

## “Sleeping Beauties” in English Classrooms: The English Divestment of Korean High School Students

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Ahn, Sung-Ho G. and Lee, Mun Woo. 2017. “Sleeping beauties” in English classrooms: The English divestment of Korean high school students. *Korean Journal of English Language and Linguistics* 17-3, 547-579. This study delves into English language “divestment” in Korean classrooms by focusing on why some students sleep in their English classes. Data were collected using interviews with 26 first and second year high school students who often fell asleep in English classes. The data were subjected to the conventional content analysis and interpreted using Darwin and Norton’s (2015) investment framework. The findings showed that the students divested from English classes for four reasons. First, they did not agree with the “English is a necessity” ideology and had no interest in participating in English classes. Second, although they wanted to study English, they believed that the school curriculum and the teachers were not helpful enough. Third, the students complained about not knowing how to study English, and fourth, they felt physically tired because they often spent much time the night before on activities unrelated to their studies, such as playing computer games and using social networking services. Most students had multiple reasons at once, which shows the intricate interrelationships among the English language ideology, the available capital for English learning, and the learners’ identities. The findings of this study emphasize the need to embrace these marginalized students based on a comprehensive understanding of the discursive nature of English divestment.

**Keywords:** English divestment, identity, capital, ideology, Korean EFL students

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## 1. Introduction

In Korea, English is considered one of the most important school subjects, along with Korean and Mathematics, for entering prestigious universities, and this perceived importance is directly related to the large amount of time devoted to it (Bang and Chon 2011). However, not all students can become good at English. According to the results of the 2015 national college entrance examination (Ministry of Education 2016), only 11.6% of the total students (N=594,835) were classified as high achieving with a grade of 1 or 2 out of 9. Furthermore, among those who were not in that top student group, about 130,000 (21.9%) received grades 7, 8 or 9, which effectively labeled them “seriously underachieving students.” This number is quite surprising in that it is as large as the number of low achieving students in Mathematics, which is traditionally thought to be the most difficult subject. The number also helps us grasp how many students are considered “backwards” in Korean English language classrooms.

Not surprisingly, students who are labeled as being “deficient,” “left-behind,” and “at-risk” do not concentrate on studying English in the classroom. They are often distracted, chat with other students, do other things and in the worst cases lie face down on their desk and fall asleep in the presence of their teachers (Kwak 2004). A number of studies conducted in Korea regarding the issue of students’ demotivation have also reported common “demotivators” (Kim and Kim 2016, p. 136), including individual-level (i.e., indifference of parents, heavy dependence on private education, wrong advice from siblings), institutional-level (i.e., grammar and reading-based curriculum, conflicts with an English teacher), and cultural-level (i.e., dislike of American culture) demotivators (Hwang 2013, Kwak 2004, Kim 2009, Kim and Lee 2014, Yeo and Lee 2015). These national-level

studies emphasize that students’ motivation can be enhanced by simply removing or preventing these demotivators.

However, student engagement in L2 learning needs to be understood from a holistic and organic perspective because it is a dynamic phenomenon influenced by invisible ideology and power relations among people (Block 2007, Gordon 2004, Kramsch 2013, Menard-Warwick 2007, Skilton-Sylvester 2002). From this perspective, previous studies focusing on demotivation have only touched upon “what” makes the Korean students end up not studying English, but have not sufficiently explained “how” these factors function as demotivators in an integrative way within the given context. Furthermore, these studies have mainly relied on surveys for data collection and have not focused on those who “give up” studying English at the high school level. Therefore, this study aims to examine in what ways these “backwards” students in a Korean high school “are purposefully divesting” from institutionally forced English classes by analyzing data collected from the in-depth interviews of 26 students. The specific research question is as follows: *In what ways the underachieving students put their own agency into practice while sleeping in English classes?*

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Demotivation and Beyond

By and large, “backwards” students’ low level of classroom participation is attributed to their demotivation in English language learning. Demotivation is “a decrease or drop in level of motivation” (Falout, Elwood and Hood 2009, p. 404), assuming the following process: (a) there has been pre-existing motivation, (b) certain external factors trigger a decrease of motivation, and (c)

demotivation is internalized (Dörnyei 2001, Dörnyei and Ushida 2011). Previous studies have pointed out that common external factors, including a teacher's inefficient instruction, and his/her disagreeable personality, boring classroom activities, and dissatisfactory grades (Gorsuch 2000, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei 2008, Potee 2002, Taguchi 2005, Trang and Baldauf 2007) result in the demotivation of L2 learners. These factors combine with the students' negative psychological states, such as the lack of self-confidence and disappointment in their own performance (Falout and Maruyama 2004, Sakai and Kikuchi 2009).

As aforementioned, however, these (de)motivation-oriented approaches are insufficient to provide any deeper insight into the students' agency and the socio-cultural dynamics around them. As Norton [Pierce] (1995, 2000, 2013) reports, on the one hand, the learners may challenge and overcome significant demotivators and participate in English interactions; on the other hand, highly motivated learners may resist participating in chances to practice the target language when they cannot accept social "positionings" imposed on them in specific sites. Significantly, Norton [Pierce] (1995, 2000, 2013) has provided the researchers with a new handle on understanding teacher and student non-participation by means of identity and resistance, from a new perspective, as well. Students showed behaviors of non-attendance, irregular or unengaged attendance when their cultural identities were threatened by new social positionings (Canagarajah 1993, Giltrow and Calhoun 1992), constructed or maintained subversive identities in "safe houses" (Canagarajah 2004), resisted dealing and being connected with the apartheid past (McKinney and van Pletzen 2004), refused or accepted labels of identity going through their transition periods (Thesen 1997), or did not participate in too easy ESL activities or assignments but did proscribed activities (Talmy 2008).

