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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates Chinese postgraduate students' perceptions of motivational strategies within the British ESL (English as a Second Language) context, focusing on the perceived frequency and importance of these strategies. Motivation plays a fundamental role in L2 acquisition, while previous studies have emphasized teachers' perspectives, and less attention has been given to students' viewpoints, particularly in a cross-cultural setting in the United Kingdom L2 learning context. To address this research gap, this study adopted questionnaires adapted from Dörnyei's framework, which have been previously validated in Taiwanese and Hungarian contexts. Data were collected from 20 Chinese overseas students enrolled at University College London in the United Kingdom and analyzed using SPSS to rank 48 strategies across 10 macrostrategies. Results indicate that strategies such as recognizing students' effort and promoting self-confidence are highly valued, whereas others, like promoting group cohesiveness, are less emphasized. Compared to prior research conducted in Taiwan, this study uncovers cultural differences in strategy perception. Chinese students studying in the UK placed greater emphasis on task clarity, reflecting the challenges of adapting to English-medium instruction. It suggests that while some motivational strategies possess universal applicability, others are context-specific, influenced by cultural and educational backgrounds. This research contributes to the understanding of L2 motivation across diverse cultural settings and provides valuable insights for language teaching practices.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by shifting motivational-strategy research from teachers to learners. It is one of the few studies that have investigated Chinese postgraduates in a British ESL context. This study documents students' perceived importance–frequency patterns, offering cross-context insights that have not been previously examined.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a widely accepted truth that motivation plays a fundamental role in successful L2 learning. Besides, it is the initiator of stimulus, as well as a provider of the inner drive to pursue the objective with perseverance in language learning. Dörnyei (1998) argued that motivation is indeed a primary driving force that initiates the motive to learn, to start the process of learning L2, and eventually ensures the continuation of the learning process.

L2 motivation research is an area with a long history of development, and its understanding and interpretation by scholars have evolved over time. In the earlier stage, which lasted from the 1980s to the 1990s, motivation research was built around a social psychological perspective of motivation, primarily based on the theoretical framework by Gardner and Lambert (1972).

Despite these significant contributions, however, the earlier study left the classroom applications unexplored and offered limited guidance for language teachers in specific contexts. The 1990s saw L2 motivation research undergo a profound change, moving in a new direction and turning attention to the possibly yet-to-be-explored area of research, thereby enriching our understanding of motivation in SLA.

This study by Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) explored “Context specificity” in L2 motivation has been identified as a research gap that requires further exploration. By focusing on motivational strategies perceived by Chinese postgraduate students in the British ESL context, the present study can enrich this growing area of L2 motivation. Moreover, considering the increasing population of Chinese students pursuing postgraduate studies in the UK and the specific issues they encounter in language learning within a new educational environment, the present study serves as a valuable reference for second language acquisition and language teaching practices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivational strategies for second language (L2) learning have emerged as an important area of research, and numerous studies on this topic have attempted to bridge the gap between theoretical understandings of motivation and its practical applications. This literature review explores the evolution of research on motivational strategies and advances the approach by considering students’ perceptions across different cultural settings.

2.1. *Evolution of Motivational Strategy Research*

Over the last couple of decades, research on motivating strategies in the context of L2 learning has witnessed considerable development. Early research primarily focused on identifying motivations and exploring the validity of theories rather than developing concrete motivational techniques for classroom use. However, a growing interest in the practical aspects of motivational research in L2 has been observed in recent years.

Motivational strategies in the language classroom, as discussed by Dörnyei (2001), encompass over 100 distinct approaches that teachers can employ to enhance student motivation. This comprehensive framework has established a solid foundation for future research and practical applications in language education. His framework defines motivational strategies as those influences exerted intentionally to achieve systematic and long-lasting positive effects on learners’ motivation and engagement.

2.2. *Theoretical Background and Key Frameworks*

Gardner and Tremblay (1994) have emphasized the need for empirical evidence to promote the development of motivational strategies. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) performed a pioneering study with Hungarian English teachers, evaluating a list of 51 motivational strategies and producing “Ten Commandments for Motivating Learners” based on the empirical study. The significance of the study by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) lies in its implications and guidance for teaching practices in a classroom setting. Their study identified underused strategies and provided a set of principles that teachers could readily apply in their classrooms. It also provided a widely used empirical basis for later research into the perceived importance and actual use of motivational strategies.

