

Motivational Strategies in English as Foreign Language Teaching: a research review

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to review and synthesize the research literature relating to the use and effectiveness of motivational strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. First, an overview is presented of the prestigious empirical studies (10) across the world that provided evidence for the impact of motivational strategies on enhancing students' English learning motivations. Then, different research methodologies are assessed, effective motivational strategies both across different cultural contexts and culture-dependent are identified and the outcomes of the applications of motivational strategies are discussed. Finally, the limitations of the related research are explored and implications for future motivational strategies research are provided.

Keywords: motivational strategies, EFL, motivational theories, review

Introduction

Since motivation has been considered as one of the critical factors determining success in L2 learning, a considerable amount of research has been conducted about the nature of L2 motivation and how it affects L2 learning since long time ago (Gardner&Lambert,1959, 1972; Gardner,1985). Since the 1990s, there was a noticeable shift from a socio perspective to an education-oriented perspective, which features the study of situational factors such as language course and language teachers (Dörnyei, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Williams & Burden, 1997). Many scholars proposed and summarized motivational strategies and

techniques teachers could apply in their classroom instructions (e.g. Chambers, 1999).

Although their recommendations are of great value, they lack justification without empirical evidence to support according to Gardner and Tremblay (1994).

This research review focuses on how L2 learning motivation works in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment. The reasons for determining my research topic are as follows. First, I have been an EFL teacher for almost 20 years and am fully aware of the fundamental role that L2 motivation plays in students' learning achievement. Also, it is always more challenging to motivate and engage EFL students than English as Second Language (ESL) learners, because ESL learners are exposed to the target language in daily communication, surrounded by both visual and auditory stimulation, thus have many motivational and instructional advantages than EFL students. EFL students have to make extra efforts to find stimulation and input in English, but to make it worse, most of the input is from classrooms and artificial, which are separated from their real life; hence, it requires greater effort to instigate their interest in learning the foreign language. Therefore, it is more significant to examine how teachers perform concerning motivational strategies and to identify what motivational strategies are effective in EFL classes.

After an initial search, I have located 10 empirical studies on motivational strategies in EFL class (Albrabi, 2014; Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei, 2008; Guilloteaux, 2013; Lee, et al., 2019; Sugita McEown & Takeuchi, 2014; Moskovsky, et. al., 2013; Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012; Wong, 2014; Lee & Lin, 2019). First, I summarize the motivational strategies that are the focus of those empirical studies and identify the most prevalent strategies to guide pedagogical practices. Then, I compare the instruments adopted to measure motivation and find the strengths and weaknesses of their research methods. Moreover, I

consider if those motivational strategies can transcend to different cultural, social and institutional settings. Last but not least, the limitations of the studies are explored and recommendations for further research in the related field will be provided.

Method

The literature search for the present review was conducted in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) database, which offers prestigious research from the world's leading academic journals. Articles were included when they were (a) SSCI listed; (b) written in English; (c) published between 2000 and 2019; (e) concerned EFL teaching, and (f) concerned motivational strategies. "Motivation*" and "EFL" were the main search terms, and all articles that were found to include the terms in the title or the abstract and met the aforementioned criteria were selected for inclusion in the review. Eventually, this search resulted in 10 articles of empirical studies as listed in previous paragraphs.

Results

Profile of the studies

The empirical studies of motivational strategies are from five different countries and regions (China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Taiwan). Other than two of them surveying the use of motivational strategies, eight of the studies explore the correlational relationship between teachers' use of motivational strategies and students' motivation levels as well as their learning outcomes. Among the eight studies, six of them employ questionnaires, self-reported journals and class observations to investigate the relationship between teachers' use of the strategies and students' motivational state and learning outcomes. Only two of them assess the effectiveness of motivational strategies on learners' motivational behaviors by using quasi-experimental interventions.

The participants of these studies are mostly secondary school students and university students. Only in Cheng and Dörnyei (2007), the participants include elementary school students.

The motivational strategy measures of nine studies are based on Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) "Ten Commandments of Motivation". The *Ten commandments* were selected based on a questionnaire to 200 English teachers at various schools in an EFL environment. The following is a summary of the practices, examples and possible outcomes of the *Ten Commandments*.

