



Teaching Motivation and Demotivation Among Private English Instructors in South Korea: A Qualitative Inquiry

Somi Hong (Chung-Ang University)

Tae-Young Kim (Chung-Ang University)

Received: 10 September, 2025

Revised: 11 October, 2025

Accepted: 15 October 2025

Hong, Somi, & Kim, Tae-Young. (2025). Teaching motivation and demotivation among private English instructors in South Korea: A qualitative inquiry. *Modern English Education*, 26, 403-423.

Keywords

teaching motivation, demotivation, private English instructors, qualitative study
교수 동기, 탈동기, 사교육 영어 강사, 질적 연구

Somi Hong (First author)

Ph.D. Student

Department of English Education
Chung-Ang University

Email: hsomi0906@naver.com

Tae-Young Kim

(Corresponding author)

Professor

Department of English Education
Chung-Ang University

Email: tykim@cau.ac.kr

Abstract

This study examined the teaching motivation and demotivation of private English instructors in South Korea, a sector influenced by market pressures, parental expectations, and organizational instability. While extensive research has focused on public school teachers, the motivational dynamics of private instructors remain underexplored, despite their significant role in the Korean education system. Through semi-structured interviews with twelve instructors at various school levels and job positions, the study utilized qualitative thematic analysis to uncover key motivational and demotivational factors. The findings indicated that instructors' motivation was driven by student achievement, relational affirmation, and professional recognition, while demotivation stemmed from parental pressure, limited autonomy, lack of collaboration, and systemic instability. Notably, motivation and demotivation were not isolated states but interdependent processes influenced by the fulfillment or frustration of core needs. This study contributes to existing literature by contextualizing established frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory, the Job Demands–Resources model, and organizational justice within the private education sector. By highlighting the fragile nature of motivation and the dual role of structural conditions as both assets and challenges, the findings provide insights for enhancing teacher well-being and instructional quality in market-driven educational environments.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Korean society, private education plays a pivotal role in complementing public education and enhancing students' academic performance. Particularly in a highly competitive, exam-oriented educational environment, private education has evolved beyond its supplementary function to serve various pedagogical roles: stimulating students' learning motivation, fostering self-directed learning skills, and providing strategic academic guidance (T. Y. Kim & Y. Kim, 2016; E. Park & J. H. Lee, 2017). Alongside the expansion of private education, the role of private instructors has become increasingly professionalized, evolving beyond the mere delivery of knowledge to include educational facilitation and

motivational support (T. Y. Kim, 2018). Private instructors significantly influence not only students' academic achievements but also their learning attitudes and self-efficacy, thereby contributing to sustained long-term engagement with learning (J. Gong & T. Y. Kim, 2023).

Thus, the educational effectiveness of private instructors—who play a crucial role in the learning environment—is not determined solely by teaching methods or lesson structure but is largely shaped by their job satisfaction and teaching motivation. Therefore, a systematic understanding and analysis of teaching motivation among private instructors is essential to improving the quality of private education and, ultimately maximizing students' academic success.

Teaching motivation is a psychological factor directly linked to an instructor's engagement in instruction, the quality of their lessons, and their overall interaction with students. According to Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a harmony between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation shapes instructors' behavioral patterns and attitudes, which in turn exert a profound impact on educational outcomes. In practice, instructors with a high level of teaching motivation tend to invest more passion in their lessons and create more positive learning environments, thereby enhancing learning outcomes. Especially for private instructors, external factors such as class satisfaction, student response, financial compensation, and job security interact in complex ways to influence motivation. Thus, it is crucial to explore their motivation in detail.

On the other hand, a lack of motivation—or demotivation—can negatively affect various aspects of teaching practice. Instructors experiencing demotivation are more likely to suffer from reduced lesson quality, emotional exhaustion, and decreased job satisfaction, all of which can adversely impact both student learning outcomes and the overall educational quality of private institutions (Fernet et al., 2012). Excessive workload, insufficient compensation, and unresponsive students have been identified as primary causes of demotivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). These factors can, over time, lead to professional burnout and heightened intentions to leave the profession over time.

Given that private English education in Korea operates across diverse instructional contexts—from kindergarten to high school—teachers' motivational experiences are likely to differ depending on learner age, curriculum goals, and institutional settings. Therefore, this study included participants from multiple school levels to capture both shared and context-specific motivational factors.

Despite this reality, there has been insufficient empirical research on the teaching motivation and demotivation of private instructors—particularly research that reflects the specific characteristics and contextual factors of the private teaching profession. This study thus aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of private English instructors' levels of teaching motivation and their experiences of demotivation. By identifying the factors influencing their motivational states, this study seeks to provide practical insights to enhance teaching effectiveness and educational quality within the private education sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching Motivation

Teaching motivation is a central psychological resource that sustains teachers' instructional quality, professional satisfaction, and commitment to their students. It is not merely a matter of personal disposition, but rather a dynamic construct that emerges from the interaction between individual needs and contextual conditions. SDT provides one of the most influential lenses for analyzing these processes. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), motivation is optimized when autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied, whereas the persistent frustration of these needs generates demotivation, emotional exhaustion, and, in extreme cases, professional withdrawal (Ryan & Deci, 2017). From this perspective, private English instructors' motivation can be understood as shaped by the extent to which their institutional environments either support or constrain these fundamental needs.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model expands this framework by highlighting the balance between job demands and resources as the decisive mechanism that regulates motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). High demands—such as excessive workload, parental pressure, and performance accountability—create fertile ground for burnout, while job resources—including collegial support, pedagogical autonomy, and meaningful feedback—strengthen resilience and engagement. Later extensions of the JD–R model highlighted personal resources such as optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy (Bakker et al., 2014), emphasizing that motivational sustainability depends not only on organizational structures but also on teachers' internal capacities.

Relational perspectives, which view teaching motivation as shaped by teachers' social connections and perceived impact on others, reinforce this view. Positive interactions with students and receiving feedback about the impact of their teaching are critical to restoring intrinsic motivation. As Grant (2007) demonstrated, teachers' motivation increases when they

perceive their work as producing a prosocial impact on students' lives. Similarly, Su and Reeve (2011) found that autonomy-supportive environments foster the internalization of intrinsic goals, thereby enabling sustained engagement even in challenging contexts. Together, these frameworks underscore that teacher motivation is not a static attribute but a socially and institutionally embedded process.

Research on emotional regulation also informs this discussion. Gross (2015) and Taxer and Gross (2018) showed that teachers' adaptive strategies—such as cognitive reappraisal—help mitigate stress and maintain instructional engagement. This is especially relevant in private academies where instructors face strong parental expectations and constant accountability. Moreover, resilience studies indicate that motivation remains stable when teachers reinterpret challenges as opportunities for growth. For instance, Chen and Lee (2022) found that resilience buffered the negative effects of excessive demands on well-being in EFL contexts.

International studies provide empirical grounding for these theories. Gu and Day (2007) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study of over 300 teachers in the United Kingdom, combining repeated interviews and narrative analyses over several years. Their findings showed that even under strong policy shifts and accountability regimes that threatened teacher autonomy, many instructors sustained professional commitment by drawing upon moral purpose and the recognition of student development. Importantly, teachers who anchored their identity in students' growth displayed greater resilience to systemic pressures, illustrating that teacher motivation is often reconstructed through personal meaning-making processes when institutional conditions are adverse.

Beyond these frameworks, recent scholarship further illuminates motivational dynamics in related contexts. Zhou et al. (2025) analyzed demotivating factors across different educational levels among EFL learners in China, showing that patterns of demotivation shift over time. This suggests that private instructors, who often teach students across multiple levels, must adjust motivational strategies as learner development progresses. Van Wingerden and Poell (2019) also demonstrated that meaningful work and job crafting predicted resilience among teachers, underscoring the importance of proactive strategies in sustaining motivation. In East Asia, scholars have noted that English education in Japan often occurs within cram schools (*juku*), which remain under-examined despite their prevalence and significant role in shaping learning outcomes (Allen, 2016; Lowe, 2015; Yamato & Zhang, 2017). Similarly, Ren and Zhou (2023) showed that Chinese EFL instructors in higher education experienced demotivation when institutional resources for research and teaching were scarce, highlighting how structural factors shape motivation across cultural contexts. Collectively, these studies affirm that teacher motivation is reconstructed through the interplay of personal resources, social interactions, and institutional conditions.