2.3. *Empirical Study of Motivational Strategies*

2.3.1. *Cultural Considerations in Motivational Strategy Research*

It is essential to be aware that these motivational strategies originated from Western educational systems and should be applied with sufficient consideration of the context where the culture and people are different. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) acknowledged this limitation. Still, they argued that it is not reasonable to assume that the strategies effective in Hungary would be equally effective in different cultural, ethnolinguistic, and institutional contexts. As a result, there is an increasing number of studies examining the effect of motivational strategies across different cultures. Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) who replicated the Hungarian research in Taiwan, also emphasized the

importance of these cultural considerations in motivational strategy research. They found similarities and differences in the perceived importance of motivational strategies among Hungarian and Taiwanese teachers.

2.3.2. Students' Perceptions of Motivational Strategies

The study has previously observed major perceptions among teachers and researchers. However, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in examining students' perceptions of motivational strategies. For instance, Sugita and Takeuchi (2010) investigated how different teachers implemented motivational strategies and how effective they can be in Japanese EFL classrooms. This implies the necessity of paying attention to students' perceptions to assess whether the strategies applied are effective or not. Having built on the findings of the previous study, Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2012) examined the association between teachers' use of motivational strategies and the motivational behavior of students in Iranian EFL classes. The study found a strong positive relationship between teachers' motivational practices and students' observed motivated behavior. Wong (2014) has conducted a comprehensive study in the Chinese EFL context, examining the effectiveness of motivational strategies from the perceptions of teachers, students, and researchers. Wong and Wong (2017) explored the alignment between secondary students' perceptions of effective motivational strategies and teachers' application of these strategies in English language classrooms.

Drawing the significance from a growing body of research examining students' perceptions of teachers' motivational strategies, the present study is conducted as a replication of a previous study by Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) to explore the motivational strategies perceived by Chinese postgraduate students in British ESL educational contexts in terms of their frequency and importance. The focus of the study is on postgraduate students, who have been underexplored in motivational strategy research. Replicating Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) study enables cross-cultural comparison and adds to our knowledge of cultural factors and motivational effectiveness. The study also contributes to the "call" for further research on students' perceptions by illustrating the extent to which what teachers did was in line with what students experienced (Wong & Wong, 2017).

2.4. Research Questions

RQ1: What is the frequency of motivational strategies that teachers employ in the British Second Language Acquisition classroom setting based on the students' perceptions?

RQ2: How important are the motivational strategies used by teachers in the British ESL classroom setting according to students' perceptions?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

There were 20 postgraduate students who took part in the questionnaire survey, with 6 males and 14 females. All the participants are students studying for a master's degree in Britain and have been studying in Britain for at least one term. There are 14 English major students and 6 non-English major students. Among these participants, seven students have more than 5 years of language teaching experience, 6 of them have one to five years of language teaching experience, and 4 of them have less than one year of experience, and only 3 of them have no language teaching experience. As for the language proficiency level, 16 students are at an advanced level (CEFR level C1 - IELTS 7 or TOEFL iBT 95-113), 2 of them are upper intermediate (CEFR B2 - Around IELTS 5.5-6.5 or TOEFL iBT 72-94), and 2 of them are proficient or native users (CEFR level C2 - Around IELTS 8 or higher, or TOEFL iBT 114 or above). As we can see from the above sampling of participants, most of the students are English majors above 18 years old with language teaching experience and have achieved an advanced level of language proficiency, which means they have sufficient competency to answer the questionnaire. Having been aware of the fact that such a limited number of participants due to the time constraints of collecting and decoding data shall not represent the overall

demographic features of all overseas Chinese university students in the University College London in the UK, I confined the scope of my study and selected postgraduate students studying in Britain to prevent the overgeneralization of the findings.

3.2. Instruments

The empirical study is conducted to answer two research questions as mentioned in the above section. In order to ensure the reliability and validity of this study, I have chosen the questionnaires designed by the great scholar of motivation Dörnyei, who is also the founder of the motivation theory of L2MSS. These questions for the two questionnaires are based on solid theories and have proven validity through empirical study (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Wong, 2014). The Cronbach's Alpha for most of the clusters of items in the adopted questionnaires applied in different contexts has proved to be above 0.7. The two questionnaires share the same rating scale for the 48 questions of the same set of motivational strategies used in the Taiwan study by Cheng and Dörnyei (2007).

To protect the privacy of the demographic information, I have informed the participants that no personal information is reflected in the study. By using these methods, the participants are less likely to provide responses they believe are desirable or positive to meet the expectations initiated by "social desirability".

