

Demotivating and Remotivating Factors Affecting Korean Language Learners in Thailand

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Abstract

This study examined the demotivation and remotivation of Thai university students majoring in Korean as a foreign language. While motivation in English learning has been extensively researched, studies on languages other than English (LOTes) remain limited. To address this gap, a mixed-methods approach was applied to data from 204 Korean majors in Thailand. The findings indicated that learners were most strongly demotivated by assessment-related anxiety, loss of confidence, and the heavy academic burden of studying Korean, alongside a gradual decline in cultural interest. In contrast, remotivation was fostered by recognizing the instrumental value of Korean for future goals and by renewed engagement with Korean culture, often supported by teachers and peers. These results highlighted the shifting interplay of psychological, academic, and cultural factors in sustaining motivation. The study extends research on LOTes and offers practical implications for fostering supportive and goal-oriented learning environments.

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1 Introduction

Motivation is a crucial factor that enables successful second or foreign language learning (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1998; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). A high level of motivation helps learners overcome limitations in learning conditions and allows them to succeed despite challenges encountered during the learning process (Dörnyei, 2001). However, initial motivation does not guarantee sustained engagement with the target language. Therefore, it is essential to examine not only what initially motivates learners, but also what causes demotivation and how motivation can be regained. Understanding these dynamics offers a more complete view of the long-term motivational process in language learning.

Over the past decades, many researchers have attempted to identify the factors that lead to demotivation in foreign language learners (Kikuchi, 2009; Kim & Seo, 2012; Trang & Baldauf, 2007) and to explore strategies for overcoming demotivation (Falout, 2012; Trang & Baldauf, 2007). These studies highlighted several key demotivating factors and a variety of strategies used to reengage learners, primarily in the context of English as a second or foreign language.

However, in many countries, English is treated as a compulsory subject in the education system,

whereas languages other than English (LOTEs) are typically studied as second or elective languages based on personal interest or institutional offerings. Given this context, the experiences of demotivation and remotivation when learning LOTEs may differ from those observed in English language learning. Therefore, it is meaningful to examine what factors reduce motivation among LOTE learners and how they are able to recover their motivation within these distinct learning contexts.

The present study investigated the factors that demotivated and remotivated university students majoring in Korean in Thailand. The rise of the Korean Wave and extensive support from the South Korean government have led to the increasing popularity of Korean as a foreign language throughout Southeast Asia, with a particularly notable expansion in Thailand. Currently, 18 universities in Thailand offer Korean as a major, and over 49,000 students are learning Korean at the secondary education level. Given this rapid growth, it is important to go beyond increasing learner numbers and to pay closer attention to changes in learners' attitudes and motivation.

Although some researchers have examined motivational factors among Korean learners in Thailand (Yang & Chanyoo, 2022), little is known about what causes demotivation among this group and how such learners regain their motivation. To address this gap, the current study adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the demotivating and remotivating factors affecting Korean majors in Thai higher education.

Accordingly, the following research questions were established:

Research Question 1: What are the main factors that contribute to the demotivation of Korean language majors in Thailand?

Research Question 2: What factors facilitate the remotivation of Korean language majors in Thailand after experiencing demotivation?

2 Literature review

2.1 Demotivation

Demotivation is a widely discussed concept in second and foreign language learning research. One of the earliest and most influential attempts to define demotivation was made by Dörnyei (1998), who identified major demotivating factors through qualitative interviews with 50 Hungarian students studying English or German. Based on this study, he outlined nine primary demotivating factors: (1) the teacher, (2) inadequate school facilities, (3) reduced self-confidence, (4) negative attitudes toward the L2, (5) the compulsory nature of L2 learning, (6) the interference of another foreign language, (7) negative attitudes toward the L2 community, (8) attitudes of group members, and (9) the coursebook. This foundational framework informed numerous subsequent studies and helped establish the distinction between external and internal sources of demotivation.