These studies discuss how the students’ agentive practices foreground the process of “divestment” in such a situational context where learner “investment” has institutionally and socio-culturally been reified (Darvin and Norton 2015). They also suggest what should be done to “restore” these marginalized students on to their legitimate space for possibilities, and consider the meaning of the English language and English language learning in various contexts. In other words, the previous studies show that the unidimensional theories of motivation in second language acquisition need to be replaced with the theory of social identity and “investment” which emphasizes the correspondence between the inner desire to learn a target language and the outer context. Therefore, this study delves into how these so-called “deficient,” “left-behind,” and “at-risk” students “question, protest against, and/or partially or completely divest from” English language learning, through the lens of investment.

## 2.2. Divestment as the Reverse of Investment

Darvin and Norton (2015) elaborate a new model of investment using the three constructs of ideology, capital, and identity (see Figure 1). They argue that the concept of investment is useful for investigating the extent to which learners are “invested in the language and literacy practices of their classrooms and communities” (p. 47) through the interplay of those three notions. According to Darvin and Norton, ideology refers to “a normative set of ideas” (p. 43), which will affect learners’ habitus or inherent dispositions to think or act in certain ways like sleeping in class, and to constitute their identities along with their agency to change their socio-cultural contexts. Capital is “a power for social reproduction and transformation” (p. 44) and comprises the symbolic resources that learners need to invest themselves in, or can imagine to achieve from, learning the target language. Finally,

identity is how the learners perceive their current and future selves in relation to how others position them in the given context. In Korea, these notions should be modulated to suit the specific context. For this study, ideology crucially comprises the socially prevalent, value-laden English ideology, which is directly related to the “English fever” phenomenon (Krashen 2003) and will position learners. Capital comprises any type of resource available for, or attainable from, students’ English learning, and identity refers to the students’ self-perception, mainly in relation to English and English learning.

As shown in Figure 1, the interplay of these three constructs creates overlapping areas called “systemic patterns of control,” “affordances or perceived benefits,” and “positioning.” The first area of systemic patterns of control is located where ideology and capital overlap, and it includes educational policies, codes, or institutions like schools. This means that learners can invest in English learning when they comply with the schooling system and resources, determined by the educational ideology and distributed in the society. The second area including affordances or perceived benefits is where capital and identity overlap, and it implies that learners’ current capital should be usable as affordances and they should be able to see themselves as obtaining a bigger capital from learning English to invest themselves in English learning. The third area, positioning, is where identity and ideology overlap, connoting that learners should simultaneously acknowledge the socially accepted English ideology which position them and have confidence in themselves to invest in English learning. Learners will exert their agency of full investment only if all the three socio-cultural conditions are acceptable to them at the same time.



Figure 1. Investment: Ideology, Capital and Identity (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 42)

Darvin and Norton's theoretical framework can provide us with more fundamental and multi-dimensional explanations about this English divestment population, including whether they agree or disagree with the socially prevalent English ideology, what kind of capital is accessible to them, how they perceive themselves, and, most importantly, how these factors function in an interrelated way, causing divestment in the long run in a certain context. This study can, therefore, be viewed as a way of testing to what extent Darvin and Norton's (2015) theory of investment can adequately be extended to shed light on a setting of learning English as a foreign language in South Korea.

### 3. The Study

The participants were first and second year students in a public high school in a suburban area in the northern part of Seoul, where most of the households were middle or lower-middle class. An English teacher at the school whom one of the researchers had known for many years helped the researchers access the

participants. More often than not, the teacher showed her own concerns about dealing with this group of students. She was very helpful in terms of accessing the school and picking out the underachieving students who usually slept in English class from among those who had volunteered to participate in the interview. Seventeen of the students were male and nine were female. The interviews were mainly conducted individually, but if the students wanted, group interviews with up to four people were conducted. The interviews were semi-structured, with seven lead-off questions used, as presented in Table 1. In addition, for question 7, the students were asked to draw a picture regarding the relationship between English and themselves, but if only they wanted to. Twenty-one out of the 26 students drew a picture and spent some time explaining it during the interview (see Figure 2). Each interview lasted between about 30 minutes and an hour depending on the number of interviewees, took place in a school counseling room and was recorded under an agreement made with each student.

**Table 1. Interview Questions**

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1. Since when have you started to sleep in English class?
  2. What causes you to sleep in English class?
  3. How does the teacher react when you sleep in English class?
  4. What do you usually do in other classes?
  5. How do you feel when you sleep in English class?
  6. What do your parents usually tell you about your English studying?
  7. What does English mean to you?
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The collected data were transcribed and subsequently translated into English before being subjected to “conventional content analysis” (Hsieh & Shannon 2005), which allows the codes to be emerged during the analysis. The researchers read the data carefully and came up with “key thoughts or concepts” (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, p. 1279). These initial coding schemes were then merged into four broader categories: “Why do I need to



learn English?” , “I like English, but the ‘systemic patterns of control’ are not acceptable” , “I do want to learn English, but I just don’ t have enough ‘affordances’ ” , and “I’ m too tired to concentrate on studying in English class.” Each of these categories is presented in the findings section, with diagrams based on Darwin and Norton’ s (2015) theoretical framework of “ideology, capital and identity.” Because some of students had more than two reasons for sleeping in class, the total number of students discussed in the findings section is greater than 26.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Reaction 1: Why Do I Need to Learn English?