To encourage the participation of the participants, I have used Likert-type questionnaires developed by Microsoft Forms to collect information so that it can be easily distributed to the participants and convenient for them to complete the answers both through mobile or computer without involving any paperwork. The initial pool of strategies designed by Dörnyei contained more than 100 strategies and was then reduced to 48 motivational strategies to adopt the specific instrument when this study was conducted in Taiwan (For the list of all the strategies, see Table 1).

Table 1. Final rank order and descriptive statistics of the strategy scales and the individual constituent strategies.

Scales and constituent strategies	Mean	SD
1. Proper teacher behaviour ($\alpha = 0.337$)	5.01	0.47
Show students you care about them.	5.65	0.489
Establish a good rapport with students	5.55	0.686
Show your enthusiasm for teaching.	5.4	0.598
Share with students that you value English as a meaningful experience.	5.1	0.852
Be yourself in front of students.	3.35	1.496
2. Recognise students' effort ($\alpha = 0.739$)	5.388	0.714
Recognise students' effort and achievement.	5.6	0.681
Monitor students' progress and celebrate their victories.	5.474	0.772
Make sure grades reflect students' effort and hard work.	5.211	1.134
Promote effort attributions.	5.2	1.105
3. Promote learners' self-confidence ($\alpha = 0.841$)	5.03	0.9
Provide students with positive feedback.	5.2	1.24
Teach students learning techniques.	5.1	1.294
Encourage students to try harder.	4.95	1.05
Design tasks that are within the students' ability.	5	0.918
Make clear to students that communicating meaning effectively is more important than being grammatically correct.	4.9	1.21
4. Creating a pleasant classroom climate ($\alpha = 0.757$)	4.679	0.943
Create a supportive classroom climate that promotes risk-taking.	5.1	1.021
Bring in and encourage humour.	4.684	1.25
Avoid social comparison.	4.55	1.356
Use a short and interesting opening activity to start each class.	4.45	1.356
5. Present tasks properly ($\alpha = 0.478$)	5.1	0.852
Give clear instructions by modelling.	5.4	0.995
Give good reasons to students as to why a particular task is meaningful.	4.8	1.105
6. Increase learners' goal-orientedness ($\alpha = 0.842$)	4.775	1.032

Scales and constituent strategies	Mean	SD
Help students develop realistic beliefs about English learning.	4.75	1.118
Find out students' needs and build them into the curriculum.	5.25	0.967
Encourage students to set learning goals.	5.05	1.395
Display the class goal in a wall chart and review it regularly.	4.05	1.468
7. Make the learning tasks stimulating ($\alpha = 0.794$)	4.225	1.026
Break the routine by varying the presentation format.	3.7	1.525
Introduce various interesting topics.	4.75	1.41
Present various auditory and visual teaching aids.	4.7	1.261
Make tasks attractive by including novel and fantasy.	4.056	1.626
Encourage students to create products.	4.35	1.309
Make the task challenging.	3.7	1.49
8. Familiarise learners with L2-related values ($\alpha = 0.826$)	4.486	0.91
Increase the amount of English you use in the class.	4.7	1.418
Encourage students to use English outside the classroom.	4.35	1.631
Familiarise students with the cultural background of the target language.	5.05	0.999
Introduce authentic cultural materials.	5.1	0.912
Remind students of the benefits of mastering English.	4.45	1.572
Invite senior students to share their English learning experiences.	4.1	1.071
Invite English-speaking foreigners to class.	3.65	1.309
9. Promote group cohesiveness and group norms ($\alpha = 0.742$)	3.96	0.87
Explain the importance of the class rules.	4.3	1.38
Encourage students to share personal experiences and thoughts.	4.7	1.129
Allow students to get to know each other.	3.5	1.1
Ask students to work toward the same goal.	3.75	1.372
Let students suggest class rules.	3.55	1.191
10. Promote learner autonomy ($\alpha = 0.856$)	4.258	0.989
Adopt the role of a 'facilitator'.	4.7	0.865
Encourage peer teaching and group presentation.	4.55	1.395
Teach self-motivating strategies.	4.75	1.209
Allow students to assess themselves.	4.2	1.576
Give students choices in deciding how and when they will be assessed.	3.95	1.317
Involve students in designing and running the English course.	3.4	1.314

3.3. Procedures

To encourage active participation and make it convenient for participants to answer the questionnaire, data were collected from students studying TESOL at University College London through the WeChat group, North Lodge Students' WeChat group, due to the ease of communication via WeChat, which is a widely popular chat software among Chinese users. The responses from participants were very encouraging, and most completed the questionnaires cooperatively. It took four days for all participants to finish the questionnaires.