In the EFL context, researchers in various countries have expanded on Dörnyei's framework. Studies conducted in Japan (Kikuchi, 2009; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009), Vietnam (Trang & Baldauf, 2007), China (Wang & Guan, 2020), South Korea (Kim & Seo, 2012; Song & Kim, 2017), and Turkey (Akay, 2017) have identified a range of demotivating factors. Many of these studies have confirmed the strong influence of external elements such as teaching methods, classroom materials, curriculum content, and teacher behavior. Several studies have pointed to teacher-related factors as central causes of demotivation. For instance, Hasegawa (2004) found that teacher behavior was a major source of demotivation among Japanese high school students. Similarly, Trang and Baldauf (2007) reported that Vietnamese learners most frequently cited teaching methods as a demotivating factor, and Song and Kim (2017) also highlighted instructors' approaches as a key contributor to motivational decline among Korean high school students. In addition to these teacher-related influences, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) emphasized the impact of course content, materials, and exam

pressure.

In addition to external influences, many studies have drawn attention to internal demotivating factors. Sahragard and Alimorad (2013) identified a lack of interest and low self-confidence as major causes of demotivation among Iranian learners. Falout and Maruyama (2004) noted that learners with lower language proficiency were particularly prone to internal forms of demotivation, such as reduced self-efficacy or a sense of hopelessness.

Outside the EFL context, research into demotivation in LOTEs, including Korean, has revealed a range of context-specific factors. In the Korean as a Foreign Language (KFL) context, learners have often attributed their demotivation to challenges such as the dissimilarity between Korean and their native language, the relatively low perceived importance of Korean, and negative attitudes toward the language or its culture (Lee, 2023; Song, 2019). Likewise, Hamada and Grafström (2014), examining Japanese learners in Australia, identified limited exposure to authentic language and the low perceived utility of Japanese as major demotivating factors. Similarly, Liu et al. (2020) found that Chinese language learners were discouraged by their slow progress and restricted opportunities for cultural engagement.

Overall, the literature shows that demotivation results from a complex interplay of external and internal factors, shaped by the learners' linguistic, cultural, and educational context. While EFL studies have traditionally emphasized institutional and instructional factors, LOTE contexts, especially KFL, require attention to learner-specific, cultural, and affective variables. In Thailand, where Korean is studied as a foreign language primarily by university majors, understanding these factors is essential for supporting learner engagement and persistence.

2.2 Remotivation

While the study of demotivation helps identify the obstacles that hinder language learning, it is equally important to examine how learners recover their motivation after encountering such setbacks. Motivation is a dynamic and fluctuating process; learners often alternate between periods of high engagement and phases of low motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). In this context, the concept of remotivation becomes central, as it refers to the process through which learners regain their desire and willingness to continue learning after a period of decline.

Ushioda (1998, 2001) was among the first scholars to define remotivation as a process of recovering motivation, often involving metacognitive awareness and motivational thinking. She identified several key strategies employed by learners to remotivate themselves, including goal-setting, reflecting on the purpose of language learning, seeking temporary relief from the learning process, and discussing motivational problems with peers or teachers. These strategies emphasize the role of learners' self-regulation in overcoming demotivation.

Building on this, Falout (2012) categorized remotivation strategies into internal and external domains. Internal strategies include self-reflection, reevaluating goals, and developing personal responsibility for learning. External strategies involve support from teachers and peers, changes in learning materials, or exposure to stimulating content. Falout's research demonstrated that learners who actively engage in remotivation strategies are more likely to regain confidence and maintain long-term engagement with the target language.

In the EFL context, Trang and Baldauf (2007) explored the remotivation experiences of Vietnamese university students and found that the most frequently cited remotivating factor was the learners' awareness of the importance of English for future academic or professional success. Similarly, Kim and Kim (2017) revealed that Korean high school students overcame demotivation through a combination of extrinsic motivators (e.g., importance of grades, watching media content in English) and intrinsic changes (e.g., changing study habits, building self-efficacy).

Studies in the KFL context have also highlighted unique remotivating factors. For instance, Oh (2020) and Lee (2023) noted that learners' awareness of the instrumental value of Korean in their

careers, their confidence in navigating Korean society, and their renewed interest in Korean culture often helped them return to learning with increased determination. Furthermore, Li and Han (2024) emphasized the importance of the learners' ideal L2 self as a significant motivator for persisting in their studies.

In sum, the literature on remotivation highlights that both internal and external factors play essential roles in helping learners recover from motivational decline. These include cognitive strategies such as goal reorientation, affective factors like renewed interest in cultural content, and social influences such as encouragement from teachers or peers. For learners of Korean in the Thai context—who often begin their studies due to cultural interest—it is important to understand how these learners reignite their motivation and how educational institutions can support that process.

