

## Analyzing the Use of Motivational Strategies among Iranian In-Service EFL Teachers

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**ABSTRACT:** Motivation as a determiner of failure and success plays a crucial role in second language learning process. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the Iranian EFL teachers' perception of motivational strategies. This study was conducted to identify and develop more effective implementation of motivational strategies. To accomplish the purpose of the study, 160 teachers of English in Iran were asked to evaluate a list of motivational strategies in order to specify the most important and the most frequent motivational strategies, and also to investigate a possible relationship between the use of motivational strategies and teachers' experience. The results of the study indicated that the use of motivational strategies is somehow culture-dependent; some motivational strategies were found to be transferable to other cultural contexts, and some were found to be culture-dependent. Moreover, the results revealed that the years of teachers' experience could affect the use of motivational strategies to some extent.

**Key words:** Motivation, Motivational Strategies, Cultural-Dependence.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE  
Pii: S232247701400012-5  
Received 07 Feb. 2015  
Accepted 15 Mar. 2015

### INTRODUCTION

There are many factors that can affect the success in learning a second/foreign language such as the duration of the course, teacher's characteristics and abilities, teaching methodology, textbook, the size of the learner group, and the most important, the characteristics of the language learner (Schmitt, 2002). The study of language learner characteristics or individual differences is rooted in second language studies which include factors such as language aptitude, motivation, or learning styles that are significant contributors to success in a second/foreign language (Dörnyei, 2005).

Motivation is one of the basic factors that determine success and failure in L2 learning; thus, motivational strategies should be regarded as a crucial aspect of the theoretical analysis of L2 motivation (Dörnyei and Cheng, 2007). Motivation is remarkably complex; it is a property of the learner, but is a transitive concept: teachers can motivate their learners; it is dynamic and changes over time especially in the long term learning process (McDonough, 2007). Although there are a number of research in the field of motivation that have been devoted to identifying and analyzing the nature and different types of motivation; "the question of how to motivate language learners has been a neglected area in L2 motivation research" (Dörnyei and Csizer, 1998, p. 203).

Since motivation, which has been defined by a number of different researchers in many different ways, is multifaceted, a simple definition is not possible. Motivated individuals could be recognized by certain characteristics: they are goal-directed, they try hard to achieve their goals, they have expectancies about their success and failure, and as they reach some degrees of success they show self-efficacy. They

have a strong desire to achieve their goals, and they have motives for their behavior (Gardner, 2010). According to Ellis (1997) "motivation includes the attitudes and affective states that affect the degree of learners' effort to learn an L2" (p. 75). Motivation refers to the learners' orientation with regards to the purpose of learning a second/foreign language (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991).

Motivational strategies refer to (a) teacher's instructional mediation to show and foster the student's motivation and (b) student's self-regulating strategies that learners apply to manage the level of their own motivation (Dörnyei and Guilletoaux, 2008). According to Dörnyei (2001), motivational strategies are techniques that foster the goal-related behavior of individuals; these behaviors can be promoted by a number of different ways.

Motivational strategies first gained popularity in the 1990s, when the importance of the learning environment in shaping the situated aspects of learners' motivation was highlighted. A number of different scholars proposed various lists of motivational techniques (e.g. Alison, 1993; Dörnyei, 1994; Oxford and Shearin, 1994; Williams and Burden, 1997) that teachers could use to improve their teaching by creating a more motivating environment in their classes (Dörnyei and Guilletoaux, 2008).

One of the best categorizations of motivational strategies in the language classroom was created by Dörnyei (2001) including 35 strategies each of which consists of different micro-strategies, the use of which could be beneficial for both teachers and learners. The motivational strategies include four main dimensions: (a) Creating basic motivational conditions, by creating a good teacher-student relationship, a pleasant and supportive class environment, and establishing a cohesive learner group with specific group norms, (b) Generating initial motivation, by using techniques to

foster the learners' expectancy of success and increasing their positive attitudes toward the language class and language learning in general, (c) Maintaining and protecting motivation by promoting situation-specific task-motivation (e.g. using enjoyable and relevant tasks), allowing learners to maintain their positive attitude in communication tasks with a limited language code, and promoting learner autonomy, (d) Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation by giving effective and encouraging feedback, increasing learners' satisfaction, and offering rewards in a motivational manner, and using grades in a motivational manner.

According to Dörnyei and Cheng (2007) motivational strategies could carry some specific characteristics of a certain culture, which means that these motivational practices include fundamentally important beliefs that could affect the use of each strategy in teaching practice.

The present study aimed to investigate the use of motivational strategies among Iranian FL teachers. To accomplish the purpose of the study, the following research questions were posed:

- Which motivational strategies have been identified as the most important ones by the Iranian EFL teachers?
- Which motivational strategies have been identified as the most frequent ones by the Iranian EFL teachers?
- Is there any significant relationship between the use of motivational strategies and Iranian teachers' teaching experience?