The first group of students included those who did not agree with the socially prevalent ideology that emphasizes the importance of English and forces commitment to English study (Park and Bae 2009, Lee, 2016). Six out of the 26 students mentioned that English was not significant in their life and expressed doubt about the reasons they had to learn it. Notably, they did not mention the “English fever” phenomenon (Krashen 2003) in Korean society and defined English and English learning as “other people’ s business.” As Participant 17 showed, this group’ s disconnection from English and English learning could be attributed to the gap between their current selves as underachievers and their imagined selves, which they believed they could never be at a high level (Norton 2013, Kanno and Norton 2003). In addition, the imagined community to which they could belong by studying English diligently (Darvin and Norton 2015) did not appeal to them because they insisted that they would choose a major at college or get a job for which English would be irrelevant.

[Excerpt 1: Participant 19]

R: What does English mean to you?

P19: It' s an unnecessary subject.

R: Ah, unnecessary? So ...

P19: Well, I don' t have an opportunity to go abroad and well ... it' s a foreign language anyway. It is needed by honor students or ... those who want to go to university or become a big guy in the future so that they need to communicate in English with foreigners, but I' m not one of them.

R: But you said you wanted to go to college with a sport major.

P19: I don' t really have to study English so hard to go to college with a sport major. I just need to study basic English because I won' t live in an English-speaking country.

Due to this self-perceived “illegitimacy” to be a member of English-related imagined community (Barab and Duffy 2000, Kanno and Norton 2003), they felt that English class was nothing more than meaningless time spent at school sitting at a desk. English was too difficult to learn, which made them feel disconnected and frustrated. Participant 21 displayed this perspective well in the following excerpt.

[Excerpt 2: Participant 21]<sup>1</sup>

R: So, what does English mean to you? What does it mean?

P22: It' s...difficult...language of another country (laughing).

R: (Laughing)

P22: English can never become mine...

R: Uh...So, it can never become yours=

P22:= It' s a difficult language of another country.

R: OK. So, do you think it cannot be yours because it' s difficult to learn?

P22: Yes. I simply cannot catch up with the coursework.

<sup>1</sup> =: Latching speech; ( ): Gestures, laughter, etc.

R: You cannot catch up with the coursework...If so, what does English class mean to you? What do you think about an English class? What’s the meaning of it?  
 P22: English class...is...um...it’s just killing time at school.  
 R: I see.  
 P22: I spent the time meaninglessly.  
 R: You spent the time meaninglessly.  
 P22: Yes.

The students’ disconnection from English was also well expressed in their drawings. Four out of six students drew the relationship, but except for Participant 7, the others had multiple reasons for sleeping in English classes. Thus, Participant 7’s picture was chosen as a representative example of the first group of students. Interestingly enough, Participant 7 drew a picture in which English was devouring her like a monster from which she was trying to escape (see Figure 2). Like the other students in group 1, she doubted the socially prevalent ideology of “English is a necessity” and said “I really don’t know... I don’t think English is that necessary to me... Will I ever go to another country? Will I ever be able to get a job?” To her, English was just a stressor to which she could never feel affinity to.

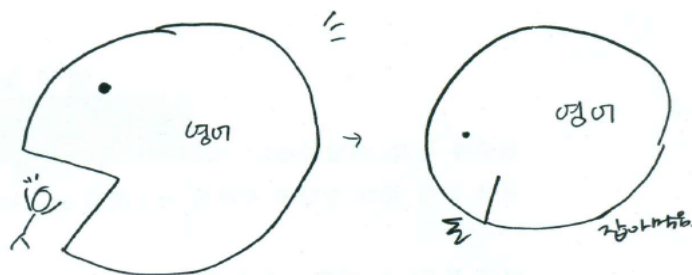
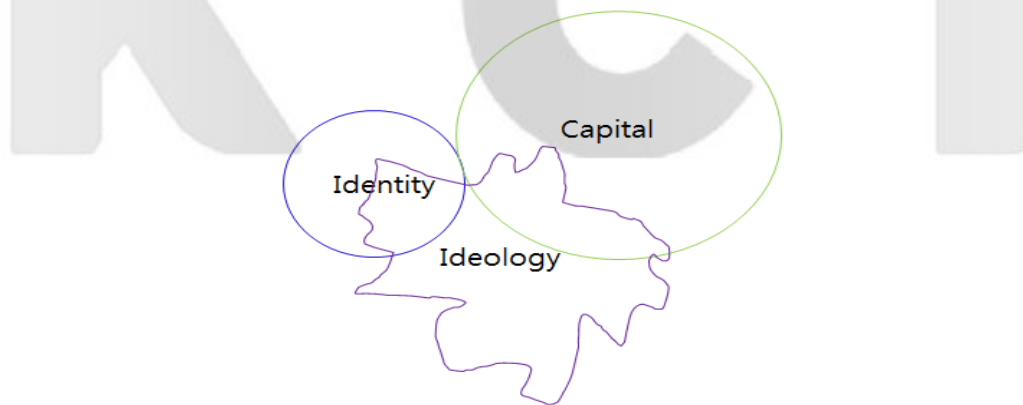