3.4. Data Analysis

All the data were exported from Microsoft Forms to Excel, and then the data in Excel were imported into SPSS. The statistical analysis was conducted via SPSS. The 48 strategies were classified according to the 10 macro-strategies. The statistics were analyzed through SPSS to calculate the sum of all scores for each strategy and then the means of each strategy, which prepared a rank order for each strategy and also for the 10 macro-strategies. This data analysis was applied to importance and frequency. Proceeding from this, the results of frequency and importance were calculated with mean-difference and z-difference to identify strategies that were particularly underused relative to their importance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The dataset produced findings that were both homogeneous and unexpected from the previous study. With the reliability of the motivational clusters confirmed, I then analyze the importance of the questionnaires perceived by

the students studying at UCL before analyzing the frequency questionnaires. All these analyses were conducted with comparison to the previous study to summarize what strategies are universal across different contexts and what strategies may be context-specific, and how the frequency and importance change due to different reasons such as culture, learning habits, educational system differences, etc.

4.1. The Reliability of the Strategy Clusters

The analysis of reliability for the 10 strategy clusters revealed the average Cronbach's Alpha across all clusters. For the Cronbach's Alpha of frequency evaluation on the ten clusters, the lowest is 0.337 for "proper teacher behavior," and the highest is 0.856 for "promote learner autonomy." There are 8 strategy clusters with Cronbach's Alpha above 0.7 in frequency, as shown in Table 1. Of the Cronbach's Alpha of importance evaluation of the ten clusters, all 10 strategy clusters have Cronbach's Alpha above 0.8, as shown in Table 3. By comparison, the Cronbach Alpha for frequency evaluation of the 10 clusters is higher than that of importance evaluation. Several factors may contribute to this difference, such as the greater objectivity of frequency evaluation versus the subjective nature of importance evaluation, the lower cognitive load of frequency evaluation versus the higher cognitive load of importance evaluation, and the reduced vulnerability of frequency evaluation to social desirability bias compared to the increased vulnerability of importance evaluation to social desirability bias. Additionally, two clusters exhibited significantly lower Cronbach's Alpha values among all clusters in importance evaluation. These included "Proper teacher behavior" ($\alpha=0.337$) and "Present task properly" ($\alpha=0.478$). This notably lower Cronbach Alpha value in importance can be interpreted from the perspectives of the different natures of frequency and importance evaluations, which contribute to the reasons for their differing Cronbach Alpha values.

Table 2. Rank order of the importance scales.

Scale	Mean	Britain survey rank	Taiwan survey rank
2. Recognise students' effort	5.388	1	2
5. Present tasks properly	5.1	2	5
3. Promote learners' self-confidence	5.03	3	3
1. Proper teacher behaviour	5.01	4	1
6. Increase learners' goal-orientedness	4.775	5	6
4. Creating a pleasant classroom climate	4.679	6	4
8. Familiarise learners with L2-related values	4.486	7	8
10. Promote learner autonomy	4.258	8	10
7. Make the learning tasks stimulating	4.225	9	7
9. Promote group cohesiveness and group norms	3.96	10	9

4.2. The Main Motivational Macrostrategies

In this study, the rank order of 10 motivational macro-strategies was calculated according to the responses from the students' perceptions. To effectively analyze the importance of each scale, the mean values of all related items under the same cluster were calculated. To improve reliability and validity, some invalid values and marginal items, due to random, repetitive, and incomplete filling of the questionnaires, have been removed.

Table 2 presents the overall rank order of all the strategy clusters, according to the importance attached to them as perceived by the students studying at UCL, is presented. From Table 2, we can observe differences in ranking between the British students' perceptions of motivational strategies and the rankings provided by the teachers in Taiwan based on (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007).

(1) Proper teacher behavior

As we can see from the table, both students studying at UCL and teachers rank this cluster within the top five, which suggests that teachers' behavior in motivation possesses some universal importance across different cultures. However, there are some differences in the ranking. The teacher in Taiwan ranking it in first place may be caused by East Asian culture, in which there is a strong emphasis on teachers as models. The Confucian values also place

importance on the moral character and conduct of educators. Cheng (2010) believed that teachers' knowledge and value systems impact students. By comparison, the lower rank of fourth for the cluster by Chinese students studying at UCL in a British classroom setting could imply that teachers in British contexts tend to play a more implicit role in motivation.