Reflective and qualitative approaches have also been shown to enhance motivation. T. Y. Kim (2006) demonstrated that qualitative interviews with Korean ESL learners in Canada not only elicited rich narratives about language learning motivation but also facilitated learners' metacognitive awareness and emotional stabilization, thereby reinforcing their motivation. To avoid over-reliance on a single study, subsequent research has provided converging evidence. For example, Hulleman and Harackiewicz (2009) showed that structured reflective writing tasks increased students' interest and intrinsic motivation by helping them connect academic work to personal goals. Similarly, Su and Reeve (2011) found that autonomy-supportive feedback in classroom contexts promoted the internalization of intrinsic goals, sustaining engagement even under challenging conditions. Together, these studies highlight that reflection and feedback—whether through qualitative interviews or pedagogical interventions—play a significant role in rebuilding and sustaining teacher and learner motivation.

Teaching Demotivation

The loss of teaching motivation—teaching demotivation—is a critical psychological phenomenon that undermines an instructor's job performance and instructional effectiveness. According to Fernet et al. (2012), a decline in motivation generally reduces job satisfaction and performance and is closely related to emotional exhaustion or burnout. A decrease in instructor motivation also correlates with a decline in student achievement and can ultimately threaten the sustainability of educational institutions.

Private instructors are particularly vulnerable to demotivating factors such as work overload, emotional labor, and lack of student engagement. These challenges not only reduce motivation but also contribute to a systemic decline in the overall quality of education. Chang (2020) emphasized that strict emotion display rules in schools intensify burnout when teachers lack effective regulation strategies, while Ghanizadeh and Royaei (2015) found that heavy reliance on surface acting was a strong predictor of burnout among EFL teachers. These findings highlight the importance of emotional labor as a distinct demotivational factor in language teaching contexts.

It is important to note that demotivation is not simply the absence of motivation but an independent psychological state that undermines professional performance and well-being. Klassen and Chiu (2010) analyzed cross-national data from

thousands of teachers across multiple countries to examine how institutional stability influences stress, burnout, and satisfaction. Their comparative analysis revealed that teachers in systems characterized by instability and performance-driven cultures experienced significantly higher levels of demotivation. Conversely, teachers in more stable institutional contexts reported lower burnout and greater satisfaction. This comparative perspective demonstrates that systemic conditions shape motivational experiences across national contexts and underscores the vulnerability of teachers in educational environments marked by uncertainty and competition—features that strongly resemble Korea’s private education sector.

Recent comparative evidence also broadens the discussion of teacher demotivation. Santoro (2011) introduced the concept of demoralization to describe teachers’ moral and professional frustration when institutional and policy constraints prevent them from engaging in what they regard as good teaching. She argued that many teachers leave the profession not because they have lost motivation or commitment, but because excessive accountability pressures, constant policy reforms, and the erosion of professional autonomy make it impossible for them to realize the moral rewards of teaching. This perspective highlights the structural and ethical dimensions of teacher demotivation beyond individual psychological factors. Similarly, E. M. Skaalvik and S. Skaalvik (2016), in a large-scale Norwegian survey, found that value misalignment, time pressure, and student behavior problems were central drivers of teacher stress and demotivation. Building on this line of research, Sato et al. (2022) examined Chilean EFL teachers’ motivation and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that pandemic-related stress increased perceived burnout, whereas teachers’ motivation was negatively associated with burnout levels, suggesting a potential buffering role. Extending the discussion to organizational contexts, Tarantul and Berkovich (2025) analyzed how teachers’ motivations for emotional labor vary depending on institutional settings, highlighting that institutional culture determines whether emotion work becomes demotivating. Bristi et al. (2025) further showed in a systematic review that demotivators manifest differently across educational levels, emphasizing the need for multi-level analysis. These studies reinforce that demotivation is not merely a psychological outcome but a product of systemic and cultural mismatches, echoing patterns observed in Korea’s private education sector where institutional instability and high parental expectations compound the risk of burnout.

Teaching Motivation and Demotivation in the Korean Context

In Korea, research has primarily addressed public school teachers, while systematic analysis of private-sector instructors remains sparse. T. Y. Kim and Y. Kim (2016) investigated the initial career motives and sources of demotivation among EFL teachers through survey and interview methods. Their study revealed that teachers derived strong motivation from intrinsic rewards such as student success and professional fulfillment, yet reported significant demotivation stemming from administrative burdens and students’ passive learning attitudes. This highlighted the dual role of instructional and non-instructional factors in shaping teacher motivation. E. Park and J. H. Lee (2017) examined the general and subject-related job satisfaction of secondary English teachers, analyzing survey data that distinguished between classroom-related and extra-instructional duties. While teachers expressed considerable satisfaction with teaching itself, they reported that administrative obligations and non-teaching tasks had a markedly negative effect on their overall job satisfaction. This study illustrated how dissatisfaction rooted in peripheral tasks can undermine broader professional engagement, a finding particularly relevant to the private sector, where non-instructional duties are often extensive.

T. Y. Kim (2018) offered a broader sociocultural perspective, analyzing how English in Korea operates as both a symbolic resource and a practical tool for upward mobility. Although not directly focused on private instructors’ motivation, this study highlights the larger societal pressures that indirectly shape motivational dynamics in the private education sector. Such dynamics are magnified in private institutions, where parental demands and performance outcomes are closely tied to institutional reputation and survival. In a meta-analysis of English teacher education research, H. J. Kim (2020) found that most studies have centered on pre-service and public-school teachers, emphasizing cognitive and identity-related aspects of teaching rather than motivational or affective dimensions. This imbalance underscores the limited understanding of teachers’ emotional experiences and intrinsic drives, especially within the private sector. Furthermore, J. Gong and T. Y. Kim (2023) found that Korean bilingual instructors often experience diminished motivation due to the psychological burden of unrealistic expectations from parents. In contrast, dispatched instructors show varying demotivating factors depending on working conditions and attitudes of institutional leaders—such as infringement on teaching autonomy or informal demands—highlighting the role of external organizational pressures.

More recent studies have directly examined private-sector English instructors. T. Y. Kim and J. J. Ahn (2016) investigated itinerant early childhood English teachers, identifying both intrinsic rewards (e.g., enjoyment of teaching children) and heavy emotional labor as critical factors influencing their motivation and demotivation. Likewise, H. J. Kim and S. Lee

(2023) conducted a comprehensive literature review of 143 domestic studies on private English education, mapping research trends, methods, and key issues rather than analyzing teacher motivation directly. Their analysis provides an essential backdrop for situating teacher motivation within the broader private education sector in Korea. Together, these findings demonstrate that while public school research emphasizes institutional stability and administrative burdens, private-sector studies reveal vulnerabilities tied to market accountability, parental expectations, and the precarious working conditions of private English instructors. This gap underscores the necessity of examining private English instructors' motivation and demotivation in greater depth within the Korean context.

This contrast highlights that public education research has largely focused on institutional and policy-related factors, whereas private education research remains limited, revealing the need to understand how market-driven and parent-centered environments uniquely shape teachers' motivation and demotivation. To address this gap, the present study adopts a multifaceted analysis that integrates SDT, the JD–R model, and relational perspectives (Grant, 2007; Su & Reeve, 2011) to capture both individual and contextual factors shaping private English instructors' motivation and demotivation.

In light of this background, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What factors influence teaching motivation and demotivation among private English instructors?
2. How do motivational and demotivational experiences differ across school levels (kindergarten–lower elementary, upper elementary–middle school, high school)?
3. How do these experiences vary depending on instructors' job positions (instructor, lead instructor, director- instructor)?

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to investigate the motivational and demotivational experiences of private English instructors in South Korea (cf. Yin, 2014). Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were employed to capture participants' subjective perspectives and the contextual factors shaping their professional experiences. This design was chosen because it allows for a nuanced exploration of the complex and individualized nature of teacher motivation and demotivation in private education settings.

