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English for specific purposes teachers' beliefs about their motivational practices and student motivation at a Chinese university

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Abstract

While it is increasingly recognized that teachers have a crucial role to play in motivating learners, language teacher cognition research that focuses on beliefs about second language (L2) learner motivation and motivational practices is still rare, particularly in English for specific purposes (ESP) settings in Asia. Furthermore, much of what is available does not employ stimulated recall interviews to facilitate a comparison of espoused beliefs elicited beforehand, observed classroom practices and situated cognitions. We have employed such methodology in an under-researched ESP setting in China, to gain insights into the influence of culture and context on teacher beliefs and behavior. Our qualitative case study of three Chinese ESP teachers highlights harmony and tensions between espoused beliefs regarding student motivation and the teacher's motivational role, and motivational practices, this harmony/disharmony being likely to impact these teachers' self-determination. It considers possible reasons for identified tensions, including limited professional development opportunities in ESP, apparently dated knowledge of L2 motivation theory, deeply embedded Confucian values and an entrenched assessment

culture. Findings suggest the need for awareness-raising and mentoring activities designed to support cognitive harmony regarding motivation and motivational practices amongst ESP teachers.

Keywords: teacher beliefs; L2 motivation; motivational practices; English for specific purposes; China; stimulated recall

1. Introduction

While the understanding of both second language (L2) learner motivation and teachers' motivational practices has developed considerably in English language teaching (ELT) in recent decades (Lamb, 2017), there has been less focus on these issues in the English for specific purposes (ESP) literature, even though motivation is also important in the latter field. So, whereas, for example, the journal *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching (SSLT)* devotes considerable attention to motivation, having published no fewer than 19 articles with *motivation* in the title since Pawlak (2012), in contrast, the most recent article in *English for Specific Purposes* with motivation in the title was Peacock's (2003) book review of Dörnyei (2001), which makes no reference to ESP. References to ESP are also rare amongst the 19 articles with motivation in the title in *SSLT*, though Barzegar and Sadr (2013) do explore the effects of emotional intelligence awareness-raising on L2 motivation in an ESP context, supported by teachers' motivational strategies. However, neither in this study nor in the fields of ELT or ESP more generally is there much consideration of teachers' *beliefs* about motivation and motivational practices.

We explore language teachers' beliefs about motivation and motivational practices in an ESP learning environment in China. This is a national context where there is still pressure on teachers to adopt Western ideas and methods related to ELT, even though these ideas and methods may not always fit cultural norms and contextual realities (Butler, 2011). Such pressure might contribute to cognitive disharmony in teachers. While such cognitive disharmony can spur the positive change characteristically sought in teacher education (Golombek, 2015), unfortunately another potential outcome is that it may be a cause of downwardly spiraling self-efficacy beliefs in unsupported in-service teachers (Wyatt, 2018). Our perspective is that, while the relationships are always likely to be highly complex (Bastürkmen, 2012), relative harmony between beliefs about L2 learner motivation and motivational practices seems likely to support psychological well-being in self-determined teachers (Deci & Ryan, 1985). We explore this issue in an under-researched ESP university context in China, focusing on three teachers in a qualitative case study (Stake, 1995) for insights into

their beliefs about student motivation, motivational practices and how these are shaped by culture and context.

2. Literature review

In reviewing the literature, we first consider the need for language teacher cognition research regarding L2 learner motivation and teachers' motivational practices, and argue that there is a need for qualitative research in ESP settings that includes stimulated recall. We then review the literature on language teachers' espoused beliefs regarding L2 learner motivation and their motivational classroom practices, and consider the roles played by the ESP context and local culture in shaping teachers' beliefs. We then review language teacher cognition studies in China.