(2) Recognise the student's effort

This macrostrategy has enjoyed a high rank both from the Chinese students' perceptions in a British classroom setting and Taiwanese teachers' evaluations, which demonstrates the effectiveness of this cluster has been acknowledged across different cultures. According to Dörnyei and Csizér (1998), the motivational strategy was one of the "Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners." The practice of recognizing students' effort helps teachers build a positive learning environment that contributes to students' persistence in language learning. As a strategy, it is effective for both achievement-oriented and growth-mindset approaches (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). It shall be encouraged to practice language learning to improve student engagement.

(3) Promote learners' self-confidence

It is a very interesting finding that both Chinese students studying at UCL in a British educational setting and teachers in Taiwan place the same high value on promoting learners' self-confidence. In the study of Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) study conducted in a Hungarian setting, this cluster also ranked among the top five. Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) also found the cluster consistently ranked among the top list of motivational strategies by Taiwan teachers. According to MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) self-confidence influences a person's willingness to communicate in a second language. The high ranking by teachers in Taiwan also suggests that teachers are aware of the important role they play in building students' self-confidence.

(4) Create a pleasant classroom climate

For this cluster of macrostrategies, the teachers in Taiwan ranked higher than those of Chinese students studying at UCL in a British ESL setting. According to Cheng and Dörnyei (2007), Taiwanese teachers are aware of their role as guides, and they have an impact on student motivation through their behavior. Chinese students studying at UCL in a British ESL setting may have been influenced by their previous learning experiences, where the teacher-centered approach is frequently adopted. According to Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) a good teacher is capable of creating a positive atmosphere that boosts learners' willingness to improve their skills. In Taiwan, teachers have more control in creating a positive classroom atmosphere, while in the British ESL classroom setting, students studying at UCL might prioritize other factors, such as cultural adaptation and immersion into the native language, over the classroom atmosphere.

(5) Present tasks properly

Presenting tasks properly concerns several important strategies, such as giving clear instructions and providing good reasons for the students studying at UCL to understand the meaning of pedagogical activities. Bolkan (2017) has argued that teacher clarity is an important communication skill that has a significant influence on how well students can learn and comprehend the knowledge. The second rank from Chinese students studying at UCL for this macrostrategy suggests that Chinese students studying at UCL in a foreign educational background may value clear language instruction due to the adaptation to a new system. As suggested by Pun and Thomas (2020) there are indeed challenges in English medium instruction for teachers. This finding highlights the necessity of clear presentation of tasks by the teacher to meet the diverse needs of the students.

(6) Increase learners' goal-orientedness

The concept of goal in L2 acquisition motivation research has a long and evolving history. Its importance has been emphasized by many scholars. According to Cheng (2023), goal plays a crucial role in L2 acquisition and serves as a powerful tool to enhance motivation. The low ranking of teachers in Taiwan may be caused by implementation challenges and a poor understanding of the meaning of goal-setting. The shared low ranking between Taiwanese

teachers and Chinese students implies that it is necessary to integrate goal-related strategies and activities into ESL classrooms.

(7) Make the learning tasks stimulating

The importance of making learning tasks stimulating has been supported by different theoretical perspectives. Keller (1987) ARCS model of motivational design emphasizes the importance of drawing students' attention through instructional materials that can appeal to them, which aligns with the concept of making tasks interesting and stimulating. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) argued that interesting activities can enhance student engagement. However, both Chinese students in British ESL classroom settings and teachers in Taiwan have ranked these strategies relatively low. Gu and Maley (2008) explained that Chinese students come to the UK to improve their language skills and gain knowledge, and they consider the "interesting" activities to be limited in academic rigor.

(8) Familiarise learners with the L2 culture and L2-related values

Familiarizing learners with the L2 culture and L2-related values has been valued as an important aspect of language learning. A competent person in intercultural communication must command both the language and be able to understand cultural differences (Byram, 2021). In Vygotsky's theory of mind, language learning is inseparable from cultural understanding (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Although there are different theories supporting the pivotal role of culture in language learning, Taiwanese teachers and Chinese students in British ESL classroom settings ranked it very low. Despite its importance, the strategy has been undervalued by Chinese students studying abroad because they prioritize linguistic and academic goals over cultural learning.

(9) Promote group cohesiveness and group norms

According to Forsyth (2021) the group with better cohesiveness outperformed those with less unity because of their stronger relational bonds and commitment to shared goals. For teachers in Taiwan, there is a long-standing tradition of a teacher-centered approach and achievement-driven teaching methods. Teachers may consider group activities time-consuming and not directly contributing to teaching objectives. Meanwhile, Chinese students studying at UCL in Britain have been influenced by the culture of teacher-centered learning. They tend to value teacher authority and undervalue peer learning in a group. Chen and Curdt-Christiansen (2024) also, there has been debate about the impact of student-centered discussions in the UK and teacher-centered methods in China, which have led to different performances of group work in the classroom.