Participants

Twelve English instructors employed at private academies and test-preparation institutes in the metropolitan area participated in the study. All participants had at least seven years of teaching experience and held one of three positions: instructor, lead instructor, or director-instructor. Purposive sampling ensured diversity in age, teaching experience, and institutional contexts. Table 1 summarizes participants' demographic and professional information, including gender, years of experience, position, school level, degree, and academic major.

For clarity: Instructor = no administrative duties; Lead instructor = supervises instructors and reporting; Director-instructor = instructional and administrative leadership with parent liaison responsibilities.

TABLE 1
Participant Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Experience	Position	School Level	Degree/Major
Minji	Female	7 years	Instructor	Kindergarten-Lower Elementary	Bachelor's (English Linguistics)
Sejung	Female	10+ years	Instructor	Upper Elementary-Middle	Bachelor's (Design)
Hyejin	Female	10+ years	Instructor	Upper Elementary-Middle	Master's (TESOL)
Yeji	Female	7 years	Instructor	Upper Elementary-Middle	Master's (English Education)
Jieun	Female	15 years	Instructor	High	Bachelor's (Public Administration)

Pseudonym	Gender	Experience	Position	School Level	Degree/Major
Juyeon	Female	15+years	Instructor	High	Bachelor's (English Language & Literature)
Suji	Female	13 years	Lead Instructor	Kindergarten-Lower Elementary	Bachelor's (English Language & Literature)
Jaeyoung	Male	10 years	Lead Instructor	Upper Elementary-Middle	Bachelor's (Service Management)
Junghun	Male	15 years	Lead Instructor	High	Bachelor's (Business Administration)
Sunhye	Female	10 years	Director-Instructor	Kindergarten-Lower Elementary	Bachelor's (English Language & Literature)
Minyoung	Female	17 years	Director-Instructor	Upper Elementary-Middle	Master's (English Language & Literature)
Sunghyun	Male	20 years	Director-Instructor	High	Bachelor's (Education)

Note. All participant names are pseudonyms, and identifying details have been anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

Rationale for School-Level Classification

Although the Korean school system is conventionally divided into elementary, middle, and high school, this study reclassified school levels into three categories: (1) kindergarten and lower elementary, (2) upper elementary (Grades 4-6) and middle school, and (3) high school. This reclassification reflects both curricular continuity and developmental stages relevant to teachers' motivational contexts.

Kindergarten and lower elementary students (Grades 1-3) share strong similarities in their learning environment. Instruction is guided by the Nuri Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2019) and the integrated subjects of the 2015 Revised National Curriculum ("Good Living," "Wise Living," and "Joyful Living") (Ministry of Education, 2015). These curricula emphasize play-based and thematic learning, encouraging exploration and creativity. Students at this stage rely heavily on concrete thinking and teacher guidance, which shapes teachers' experiences of relational motivation but also increases emotional and parental communication demands. Upper elementary (Grades 4-6) and middle school students were grouped together because they undergo a comparable curricular and developmental transition. From Grade 4, instruction shifts to subject-based learning in Korean, mathematics, English, and science (Ministry of Education, 2015), aligning with middle school structures. Developmentally, this stage is marked by the emergence of abstract reasoning, greater demands for self-regulation, and the onset of adolescence. During this period, teacher-student and peer relationships significantly influence academic engagement, with peer support having an effect only when teacher-student relationships are positive (Košir & Pikić Jugović, 2025; Wang & Eccles, 2012). These shared curricular and developmental characteristics justify analyzing upper elementary and middle school as a single category. High school was retained as an independent category in accordance with the established educational system. This classification is also consistent with stage-environment fit theory (Eccles & Roeser, 2009), which emphasizes the alignment of instructional contexts with learners' developmental needs.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted between May and July 2025 through individual semi-structured interviews lasting 40-60 minutes each. Interviews were conducted in Korean to allow participants to share their experiences freely. Prior to participation, all instructors received a detailed explanation of the study's purpose and procedures and signed a written informed consent form. All sessions were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and used as primary data. The interview protocol included questions about initial career motives, current motivational sources, demotivating experiences, perceived changes in motivation over time, and current levels of professional engagement. Two pilot interviews were conducted to refine and stabilize the protocol, but they were excluded from the final dataset. Full protocol is provided in

Appendix A.

Data analysis combined keyword frequency analysis with thematic analysis. First, frequently recurring terms related to motivation and demotivation were identified across transcripts, and their contexts were examined for interpretive accuracy. Subsequently, thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Coding was inductive, with frequency analysis serving as supportive reference material. Codes were then clustered into higher-order themes and refined to ensure coherence, with representative quotations selected to illustrate key findings. Frequency analysis highlighted lexical salience across cases, and these frequent codes were subsequently developed into sub-themes and higher-order themes as illustrated in Appendix B. Themes were validated interpretively, not by counts. Coding scheme appears in Appendix B.

To enhance trustworthiness, multiple strategies were employed. Member checking was conducted by sharing selected interpretations with participants for factual verification, and peer debriefing involved an experienced qualitative researcher independently coding 25% of the transcripts. Any discrepancies were resolved collaboratively. Analytic memos were maintained throughout the research process to document coding decisions and interpretive reflections. Ethical principles were strictly observed: all participants provided informed consent, pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity, and data were stored securely in encrypted files accessible only to the researcher. Data will be retained for three years after the conclusion of the study and then permanently deleted.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed crucial keywords that influence private English instructors' teaching motivation and demotivation. The tables in the following subsections present the top five keywords related to (de)motivation, their frequency, and representative comments from the instructors.

Analysis of Teaching Motivation Factors

This section addresses research question 1, which examines the key factors influencing teaching motivation and demotivation among private English instructors. An analysis of the interview transcripts revealed five primary motivational factors shaping private English instructors' experiences (see Table 2). These include feedback, relationship, achievement, passion, and reward. Each keyword represents a dimension of instructor motivation as articulated in their responses. The table outlines the top five motivation-related keywords, their frequency of occurrence, and illustrative quotes from participants.

TABLE 2

Top 5 Teaching Motivation Keywords

Rank	Keywords	Frequency	Example
1	Feedback	69	<i>I feel really good when I receive positive feedback...</i>
2	Relationship	51	<i>When I have a good relationship with the students, the classroom atmosphere becomes really good.</i>
3	Achievement	31	<i>When students got 100 score on their test, I really feel good.</i>
4	Passion	30	<i>I definitely feel more passionate and interested.</i>
5	Reward	28	<i>Seeing their English improve is the most rewarding part of teaching.</i>

These findings indicate that private English instructors are primarily motivated by intrinsic and relational factors, especially student response, emotional connections, and perceived instructional impact. These keywords align with teacher motivation concepts such as intrinsic value, emotional labor, and self-efficacy.

Differences in Teaching Motivation by School Level

This section addresses research question 2, which explores how motivational experiences differ across school levels (kindergarten–lower elementary, upper elementary–middle school, and high school). Teaching motivation varied across educational stages—kindergarten/lower elementary, upper elementary/middle school, and high school. The differences were rooted in instructional goals, developmental stages, and types of student–teacher interaction. This section maps participants'

motivational narratives to the key terms from Table 2: feedback, relationship, achievement, passion, and reward. The kindergarten–lower elementary group included three instructors (Sunhye, Minji, Suji), the upper elementary–middle school group included five instructors (Hyejin, Sejung, Jaeyoung, Yeji, Minyoung), and the high school group included four instructors (Juyeon, Jieun, Junghun, Sunghyun).

Early Literacy Progress and Emotional Rewards (Kindergarten–Lower Elementary). Instructors working with kindergarten and lower elementary students reported that their motivation was most strongly sustained by the visible developmental progress of their students. They found particular meaning in helping young learners take their first steps in English literacy. Seeing children advance from having no familiarity with the alphabet to reading simple words or sentences made teachers feel that their efforts were worthwhile and impactful. Sunhye noted, “When they come in completely unfamiliar with English and eventually become able to read beginner-level books... It’s actually more rewarding when a student who didn’t even know the alphabet ends up reading on their own.” Rather than focusing on test performance or standardized outcomes, these teachers valued gradual, process-based growth. They described how children’s small milestones—such as recognizing letters, singing phonics songs, or reading words independently—brought both instructional satisfaction and emotional fulfillment. Minji also highlighted this process-oriented growth:

Minji: Many of the kindergarten children don’t even recognize the alphabet when they start. I teach them how to write letters, use phonics songs, and as they follow along, they grasp the concepts quickly. Later, when they begin to read words, it’s professionally gratifying and meaningful.