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study specifically targeted university students majoring in Korean, as they are required to engage in continuous Korean language study throughout their undergraduate program. Unlike non-majors or elective learners, who may discontinue their studies when demotivated, Korean majors are less likely to withdraw because of temporary motivational fluctuations. Therefore, they represent a suitable group for examining the interconnected processes of motivation, demotivation, and remotivation over an extended period.

A total of 241 Korean majors were surveyed across five Thai universities where Korean language programs are firmly established in major, minor, and general education tracks, providing stable academic environments in which Korean is taught systematically. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, with Korean language instructors at the selected universities distributing the online survey link to eligible students via official communication channels. Of the 241 respondents, only those who reported having experienced demotivation—whether they had overcome it or were still demotivated—were included in the analysis, resulting in a final sample of 204.

3.2 Research instruments

This study used a mixed-methods approach to investigate the causes of demotivation and remotivation among Thai learners of Korean. The research questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section collected participants' demographic information. The second section examined the factors contributing to learners' demotivation. Items for this section were adapted and modified from previous studies, including those by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), Sakai and Kikuchi (2009), and Trang and Baldauf (2007). Since the primary aim of this study was to understand demotivation in the context of LOTEs, particularly Korean, the questionnaire design also incorporated insights from prior research conducted in the KFL context. As a result, the instrument included newly developed items that are not typically found in EFL-based research, such as “the status of the Korean language” and “attitudes toward Korean people and culture.”

Based on these sources, the demotivation questionnaire included the following key variables: (1) teachers (teaching methods, student-teacher relationships, and teacher attitudes), (2) learning content (quantity of content, discrepancy between curriculum and instruction, and content quality), (3) the status of the Korean language (usage, value, and opportunities for use), (4) attitudes toward Korean people and culture, (5) coursebooks/materials, (6) burden of learning, (7) learning environment, (8) learners' psychological factors, and (9) assessments and examinations.

The validity of the questionnaire items was reviewed by three experts. The index of item-objective congruence (IOC) was calculated for each item, and those with scores below 0.8 were eliminated. Minor revisions were made to clarify the wording of certain items based on expert feedback

The final questionnaire contained 36 items, each measured on a 5-point Likert scale with the following response options: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The questionnaire was administered in Thai to ensure clarity and ease of understanding for participants.

Table 1. Categories and number of items for demotivating factors

Factors	Number of items
Teachers	4
Learning content	4
The status of the Korean language	4
Attitude toward Korean people and culture	4
Coursebooks/Materials	4
Burden of learning	4
Learning environment	4
Learners' psychological factors	4
Assessments and examinations	4

To identify additional demotivating factors not captured in the closed-ended items, one open-ended question was included in the survey. This item allowed learners to reflect on and describe, in their own words, the specific causes of demotivation they had experienced. The responses were then thematically analyzed to identify any patterns or recurring issues.

The final section of the questionnaire was designed to examine the factors that helped learners overcome demotivation. The construction of this section was informed by existing literature on remotivation, including studies conducted in the EFL context (Jung, 2011; Song & Kim, 2017; Trang & Baldauf, 2007;), as well as research specific to KFL learners (Lee, 2023; Oh, 2020). In particular, prior studies on Korean learners have emphasized the importance of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors in remotivation. For example, the perceived instrumental value of Korean for career development and sustained interest in Korean culture have been identified as key contributors to learners' continued engagement.

Drawing on these findings, the remotivation section of the questionnaire was structured around the following key variables: (1) teachers and teaching methods, (2) learning content, (3) encouragement from others, (4) learning environment, (5) awareness of the importance of Korean, (6) attitude toward Korean culture, (7) interest in language learning, and (8) ideal L2 self. A total of 27 items were developed, and responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale, consistent with the demotivation section.

Table 2. Categories and number of items for remotivating factors

Factors	Number of items
Teachers / Teaching methods	3
Learning content	3
Encouragement from others	3
Learning environment	3
Awareness of the importance of Korean	4
Attitude toward Korean culture	4
Interest in language learning	3
Ideal L2 self	4

3.3 Data collection and analysis

All procedures, including the design and administration of the questionnaire, were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Data were collected in November 2023 through an online survey distributed via Google Forms. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (version 23). Reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis were first conducted to identify sub-factors relevant to the LOTE context. Mean scores were then calculated to examine Korean learners' perceptions of each factor. To complement the quantitative results, findings from the semi-structured interviews will be integrated into the discussion.