(10) Promote learner autonomy

Promoting learner autonomy is an essential strategy for language learning. The theoretical framework supporting this concept is largely based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT). It is argued by Ryan and Deci (2017) that autonomy is one of three basic psychological needs, alongside competence and relatedness. Han (2021) also addressed the importance of cultivating students to become autonomous by providing a social and supportive context. By comparing the current study with Cheng and Dörnyei (2007), both the Chinese students in British ESL classroom settings and Taiwanese teachers have ranked this cluster of strategies low. Taiwanese teachers often hold traditional views where the teacher shall be the authority and guide the teaching. However, under the influence of Western cultural contexts, which encourage autonomy in students, Chinese students studying at UCL demonstrate adaptation to Western learning culture and rank higher than Taiwanese teachers in this macrostrategy.

4.3. Frequency Items Versus Importance Items

The frequency questionnaires perceived by Chinese students studying at UCL in a British ESL classroom setting aim to gather information on how often teachers have applied specific motivational strategies based on students' observations and learning experiences. By comparing these results with the importance questionnaires of these students, it is possible to identify strategies that are considered important by students but have been underutilized by

teachers in the British context. Following Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) approach, the relevant data have been evaluated for statistical analysis concerning the research questions.

Firstly, the mean frequency for each strategy is presented to show how often it has been used in practice.

Secondly, the difference between a strategy's mean frequency and the overall average frequency is presented as mean-diff to suggest whether it is used more or less than other strategies.

Thirdly, the difference between standardized importance and frequency scores is presented as z-diff in Table 3. A negative z-diff suggests the strategy is underused relative to its perceived importance, while a positive z-diff indicates the opposite.

These measures help us understand which strategies are underutilized relative to their perceived importance, enabling us to identify potential gaps between students' perceptions of importance and teachers' practices in motivational strategy use. Table 3 demonstrates the three measures as mentioned. Any items with the lowest score were not deleted, as in the original study by Cheng and Dörnyei (2007), but the same effect has been achieved by deleting some invalid questionnaires before proceeding to data analysis. There are very few invalid questionnaires.

Table 3. Frequency statistics of the application of the 10 clusters of strategies: mean frequency; difference between the item's mean frequency and the mean frequency of all items; relative frequency (i.e., the frequency of an item relative to the importance perceived by students studying at UCL attached to it), and its rank order.

Scales and constituent strategies	Mean-frequency	MEAN- diff	z-diff
1. Proper teacher behaviour ($\alpha = 0.927$)	4.69	0.466	0.32
Show students you care about them.	4.5	0.276	1.15
Establish a good rapport with students.	4.8	0.576	0.75
Show your enthusiasm for teaching.	4.95	0.726	0.45
Share with students that you value English as a meaningful experience.	4.7	0.476	0.4
Be yourself in front of students.	4.5	0.276	-1.15
2. Recognise students' effort ($\alpha = 0.912$)	4.838	0.613	0.55
Recognise students' effort and achievement.	5.25	1.026	0.35
Monitor students' progress and celebrate their victories.	4.9	0.676	0.3
Make sure grades reflect students' effort and hard work.	4.5	0.276	0.45
Promote effort attributions.	4.7	0.476	0.5
3. Promote learners' self-confidence ($\alpha = 0.847$)	4.76	0.536	0.27
Provide students with positive feedback.	5.25	1.026	-0.05
Teach students learning techniques.	4.6	0.376	0.5
Encourage students to try harder.	5	0.776	-0.05
Design tasks that are within the students' ability.	4.65	0.426	0.35
Make clear to students that communicating meaning effectively is more important than being grammatically correct.	4.3	0.076	0.6
4. Creating a pleasant classroom climate ($\alpha = 0.827$)	4.375	0.151	0.304
Create a supportive classroom climate that promotes risk-taking.	4.25	0.026	0.85
Bring in and encourage humour.	4.5	0.276	-0.05
Avoid social comparison.	4.5	0.276	0.05
Use a short and interesting opening activity to start each class.	4.25	0.026	0.2
5. Present tasks properly ($\alpha = 0.912$)	4.725	0.501	0.375
Give clear instructions by modelling.	4.9	0.676	0.5
Give good reasons to students as to why a particular task is meaningful.	4.55	0.326	0.25
6. Increase learners' goal-orientedness ($\alpha = 0.785$)	4.338	0.113	0.438
Help students develop realistic beliefs about English learning.	4.55	0.326	0.2
Encourage students to set learning goals.	4.3	0.076	0.75
Display the class goal in a wall chart and review it regularly.	3.8	-0.424	0.25
7. Make the learning tasks stimulating ($\alpha = 0.891$)	3.992	-0.233	0.233
Break the routine by varying the presentation format.	3.45	-0.774	0.25
Introduce various interesting topics.	4.55	0.326	0.2
Present various auditory and visual teaching aids.	4.4	0.176	0.3
Make tasks attractive by including novel and fantasy.	3.7	-0.524	-0.05
Encourage students to create products.	4.105	-0.324	0.45