Figure 2. Picture Drawn by Participant 7

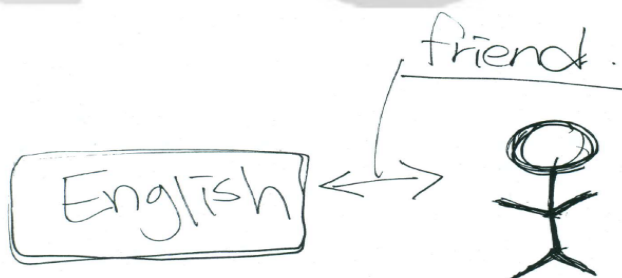
Based upon Darvin and Norton's (2015) framework, English divestment among this first group of students had several characteristics (see Figure 3). First, they did not find it particularly difficult to access the capital they needed for investment in English learning. They were provided with proper parental support and refined English curricula at school and at private institutes. However, they discounted the need for English fundamentally, distancing themselves from the language (Barab and Duffy 2000). As a result, their identities diminished, with no area overlapping the realm of capital. This can explain why they did not see any benefits to learning English. Their negative ideology is shown as an irregular shape in Figure 3 to illustrate these students' negative self-positioning (the overlapping area between identity and ideology) and their poor engagement with English class (the area between capital and ideology).



**Figure 3. Identity, Capital and Ideology of the First Group of Participants**

**4.2. Reaction 2: I Like English, but the “Systemic Patterns of Control” Are Not Acceptable.**

While the first group of students believed that they did not need English in their lives, the second group showed a strong fondness for speaking and learning it. This was quite contradictory to the general perceptions attached to these underachieving students who usually slept in English class. In addition, it was quite surprising that there were twice as many students in this group as the first. Eleven out of 12 students expressed dissatisfaction with their school’s support and included English teachers and the English curriculum as their main reasons for giving up English study. Their positive attitude toward English ideology was represented well in Participant 20’s drawing (see Figure 4). Participant 20 was the only one who gave this as her sole reason. When she was asked to draw the relationship between her and English, she asked a rhetorical question: “Isn’t it a friend? A friend?” and drew the picture below.



**Figure 4. Picture Drawn by Participant 20**

Participant 20 was particularly notable because she had lived in Canada for one year when she was in the fifth grade of

elementary school. Due to her experience in an English-speaking country, she was able to take the most critical stance on the current English curriculum in Korea. She had a strong belief that language, including English, is for communication. She insisted that memorization of the textbook for taking a test and the lack of genuine communication with an English native speaker were the main reasons she disengaged from English class (Kim, 2009; Kim & Lee, 2014). To her, sleeping in English classes was a kind of resistance toward an unfair school system and a form of passive protest against the impractical English curriculum in Korea.

[Excerpt 3: Participant 20]

P20: I'm not sure about your opinion as a professor at the department of English education, but I personally believe that we don't need to memorize the reading texts in the textbook. I think if we are taught basic vocabulary needed for daily life and a little bit of grammar such as subject and object, we can communicate with others. I think communication is the most important for daily life, and I wonder why we have to memorize all these things which we will forget completely after the mid-term. I don't know why the school cancelled the class with a native English-speaking teacher. I enjoyed his class because it was fun and I could actually talk to him in English, but now, I don't have any opportunity like that. English class is just not fun at all.

The students' criticism also extended to their teachers (Falout, Elwood and Hood 2009, Hwang 2013, Sakai and Kikuchi 2009). All 12 students mentioned that some English teachers were too authoritative, too direct, too manipulative, too discriminatory, or too indifferent. The underachieving students' comments showed that they were influenced significantly by affective or personality factors of the teachers, which shows that this group of students

was eager for emotional support from their teachers. That is, they chose to sleep in class as a form of resistance towards the teachers because they thought that they did not get enough emotional support from their teachers. For example, Participant 5 attributed his sleeping in class to his indifferent English teacher.

[Excerpt 4: Participant 5]

R: Under what circumstances do you dislike your English teacher?

P5: Well...at the beginning of the semester, she was OK.

R: At the beginning of the semester?

P5: Yes, at that time, she paid some attention to me.

R: She did?

P5: Yes, but now...she' s not interested in me at all.

R: Hm...

P5: So I just lie face down on the desk in English class.

The identity, capital, and ideology model (Darvin and Norton 2015) of this second group of students was quite different from that of the first group. Unlike the first group, these students had a very wide circle of ideology with a solid line because they followed the socially accepted English ideology and admitted the importance of English. Also, their identity was not diminished because they had their own critical and resistant voice with regard to the current Korean educational system, regardless of their scores at school. However, they had a negative perspective on the available capital for English learning (Dörnyei and Ushida 2011). Thus, the capital area in Figure 5 is shown as an irregular shape. That is why the perceived benefits of English study were not mentioned explicitly by this group (the overlapping area between identity and capital) and why they did not participate in class actively (the overlapping area between capital and ideology). Finally, there was no overlapping area between the circles of identity and ideology because their identities were resistant,

heading away from the circle of ideology. This “non-positioning,” in turn, resulted in divestment from English learning in general.

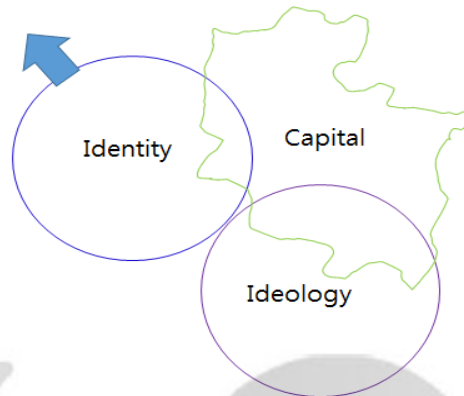


Figure 5. Identity, Capital and Ideology of the Second Group of Participants

#### 4.3. Reaction 3: I Do Want to Learn English, but I Just Don't Have Enough “Affordances.”

The third group of the students, which comprised more than half of the participants (17 out of 26), also expressed negative feelings about studying English. Unlike the second group of students, who criticized the impractical and discriminatory school system (Dörnyei and Ushida 2011), the criticism of students in group 3 focused more on themselves as learners who gave up studying English a long time ago and did not even know where to begin again. All 17 students who talked about the issue of “English studying skills” had a long history of not studying English. Participants 10 and 11 pointed out that once they got off the track at elementary school, it was impossible for them to catch up with the school curriculum.