Spontaneous reactions from students also played an important role in sustaining motivation. Children’s laughter, verbal responses, or enthusiastic participation were viewed as meaningful indicators that the lesson was connecting, and that students were emotionally engaged. A number of instructors emphasized the role of classroom relationships—not only between teacher and student, but among students themselves. When peer interactions were harmonious and the overall atmosphere felt emotionally safe, teachers reported feeling more energized and focused in their work. Sunhye stated, “Rather than how I get along with them, I think I care more about how they get along with each other. If they’re getting along well, the classroom climate becomes more positive, and that’s motivating.” Likewise, Suji stated:

Suji: Because they’re young, I tend to care more about how the kids get along with each other than how they get along with me. When they suddenly stop talking after being close, I get confused. I usually check first whether the mood among them is okay.

These findings suggest that the motivation of instructors at this level was not driven by academic achievement, but by the meaningful, everyday experiences of supporting children’s early learning, receiving authentic feedback, and maintaining a supportive social environment in the classroom. Their motivation was rooted in the small but significant changes they observed—and shared—in the learning process. Importantly, this highlights how motivational sources at the kindergarten–lower elementary level differ from those of instructors teaching older learners, for whom academic achievement and examination results played a more central role, as presented in the next section. This pattern reflects the unique role of private English instructors in guiding very young learners through the first steps of English literacy, a stage that in public schools usually emerges later in the curriculum.

Achievement Recognition and Relational Satisfaction (Upper Elementary–Middle). For instructors teaching upper elementary and middle school students, motivation was primarily sustained by students’ academic performance and demonstrated comprehension. Teachers described feeling most fulfilled when students achieved high scores on assessments or clearly understood lesson content. Hyejin said, “When students score 100 on a test, I feel really good.” Yeji added, “When students say they understand what I taught, it reassures me that I’m doing things right.” Positive feedback from students—whether expressed verbally or shown through classroom behavior—also played a key role in reinforcing teachers’ instructional confidence and engagement. Such responses provided immediate, informal validation that their teaching was effective, which in turn encouraged teachers to maintain or further improve lesson quality. Minyoung said, “When I get positive feedback from students, it makes me feel that I’m doing a good job.” Instructors noted that recognition from parents further motivated them by affirming their teaching effectiveness. Comments such as a child finding English enjoyable or easy to understand served as meaningful validation of their efforts. Yeji said, “During parent meetings, when I hear that students find English enjoyable or easy to understand, it really motivates me and makes me feel that I’m on the right track.” Teachers were also motivated by students’ emotional and interpersonal development. Witnessing students become more

confident, engaged, or expressive in class contributed to a broader sense of professional reward that extended beyond academic outcomes. Sejung said, “Even when it’s not about grades, when I see students grow or become more confident, I feel proud to be part of that process.”

Overall, instructors at this level drew motivation from a combination of academic achievement, feedback, emotional connection, and student development. Their motivation was shaped by the cumulative effects of student engagement, success, and growth observed in the classroom. Importantly, these sources of motivation were distinctive to upper elementary–middle school instructors, differing from those of kindergarten–lower elementary teachers, who emphasized early literacy milestones and spontaneous reactions, and from high school instructors, whose motivation was more strongly tied to exam performance and measurable academic outcomes. This combination also reflects the private English institute context, where parental feedback and visible academic progress function as particularly strong reinforcements for instructors’ motivation, given the direct link to course continuation and institutional reputation.

Performance Pressure and Professional Growth (High School). High school instructors reported that their teaching motivation was primarily driven by students’ academic achievement, visible improvement, and the perceived impact of their instruction. They experienced a strong sense of fulfillment when students raised their test scores or received college acceptance offers. Junghun stated, “When they get into college or their mock exam scores go up, that’s when I feel a sense of reward. When I can see students making progress—that’s when I feel good.” These moments were particularly meaningful when students who had seemed likely to give up began studying again and achieved tangible outcomes. Instructors found motivational value not only in the results but also in the students’ process of change. Juyeon mentioned, “Students who seemed like they were going to give up but decided to keep studying—that kind of thing, and of course, when they get good grades.”

Some instructors, however, noted that student-teacher relationships were not a significant motivational factor in the high school context. Due to the urgency of entrance exams, emotional bonds were often secondary to measurable results. Juyeon said, “Because they’re high school students and college is right around the corner, there’s no time to focus on my relationship with them. What matters is scores and getting into university.” In addition, instructors emphasized that ongoing professional development was essential for sustaining their motivation. The constant changes in exam formats and college admission policies required them to regularly seek updated information and refine their teaching strategies.

Sunghyun: *I think this is a job where you constantly have to develop yourself. The types of exams and college admission policies keep changing, so I’m always looking for new information and trying to figure out better ways to explain things more clearly.*

These accounts illustrate that the motivation of high school instructors was primarily grounded in result-oriented factors, especially students’ academic progress and performance. Ongoing self-development functioned as a key resource for maintaining this motivation. While emotional rapport was seen as secondary, these instructors demonstrated a strong sense of professional commitment and focus on instructional impact. This emphasis on measurable results and professional growth distinguished high school instructors from those teaching younger learners, who derived motivation mainly from early literacy milestones or relational satisfaction. It also reflects the private English institute environment, where instructors’ motivation is closely tied to exam outcomes and university entrance results, pressures that are intensified by parental expectations and the market-driven nature of private education.

Differences in Teaching Motivation by Instructor Position

This section addresses research question 3, which investigates how instructors’ job positions (instructor, lead instructor, and director-instructor) influence their teaching motivation and demotivation. Teaching motivation varied across instructor roles as well. Participants were grouped into three categories—Instructors, Lead Instructors, and Director-Instructors—each showing distinct motivational patterns. This section connects the themes identified in each role to the top motivation keywords from Table 2: feedback, relationship, achievement, passion, and reward. The instructor group included six participants (Hyejin, Juyeon, Jieun, Sejung, Yeji, Minji), the lead instructor group included three participants (Jaeyoung, Junghun, Suji), and the director-instructor group included three participants (Sunhye, Sunghyun, Minyoung).

Direct Instructional Fulfillment (Instructors). Instructors without administrative responsibilities reported that their teaching motivation was primarily fueled by students’ academic achievement and visible growth. They felt deeply rewarded when students improved their grades or were admitted to college. Juyeon shared that “Students who seemed like they were

going to give up but decided to keep studying—that kind of thing, and of course, when they get good grades,” which made her feel most fulfilled. Jieun similarly stated, “When students’ performance improves, I prepare harder and teach more passionately. After all, this is private education, so outcomes matter—and that was the foundation of my motivation.” Moments when students expressed understanding or excitement during lessons also contributed to their sense of teaching efficacy. Spontaneous reactions such as saying “I get it now” boosted teachers’ confidence and kept them motivated. Yeji explained, “When students enjoy class and tell me they’ve learned something they didn’t know before, it feels good.”

Some instructors traced their initial motivation to the symbolic value or appeal of the teaching profession itself. The idea of guiding others and the social status associated with being a teacher played a role in their career choice. Hyejin reflected, “Teaching just looked like something really admirable to me. There’s a certain level of honor or status in being a teacher. I think that mattered more to me than money at the beginning.” Instructors also found emotional support through building bonds with students. Even when unrelated to grades, seeing students trust them, engage more, or grow emotionally was a strong source of fulfillment. Minji shared, “I just liked being around kids. Seeing them made me happy—and that kind of thing motivated me more.” Likewise, Sejung said, “When I see that I’ve become someone students can rely on, that’s when I really feel a sense of meaning in what I do.”