Scales and constituent strategies	Mean-frequency	MEAN- diff	z-diff
Make the task challenging.	3.7	-0.524	0
8. Familiarise learners with L2-related values ($\alpha = 0.792$)	3.821	-0.403	0.664
Increase the amount of English used in the class.	4.6	0.376	0.1
Encourage students to use English outside the classroom.	3.85	-0.374	0.5
Familiarise students with the cultural background of the target language.	4.25	0.026	0.8
Introduce authentic cultural materials.	4.7	0.476	0.4
Remind students of the benefits of mastering English.	4.3	0.076	0.15
Invite senior students to share their English learning experiences.	2.75	-1.474	1.35
Invite English-speaking foreigners to class.	2.3	-1.924	1.35
9. Promote group cohesiveness and group norms ($\alpha = 0.827$)	3.95	-0.274	0.01
Explain the importance of the class rules.	3.45	-0.774	0.85
Encourage students to share personal experiences and thoughts.	4.4	0.176	0.3
Allow students to get to know each other.	4.55	0.326	-1.05
Ask students to work toward the same goal.	4	-0.224	-0.25
Let students suggest class rules.	3.35	-0.874	0.2
10. Promote learner autonomy ($\alpha = 0.895$)	3.592	-0.633	0.667
Adopt the role of a 'facilitator'.	4.3	0.076	0.4
Allow students to assess themselves.	3.75	-0.474	0.45
Give students choices in deciding how and when they will be assessed.	3.45	-0.774	0.5
Involve students in designing and running the English course.	2.3	-1.924	1.1

Negative figures indicate underutilization, and positive ones refer to overused items relative to their importance.

It can be seen from Table 3 that “promote group cohesiveness and group norms” has been perceived as the least used macrostrategy. Two items in this cluster were used less than their perceived importance, which are “allow students to get to know each other” and “ask students to work toward the same goal.” The low usage of these strategies contributed to the overall low average score of the entire cluster. The importance of this macrostrategy was also ranked lowest by Chinese students in the British ESL classroom setting. Therefore, its low frequency and importance rank suggest that it is challenging to promote group cohesiveness and group norms among Chinese students studying at UCL in an ESL classroom setting.

Following up on the macrostrategy of “promote group cohesiveness and group norms” is “make the learning tasks stimulating.” Most strategies in the cluster show slight overuse of the strategies relative to their low importance, with the strategy of “make tasks attractive by including novel and fantasy” as the only one slightly underused strategy relative to its low rank importance. This suggests, despite its relatively low rank importance, that little more practice on making tasks attractive by including novel and fantasy elements is desired in pedagogical practice.

Among all motivational macrostrategies, promoting learner autonomy has the lowest scale mean difference, which is consistent with the study in Taiwan. This suggests that the strategy has been used the least compared with other clusters in British ESL classrooms. The z-diff of 0.667 for this strategy indicates that, although it has been used the least frequently in class, it is still considered by students as a slight overuse strategy for them. This may be caused by the fact that Chinese students have a long history of immersing in a learning environment prevalent with a teacher-centered approach and are not accustomed to autonomous learning.

Besides looking at group averages, I also observed the relative frequency of some individual strategies. Among all items, the two strategies considered underused relative to their importance are “allow students to get to know each other” (z-diff -1.05) and “be yourself in front of students” (z-diff -1.15). Chinese students studying overseas are far from home, and they may try to integrate into the new environment by knowing more peers and friends to gain a sense of belonging and community. Therefore, it suggests that “allow students to get to know each other” should be used more frequently in the future. The strategy of “be yourself in front of students” topped the list as the underused strategy relative to its importance. When teachers are authentic and open, it helps to build trust and stronger

connections with their students. This openness also encourages students to communicate more freely with their teachers about course material and personal concerns.