[Excerpt 5: Participant 10 & 11]

R: When did you start to sleep in class?

P10: I’ ve slept in class since elementary school.

R: Since elementary school?

P10: I tried to listen to the teacher in elementary school and middle school, but I just couldn’ t follow it. I think regular English classes at school are not enough to learn English.

R: You think so?

P10: Yes.

R: Wasn’ t it easy at elementary level?

P10: No, it was really difficult.

R: Even at elementary level?

P10: Yes.

R: You said “English classes at school are not enough to learn English.” Then, have you ever tried to go to private English institutes?

P10: Yes I did, but the grade is all the same.

R: What about you?

P11: Well...me, too. I mean, I gave up studying English when I was in fourth grade in elementary school.

R: Hmm...

P11: At that time...when I look back upon that time, English was easy, but I just couldn’ t follow it.

R: You mean back in the past, right?

P11: Yes.

R: OK.

P11: Since then, I’ ve lost my interest in English.

This recurring difficulty and frustration with learning English resulted in a shrinkage of these students’ identities (Gordon 2004, Lee and Ahn 2016, Menard-Warwick 2007, Skilton-Sylvester 2002). Their perceived difficulty regarding English was also expressed in their drawings. Participants 10 and 22 were the only ones who

gave the reason “don’ t know how to study English” in their drawings and they illustrated their disappointment with themselves by drawing a game of hide and seek and a tangled skein within a maximized distance between her and English. Participant 22’ s explanation of her picture (see Figure 6) shows well how this group of students viewed themselves in relation to English.

[Excerpt 6: Participant 22]

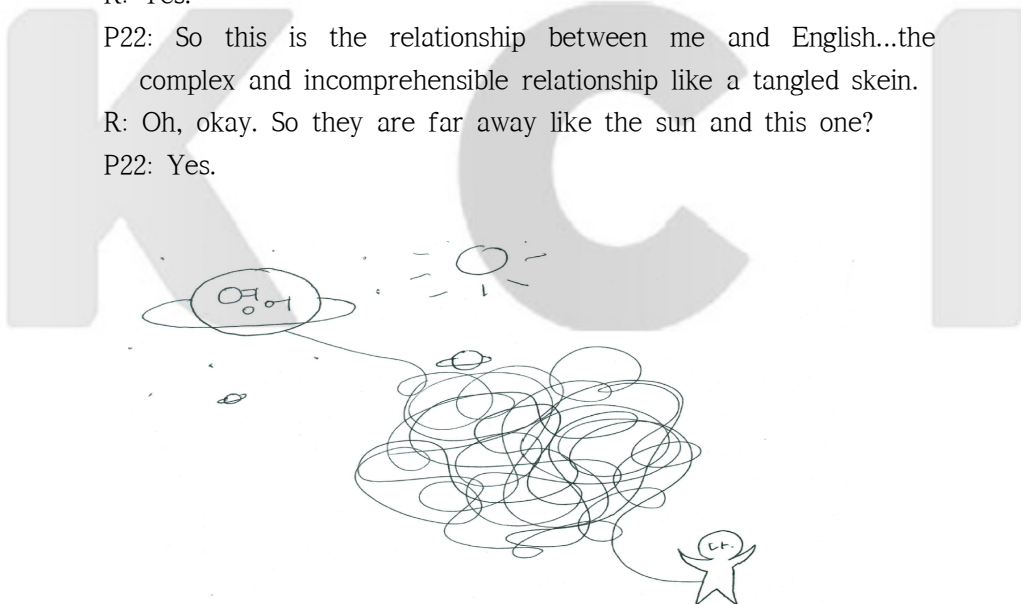
P22: How can I say it? Well...this is the relationship between me and English...Well, when you express in a picture that your brain is filled with many things, you draw lines like this randomly, right?

R: Yes.

P22: So this is the relationship between me and English...the complex and incomprehensible relationship like a tangled skein.

R: Oh, okay. So they are far away like the sun and this one?

P22: Yes.



**Figure 6. Picture Drawn by Participant 22**

The students’ vulnerable identities were also directly related to their “otherized” reason for learning English (Afshar 2012). Although they seemed to comply with the socially accepted English ideology, mainly in terms of instrumental orientations such as

entering a college, getting a job or taking a trip abroad (Dörnyei 2001). However, they described these reasons by starting with a “people say” phrase. That is, the necessity of learning English was not fully internalized, but externally given to them. Participant 23’s indirect speech pattern represented well this “loosely constructed English ideology.”

[Excerpt 7: Participant 23]

R: What does English mean to you, Participant 23?

P23: English?

R: Yes, what does that mean?

P23: People say if I don’t study English, my life will be completely ruined...like they say I won’t get a job because I don’t have a TOEIC score. Yes, yes, I know that. So I turn on the computer to take an online English class, and then, I don’t understand anything. I don’t understand anything, so I turn it off after watching...like three lectures. I know I have to learn it, but I don’t know how to learn it, so I give up. It’s like...a necessity but it’s very far from me. I know I have to do it, but I keep postponing it.