2.1. The need for L2 learner motivation-oriented teacher cognition research utilizing stimulated recall

Language teacher cognition research, the study of "what language teachers think, know and believe" and of how these cognitions shape their classroom practices (Borg, 2006, p. 1), is needed for the following reasons. Firstly, as Borg (2015) explains, it can furnish insights into how policy is being realized in practice; it can also shed light on the extent to which teaching practices seem optimal, support the evaluation of past or ongoing teacher education programs and shape any needs analysis leading into the design of future programs. It can additionally shed light on how educational organizations work, the extent to which different aspects of the curriculum appear to be aligned, the influence of cultural assumptions on practices in different contexts and the extent to which educational policy needs re-examining (Imran & Wyatt, 2015; Walsh & Wyatt, 2014). It is also required to investigate widely discussed areas of teaching and learning that have been under-explored in teacher cognition studies (Borg, 2015), particularly since there can be a gap between second language acquisition theory and teaching practice (Borg, 2006). Hennebray-Leung (2020) reminds us that L2 motivation theory developed by researchers and disseminated through academic publications may be only partially accessible to teachers as public theory, before being reconstructed as these teachers develop their own private theories in unpredictable ways in different contexts.

Although reasons for any lack of congruence between teachers' beliefs and practices may be complex (Bastürkmen, 2012), an identified gap between cognitions and practices regarding L2 motivation theory in particular could be a cause for concern. For example, while there is increasing empirical evidence that the use of motivational strategies by teachers (Dörnyei, 2001) might be appropriate

in different ways in different contexts, the view that was prevailing until the 1990s, advanced by Gardner and his associates (e.g., Gardner & Lambert, 1959), was that students' underlying motives and attitudes towards the language and its speakers were far more important than anything that happened subsequently in class (Lamb, 2017). Teachers holding such a Gardnerian view, reflecting somewhat dated theoretical knowledge, might hold skeptical beliefs as to the value of motivational strategies. Beliefs, which can be conceptualized as an affective way of knowing (Pajares, 1992), intersect with knowledge to shape practices.

To date, there has been only limited research exploring the relationships between language teachers' conceptions of L2 motivation and their motivational practices (Lamb, 2017). Moreover, that research available has tended to elicit *espoused* (Zhu & Shu, 2017), *idealized* (Imran & Wyatt, 2015) or *professed* (Zheng, 2013) beliefs, which are not necessarily closely related to classroom practice, unlike the "practically-oriented cognitions" (Borg, 2006, p. 280) which inform teachers' actual work. To elicit the latter, sometimes termed *situated* cognitions (Walsh & Wyatt, 2014) or *implicit* beliefs (Zhu & Shu, 2017), it is common in teacher cognition research to observe classroom behavior and then seek explanations in stimulated recall interview (SRI).

Stimulated recall involves using data from the observed lesson in the form of audio- or video-recordings or notes to prompt reflection on classroom events (Gass & Mackey, 2000). This method can provide insights into how factors such as context, culture or teacher education impact teachers' classroom practices and shape situated cognitions that perhaps conflict with espoused beliefs, leading to cognitive disharmony that once understood can be addressed. For example, using stimulated recall with in-service secondary school English teachers in Hong Kong, Hennebry-Leung (2020) was able to identify the need for mechanisms in continuing professional development that would facilitate the intertwining of teacher learning, teaching practice and reflection in an interactive way to support greater harmony. However, the method has been under-employed in language teacher cognition research on motivation. While Muñoz and Ramirez (2015), for example, identified a gap between espoused beliefs regarding motivational strategies, elicited in interview, and observed classroom practices, they did not use stimulated recall to explore the situated cognitions of the Colombian teachers in their study.

Qualitative research methodology utilizing stimulated recall is particularly needed in ESP. Bastürkmen and Bocanegra-Valle (2018) highlight that while there are large bodies of literature on linguistic description in ESP and on teaching and learning ESP, there is almost nothing on the ESP teacher. We focus now on what we do know, first considering more broadly espoused beliefs regarding L2 student motivation and the motivational practices of language educators.

2.2. Language teachers' espoused beliefs regarding L2 learner motivation and motivational classroom practices

While the field of L2 motivation research has made considerable advances in recent decades (Al-Hoorie, 2018; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Lamb, 2017), we know only a little about language teachers' espoused beliefs regarding student motivation and self-reported motivational classroom practices from the few small-scale studies (e.g., Cowie & Sakui, 2012; Harvey, 2013; Hennebry-Leung, 2020; Lee, 2015) available. These studies reveal espoused beliefs based on varying levels of theoretical knowledge regarding research on L2 motivation.