As these examples show, instructors were motivated by a mix of academic progress, spontaneous feedback, personal values associated with teaching, and emotional connections. Their motivation was sustained not through structural incentives, but through repeated moments of meaningful interaction in the classroom. This emphasis on visible student outcomes and immediate feedback also reflects the unique role of private English instructors, whose motivation is closely tied to both students’ English proficiency gains and parental satisfaction. Unlike other subjects, English teaching in private institutes provides instructors with tangible and frequent indicators of progress—such as improved test scores, reading ability, or spontaneous expressions of understanding—which in turn directly influence student retention and re-enrollment.

Collaboration and Shared Passion (Lead Instructors). Lead instructors emphasized the importance of collaboration and interaction with fellow instructors as a source of teaching motivation. They reported that sharing teaching ideas and activities during meetings often sparked renewed enthusiasm. Suji commented, “When we discuss activities and ideas in meetings, and share information, I start to think, ‘Oh, this sounds fun—I should try it too.’ It makes me more motivated.” They also explained that the attitude of colleagues directly influenced their own motivation. Suji noted, “I think it really depends on my coworkers. When I see someone working hard, I naturally start to work harder too.” Observing passionate and committed coworkers inspired them to put in greater effort. In addition, instructors emphasized that workplace relationships played a key role in maintaining their motivation. Jaeyoung remarked, “I think relationships with the people at work—those human connections—have a big impact.” Support and respect from directors and coworkers encouraged continued engagement in lesson preparation and instruction.

Overall, lead instructors drew motivation from interactions beyond the classroom, particularly through collaboration, peer influence, and interpersonal dynamics within the institution. These non-instructional elements played a central role in sustaining their teaching engagement. In the context of private English education, collaboration was especially meaningful because effective instruction often depended on sharing communicative activities, feedback strategies, and methods to engage students. This focus on interactive pedagogy distinguished English lead instructors’ motivational sources from those of instructors in other subjects, where teaching methods are more standardized and less dependent on classroom dynamics.

Emotional Affirmation and Autonomy (Director-Instructors). Some director-instructors explained that their initial motivation for teaching stemmed not from educational ideals, but from a preference for autonomy and flexibility in the workplace. Rather than following top-down structures, they were drawn to designing and running their own lessons. Sunhye explained, “The corporate work environment didn’t suit me. I wanted to design my own curriculum and not just follow orders from a boss.” Over time, their engagement deepened through emotional interactions with students and parents. During parent consultations, receiving feedback that their personal attention was noticed often reinforced their sense of professional fulfillment. Sunghyun stated, “I try to remember every student’s name and face. When parents say, ‘The director really cares about each student,’ it makes me feel proud.” Reviewing counseling logs and giving personalized praise also helped them feel more effective as instructors. When students passed along these compliments to their parents, and parents in turn expressed appreciation, it created a motivational loop rooted in emotional affirmation. Minyoung described, “When I read the counseling logs and see that a student is doing well, I make a point to compliment them. Later, parents say the director praised their child, and that makes me feel really good too.”

Thus, director-instructors sustained their motivation through relational dynamics and emotional feedback rather than structural incentives or hierarchical authority. Through these emotionally affirming interactions, they deepened their professional identity and reaffirmed the value of their teaching role. For private English director-instructors in particular,

direct engagement with parents played a decisive role: when their personal care was recognized, their motivation was reinforced not only as teachers but also as institutional leaders. This process extended beyond classroom outcomes, linking parental trust to the stability of the institute and constituting a distinctive source of motivation unique to their dual role.

Analysis of Teaching Demotivation Factors

Demotivation among private English instructors did not stem from a single factor but manifested differently depending on their instructional context and professional role. In particular, differences in school level (kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school) and job position (instructor, lead instructor, and director-instructor) shaped the nature and intensity of demotivating experiences. This section introduces the key demotivating factors and compares how they vary across school levels and instructor roles. At the same time, frequency analysis revealed five recurring demotivation keywords—lack of collaboration, work environment, stress, fatigue, and unfairness (Table 3)—which corresponded to the systemic and relational challenges instructors described.

TABLE 3
Top 5 Teaching Demotivation Keywords

Rank	Keywords	Frequency	Example
1	Lack of Collaboration	52	<i>I prefer when everyone just does their own part—too many people try to slide by.</i>
2	Work Environment	42	<i>As the education system keeps changing, my teaching hours have increased a lot.</i>
3	Stress	31	<i>When lesson preparation takes up too much time, it was very stressful.</i>
4	Fatigue	18	<i>I'm just too exhausted from the workload to actually do it.</i>
5	Unfairness/Injustice	13	<i>Another team received a premium gift set, while we were given a cheaper, normal version.</i>

The keywords presented in Table 3 reflect core dimensions of teaching demotivation as experienced by the private English instructors in this study. Lack of collaboration referred to conflicts with colleagues, particularly when fellow instructors failed to meet shared responsibilities or contributed unequally to team efforts. Work environment encompassed institutional and physical conditions beyond instructors' control, such as frequent curriculum changes, excessive teaching hours, or poorly equipped classrooms. Stress denoted the psychological strain experienced by instructors due to burdensome lesson preparation, pressure to produce measurable student outcomes, or difficult interactions with parents. Fatigue described instructors' emotional and physical exhaustion, often resulting from long work hours, repetitive instructional tasks, and insufficient recovery time. Unfairness reflected instructors' perceptions of organizational injustice, including unequal allocation of team rewards, favoritism by management, and lack of transparency in performance evaluations.

Differences in Demotivation by School Level

Demotivation among private English instructors varies significantly by school level, shaped by differences in institutional expectations, classroom demands, and the developmental stage of students. Instructors teaching kindergarten and lower elementary levels often experience demotivation due to emotionally unresponsive students, excessive administrative workload concentrated at specific times, and sudden changes in institutional policies or event planning requirements. These challenges are often intensified by parental pressure and lack of systemic support. Instructors of upper elementary and middle school students tend to experience demotivation related to managing classroom atmosphere, balancing between academic delivery and student engagement, and dealing with emotionally fluctuating adolescent learners. In contrast, high school instructors face heightened stress due to grade-oriented performance pressures, college entrance-related responsibilities, and the need to meet institutional outcome expectations. This section outlines how these school-level distinctions manifest in unique demotivating experiences among instructors.

Work Environment Strain and Emotional Burden (Kindergarten–Lower Elementary Instructors). Kindergarten and lower elementary instructors commonly experienced demotivation due to schedule constraints, administrative overload, and parental pressure. For example, Sunhye noted that with the rise of afternoon care programs, it became difficult to recruit students for earlier class slots, saying, “When I try to fill those classes, I just think, ‘No one will come anyway,’ and that takes away my motivation.” Minji explained that when multiple responsibilities like counseling and student report writing

converged, she felt overwhelmed and stressed: “When a lot of tasks pile up all at once—like writing student reports and doing counseling—it gets really stressful. I wish the work was more evenly spread out.” Suji expressed frustration with parental demands, stating, “Some moms expect you to only pay attention to their child. They contact you at all hours. That’s why I use two phones—I don’t even look at the work one after I leave.” She also recounted the chaos during semester transitions when new enrollments, teacher turnover, and handover duties all overlapped, leading her to question her sense of control: “During those times I sometimes wonder, ‘What am I even doing right now?’”

Overall, demotivation at this level stemmed from unpredictable scheduling, emotionally demanding parents, and clustered administrative obligations. Importantly, these challenges were intensified in the private English institute context, where early literacy instruction overlaps with childcare expectations and parental competition for accelerated progress. Unlike in public schools, where instructional hours and duties are more standardized, English instructors in private institutes face fragmented schedules and direct parental demands that blur the line between teaching and caretaking responsibilities.

Lack of Colleague Interactions and Perceived Unfairness (Upper Elementary–Middle School Instructors).

Instructors in this group identified demotivating factors related to interpersonal dynamics, work imbalance, and a lack of autonomy. Hyejin emphasized the impact of peer collaboration, stating, “If everyone is proactive and takes initiative, I also feel more motivated to cooperate. But when others try to free-ride or don’t pull their weight, I just don’t want to collaborate with them.” Minyoung described the intensity of the workload when administrative and instructional duties overlapped. She noted that on some days, she had to prepare lessons late at night after finishing office work in the morning and realized she had not taken a single day off for an entire month. She also voiced frustration about unfair parental expectations, recalling instances where students did not complete assignments yet parents blamed her for poor grades. Sejung noted that autonomy influenced her motivation significantly: “I’m okay with doing extra work if I can decide when and how much to do. But if it’s forced or pushed on me, and I feel like I have no choice, that’s when my motivation really drops.”

