learning motivation.

## **6. Conclusions**

This paper explored how Korean high school students recovered their EFL learning motivation and achieved higher English test scores from a state of demotivation. EFL learning remotivation components play a critical role in driving students to attain higher proficiency, thereby strengthening the EFL learning motivation related to their EFL learning behavior. The results of this study are summarized as follows.

The components of the students' EFL learning remotivation were mainly external, such as peers and goals in socio-educational contexts. As a characteristic of the educational environment in Korea, competitiveness with peers played a role in strengthening the students' EFL learning motivation to get into an exclusive high-ranking universities. The greater the desire the students had to achieve their goals, especially regarding university admissions, the stronger the intensity of EFL learning effort became, thereby resulting in motivated behavior. When EFL learning motivated behavior was strengthened, it influenced English proficiency positively, enabling the students to achieve self-efficacy, which in turn helped maintain higher English proficiency.

The limitations of this study are a small number of participants and the lack

of other data sources such as observation or diary to analyze motivational changes in progress because this study is based on students' past recollection of L2 learning. Furthermore, future research should examine the dynamic relationships between the EFL learning motivation process of remotivation and the components affecting EFL learning in diverse educational contexts. The findings of such a study would complement the limitations of this research. Kim and Kim (2011) argued that gender differences exist in L2 learning style and motivation. However, this study focuses only on the interviews of male students in order to explore the motivational changes among male students in a thorough manner. A future study examining females might result in different findings.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Level: Secondary

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## Appendix

### 1. Main Interview: First Session

#### 1.1 EFL Learning Atmosphere

- 1) Could you explain in detail the proceedings of your English class? What assignments do you get?
- 2) Could you describe in detail the atmosphere of your English class?
- 3) How is your relationship with English teachers?
- 4) Do you participate actively in your English class?
- 5) Are you satisfied with your English class? Why or why not?

#### 1.2 EFL Learning Motivation

- 1) Was there a specific moment when you thought you should work hard on your English? Could you tell me about the experience and why you felt that way?
- 2) What is the hardest part of studying English?
- 3) What efforts have you made to overcome the difficulties?
- 4) Do you think you need to study English? If so, why?
- 5) What kind of ideal images of yourself do you wish for as you study English?

### 2. Main Interview: Second Session

#### 2.1 Assessment of EFL Achievement

- 1) What is the format of your English exams? (e.g., essay-type, multiple choice)
- 2) Could you explain how you prepare for your exam? (e.g., duration and method)?
- 3) Are you satisfied with your English score in high school? Why?
- 4) Do you share your score with your friends? What do you think when you hear about other friends' scores?
- 5) What are the difficulties in preparing for an English exam?

#### 2.2 How to Improve Your English Proficiency

- 1) What do you do to improve your English vocabulary (or grammar) knowledge?
- 2) What do you do to improve your reading (or listening) comprehension?
- 3) What do you do to improve your English writing (or speaking) skills?
- 4) When you cannot understand something while studying English, how do you deal with it?
- 5) How confident are you in studying English? How much fear do you have?
- 6) What angers or annoys you while studying English? How do you deal with these emotions?
- 7) Does someone encourage you to study English well? If so, please tell me who and what kind of encouragement you get.
- 8) What is the most significant change in English study since coming to high school from junior high school?