4 Findings

4.1 Demotivating factors for learners

To identify the main demotivating factors among Thai learners of Korean, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. As described in the Research Instruments subsection, the survey included 36 items related to demotivation. Items with communalities below 0.4 were removed prior to the analysis. The factor analysis was then performed using oblimin rotation. As a result, six demotivating factors were extracted, comprising a total of 23 items. Table 3 summarizes the results of the factor analysis.

Table 3. Results of the exploratory factor analysis of demotivation factors

	Factor	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
F1: Assessment and lack of confidence (.807)							
16	I was worried that I wouldn't get a good score.	.779					
17	I was not confident while communicating in Korean.	.737					
36	Although I worked hard, my Korean skills did not improve.	.687					
18	Compared to my friends' skills, mine are not good.	.565					
F2: Teachers and learning materials (.812)							
2	I didn't like the teacher's teaching style.		.699				
1	The teacher's explanations were difficult to understand.		.699				
29	The learning materials used in class were not interesting.		.672				
9	I seldom have opportunities to communicate in Korean.		.599				
19	The teacher's explanations were one-sided.		.502				
F3: Attitude toward Korean people and culture (.852)							
5	The image of Korean people changed.			.940			
25	I have negative thoughts about Korean society.			.659			
26	I'm less interested in Korean K-pop and dramas than before.			.636			
6	I am less curious about Korean culture than before.			.633			
F4: The status of Korean language in Thailand (.812)							
22	I felt that Korean was not the language that I should learn.				.831		
24	I wanted to spend time doing things other than studying Korean language.				.773		
23	I thought knowledge of the Korean language to be unimportant.				.614		
3	I thought that studying Korean would not benefit my future career.				.514		

F5: Learning environment (.837)

13	The size of my language class was not appropriate.	.836
14	I was not satisfied with the classroom's atmosphere.	.642
32	The classroom's facilities were inadequate for studying.	.544

F6: Burden of learning (.742)

7	There are too many complicated things to learn.	.809
27	There are numerous grammatical aspects and words to memorize.	.726
28	The Korean class requires too much effort.	.495

Factor 1 is related to the students' psychology and includes assessment and lack of confidence. It consists of four items and explains 10.5% of the total variance. A careful examination of the items in Factor 1 reveals students' fears of not receiving good evaluation scores and trepidation about communicating in Korean. Factor 2 is related to teachers and learning materials and explains 10.3% of the total variance. It includes the methods used by teachers to conduct lessons and materials utilized in the classroom.

Factor 3 involves learners' attitudes toward South Korea and explains 9.9% of the total variance. Many Thai learners started studying Korean after becoming interested in K-pop or Korean dramas while in secondary education. Hence, any weakening of these interests can cause a decline in motivation. Factor 4 is related to the status of the Korean language and accounts for 9.3% of the total variance. The status of Korean in Thailand can be linked to various perceptions in Thai society and employment prospects.

Factor 5 is associated with the learning environment. The classroom environment, facilities, and atmosphere can all be factors influencing the decline in students' learning of Korean. Finally, Factor 6 indicates the burden of learning. Korean learners may find it difficult to study when they have too many things to prepare or memorize. Therefore, this factor includes items that capture the overall difficulties of learners.

To identify which factors contributed most to demotivation among Thai students majoring in Korean, this study analyzed the descriptive statistics for each factor, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for each factor

Factor	M	SD
F1: Assessment and lack of confidence	3.27	.947
F2: Teachers and learning materials	2.56	.812
F3: Attitude toward Korean people and culture	2.56	.970
F4: The status of the Korean language in Thailand	1.74	.659
F5: Learning environment	1.76	.774
F6: Burden of learning	2.92	.802

As indicated by Table 4, the factor promoting the highest level of demotivation among Korean majors was assessment and lack of confidence ($M = 3.27$). This was followed by the burden of learning ($M = 2.92$), attitude toward Korean people and culture ($M = 2.56$), and teachers and learning materials ($M = 2.56$). In contrast, the status of the Korean language in Thailand ($M = 1.74$) and the learning environment ($M = 1.76$) had relatively lower impact.