Overall, demotivation among upper elementary and middle school instructors resulted from strained colleague interactions, excessive duties beyond contract terms, and diminished agency, highlighting the role of institutional fairness and collaborative culture. Importantly, in the private English institute context, these issues were amplified by the high stakes of visible academic outcomes and direct parental oversight. Instructors felt that collaboration breakdowns or unfair blame from parents directly undermined their professional credibility, a pressure less pronounced in public school settings where evaluation systems are more standardized.

Policy Instability and Performance Pressure (High School Instructors). High school instructors reported demotivation driven by curriculum instability, heightened academic pressure, and loss of autonomy. Jieun explained that the sudden removal of the standardized test bank forced her to rebuild all assessments from scratch, which substantially increased her workload: “When the test bank disappears, I have to start everything from scratch. That’s when the workload really piles up.” Juyeon shared that uncooperative students and demanding parents who blamed teachers regardless of student effort undermined her motivation: “When I deal with uncooperative students or unreasonable parents, or when a student’s grades don’t improve, I start to lose motivation.” In addition, Junghun explained how student turnover negatively affected his motivation. He noted that “When students’ grades drop, they immediately withdraw from the academy and enroll in another one. That kind of withdrawal really hurts my motivation.”

These findings suggest that demotivation among high school instructors was closely linked to institutional volatility, academic outcome pressures, and limited control over educational processes. These conditions not only led to emotional fatigue but also eroded their sense of professional efficacy. Importantly, in the private English institute context, such pressures were intensified by the weight of college entrance exams and the market-driven environment, where student withdrawal and parental expectations directly influenced instructors’ job security and institutional reputation.

Differences in Demotivation by Instructor Position

Demotivation among private English instructors also differs markedly by job position, reflecting variations in role expectations, organizational pressure, and levels of decision-making authority. Instructors without leadership roles often reported feeling disregarded, overburdened by administrative tasks, and deprived of autonomy in their work environments. In contrast, lead instructors experienced demotivation stemming from the dual demands of teaching and management, frequently citing excessive responsibility, lack of control over regular instructors, and role conflict between upper and lower organizational tiers. Director-instructors, while expressing a sustained sense of professional obligation, revealed symptoms of burnout associated with prolonged overwork, ongoing parental pressure, and the instability of institutional systems. This section explores how demotivating factors are shaped by instructors’ hierarchical positions within the academy structure,

drawing on first-hand accounts of their lived experiences. Importantly, in the private English institute context, these role-based pressures were intensified by parental expectations for visible language outcomes and the market-driven environment, which directly tied instructors' authority and workload to student retention and institutional performance.

Stress, Fatigue, and Lack of Social Recognition (Instructors). Instructors without leadership roles reported demotivation stemming from persistent stress and feelings of being disregarded within their teaching environments. Hyejin described the emotional toll of managing disruptive students, unreasonable parents, and administrators who treated instructors as machines rather than professionals. Hyejin stated, "Every day I lose motivation. When students don't listen, when I get into conflicts with them, and when the director criticizes me... When they treat us like teaching machines and don't care about our well-being..." Structural inefficiencies and involuntary work obligations further undermined their motivation. Yeji noted that a poorly executed system change significantly increased her administrative workload, while Sejung described the demoralizing nature of forced overtime with inadequate compensation. Yeji shared, "What they implemented was even worse... We had to send notices in two different ways." Sejung noted, "If I'm being forced to do it, not because I want to, that really kills my motivation." Unexpected administrative burdens unrelated to teaching also contributed to frustration. Minji shared her experience of being assigned last-minute event preparations, which disrupted her primary teaching duties and left her feeling overwhelmed. Minji explained, "We're out there buying snacks and toys last minute. I really hate it."

Overall, these instructors were primarily demotivated by disrespectful treatment, forced labor, and a lack of autonomy. Their accounts highlighted how top-down management decisions and unbalanced responsibilities contributed to emotional fatigue and disengagement. In private English institutes, these challenges were amplified by subject-specific expectations. For English instructors, public schools' emphasis on performance-based tasks such as speaking or writing assessments meant that students frequently sought additional support at the academy. Preparing materials, giving individualized feedback, and guiding students through these tasks added to instructors' workload and heightened their sense of fatigue and undervaluation compared to other occupations.

Dual Role Overload and Collaboration Strain (Lead Instructors). Lead instructors reported demotivation primarily due to excessive responsibilities and organizational pressure associated with their dual roles. Jaeyoung recalled working for ten consecutive days while juggling counseling duties and teaching, highlighting the emotional strain caused by overlapping roles and a constant pressure to perform. Jaeyoung stated, "I had to work for ten days in a row... I opened the office alone on a Sunday and made calls from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.... Handling counseling calls and teaching at the same time was the hardest part." He also pointed out the stress caused by constant performance comparisons using metrics shared across the staff. Additionally, he described a sense of disconnect between himself and upper managers including director-instructors. Junghun expressed demotivation resulting from the need to supervise junior instructors while also reporting to academy leadership. Although he bore significant responsibility, he lacked the authority to address uncooperative behaviors among colleagues, which left him frustrated and disengaged.

Junghun: I have to manage the instructors below me, report to the director above, and teach as well... But when I see other instructors slacking off, sometimes I want to intervene, but I end up ignoring it. That makes me not want to work at all.

Suji described emotional fatigue during student recruitment seasons. During these periods, she had to juggle onboarding new instructors, maintaining regular classes, and handling increased administrative demands. The cyclical nature of academic turnover and peak workloads led to recurring feelings of burnout and disillusionment. Suji stated, "It's the time when new students come in, and the director gets sensitive, instructors switch jobs... I'm so busy with training, teaching, and everything else. That's when I start to wonder what I'm even doing."

Taken together, lead instructors experienced demotivation due to overlapping responsibilities, a lack of control over subordinates, and institutional demands from both above and below. Their accounts reflected heightened stress, fatigue, and emotional labor resulting from their intermediary position within the academy hierarchy. In the case of private English institutes, these challenges were further intensified by the subject-specific demands of English instruction. Unlike other subjects, English subject required lead instructors to coordinate performance-based tasks such as speaking or writing assessments, ensure consistent feedback across instructors, and address heightened parental expectations regarding communicative competence. This combination made their demotivation distinctive, as they were not only overburdened by managerial duties but also by the unique evaluative pressures tied to English education in private settings.

Organizational Instability and Emotional Labor (Director-Instructors). Director-instructors described a persistent sense of duty even in the face of burnout, but also acknowledged moments of emotional fatigue and detachment. Sunhye explained that although she occasionally experienced exhaustion, her responsibility as the director sustained her motivation. Sunhye stated, “Even when I’m burned out, I try not to lose motivation because I have to protect what I’ve built... I just try not to be greedy and focus on what I can control. That’s how I manage my mindset.” Her narrative shows a form of psychological endurance rooted in ownership but also implies self-imposed emotional suppression. This reveals how personal responsibility can sustain motivation while simultaneously concealing underlying exhaustion.

Sunghyun identified multiple stressors, including parental complaints, unmanageable staffing transitions, and external educational policy changes. He shared the strain of dealing with student withdrawals triggered by teacher turnover and unrealistic demands from parents. Sunghyun noted, “When a teacher quits, student withdrawals increase. Parents complain or even demand that we fire certain teachers. And when education policies shift—like the high school credit system or GPA reform—it makes me feel disheartened.” Despite these pressures, he continued to work through weekends and faced chronic fatigue. This underscores the toll of relentless managerial and instructional demands that director-instructors endure on a daily basis.

Likewise, Minyoung highlighted the toll of excessive workload and emotionally charged interactions with parents. She described working continuously without rest, managing both administrative and instructional tasks, often late into the night. She shared, “When there’s just too much work—teaching, admin, everything—I sometimes end up working all day and realize I’ve gone a whole month without a single day off.” Her experience illustrates the long-term effects of overwork and the erosion of personal time. It reflects a deep sense of physical and emotional fatigue that accumulates over time.