Two of three experienced and Masters-qualified Hong Kong Chinese teachers in Lee (2015), for example, were unable "to provide any detailed account of leading L2 motivation theories" (p. 7). At the same time, the third of them seems to have had a sense of historical developments, for example, knowing something about Gardner and Lambert's (1959) social-psychological approach, which held that an *integrative* orientation, that is, a willingness to identify with the target language community, was more important for success than an *instrumental* orientation, that is, a concern with pragmatic gains from L2 proficiency such as getting a better job. Of course, the explanatory power of this dichotomy has been questioned since the 1990s (Lamb, 2004). The teacher also knew about the emergent orientation, *international posture* (Yashima, 2002); this refers to a willingness to interact in intercultural settings through English, including in contexts where it is used as a lingua franca, without, however, necessarily wishing to identify with the foreign other. Furthermore, the teacher was also aware of the cognitive-situated phase of L2 motivation research that emerged in the 1990s, when the importance of the classroom environment was recognized, and interest in motivational macro-strategies (Dörnyei, 2001) was sparked; these macro-strategies include setting a personal example with behavior, developing good relationships with learners, making well-presented learning tasks stimulating, familiarizing learners with the target language culture, encouraging learner autonomy and promoting learners' self-confidence (Lamb, 2017).

What teachers know about L2 motivation is important, since this knowledge is likely to shape their beliefs and perhaps their practices. For example, teachers holding Gardner's now much-challenged view that orientations are more important than any subsequent educational experience may be less likely to employ motivational macro-strategies (Lamb, 2017). Such a stance is evident, for example, in a Japan-based teacher in Cowie and Sakui (2012), who reports believing: "students are innately motivated. . . [and] there is relatively little she can do to change their levels of determination to learn" (p. 138).

In contrast, if teachers believe their motivational practices can make a difference, this might impact their use of strategies. Several UK-based EAP teachers interviewed in Harvey (2013) highlight the need for strategies, such as creating trusting relationships with students within a safe environment in which risks with language can be taken and new identities experimented with. These teachers also emphasize that students need to “know that their teacher understands their experience of the learning process and the pragmatic gains for which they are aiming, and that there are various influences operating in their lives” (p. 2).

To draw on two further current motivation theories, Deci and Ryan’s (1985) Self-Determination Theory and Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self-System: if teachers employ macro-strategies appropriate for the context, then students’ psychological needs for relatedness, autonomy and competence are more likely to be met, allowing students to engage efficaciously in more intrinsically-motivated, self-determined behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985); teachers’ use of macro-strategies might allow learners to fulfil their *ideal L2 selves*, that is, their visions of themselves as competent language users (Dörnyei, 2009).

2.3. The role of the ESP context and local culture in shaping teachers’ beliefs

As teachers’ espoused beliefs quoted in Harvey (2013) above suggest, learners need to feel that their goals and social experiences are valued. Context matters, with “the local educational culture,” “broader curriculum goals,” “preferences and interests of particular learner groups,” and “individual learner needs, wants and identities” all requiring the consideration of their teachers (Lamb, 2017, p. 311).

ESP learners, like the EAP learners referred to in Harvey (2013), are perhaps more likely to be concerned about pragmatic gains that relate to an instrumental orientation than are many other learner groups. If related to professional needs and clearly relevant to future careers, the ESP curriculum might be more motivating (Bastürkmen, 2010; Kember et al., 2008), particularly if course material authentically (Danaye Tous & Haghighi, 2014) focuses on students’ specializations (Malcolm, 2013) in an accessible way (Marwan, 2009). It can also help motivation if a specifically task-based syllabus based on practical business situations (Chen, 2005; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) is followed.

However, besides strengthening instrumental motivation, supporting ESP learners’ intrinsic enjoyment in using materials is also important, as some teachers emphasize, for example most of the 21 ESP university teachers in Spain sampled by Bastürkmen and Bocanegra-Valle (2018). According to Ahmed (2014), increases in intrinsic motivation can be achieved by the fulfilment of several related principles, for example by promoting learner autonomy through the use of authentic materials that capitalize on ESP learners’ interests in developing technology in a digital world.

Ideally, employing motivational principles through interactive use of engaging materials and tasks (Watson Todd, 2003) can also enhance both ESP learners' feelings of relatedness and their self-efficacy beliefs (Su et al., 2018).