Table 1
Examples and outcomes of Ten commandments

Ten Commandments	Example	Outcome
Set a personal example with your own behavior	(Teacher) Prepare for the lessons properly; Show a good example by being committed	Model the students with motivated teachers
Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom	(Climate) Bring in humour, laughter and smile ; Have games and fun in class	Relieve students' anxiety
Present the tasks properly	(Task) Provide clear guidance about how to do the task	Raise students' interest and expectancy
Develop a good relationship with the learners	(Rapport)	Energize learning effort
Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence *	(Self-confidence) Make sure that students experience success; Give positive feedback and appraisal	Closely related to subjective competence
Make the language classes interesting *	(Interest) Choose interesting topics and supplementary materials	The quality of students' experience contributes to motivation
Promote learner autonomy *	(Autonomy) Encourage creative and imaginative ideas; Encourage questions and other contributions from the students	Taking responsibility in their own learning can truly motivate them to self-regulate learning
Personalize the learning process *	(Personal relevance) Try and fill the tasks with personal	Promote peer and group development

	content that is relevant to the students	
Increase the learners' goal-orientedness	(Goal) Help the students develop realistic expectations about their learning	Stimulate motivation
Familiarize learners with the target language culture *	(Culture) Familiarize the learners with the cultural background of the language they are learning	Influence how well they can incorporate important part of the language

Note. *indicates the prevalent strategies found in the ten studies.

Nine of the studies adapted their strategy list based on different learner needs and then tested the outcomes, teachers' and students' perceptions or the variables that might impact the effectiveness of those strategies, such as students' language proficiency and gender. One study (Sugita McEown & Takeuchi, 2014) created a motivational strategy list by collecting answers from surveys to teachers rather than using the established framework.

Major Findings of the Studies

Most of the studies confirmed the positive impact of some of the motivational strategies from Dörnyei and Csizér (1998)'s framework on students' learning behavior. Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) conducted a modified replication of the Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) study in Taiwan, which collected a survey of 387 EFL teachers about their perception of importance of motivational strategies and their frequency of applying them in class. Four strategies are discerned as effective in the Taiwan context (*Set a personal example, recognize students' effort and celebrate their success, promote their self-confidence, and create a pleasant classroom atmosphere*). Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) carried out a large-scale investigation involving 1300 junior high school students taught by 27 teachers with the self-report questionnaires and a classroom observation instrument (Motivation Orientation of Language Teaching, ie. MOLT). The result indicates that teachers' use of motivational

strategies is closely related to teachers' learning behavior and motivational state; With an adapted Dörnyei (2008) classroom observation instrument and questionnaire, Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2012) conducted a study in Iran among 741 male students from 26 secondary EFL classes taught by 17 teachers, providing observational evidence that teachers' motivational practices significantly related with students' motivational behavior; Wong (2014) investigated 900 Chinese secondary students and 10 teachers with three instruments: a teacher self-rated questionnaire (Dörnyei, 2001), student questionnaires and lesson observations (measured with adapted MOLT scheme), identifying six strategies to be effective for enhancing students' language learning motivation;

The two quasi-experimental intervention research conducted in Saudi Arabia revealed the motivation strategies adopted in the EFL classroom could enhance learner motivation (Albrabi, 2014; Moskovsky, et al., 2013), which in turn led to higher achievement levels for learners (Albrabi, 2014).

In addition to testing the established framework of Dörnyei and his colleague, Lee and Lin (2019) identified several motivational strategies beyond the traditional taxonomy: direct English instruction and provision of authentic materials. The rationale for their expanding of the foundational framework is they advocate it is an "acknowledgement of the teachers' professionalism and autonomy" (p.454); it is possible for teachers to have other applicable motivational strategies to shape their classrooms. The research can help form a more comprehensive and hierarchical framework.

Sugita McEown and Takeuchi (2014) examined how teachers impact students' motivational level in Japan EFL classroom and identified three strategies (*keep pace with the students and get them involved in the activities, display enthusiasm of teaching English, speak*

English with proper pronunciation), which are drawn from student surveys, showed a negative correlation on students' motivation of different proficiency levels. The reason for the discrepancy might be that motivational strategies used for Sugita McEown and Takeuchi (2014) study were obtained from students' open-ended questions and they resemble more teaching skills than motivational strategies. Also, the task types utilized in the examined class may have impacted the research result which researchers failed to give consideration to.

The final study to mention, Lee, Gardner, and Lau (2019), examined if EFL teachers' motivational practice can transcend the classroom and the result indicates that students' attitudes and behavior beyond the classroom are affected by teachers' motivational effort.

Prevalent Motivational Strategies across the Studies

The findings of those studies provide compelling evidence to confirm some of Dörnyei's (1998) "Ten Commandments of Motivation". It can conclude some motivational strategies can transfer across cultural and ethnolinguistic contexts. For example, Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) identified the following strategies more effective toward motivating EFL students: *Set an example, Create a relaxed atmosphere, Promote learner's self-confidence and Familiarize learners with L2-related values*; Moskovsky (2013) revealed a similar list: *provide individual support, supply background knowledge and provide positive rewards and praise*; Wong (2014) advocated effective motivational strategies are: *Sufficient preparation and assistance, Recognizing success and Reminding students instrumental value of L2*; Lee, Gardner and Lau (2019) argued teachers can enhance students motivation behavior by *drawing students attention to unique and difficult aspect of English, using group work, building confidence and promoting learner autonomy*; Lee and Lin (2019) suggested the ways teachers can motivate students are: *help students recognize their own strength, tell*

students the usefulness of the knowledge and provide positive feedback on students' performance.