These accounts illustrate that director-instructors experienced demotivation not from lack of responsibility but from unrelenting workloads, parental conflict, and systemic instability. Their commitment to institutional survival often masked underlying burnout, revealing how sustained pressure can erode motivation even at the highest levels of leadership. In the case of private English institutes, these pressures were further intensified by the subject-specific demands of English instruction. Unlike subjects where outcomes are measured primarily by test scores, English required directors to respond to parental expectations for both measurable achievement and communicative competence, including speaking and writing performance. This dual burden made their demotivation distinctive, as directors had to balance administrative leadership with the symbolic and practical responsibility of sustaining the institute’s reputation in English education.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the teaching motivation and demotivation of private English instructors in South Korea, revealing how these experiences were shaped by relational, institutional, and organizational factors. The findings indicate that motivation and demotivation were not static but fluid, coexisting processes that were constantly reconfigured by the pressures of private education. Unlike many public-sector contexts, instructors in academies had to negotiate market-driven demands, parental expectations, and institutional instability, which altered how established motivational theories manifested in practice. These results echo international findings that teacher motivation is rarely stable but instead embedded in broader social and institutional dynamics (Gu & Day, 2007). In addition, this study highlights the need to compare motivational experiences between public and private school teachers. Prior research on public school teachers in Korea (e.g., T. Y. Kim & Y. Kim, 2016; E. Park & J. H. Lee, 2017) shows that while teachers often find motivation in student success and professional fulfillment, they also face demotivation from administrative burdens and rigid institutional demands. By contrast, private English instructors in this study reported more fragile motivational states shaped by parental expectations, market accountability, and institutional instability. Where direct comparative studies are lacking, speculative insights suggest that motivations in public contexts may be buffered by systemic stability and broader educational missions, whereas motivations in private contexts are destabilized by consumer-oriented pressures and immediate performance outcomes.

RQ1. Factors Influencing Teaching Motivation and Demotivation

Instructors consistently pointed to student enjoyment, academic progress, and recognition as major motivational drivers. Yeji described how students’ visible engagement reaffirmed her professional purpose, highlighting the relational satisfaction derived from students’ enjoyment and growth. Jieun stated, “When students’ grades are directly connected to my teaching, I prepare even more thoroughly. After all, this is private education—there must be visible results. That became the foundation of my motivation.” These narratives illustrate that competence and relatedness, core needs in SDT (Deci & Ryan,

2000), functioned not as abstract ideals but as daily, tangible motivational resources that were continuously reinforced through visible student engagement and measurable results. At the same time, these factors could turn into sources of demotivation when expectations were unmet. Juyeon reflected that her commitment declined when students' grades stagnated despite her effort, while Suji noted that parental intrusion blurred her personal and professional boundaries. These accounts demonstrate how satisfaction and frustration of needs coexisted, creating volatile (de)motivational states.

Theoretically, these findings extend SDT by showing that competence and relatedness are not solely internalized needs but are externally conditioned in consumer-oriented environments. Teachers' professional value was tied to parental approval and measurable outcomes, revealing how market logics transform psychological needs into performance contingencies. This resonates with A.R. Cho and T. Y. Kim (2017), who emphasized the centrality of parental demands in private academies, and is consistent with T. Y. Kim and Y. Kim (2016), who found that administrative workload and performance pressure undermined motivation among Korean English teachers. In contrast to public school contexts, where professional legitimacy may stem from broader educational missions, private instructors' motivation to teach was unusually fragile, destabilized whenever outcomes were not immediately visible. These findings therefore suggest that SDT requires contextual expansion to capture how market accountability makes motivation precarious in private education.

Recent research further demonstrates that teachers' use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies can mitigate demotivation and sustain engagement, even under high parental pressure (Gross, 2015). Such emotional regulation interacts dynamically with resilience, as both function to preserve teachers' psychological resources under stress. Similarly, Bakker et al. (2014) expanded the JD–R model by showing that psychological resources such as resilience and optimism function as buffers against burnout, suggesting that private instructors' motivational stability depends not only on institutional conditions but also on personal resource development.

Moreover, recent studies of teacher demotivation emphasize that teachers' intrinsic needs are profoundly shaped by institutional and policy environments. For instance, Santoro (2011) argued that many Australian teachers left the profession not because of a loss of pedagogical commitment, but because institutional accountability regimes and policy reforms undermined their moral purpose and professional autonomy. Likewise, Sato et al. (2022) examined Chilean EFL teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that pandemic-related stress heightened burnout levels, while teacher motivation was negatively associated with burnout, indicating its potential buffering role. Collectively, these findings suggest that teacher motivation should be conceptualized not only as an individual resource but also as a product of organizational and systemic conditions.

RQ2. Differences Across School Level

The findings also showed clear differences across school levels. Kindergarten and lower elementary instructors reported motivation from children's small but visible achievements and immediate classroom feedback. These moments resonated with Grant's (2007) relational job design theory, which emphasizes the motivational significance of perceiving direct social impact. Yet these instructors also described emotional labor and parental intrusion as demotivating, both of which undermined autonomy and depleted resources. Upper elementary and middle school instructors reported that witnessing student growth reinforced their teaching identity. Sejung explained, "I'm okay with doing extra work if I can decide when and how much to do. But if it's forced or pushed on me, that's when my motivation really drops." This statement directly illustrates the role of autonomy satisfaction in sustaining engagement—when tasks were self-determined, motivation was strengthened, whereas externally imposed work led to autonomy frustration and disengagement. Weak collegial collaboration also emerged as a demotivating factor, aligning with Grant's (2007) argument that reciprocity is essential for meaningful work. High school instructors described the strongest duality: they gained motivation from helping students succeed in exams and regain confidence, but faced intense demotivation from systemic instability and accountability pressures. Jieun stated, "When students' grades are directly tied to my teaching, I prepare harder. Since this is private education, there must be visible results—that became the foundation of my motivation." These experiences reveal how high school instructors encountered both the most rewarding and the most exhausting conditions within private education.

Theoretically, these results refine the JD–R model by showing that the sources of demands and resources varied systematically across school levels. In general, parental pressure dominated in early levels, collegial dynamics shaped middle levels, and systemic instability characterized high school contexts. This pattern is consistent with E. Park and J. H. Lee (2017), who identified level-specific stressors among Korean teachers, and contrasts with Fernet et al. (2012), who found that institutional stability in public schools buffered teachers from burnout. Private academies lack such institutional buffers, meaning that the same demands produce more extreme demotivational effects. These findings therefore broaden the JD–R model by highlighting how external actors and market volatility must be incorporated when analyzing teacher motivation in

private education.

Further comparative studies reinforce this interpretation. In Japan, Lowe (2015) argues that although cram schools (*juku*) are a dominant force in English-language education, they remain largely unexamined in scholarly research, pointing to the need to investigate how institutional contexts—such as hiring structures and organizational norms—may shape teacher motivation. At the tertiary level, Tsutsumi (2014) found that Japanese university EFL teachers derive motivation largely from intrinsic factors like autonomy, self-growth, and witnessing student progress, while external factors such as job security and contract conditions also significantly influence motivation. E. M. Skaalvik and S. Skaalvik (2016) similarly report that Norwegian teachers experience increased stress when institutional expectations conflict with professional values—a pattern mirrored in the Korean context, where accountability regimes are especially stringent. Bristi et al (2025), in a systematic review of university EFL teacher motivation, likewise found that school-level contexts fundamentally mediate motivational trajectories, underscoring the need for multi-level analysis.