As can be seen in Participant 23’s responses, this group of students did not lack access to the relevant capital for learning English, such as online English classes or other types of private education, let alone regular English classes at school. Practically speaking, however, they were not provided with sufficient and friendly scaffoldings for access to capital because they were not able to utilize them properly. Thus, the circle of capital from Darvin and Norton’s (2015) framework is drawn in Figure 7 as an irregular shape, reflecting the students’ disconnection from “how to study English.” As this capital area is irregular, the overlapping area between capital and the diminished identity is also irregular. This shows that the affordances that this group of

students perceived were not derived from their “own needs,” and are thus unstable and insufficiently strong. This is directly related to why the ideology circle is presented with a dotted line. Because of this “others-oriented” ideology (Afshar 2012), the students had a very shallow area of self-positioning (the overlapping area between identity and ideology) and poor participation in class (the area between capital and ideology). Unfortunately, there was no overlap between capital, identity and ideology for these students.

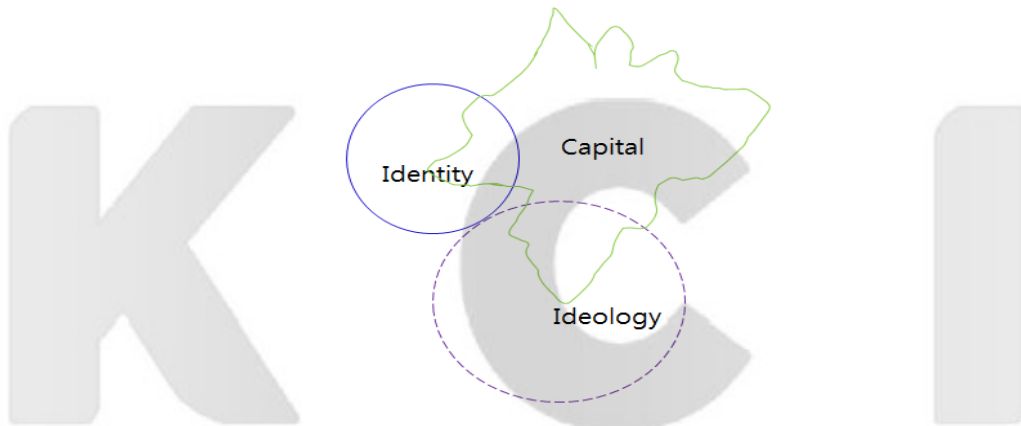


Figure 7. Identity, Capital and Ideology of the Third Group of Participants

#### 4.4 Reaction 4: I’ m Too Tired to Concentrate on Studying in English Class.

The last group of the students was different from the previous groups with respect to the degree to which they actually used the available capital. Nine out of 26 students complained that they were physically so tired that they could not concentrate on studying at school, not only in English class but also in other classes. In other words, they came to school because they were forced to behave as students conforming to a social norm (Lubeck

and Garrett 1990), but they were not willing to utilize the provided resources and instead invested their own resources like energy and time in more immediately attractive and appealing activities: entertainment and peer-socializing. They watched television or videos on the Internet and played with smart phones, computer games or social networking services (SNS) until late at night, which resulted in lack of sleep. This, in turn, caused a vicious circle of sleeping in class to supplement their lack of sleep at home. Participant 2 explained this inefficient sleeping cycle well in the interview excerpt below.

[Excerpt 8: Participant 2]

R: How do you feel when you lay your face down on the desk during class?

P2: Well...I know I have to listen to the lecture, but I just can't wake up because I'm extremely tired. I mean it. I'm really tired.

R: So, you think you have to listen to the lecture, anyway.

P2: Yes.

R: But you're extremely tired.

P2: Yes.

R: So...why? I mean, what makes you so tired?

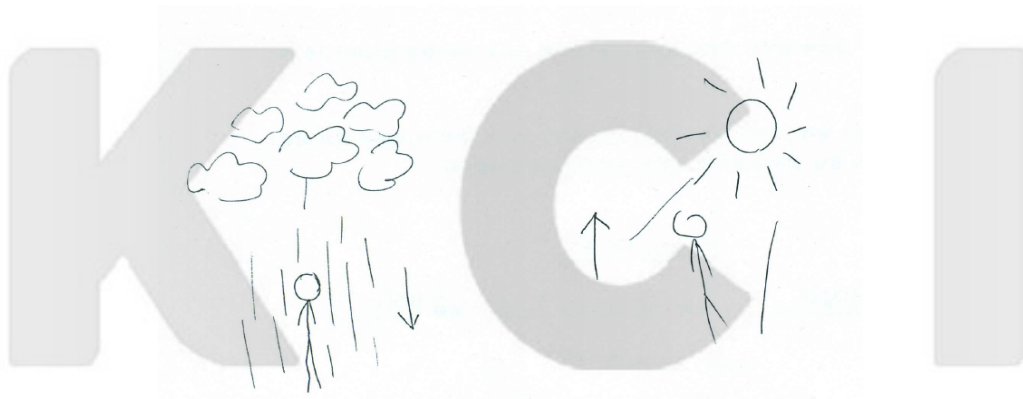
P2: Well...I sleep late at night...from time to time...I sit up until very late.

R: Do you study until late at night? Or=

P2: =No, no. I sleep late because I play with my smart phone, so...so I sleep at 1 a.m. or 2 a.m., so it influences on my class the next day.