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study is a survey in which the researchers used questionnaires to gather the requirements of the study. The researchers adopted the snowball sampling method (in order to reach as many English teachers as possible) where participants with similar backgrounds and interest took part in this study. The data were collected from different districts at different English institutes in Tehran in an attempt

to reach diversity. In order to accomplish the purpose of the study 160 teachers of English (78 males and 82 females) in Iran participated in this study.

Two groups of teachers consisting of 80 teachers were used in this study. The participating teachers teach English at different educational levels from beginner to advanced levels of proficiency. The teaching experiences and educational background of the participating teachers represented diversity too. The age of the participating teachers ranged from 21 to 41 with 1 to 21 years of teaching experience.

Two questionnaires by Dörnyei and Cheng (2007) were used to accomplish the goals of the study. In piloting phase, 40 teachers rated the questionnaires to examine the reliability and construct validity of the questionnaires. The results of the piloting phase indicated that the questionnaires were highly reliable (above 0.7) and factor analysis revealed ten clusters for each questionnaire. The participants were asked to answer either the importance questionnaire or the frequency one. The findings of the present study were compared with the findings of the study by Dörnyei and Cheng (2007) in Taiwan, Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) in Hungary, and Al-mahrooqi, Abrar-ul-Hassan, and Asante (2012) in Oman, to examine the cultural-dependence of the motivational strategies.

## RESULTS

The results of the factor analysis indicated that each strategy belongs to a specific cluster based on the loadings, and the strategies in each cluster assess the same construct (Table 1). Hence, the items of the questionnaires (48 motivational strategies) were grouped into 10 clusters based on their content similarities. Since first two research questions were of heuristic nature, they did not produce any hypotheses at the beginning. In order to answer third research question the following hypothesis was generated:

- There is not any relationship between Iranian teachers' experience and the use of motivational strategies.

**Table 1.** Summary of the factor analysis

| Motivational Strategies                      | Items                   |
|--|-------------------------|
| Promote group cohesiveness and group norms   | 3, 24, 35, 44           |
| Proper teacher behavior                      | 1, 2, 17, 23, 40, 47    |
| Creating a pleasant classroom climate        | 5, 21, 30, 41           |
| Recognize students' effort                   | 8, 15, 42, 46           |
| Promote learners' self-confidence            | 11, 28, 33, 34, 36      |
| Stimulating the tasks                        | 12, 13, 18, 27, 43, 45  |
| Present tasks properly                       | 6, 25                   |
| Increase learners' goal-orientedness         | 10, 20, 26, 31          |
| Promote learner autonomy                     | 14, 16, 22, 29, 37, 48  |
| Familiarize learners with L-2 related values | 4, 7, 9, 19, 32, 38, 39 |

In analyzing the data, the mean of each strategy was calculated to specify the rank order of the ten clusters. As table 2 indicates, it can be concluded that the most important macro-strategies were proper teacher behavior, promoting group cohesiveness, creating a pleasant classroom climate, stimulating the tasks, and promoting learners' self-confidence. The least important macro-strategies were recognizing student's efforts, presenting tasks properly, increasing learners' goal-orientedness, familiarizing learners with L2-related values, and promoting learner autonomy.

In order to answer second research question the mean frequency of each macro-strategy was

calculated to estimate the rank order based on the frequency of their use. As it is shown in table 3, the most frequently motivational strategies that Iranian teachers use in their teaching practice were promoting group cohesiveness, proper teacher behavior, creating a pleasant classroom climate, recognizing students' effort, and promoting learners' self-confidence. The least frequently used motivational macro-strategies were presenting tasks properly, stimulating the tasks, increasing learners' goal-orientedness, promoting learner autonomy, and familiarizing learners with L2-related values.

**Table 2.** The Most Important Motivational Strategies

| Motivational Strategies                        | Mean | SD   |
|--|------|------|
| 1. Proper Teacher Behavior                     | 5.44 | 0.63 |
| 2. Promote Group Cohesiveness                  | 5.40 | 0.71 |
| 3. Creating a Pleasant Classroom Climate       | 5.31 | 0.73 |
| 4. Stimulating the Tasks                       | 5.26 | 0.74 |
| 5. Promote Learners' Self-confidence           | 5.25 | 0.78 |
| 6. Recognize Students' Effort                  | 5.23 | 0.78 |
| 7. Present Tasks Properly                      | 4.77 | 0.95 |
| 8. Increase Learners' Goal-orientedness        | 4.76 | 0.87 |
| 9. Familiarize Learners With L2-related Values | 4.28 | 0.91 |
| 10. Promote Learner Autonomy                   | 4.18 | 0.85 |