The most significant demotivating factor, assessment and lack of confidence, reflects students' anxiety about tests, fear of poor performance, and perceived lack of progress. In particular, the item "I was worried that I wouldn't get a good score" received a high score of 4.20, highlighting the strong emotional burden associated with evaluations. Students frequently expressed low self-confidence and distress about being outperformed by peers. These aspects are reflected in the following student comments:

“I was confident in my Korean studies up until middle school. However, when I started studying Korean in university and being evaluated through exams, I felt like I was losing my academic ability.”

“It seems like all my friends studying with me are better than me at Korean. I want to be as good as my friends; but, because I feel like I'm falling behind, I've gradually started disliking learning Korean.”

The second highest demotivating factor was the burden of learning. Students reported that the growing complexity of grammar and vocabulary, especially at higher proficiency levels, made it difficult to maintain motivation. In particular, the demands of preparing for proficiency exams such as TOPIK intensified their academic stress. These reflections point to a strong link between increased academic workload and reduced motivation:

“The higher the grade, the more the grammar to be memorized. It's getting more and more difficult to understand the Korean grammar system, which is different from the Thai system.”

“It was challenging to attend so many Korean classes in the same semester. It's very difficult to get good scores in all exams.”

“While preparing for TOPIK, I felt discouraged by the thought that there is still so much left for me to study.”

The factor of attitude toward Korean people and culture also showed a relatively high average. Many learners initially began studying Korean out of interest in Korean pop culture; however, some reported that their attitudes had shifted over time due to changing personal interests or sociocultural concerns:

“When I was young, I was very interested in K-pop; but, as time went by, the groups I liked disbanded. Then, naturally, my interest in Korean culture decreased.”

“I think Korea is facing various social issues. I'm not confident whether I can do Korea-related work by learning Korean.”

Although teachers and learning materials did not emerge as the most influential factor, they still played a role in demotivation. Some students felt unchallenged by the instructional content or uninspired by teaching styles that did not align with their learning needs:

“I used to feel that my Korean classes were very easy. The teacher gave the impression of teaching students who know nothing about Korean; this made me uncomfortable.”

“I am always looking for new content. However, I feel that teachers are unable to satisfy this desire.”

Beyond the categorized factors, several students identified additional causes of demotivation through open-ended responses. One major theme was the lack of opportunities to use Korean outside the classroom, which made learning feel disconnected from real-life application:

"I always talk in Korean with my classmates after class, and I can't meet Korean people; so, there's no way to practice."

"Even though I'm learning Korean, there aren't many opportunities to use Korean in Thailand."

Another recurring theme was external personal factors, such as part-time work or limited chances to study abroad. These circumstances reduced study time and made it harder for students to maintain motivation:

"Since I started working part-time, my time available for Korean language study has decreased. This lack of study time has resulted in poor grades, and I'm slowly losing interest in learning Korean."

"I want to continue learning Korean by studying abroad in Korea; but, only very limited scholarships are available to international students, and it feels like such an opportunity will not come to me. So, I've lost my motivation."

These findings highlight both institutional and personal barriers to sustained language learning motivation, suggesting a need for more systemic support and opportunities for learners to engage meaningfully with Korean language and culture.

4.2 Remotivating factors for learners

To understand how Korean learners in Thailand overcome motivational challenges, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis. Although the survey included 28 questions, we performed a factor analysis using the oblimin rotation procedure and excluded all questions with communalities lower than 0.4. Results yielded four remotivating factors, including 14 questions. Table 5 presents the factor analysis results.