Their absolute lack of study time was directly related to their low grades and diminished identity (Gordon 2004, Lee and Ahn 2016, Menard-Warwick 2007, Skilton-Sylvester 2002). Eight out of nine participants in this group expressed their relationship with

English by drawing a picture; Participant 18 was the only one who considered his physical exhaustion as the sole reason for sleeping in English class. He explained that there was a wall between himself and English. This disconnection made him feel comfortable while sleeping in class, positioning him as an “underachiever” who could not follow the curriculum anyway (Comber 1998, Johnson 2000). To him, class time existed for the recovery of his physical well-being (*If I feel tired, it's like a cloudy day. But I sleep well in class, I feel so good just like a sunny day*) so that he could invest his time and energy in alternatives he liked but that were not related to English study.



**Figure 8. Picture Drawn by Participant 18**

Along with their diminished identity, these students' attitudes toward English and English learning were ambivalent. Four out of nine students complied with the generally accepted English ideology in which English was needed for instrumental reasons such as getting a job or going to a college (Dörnyei 2001). In contrast, three of the students mentioned that English was just one school subject, and one said that it was an unnecessary subject. Participant 13 had a mixed perspective; he believed that English was important but it was no more than a school subject

because of the disconnection between him and English (*But I just don't study it*) (Barab and Duffy 2000).

[Excerpt 9: Participant 13]

R: So, what does English class mean to you? Is it just one of the school subjects? Is that what you mean?

P13: Yes.

R: One of the school subjects...Well...if you say it's one of the school subjects, are you saying that it's not that important or it's important?

P13: It depends how you think about it.

R: What do you think? (laughing)

P13: Um...I think it's... important anyway.

R: Do you think it's important?

P13: Yes.

R: But then=

P13: But I just don't study it.

Darvin and Norton's (2015) framework can be used to explicate this last group of students' capital, identity and ideology as follows. The most distinctive characteristic of these students was the fact that they did not utilize the available English learning capital around them and spent their time and energy doing irrelevant things. Thus, the circle of possible capital can be illustrated with a very thin, dotted line. The circle of their identity can be represented as a small one, too, reflecting their disconnection from English. Because their English ideology was ambivalent, the circle that refers to it is drawn as a distorted one. As a result, the overlapping area between identity and ideology shows their negative self-positioning as “underachievers” (Comber 1998, Johnson 2000). However, the affordances (the overlapping area between identity and capital) were not tangible because the students did not actually utilize the

capital expressed with a dotted line. By the same token, the overlapping area between capital and ideology represents their “possible” participation in English classes, which is different from their actual non-participation.

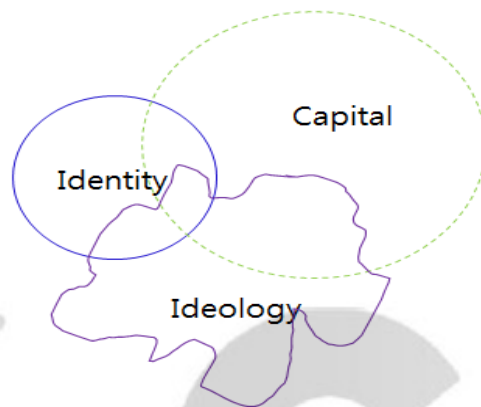


Figure 9. Identity, Capital and Ideology of the Fourth Group of Participants

## 5. Discussions and Implication

Ostensibly, the “sleeping beauties” in Korean high school English classrooms are “just demotivated” (Kim and Kim 2016, Kim and Lee 2014, Yeo and Lee 2015). Through the lens of investment theory (Norton 2013, Darwin and Norton 2015), however, we have discovered their passive looking behaviors resulted from their exerting different types of agency against the current educational system. Across the four different student reactions leading to “classroom sleeping”, the three overlapping areas involving “positioning”, “systemic patterns of control”, and “affordances or perceived benefits” were either questioned, rejected or criticized (reactions 1,2 and 3) or nullified (reaction 4).



It should be noted that in contrast to the traditional theory of demotivation, which emphasizes the unidirectional influence of external demotivators on internal ones grades (Falout and Maruyama 2004, Gorsuch 2000, Hasegawa 2004, Potee 2002, Sakai and Kikuchi 2009, Taguchi 2005, Trang and Baldauf 2007, Tsuchiya 2006), all the external and internal factors functioned simultaneously, influencing the English divestment in an integrated way (Darvin and Norton 2015).

Moreover, the four reactions were not mutually exclusive, meaning that a student could have more than one reaction at the same time. In fact, among the 26 participants, only five showed a sole reaction, while the rest exerted two or three. For instance, Participants 8 and 17, who were among the three participants with three reactions, showed reaction 2, 3 and 4 simultaneously. They complained about her English teacher’s unfriendly personality and boring instruction along with their own ignorance about how to study English and physical exhaustion during the class. Participant 9 showed a combination of reactions 1, 2 and 3, saying that he did not like his authoritative English teacher, did not know how to study English, and above all, did not understand why he had to learn English. The fact that various “reaction combinations” are possible implies that divestment, like investment, is a discursive and dynamic concept that needs to be studied more comprehensively (Norton 2013, Darvin and Norton 2015).