Teachers' motivational practices are likely to be shaped by factors such as the value they attach to motivational principles and their perceptions of the motivation of their ESP learners. In turn, these ESP teachers' cognitions will have been shaped by various sources. These sources would include classroom practice, professional coursework, and schooling, that is, Lortie's (1975) *apprenticeship of observation*, which refers to the thousands of hours that teachers have already spent as learners observing their own teachers (Borg, 2006). These sources might be felt within or across cultures.

Though under-explored in language teacher cognition research, local culture experienced through schooling, teacher education and teaching practice is likely to play a pervasive role in shaping ESP teachers' cognitions and motivational practices. This is clear to L2 motivation researchers, with Lamb (2017) emphasizing that motivational strategies, developed in relation to the local curriculum and sociocultural context, are culture-specific. So, comparing Hungarian and Taiwanese ELT contexts, Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) highlight that Hungarian teachers tend to support *proactive autonomy*, for example by encouraging learners to choose or design instructional materials. This is in contrast to Taiwanese teachers, who may be more likely to support *reactive autonomy*, for example through encouraging learners to work independently while following their teacher's agenda. The authors ascribe this finding to "the common belief amongst Chinese educators that the teacher is the ultimate source of knowledge" (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007, p. 170).

Another motivational strategy that emerged in Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study as particularly important in a Chinese context is recognising students' sustained effort, which these authors relate to Confucian values and the historical importance of paper-and-pencil exams in career advancement. Similarly, Wong (2014) found that the motivational strategy Hong Kong Chinese ELT teachers reported using most often was offering students rewards, such as confectionary or writing implements, which the students could then use for showing off. This strategy, which is strongly discouraged in many educational contexts for the negative effects it can have on intrinsic motivation, physical health and psychological wellbeing, appears related to the stress placed in China on performing in high stakes exams (Wong, 2014).

The importance of exam preparation in China is evident in other studies (e.g., Yuan & Stapleton, 2020; Zhu & Shu, 2017). For example, Lamb and Wedell (2015) compared inspiring English language school teachers in Indonesia and China from learners' perspectives. The Chinese learners in the study appeared

to measure progress more in terms of “improved assessment scores,” and also differed from their Indonesian counterparts by placing more value on “the effective use of traditional methods” than on “novelty in methodology” (p. 214). A Chinese ELT teacher, selected for observation as she had been nominated as inspiring by multiple former students, taught in the following way. Besides radiating enthusiasm throughout, she revised grammar through rapid short stages, initiated all activities to which students responded, encouraged competition between groups, focused on textbook language and ensured there was always a clear *right* answer. Subsequently, this teacher emphasized in interview that she wanted her lessons to be not only interesting, but also fast and intensively competitive, since she was preparing students for a highly competitive world of future exams (Lamb & Wedell, 2015). There was thus a synergy between practices and the situated cognitions elicited, which appeared to be in harmony with local culture; these researchers had not investigated her espoused beliefs.

2.4. Language teacher cognition studies in China

Although research exploring English language teacher cognition regarding learner motivation and teachers’ motivational practices is limited, particularly in ESP contexts in China, some local studies focusing on language teacher cognition in other ELT curricular areas and typically eliciting both espoused beliefs and those situated in relation to observed classroom practices do provide insights. Zheng (2013), for example, explored tensions between the espoused beliefs and practices of a secondary school English teacher. This teacher professed to promote learners’ overall language competence in accordance with the new Western-influenced curriculum through communicative language teaching (CLT) and the use of authentic activities, but instead then taught to pass the exam. Zheng discusses these tensions in terms of core beliefs, which are more stable, and peripheral beliefs competing against each other, with some new beliefs assimilated into her practices, but others showing evidence of only token adoption. Relating these findings to complexity theory, Zheng (2013) suggests that teachers potentially conflicted need help in reflecting so that they can better understand themselves and how factors such as culture, prior learning experiences, learner expectations and curriculum chaotically and dynamically impact what they do in a rapidly changing Chinese society. Tao and Gao (2018) have similarly argued that reflection-focused professional development could benefit Chinese ESP university teachers seeking to develop robust professional identities. They explain that, despite growing recognition of the importance of ESP in Chinese universities, ESP teachers can still feel marginalized.