These high frequency strategies such as *promote learner's self-confidence, familiarize learners with L2-related values, building confidence and promoting learner autonomy* can be further categorized into two major types of applications of motivational principles:

Expectancy x value model and self-determination theory, which will be further discussed in the implication part.

Cultural-dependent Motivational Strategies

Despite the abovementioned motivational strategies transferring across ethnolinguistic and cultural contexts, some strategies seem to be culture-specific and culture-dependent.

For example, Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) examined whether the motivational strategies derived from Western context (Dörnyei, 1998 in Hungary), had relevance in Taiwan, found there was resemblance in the teachers' practice. However, they also found some disparity between the results of the two studies. In Taiwan, teachers do not attach much importance to *making the learning task interesting*. The researchers interpreted the difference as caused by the test-driven education culture in China, which perceives learning as effortful investment and diligence. There is a widespread Chinese proverb: *学海无涯苦作舟*, which means *Hard-working is the boat to the endless sea of learning*. Generally speaking, Confucian ideology stresses one's efforts are the key to learning success (Wong, 2008). It is evident there are cultural differences concerning motivational practices; meanwhile, the research findings also unfold the trouble spots in EFL teaching for the teachers of different cultures. It might be worth exploring how those teachers should break through their culture boundaries so that they can bring their students' potential to full play.

Not only there are discrepancies existing between western and eastern cultural contexts, but there are even group differences observed between similar cultures and ethnolinguistics. Guilloteaux (2013) reported there are differences between motivational beliefs and practices of Korean and Taiwanese teachers. It is found the Korean teachers in the research do not value the importance of *creating a positive classroom climate* or *promoting learner group cohesiveness*; however, such climate building strategies ranked higher in Taiwan. This suggests that these strategies are dependent on different local contexts. Such a finding supports Littlewood (2000)'s recommendation that scholars should explore how teachers' preconceptions about the nature and extent of culture influences on learning in greater depth. Finally, the most striking finding of this research was those Korean teachers under study underutilize nearly all the examined motivational strategies, which is not the case in other cultural contexts. This finding suggests that those Korean teachers under research do not prioritize motivating of the students. It indicates that Korean teachers may profit by receiving facilitation in finding the significance of motivating students rather than solely rely on examination-oriented instruction. After all, motivation is causally related to the learning outcome.

What remains to be learned is whether some discrepancies obtained from the studies are due to the participants' lack of knowledge and training of motivational skills, constraints of the specific contexts, or some other factor, such as, misinterpretation of the questionnaire items. These can be issues to be explored in future.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Most, if not all the studies about EFL motivational strategies are based on Dörnyei and his colleague's framework. Some of the motivational strategies are overlapping with each

other or representing the same meaning with different terms. For example, *present the tasks properly* is ambiguous, which can refer to the same thing as *make the language classes interesting*. These deficiencies make the related research messy and confusing. Some motivational strategies seem to be identical to basic instructional or management skills rather than motivational practices, such as *set a personal example with your behavior*; Or even in some research, *clear English pronunciation and writing* is also listed as strategies. The reasons that there are more instructional rather than motivational focus in motivational strategies studies in EFL class can be explained from Dörnyei's (2001) argument: the best motivational intervention is the quality instruction practices because no matter how effective motivator a teacher is, without instructional explicitness, the learners cannot follow the instruction and motivation will unlikely happen.

However, when it comes to research, the primary thing that needs to be clarified is what the motivational strategies entail so that confusion and unreliable results can be avoided. Also, it seems all of the studies fall short because they lack a motivational theoretical framework as a research foundation. Therefore, future motivational strategy studies need to follow a clear line of theoretical perspective. There are valuable theoretical offerings that can enlarge the existing EFL motivation studies.

As stated in the previous part, there are some universally effective motivational strategies which can be classified into two major types of applications of motivational frameworks: Expectancy x value model and self-determination theory. Therefore, I propose the future research of EFL motivational strategies can integrate those motivational theories so that an expanded, more comprehensive theoretical framework of EFL learning motivation could be developed.