The left-behind students’ complex inner state, illustrated in detail in this study, is in line with a comprehensive understanding of their divestment from English. Like other students in previous studies, the second group of students attributed their not studying English to impractical English curriculum, boring instruction, and unfriendly teachers (Hwang 2013, Kim 2009, Kim and Lee 2014, Yeo and Lee 2015). However, their sleeping in class was not a form of passive resignation or disappointment, but an active demonstration of their resistance toward those unfavorable

external conditions. Their critical perspectives were directly related to their resistant identity which did not accept the externally assigned positioning of “underachievers.” Their rejection of being positioned in this inferior position in the classroom (Te Riele 2006) seems to contrast with the students in the other groups who demonstrated minimized identity. However, for Participants 3 and 10, and for other participants who showed multiple reactions including reaction 2 and other(s) at the same time, these two seemingly contradictory identities could actually co-exist. This suggests that although they may seem to have no motivation at all, they in fact have an inner struggle between their claimed and assigned positioning (Varghese, Morgan and Johnson 2005).

Another piece of evidence that these students were not completely amotivated (Falout, Elwood and Hood 2009) is that they dwelled on their troubles regarding English study and kept trying to learn English. Notably, 22 participants out of the 26 were receiving or had received extracurricular support, such as from private English institutes, one-on-one tutoring or on-line classes. Yet, the problem with such support, as the third group showed, was that the students did not know “how to come back to the mainstream curriculum, once they get lost” and simply adding extracurricular support was not sufficient to put them “on track again.” The majority of the participants (20 out of the 26) began sleeping in English classes when they were in middle school (N=15) or even in elementary school (N=5), and no matter how hard they tried to catch up with the high school English coursework, it was impossible for them to do this given their long history of “not studying English.” This is mainly because the official English curriculum emphasizes a carefully planned consistency throughout the elementary and high school levels (Bang and Chon 2011). However, for underachieving students who have lost their way but want to come back to school again, the inflexibility of the official English curriculum is “without mercy”

and cannot embrace these so-called “prodigal returnees.” Although it may not intend to, this non-inclusive English curriculum stigmatizes these students and cannot change their divestment from English into investment (Comber 1998, Johnson 2000).

Thus, the school curriculum would need to be modified to embrace an already marginalized population (Appleton, Christenson and Furlong 2008, Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris 2004). The current English curriculum in Korea is very uniformly organized and does not allow for various individual factors (Bang and Chon 2011). However, the left-behind students who cannot see any rationale for studying English within the current curriculum definitely need a more flexible and customized one. The current proficiency-based English instruction system, which divides students into two or three classes and assesses them all with the same test form, is not enough. The school should help students set a personalized goal based on their own proficiency-levels and allow them to feel a sense of accomplishment by testing them based on what they have learned in the customized English class. The content of the class needs to be in line with their interests, and the final destination does not need to be at the same level as other students. If it is enough to fulfill their personalized goal, the flexible English curriculum could let the students spend more time working on their own program instead of forcing them reach the same goal as others. It may sound idealistic, but such macro-level change should be accompanied by micro-level efforts with teachers and students to wake up the numerous “sleeping beauties” in Korean English classrooms.

Furthermore, a discriminatory English curriculum, which favors only those who are good at studying, can be categorized with teacher factors as well (Falout, Elwood and Hood 2009, Hwang 2013, Sakai and Kikuch, 2009). Like previous research which has shown that high-proficiency language learners tend to point to

teacher factors for their success, including teaching styles and personalities (Falout and Maruyama 2004), the low-proficiency English learners in this study also talked frequently about their teachers when describing their divestment from English. What is noteworthy here is that the students mainly focused on how well the teachers supported their emotional vulnerability. As can be seen in the interviews with all 12 participants in group 2, the students complained about their teachers for not being affectively supportive toward them. From this, it can be inferred that these daunted students long for the teachers' attention and encouragement as much as they want to know about how to study English well. Another way that these students need teachers' help is not directly related to study itself, but may be addressed through guidance counseling. Students, who have been away from the official English curriculum for a long time may not know how to manage their time effectively and often waste their time meaninglessly, like the students in group 4. Without modifying these habits, they cannot be set "on the track again," and this is precisely the area in which low-proficiency learners need their teachers' practical help.

Finally, these students raise a fundamental question, "Why do we need to learn English in EFL countries including Korea?" The fact that these left-behind students cannot internalize (group 3) and/or do not agree with (group 1) the socially prevalent English ideology (Park and Bae 2009, Lee 2016) demonstrates that a highly instrumental and extrinsically oriented English ideology does not appeal to this population. Under these circumstances, it is even more difficult for them to pursue integrative and intrinsic motivation to learn English, as studies on motivation would predict. We believe that the most important point is that students should be provided with an opportunity to project "their own" imagined selves in an imagined community where people need English (Darvin and Norton 2015). This opportunity does not simply mean

“dream for the future” but indicates “expansion of their own future goal” by using English as a world communication tool (Jenkins 2007). For instance, Participant 7, who wanted to become a pianist in the future, thought that English was not related to her future life and she did not need to get a high score on a standardized English proficiency test. However, if she could have imagined herself teaching international students in her future private piano institute, participating in an international-level piano contest and being interviewed by the international press, or uploading a video of her performance on YouTube with a short English explanation, she could have gained a practical reason why she needed to learn English in her life. In other words, English in Korea needs to be understood not as a “social marker” that one should try to obtain to be esteemed by others (Bourdieu 1991, Lee 2016) but as a “tool” that can help Koreans live in an interconnected, globalized society, without being marginalized.

With this paradigm change, we want to stress that these “sleeping beauties” need as much attention as honor students in the future studies, as they have as much potential and right to be in the “center” of the classroom (Te Riele 2006). We believe that they are the ones who truly need help from the school and teachers, and most importantly that they can be fully fledged members of our society in the future.

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