Bearing in mind that feelings of being marginalized can undermine well-being and self-determination in teachers (Deci & Ryan, 1985), we now explore

language teacher cognition regarding L2 motivation and motivational practices at a Chinese university. We do this by employing not only emic but also etic perspectives, i.e., by analyzing the voices of our participants in relation to motivational and cultural constructs in public theory. Utilizing this combination of perspectives is a strategy recommended by Watt and Richardson (2015), who argue that a combined emic/etic approach "is important to progress the burgeoning body of work concerning teachers' beliefs and motivations" (p. 203).

3. The study

As indicated above, language teacher cognition research relating to student motivation is limited, particularly amongst ESP teachers in China. Furthermore, research utilizing stimulated recall to explore the relationships between the classroom practices and espoused beliefs of Chinese ESP teachers, and to explore how these beliefs are impacted by culture and context, is needed. Our research questions are accordingly:

1. What espoused beliefs do three Chinese ESP teachers hold about student motivation?
2. To what extent do their motivational practices in the ESP classroom fit their espoused beliefs, and which factors might explain any gaps identified?

3.1. Research context and participants

This qualitative case study (Stake, 1995) took place at a Chinese university, where Business English, as part of the university's College English Curriculum, is compulsory for all 2nd-year Business majors. It is taught by a team of seven ESP teachers, all non-native speakers of English, expected to follow the same CLT-oriented syllabus, which outlines teaching objectives, textbook and assessment. Classes are large, each containing approximately 50 students with a shared L1. English is the default language of instruction, with Chinese occasionally used to facilitate understanding.

Three teachers were selected for the final study (from five willing and available volunteers – the other two participated in a pilot study). The most important consideration in selecting these three cases was to maximize what could be learned (Stake, 1995). Of the two male volunteers, for example, one (Gang – pseudonym) seemed more highly articulate than the other and therefore seemed more likely to be able to provide rich information about his beliefs and practices; he was also highly popular with students, according to the student evaluations of teaching that were shared, which suggested that he knew how to motivate his students. Gender balance and variety were also considerations in

sampling. The two females selected included Li (pseudonym), the most experienced of the five volunteers; Li was highly supportive of the research and was eager to contribute. Also included was Yan (pseudonym), a teacher who had a particularly varied background and who was studying part-time for a PhD.

The participating teachers also had certain shared characteristics. All three held Business-related Masters degrees and had 5-10 years' ESP experience, though Li had also taught General English for 20 years. They had received the Teaching Certificate for Tertiary Education from the provincial Education Department. None had taken specific English language teaching qualifications, which is quite typical of College English teachers in China; most major in linguistics, translation or literature (Borg & Liu, 2013). Also typical of Chinese College English teachers is that Li and Gang had not worked outside teaching; relevant business work experience amongst such teachers is unusual (Tao & Gao, 2018). Yan was an exception; like several of the teachers in Tao and Gao (2018), she had gained some experience in an international company before becoming a university teacher. In-service training in such university contexts is limited, usually taking the form of lectures by experts (e.g., on linguistics), peer discussions, both formal and informal, and observations of demonstration classes (Rao & Lei, 2014). Participating teachers were informed of the research aims and design, and were guaranteed confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw at any stage, in line with ethical guidelines.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Qualitative data were collected through pre-observation interviews, classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews (SRIs) by the first researcher (hereafter I). As an insider (Holliday, 2007) colleague on study leave, I could easily build rapport with the participants and could utilize shared cultural knowledge during data collection. At the same time, I was fully conscious of needing to be reflexive. I maintained a neutral role throughout data collection processes, seeking to explore and avoiding rushing to judgment. This is particularly important in SRIs, to allow for more complete recall commentaries to be gathered.

Pre-observation interviews focused on participants' general understanding of ESP student motivation and their own motivational practices (Appendix A). These interviews were semi-structured to allow both interviewer and interviewees flexibility to explore themes of relevance as they arose (Dörnyei, 2007). Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent, to enable me, the interviewer, to focus fully on the conversation and to facilitate subsequent analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). All interviews were conducted at least one week before classroom observations in an attempt to minimize the impact of pre-conceived notions triggered by the interview questions.