Expectancy x value model posits that the two most immediate predictors of learners' persistence, effort and achievement are expectancies for success and task value beliefs (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, 2000). This model can be closely related to language learning. Learners may learn a language for a collection of reasons. The importance of the reasons for learning would decide how much effort students will spend and what cost they will pay for. In the school context, teachers should afford learners opportunities to see the relevance between the curriculum and personal needs, and allow students to perceive their capabilities to attain the goal, so that their learning motivation can be promoted. Generally speaking, only by facilitating students' perceived expectancy of success and their perceptions of value in EFL learning, can learners' efforts and performance in specific domains be facilitated. To conclude, EFL learners are motivated to learn English when they value English learning (intrinsic value, attainment value, utility value), and when they perceive they are capable of reaching the learning goals (expectancy). Therefore, the strategies teachers adopt to motivate EFL students are as revealed in the aforementioned research are related to shaping their students' beliefs about value and success in EFL. To be more specific, teachers can help students heighten their motivation by demonstrating that EFL learning can be an exciting mental challenge, a career enhancer, a vehicle to cultural awareness and friendship, and a key to world peace (Oxford & Shearin, 1996), so that they realize the benefits of EFL learning are truly worth the costs. Meanwhile, teachers should celebrate students' success and cultivate their self confidence in language learning.

Expectancy-value model has been broadly adopted in various educational research, but it has rarely been integrated into EFL motivational strategy. Future studies can apply the

Expectancy-value model to steer clear of overlapping and ambiguous strategies and may enable teachers to come up with new strategies.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation that addresses issues of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. SDT maintains that to understand human motivation, it requires the recognition of the fact that people have three major innate psychological needs: Competence (to control the outcome and experience mastery), Relatedness (to interact, be connected to, and experience caring for others), and Autonomy (to be causal agents of one's own life and act in harmony with one's integrated self) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). If these global needs are met, learners will be motivated and function optimally. As mentioned in the aforementioned studies under investigation, to realize students' inherent potential, teachers should nurture these psychological needs by allowing students to make plans and decisions about their learning, thereby supporting their sense of autonomy, or personal agency. In turn, the satisfaction of their psychological needs can foster learners' self-determined and intrinsic motivation, and ultimately achievement and success in language learning.

Some research has used Self-determination framework in other educational contexts, which has shed light on how teachers impact students' engagement in learning. For instance, Assor, et al., (2002) examined what kinds of instructions could better promote children's motivation in schoolwork. They revealed two autonomy-affecting teacher behaviors can impact students' behavioral engagement greatly in learning: elucidating personal relevance to students and restraining criticism. This theory has yet to be incorporated into motivational strategies research in EFL teaching. The application of theoretical models is promising to provide blueprints for integrating motivational and instructional strategies into class.

Another insufficiency of the studies is that the majority of them examined only secondary students, but relationships between age differences and motivational strategies are indispensable to be explored, because previous studies have disclosed progressive declines in children's motivation to do their classwork (Epstein & McPartland, 1976). Similarly, the most recent studies have affirmed a developmental decrease in overall academic motivation (Eccles et al., 1993). They explained the possible cause for motivation decline in academic learning is teachers start to lose their power over time, as adolescents may value the peer group more than authority figures. Evidently, it would be useful to examine age differences in the effectiveness of motivational strategies.

Also, the current studies only explore teachers' perceptions and use of motivational strategies rather than how students view the effectiveness of the motivational strategies. Most of the studies measured students' motivational state as an outcome of motivational strategies, but few of them examined students' evaluation of the strategies. Future research can investigate if there is alignment or misalignment in perceptions of motivational strategies between students and teachers in EFL education.

Finally, the predominant motivational strategies research is based on self-report surveys and classroom observation rather than intervention studies. Hence, it is challenging to estimate whether students' motivational behaviors are caused by single effective strategies or multivariant ones. Much rigid research designs are desirable to identify the most effective strategies or strategy clusters.

Conclusions

Motivation plays a major role in the complex process of EFL learning. The current research of motivational strategies in EFL classrooms is significant and extremely

meaningful; however, it can be expanded to include more diverse motivation strategies instead of being merely limited to Dörnyei and his colleague's framework.

More research is needed to inform the theories on motivation in EFL teaching, to explain the interconnectedness of teachers' use of motivational strategies and students' motivation behaviors. Theories can inform teachers the rationale about how and why some motivational strategies are effective. Those rationales for learning motivations is like roots to the trees. If teachers are ignorant of where the root of motivation lies, how can they water the root and facilitate the growth of the tree? Only founded on solid theoretical grounds, research can supply more practical recommendations on improving language teaching practice and promoting students' learning motivation. Therefore, theoretical models are imperative to improve the motivational aspects of the classroom environment and provide guidance on how to incorporate strategies into instruction.

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