**Table 3.** The Most Frequent Motivational Strategies

| Motivational Strategies                         | Mean | SD   |
|---|------|------|
| 1. Proper Teacher Behavior                      | 5.44 | 0.64 |
| 2. Promote Group Cohesiveness                   | 5.40 | 0.85 |
| 3. Creating a Pleasant Classroom Climate        | 5.20 | 0.81 |
| 4. Recognize Students' Effort                   | 5.08 | 0.82 |
| 5. Promote Learners' Self-confidence            | 5.07 | 0.94 |
| 6. Present Tasks Properly                       | 4.78 | 0.85 |
| 7. Stimulating the Tasks                        | 4.67 | 0.93 |
| 8. Increase Learners' Goal-orientedness         | 4.51 | 0.95 |
| 9. Promote Learner Autonomy                     | 3.34 | 0.63 |
| 10. Familiarize Learners With L2-related Values | 2.99 | 1.03 |

Finally, Pearson test examined the relationship between teachers' experience and the use of Motivational strategies. According to Table 4, teachers' experience had relationship with two motivational macro-strategies, so the null hypothesis was rejected. "Recognizing students" efforts (0.04) and "increasing

learners' goal-oriented-ness" (0.02) had significant relationship with teachers' experience which means that, these motivational strategies have been used more or less frequently among teachers who have higher experience. For the other 8 clusters we did not find enough evidence of relationship.

**Table 4.** The relationship between teachers' experience and the use of motivational strategies

| MS Clusters         |                 | C1   | C2   | C3   | C4   | C5   | C6   | C7    | C8   | C9   | C10   |
|---------------------|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|------|------|-------|
| Teaching Experience | Correlation     | 0.11 | 0.15 | 0.11 | 0.21 | 0.10 | 0.00 | -0.08 | 0.26 | 0.12 | -0.10 |
|                     | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.34 | 0.20 | 0.35 | 0.04 | 0.40 | 0.98 | 0.49  | 0.02 | 0.28 | 0.40  |
|                     | N               | 80   | 80   | 80   | 80   | 80   | 80   | 80    | 80   | 80   | 80    |

## DISCUSSION

The first question of the study dealt with the most important motivational strategies. The results indicated that top five most important motivational strategies from Iranian teachers' viewpoint are "proper teacher behavior, promoting group cohesiveness, creating a pleasant classroom climate, recognizing students' effort, and promoting learners' self-confidence". Proper teacher behavior was regarded as the most important macro-strategy by Iranian EFL teachers.

The second research question was concerned with the use of motivational strategies. The results of the study revealed that the motivational strategies that Iranian EFL teachers frequently use in their teaching practice are "promoting group cohesiveness, proper teacher behavior, creating a pleasant classroom climate, recognizing students' effort, and promoting learners' self-confidence".

The results of the study indicated that Iranian EFL teachers are aware of their potential role in motivating their learners, and try to frequently have proper behavior in their classes. The results of the studies conducted in Hungary, Taiwan, and Oman revealed that this macro-strategy is the most frequent one among all. Since, Hungary, Taiwan, Iran, and Oman have totally different contexts, it can be concluded that this macro-strategy is transferable among different cultures. The second frequent macro-strategy from the Iranian EFL teachers' viewpoint was promoting group cohesiveness, which means that group work is important and Iranian teachers use learners in their teaching to motivate them. But the results of the other strategies indicated that promoting group cohesiveness is one of the least frequent strategies in Taiwan and Oman, and has no position in the Hungarian study.

The third frequent macro-strategy among Iranian EFL teachers was creating a pleasant climate in the class which had the second position in the Hungarian study, fourth position in Taiwanese study, and fifth position in Omani study. So it can be concluded that teachers in different contexts try to create a supportive class in which the learners' motivation would be increased. Recognizing students' efforts was rated as the fourth frequent motivational macro-strategy that Iranian EFL teachers employ in their teaching practice. The same findings have been obtained in the Omani study, and it has the second position in the Taiwanese study. But there was a totally different situation in the Hungarian study, because no position has been regarded for this macro-strategy which means that its implication is somehow culture-bound. The last frequent macro-strategy was promoting learners' self-confidence,

which has the same rank order in the Hungarian study. It is also one of the most frequent macro-strategies that Taiwanese and Omani teachers employ in their teaching practice. One of the main ways to motivate the learners is to decrease the anxiety and provide learners with positive feedback, so that they could develop their self-confidence, and perform better. As the results indicated, this macro-strategy could be transferred among different cultures and contexts.

The third question of the study was concerned with the relationship between the use of motivational strategies and teachers' experience. The statistical results revealed that teaching experience could affect the use of some motivational strategies to some extent.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study are beneficial for EFL teachers, since they could identify the motivational strategies that have been used less frequently and try to use them more in their teaching practice to enhance the learners' motivation. Teachers can employ various motivational strategies in their learning practice to increase the learners' motivation in general and foster their self-confidence, positive attitude toward language learning to decrease anxiety specifically.

Since the use of motivational strategies is culture-dependent, we recommend that further research is done to reconfirm the results. The study on motivational strategies could also be conducted among EFL learners to investigate their beliefs about the importance and the use of motivational strategies by their teachers.

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