Table 5. Results of the exploratory factor analysis of remotivation factors

Factor		F1	F2	F3	F4
F1: Teachers and peers (.881)					
11	My teacher guided me well.	.965			
1	The teaching style suited me well.	.780			
20	I realized that my friends were same situation.	.675			
10	My friend understood my situation.	.604			
F2: Awareness of the importance of Korean (.813)					
9	I must learn Korean to achieve my career goals.		.934		
2	Korean language skills will help me in my future.		.800		
8	I want to do something related to Korean language or study abroad.		.756		
12	Learning Korean will be beneficial to me.		.462		
F3: Ideal L2 self (.837)					
19	I want to become a person who has good Korean language skills.			.961	
7	I think it's cool that my colleagues or foreigners have good Korean language skills.			.745	
17	I've learned more effective learning methods			.521	
F4: Attitude toward Korean culture (.801)					
3	I want to retain my interest in Korean music or programs.				.911
15	I want to enjoy Korean popular culture without subtitles.				.501
5	I want to know more about Korean society and culture.				.428

Factor 1 is associated with teachers and encouragement from peers. As an external factor related to remotivation, Factor 1 explains 17.7% of the total variance. The questions of Factor 1 confirm whether a learner’s relationship with the Korean teacher and peers helps the learner regain learning motivation. Factor 2 is related to the learner’s awareness of the importance of learning Korean. It comprises four items and explains 15.8% of the total variance. Factor 2 assesses the instrumental value of learning Korean and enables the learner to clarify how closely the learner’s future career path is related to Korean.

Factor 3 indicates the realization of a learner’s ideal self in terms of Korean as an L2. It explains 15.4% of the total variance and comprises questions related to learners’ ideals of searching for ways to become good at Korean. Finally, Factor 4 is related to the learner’s attitude toward Korean culture. It explains 9.7% of the total variance and includes questions on maintaining the learners’ interest in Korean culture and, thereby, enabling them to remotivate themselves.

To understand how demotivated Thai students majoring in Korean can overcome reduced motivation and reengage with their language studies, this study examined the descriptive statistics of the four remotivating factors, as presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for each factor

Factor	M	SD
F1: Teachers and peers	3.53	.929
F2: Awareness of the importance of Korean	4.26	.821
F3: Ideal L2 self and interest	3.66	.899
F4: Attitude toward Korean culture	4.20	.732

According to Table 6, the highest rated remotivating factor that helped Korean language learners in Thailand to overcome demotivation was awareness of the importance of Korean ($M = 4.26$). This was followed by attitude toward the Korean culture ($M = 4.20$), ideal L2 self and interest ($M = 3.66$), and teachers and peers ($M = 3.53$).

The factor awareness of the importance of Korean reflects learners’ belief that acquiring Korean proficiency is essential for achieving their academic or professional goals. For many students, the perceived instrumental value of the Korean language—particularly for employment, studying abroad, or future careers—served as a powerful motivator:

“I want to work in Korea and earn a lot of money. I believe that my knowledge in Korean language will help me achieve my dreams.”

“I want to study abroad in Korea and continue to study Korean. I have to continue learning Korean to realize my dream of majoring in Korean studies.”

Another highly rated factor was attitude toward Korean culture. While a loss of interest in Korean culture was identified earlier as a source of demotivation, many learners described recovering their motivation by engaging with new and deeper aspects of Korean society and media. Cultural engagement thus plays a dual role—it can both initiate and sustain motivation depending on the learner’s evolving interests:

“Originally, I started learning Korean due to my interest in K-pop; but, my interest has declined. However, while learning Korean, I’ve come to read a lot of webtoons and I’ve developed a desire to read them without translations.”

“When I watch Korean programs and understand the content without requiring subtitles, I suddenly feel inclined to study Korean harder. I can feel that my Korean language skills have improved over time.”

“I like Korean novels. After reading the book Kim Ji-young, Born in 1982, I became interested in the social issues plaguing Korea.”

The factor ideal L2 self and interest relates to learners’ vision of themselves as competent Korean speakers. Learners were inspired by peers or role models who had achieved fluency, and they regained motivation by imagining their own future success and experiencing tangible improvements in their skills:

“Whenever I find it difficult to study, I listen to the stories of seniors who are skilled in Korean or who have studied abroad; these stories make me want to study hard, as well.”

“On viewing the videos of foreigners who are skilled in Korean, I feel that I shouldn't give up learning.”

Lastly, the factor teachers and peers highlights the role of emotional support and encouragement in helping learners persist. Personalized attention and reassuring feedback from teachers were frequently mentioned as critical to regaining motivation. Peers also played a role by providing shared experiences and moral support.:

“I frequently talk to the teacher who taught me Korean in high school. Whenever I find it difficult to study, I contact the teacher for encouragement and feel better after.”

“When I didn't do well in a test, my teacher told me that it was okay and encouraged me to keep going. So, I was able to continue studying without giving up.”