Overall, the frequency of strategies relative to their importance, based on the perceptions of Chinese students in a British ESL classroom setting, demonstrates better alignment than that of students studying in Taiwan, as reported by Cheng and Dörnyei (2007).

4.4. Culturally and Contextually Dependent Motivational Strategies

The results of this study reveal that some strategy clusters show a consistent pattern in both current British and previous Taiwanese educational settings. This suggests that some strategies for motivating students are universal and effective across different cultures and perceptions. A closer investigation indicates that strategies such as “recognize students’ effort,” “present tasks properly,” “promote learners’ self-confidence,” and “proper teacher behavior” ranked in the top five in both studies. This demonstrates that these cluster strategies represent fundamental beliefs in teaching approaches and should be encouraged in teaching practices to yield sound learning outcomes.

While there are similarities between the two studies, I also noticed some strategies that were viewed differently by Chinese students in a British ESL classroom setting from Taiwanese teachers. For instance, Taiwanese teachers placed less importance on “presenting the task properly” but are much more supportive of “proper teacher behaviour” compared to Chinese students in a British language learning setting. These differences suggest that some strategies are more culture-specific and vary in different educational settings based on different perceptions. In the following sections, I will investigate the two strategies that show the largest mismatch, explore the reasons, and reveal the findings in more detail.

(1) Present the task properly

The difference in ranking regarding the proper presentation of tasks between Chinese students studying at UCL in British ESL settings (rank 2) and Taiwanese teachers (rank 5) can be attributed to differences in culture, language environment, and teaching approaches in Asian and Western countries. To start with, Taiwanese teachers often employ traditional methods that are teacher-centered and knowledge-driven. Teachers control the class and teach knowledge through direct instructions without much requirement for communication among students. In contrast, Chinese students studying at UCL in British contexts benefit from a more interactive environment that encourages clear communication and engagement with teachers and peers. Secondly, students in the British education context are exposed to a native environment, which presents more challenges in understanding the teacher’s instructions due to limited language proficiency (Pun & Thomas, 2020). It is natural that Chinese students, whose mother tongue is not English, seek clearer teacher instructions for better learning outcomes.

(2) Proper teacher behavior

For this cluster of macrostrategies of proper teacher behavior, the fourth rank by Chinese students studying at UCL in a British ESL setting is much lower than the top rank rated by teachers. One explanation for this is the different cultural expectations of teacher roles in Asian and Western countries. In Chinese culture, teachers are traditionally viewed as authoritative figures. As Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) found, “demonstrating proper teacher behavior” was ranked first among motivational strategies by Taiwanese teachers. According to Littlewood (1999), in Western culture, proactive autonomy is valued. However, in most Asian countries, this type of autonomy is not promoted. Chinese students studying at UCL in British settings may focus more on adapting to a new learning environment than on teacher behavior. Taiwanese teachers give priority to proper behavior due to cultural norms.

4.5. Limitations and Future Research

One of the major limitations of the study is the modest number of participants, which limits the scope for generalizing the findings of the study. Another limitation is partly caused by the time constraint for exploring deeper analysis on the evaluation of the frequency and importance of the motivational strategies. Future research can enlarge

the targeted participants and explore the reasons for the results, which can be revealed more fully by qualitative data. Future research can adopt the mixed approaches of quantitative and qualitative methods as the methodology. The objectiveness and reliability of the study can be further improved by adopting comprehensive perceptions and onsite objective observations of the strategies from teachers, students, and researchers.

5. CONCLUSION

This study compared motivational strategies perceived by Chinese students in British ESL classrooms with those used by Taiwanese teachers. While there are some similarities between the current study and the previous study, some notable differences are observed. For instance, Chinese students in British settings placed higher importance on “presenting tasks properly,” whereas Taiwanese teachers strongly emphasized “proper teacher behavior.” Strategies like promoting learner self-confidence and recognizing students’ efforts were valued in both contexts, suggesting some universal applicability. There are four strongly universally endorsed strategies in both studies, which include “recognize students’ efforts,” “present tasks properly,” “promote learners’ self-confidence,” and “proper teacher behavior.” However, significant differences emerged in areas such as learner autonomy and the importance of proper teacher behavior, which are reflective of different educational traditions and cultural values between Taiwan and Britain. The findings reveal both universal and culturally specific aspects of motivational strategies.

Interestingly, some strategies were underutilized despite their perceived importance, including being yourself in front of students and allowing students to know each other. These “motivational trouble spots” require further investigation. Although motivational strategies in both the British setting and Taiwan show some mismatch between frequency and importance, the British educational setting shows a generally better alignment between frequency and importance than that in Taiwan.

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