RQ3. Differences by Job Position

Job position also significantly differentiated motivational and demotivational experiences. Instructors derived motivation from student outcomes and classroom engagement, but often felt marginalized due to limited authority, which undermined long-term commitment. This pattern reflects organizational justice theory (Colquitt et al., 2001), where inequities in decision-making power reduce professional engagement. Lead instructors reported motivation from mentoring junior colleagues and contributing to collective outcomes, but also experienced stress from dual responsibilities, balancing classroom teaching with administrative reporting and staff management. Suji's account illustrated how such overlapping demands created role conflict and resource depletion, consistent with the JD–R model. Sunghyun stated, “I think this is a job where you constantly have to develop yourself. The types of exams and college admission policies keep changing, so I'm always looking for new information and trying to figure out better ways to explain things more clearly.” This quotation illustrates how ongoing self-development and perceived responsibility for institutional quality reinforced his sense of professional responsibility and sustained motivation. At the same time, director-instructors described prolonged overwork, staff turnover, and organizational instability as chronic demotivating factors. Other director-instructors noted that working through weekends to manage staff changes and parental complaints eroded their sustainability. These experiences align with Cropanzano and Molina's (2015) social exchange perspective, which argues that imbalanced obligations and limited reciprocity heighten stress.

Theoretically, these findings extend organizational justice and leadership research by revealing the ambivalent nature of leadership roles in market-driven contexts. While international studies often portray leadership as a resource that enhances autonomy, in private education leadership amplified responsibility without proportional authority or support. This duality highlights a unique tension in Korean academies: leadership positions simultaneously reinforced professional meaning and generated structural strain, complicating conventional assumptions about hierarchical advancement. Day and Gu (2010) argue that leadership identity is negotiated through both recognition and responsibility, a duality that strongly resonates with director-instructors in Korean private academies. Similarly, Harris (2008) emphasized that distributed leadership often redistributes workload without necessarily redistributing authority, a pattern mirrored in the accounts of lead instructors who experienced increased demands but limited decision-making power.

Overall, this study demonstrates that motivation and demotivation among private English instructors are best understood as interconnected processes shaped by market accountability, parental involvement, and institutional instability. The findings not only reaffirm the relevance of SDT and the JD–R model but also illustrate how these frameworks operate through the multiple interactions between instructors and their perceived environmental contexts. By highlighting the fragility of motivation in the private sector and the dual role of structural conditions as both resources and risks, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of teacher motivation that extends beyond the boundaries of public education. Recent work by Tarantul and Berkovich (2025) also demonstrates that teachers' motivations for emotion work versus emotional labor are conditioned by organizational settings, reinforcing the present finding that leadership in private academies can simultaneously enrich and exhaust professional engagement.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the teaching motivation and demotivation of private English instructors in South Korea through qualitative interviews conducted across different school levels and job positions. The analysis addressed three research

questions focusing on the key sources of motivation, the primary causes of demotivation, and contextual variations across positions and school levels. First, with regard to the key sources of motivation, instructors reported that their enthusiasm was primarily sustained by students' academic achievement, relational affirmation, and professional recognition. Second, concerning demotivation, instructors described parental pressure, limited autonomy, weak collegial collaboration, and systemic instability as major sources of frustration. Third, regarding contextual variations, motivational patterns differed by position and school level: classroom instructors found meaning in direct student engagement, whereas lead instructors and directors faced emotional burdens associated with managerial and accountability responsibilities. These findings collectively demonstrate that motivation and demotivation are interdependent processes shaped by whether instructors' core professional needs—such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness—are fulfilled or frustrated.

The results also provide important theoretical and pedagogical implications. While SDT remains a useful framework, it requires contextual refinement because competence and relatedness in private academies were reinforced or undermined by parental approval and performance outcomes. The JD–R model was likewise extended, as the sources of demands and resources varied systematically by school level, from parental expectations at lower levels to systemic instability in high school. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that institutions should establish structured peer feedback loops in which instructors regularly observe one another's classes, exchange constructive comments, and reflect on effective teaching strategies. Such systems can foster reflective professionalism and reduce instructional isolation. They should also develop parent consultation guidelines that define clear boundaries and communication protocols, enabling instructors to handle parental expectations consistently and minimize emotional strain. Moreover, autonomy-supportive leadership training should be implemented to help lead instructors and director-instructors practice empowering supervision rather than top-down control, thereby enhancing teachers' sense of competence and agency. In addition, reducing administrative overload and strengthening collegial collaboration can provide the relational resources necessary for sustained motivation. Finally, tailored professional development programs should help instructors across levels build emotional resilience, manage parental interactions constructively, and maintain long-term engagement in their work. Taken together, these findings highlight that motivational theories must be adapted to the distinctive dynamics of private English education, where parental involvement, accountability pressures, and institutional instability collectively shape instructors' professional motivation.

This study is not without limitations. The analysis was based on a relatively small sample of instructors within South Korea, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. In addition, while the study employed in-depth qualitative methods, future research could adopt longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to explore how motivation and demotivation evolve over time and interact with institutional change. Despite these limitations, the study provides new insights into the unique vulnerabilities and strengths of private English instructors, offering a foundation for future research and practical initiatives aimed at improving teacher well-being and instructional quality in private education. Overall, this research contributes to a more contextualized understanding of motivational processes within the private sector and offers guidance for designing supportive teaching environments that foster sustainable engagement.

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Appendix A

Interview questions: teaching motivation and demotivation of private English instructors

1. Background Information (2 items)

1. How many years of experience do you have as a private English instructor?
2. What subjects and school levels do you currently teach?

2. Teaching Motivation (8 items)

3. What motivated you to begin working as a private English instructor? What expectations did you have at the start?
4. When do you feel the greatest sense of reward from students' achievements or learning progress?
5. How do relationships with students affect your motivation? Can you share a positive example?
6. How does your personal passion or interest influence your motivation during lesson preparation and teaching?
7. Have you ever gained motivation through activities outside the classroom (e.g., counseling, mentoring)?
8. How have financial rewards or social recognition influenced your motivation compared to non-monetary factors?
9. Do you make efforts for self-development or professional growth?
How have these efforts influenced your motivation?
10. How does collaboration with colleagues or the overall private education culture affect your motivation?

3. Demotivation (8 items)

11. Have you ever experienced loss of motivation? What triggered it?
12. Has workload or stress contributed to demotivation? Which tasks were most burdensome?
13. Did student indifference or excessive parental expectations affect your motivation?
14. Have institutional or policy changes negatively influenced your motivation?
15. How did demotivation affect your teaching quality or emotional engagement with students?
16. What strategies have you used to recover from demotivation? Were they effective?
17. Did you ever consider career change due to demotivation?
18. Did demotivation lead you to change your teaching philosophy or instructional approach?

4. Change Process and Current Motivation (7 items)

19. Have you noticed changes in your motivation over time? What caused them?
 20. Have you developed strategies to sustain motivation? How effective were they?
 21. How do you evaluate your current motivation level compared to the past?
 22. What role does student feedback or achievement play in sustaining your motivation now?
 23. How do work environment and institutional support affect your current motivation?
 24. How do long-term goals support your current motivation?
 25. What lessons have past demotivation experiences taught you for sustaining motivation in the future?
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Appendix B

Coding scheme

The table below presents a representative coding scheme illustrating how initial codes were abstracted into sub-themes and higher-order themes. Initial codes were derived inductively from interview transcripts and clustered into categories consistent with Tables 2 and 3 in the Results section.

Table B1
Representative Coding Scheme

Initial Codes (from transcripts)	Sub-Themes	Higher-Order Themes
“I feel really good when I receive positive feedback.”	Student/parent feedback	Feedback
“When I have a good relationship with the students, the classroom atmosphere becomes really good.”	Positive student relationship	Relationship
“When students got 100 on their test, I really feel good.”	Academic progress / achievement	Achievement
“I just liked the kids. Seeing them made me happy.”	Passion for teaching / interest	Passion
“Seeing their English improve is the most rewarding part of teaching.”	Sense of reward	Reward
“When lesson preparation takes up too much time, it was very stressful.”	Work overload / stress	Stress
“Some moms expect you to only pay attention to their child. They contact you at all hours.”	Parent demands / emotional burden	Work Environment / Emotional Labor
“If everyone is proactive, I also feel motivated. But when others try to free-ride, I just don’t want to collaborate.”	Lack of collaboration	Collaboration
“Another team received a premium gift set, while we were given a cheaper version.”	Perceived unfairness	Unfairness
“I’m just too exhausted from the workload to actually do it.”	Fatigue / exhaustion	Fatigue

Note. Initial codes were derived inductively from transcripts, then clustered into sub-themes and further abstracted into higher-order themes. The full codebook is available upon request.