5 Discussion

This study examined the demotivating and remotivating factors among Thai university students majoring in Korean. The findings revealed that demotivation was primarily driven by internal psychological factors, such as anxiety over assessment, lack of confidence, and the academic burden of learning Korean. These internal pressures were more significant than external factors like teaching methods or the learning environment. These findings contrast with those of many EFL studies, where external classroom-related factors—such as teacher behavior, curriculum, or materials—are often emphasized as primary sources of demotivation (Arai, 2004; Dörnyei, 2001; Evans & Tragant, 2020; Kim & Seo, 2012).

In particular, the demotivating effects of academic burden and lack of confidence align with earlier findings in KFL contexts, where learners have reported difficulties with grammar complexity and limited progress as sources of discouragement (Lee, 2023; Oh, 2020). The typological differences between Thai (an isolating language) and Korean (an agglutinative language) may further contribute to this learning burden.

A key feature of KFL learners in this study was the dynamic relationship between cultural interest and motivation. Many learners initially engaged with Korean due to their enthusiasm for Korean pop culture; however, their motivation often declined as their cultural interests shifted. This is consistent with findings by Li and Han (2024), who emphasized the role of cultural interest in shaping learners’ ideal L2 self. Interestingly, renewed interest in other Korean cultural forms—such as literature, webtoons, or social issues—played a role in remotivating learners, echoing similar results

from Song and Kim (2017).

The most influential remotivating factor identified was learners' awareness of the importance of Korean for achieving personal and professional goals, such as employment or studying abroad. This supports the findings of Trang and Baldauf (2007), who found that awareness of the utility of language learning was a major remotivating factor among EFL learners. These results suggest that, contrary to assumptions that LOTEs such as Korean are perceived as less useful, students recognize Korean as a meaningful tool for their future.

From an educational standpoint, these findings imply the need for teaching strategies that address learners' internal struggles. Reducing psychological pressure through positive feedback, encouraging peer support, and fostering gradual achievement can help restore learner confidence (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kim & Kim, 2017). Moreover, integrating digital tools and culturally rich media content can enhance learner engagement and make learning more personally relevant, especially for digital-native students.

Theoretically, the results suggest a need to revisit and adapt motivational models developed for EFL contexts, such as Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009), to better reflect the motivations of KFL learners. Unlike compulsory EFL learners, those studying Korean often do so out of intrinsic interest or long-term aspirations, requiring a framework that accounts for cultural engagement, identity development, and emotional factors.

In sum, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of KFL learners' motivation by identifying the complex interplay between psychological, cultural, and academic factors. It not only adds to the limited literature on LOTEs, but also offers practical implications for instructional design and theoretical development tailored to the unique characteristics of Korean language learners in international contexts.

6 Conclusion

This study examined demotivation and remotivation, which have received relatively less academic attention than motivation of Korean learners in the KFL context. The number of Korean language learners in Thailand is increasing rapidly, with most learners beginning their studies out of interest in Korean culture. Therefore, managing their motivational states consistently is crucial. Rather than focusing solely on initial motivation, this study addressed learners' frequent experiences of demotivation and their efforts to overcome it.

The significance of this study lies in identifying the factors that help Thai university students majoring in Korean recover from decreased motivation stemming from various causes. Future research should explore demotivating and remotivating factors across different learner variables, such as major versus non-major status and levels of Korean proficiency. While studies in English education often emphasize the dynamic nature of learner motivation, particularly the interplay among motivation, demotivation, and remotivation, similar longitudinal approaches, such as the use of motivational trajectory charts, would also be beneficial to Korean language education.

Results have implications for the following aspects: First, students studying Korean in Thailand should be encouraged to pursue goals related to the use of Korean. Recognizing the practical value of the Korean language can serve as a driving force to rekindle learners' interest in Korean. Second, although learners' lack of confidence or burden of learning cannot be directly resolved, it is necessary to pay constant attention to these issues. Situations should be managed well to prevent unnecessary reductions in motivation, which may occur when learners compare themselves with others. Third, teachers should change their attitudes toward lessons. Today, students are digital natives accustomed to using mobile devices. Therefore, although systematic explanations are important in education, fun-filled and interesting activities can be motivating factors for learners and help them move beyond evaluation-focused education.

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