Particularly given that teacher beliefs can be contradictory and unconscious while verbal commentary may not always be reliable (Gass & Mackey, 2000), non-participatory classroom observations were needed. I wanted to compare what teachers actually did in the classroom and what they reported that they thought they should do or did. Two of each participant's classes (each lasting 50 minutes) were observed but not recorded in order to reduce intrusiveness. Instead, observational notes were taken and copies of teaching materials such as worksheets, handouts, course book and PowerPoint slides were collected to support subsequent description. Reactivity relating to the observer's presence (Holliday, 2007) was not thought to be an issue. This is because lessons are frequently observed for various purposes at the research site (e.g., for teacher development, teaching management, and research), with demonstration lessons quite common (Rao & Lei, 2014). So teachers and students tend to be quite comfortable with an observer's presence.

Observational data providing evidence of motivational strategies employed in the ESP classroom were partially analyzed immediately after each observed lesson, with an instrument based on Dörnyei (2001) developed for this purpose (Appendix B). This analysis enabled me to frame the issues to be discussed during the SRIs (Gass & Mackey, 2000), which were conducted shortly afterwards. Designed to uncover cognitive processes underlying classroom practices (Brown & Rodgers, 2002), SRIs took about 35 minutes each and were audio-recorded. Observational notes and copies of teaching materials were used as stimuli to prompt teachers to reflect on classroom behavior (see Appendix C for guiding questions).

Various strategies were employed during the SRIs to ease any tension that teachers might experience while commenting on their own practices. Firstly, the SRIs were conducted in a relaxed environment, with drinks and snacks provided, and both interviewer and interviewees were seated comfortably on sofas. I was very careful with body language and choice of words when asking follow-up questions, striving to maintain a neutral respectful tone. This was to avoid participants feeling that they had to present themselves more favorably or to defend themselves upon feeling judged, challenged or confronted.

Data generated from pre-observation interviews and SRIs were first transcribed, translated into English and sent to the participants for verification. With their confirmation, interview transcripts were then coded through close and repeated readings. During this process, reflexivity (Holliday, 2007) was crucial, and was achieved partly through dialogue with the second researcher, who brought an outsider perspective to data analysis. A range of teacher beliefs regarding student motivation and motivational practices were identified, categorized and subsequently reassembled into recurrent themes. Conscious of the possible effects of the social desirability response bias, we interrogated emergent findings

rigorously. For example, since methods associated with Western-oriented CLT are promoted in this context, we were conscious that teachers may be more likely to espouse adoption of them, whether or not this is merely *token* (Zheng, 2013). Illustrations of espoused beliefs, observed practice and situated cognitions in relation to particular motivational strategies were tabulated reflexively and re-examined for any hint of reactivity (Holliday, 2007). Thick descriptive accounts were then developed and are presented below to help us address and subsequently discuss our research questions.

4. Findings

4.1. What are Li's espoused beliefs about student motivation?

Li reported that motivation was "definitely" the most important factor that contributed to language learning success. She felt that most ESP students were motivated to learn the course as "it is practical" and "closely related to their subject of study," but for students who "don't need English in their future life," "nothing could fire them up." From this perspective, she argued that although teachers did have an impact, they did not and should not play a big role in motivating students. Instead, students "need to be motivated from inside . . . by themselves."

Factors Li felt most important for ESP student motivation were relevance to real-world needs, learner autonomy and positive self-efficacy beliefs, realized through motivational techniques including "developing a good relationship with students," "boosting students' confidence," and "empowering students and letting them decide what best fits their needs." The most effective strategy overall was "relating the course to practical needs," for which she favored various motivational techniques (Table 1):

Table 1 Li's favored motivational techniques

Practical needs	Favored motivational techniques
A higher GPA	Award bonus grades for active participation, presentations and assignments
Future study or career	Use authentic and relevant materials and activities
Oral communication in future career	Question students frequently during class Frequent group work to increase speaking opportunities

4.2. To what extent do Li's motivational practices in the ESP classroom fit her espoused beliefs, and which factors might explain any gaps identified?

Li's classroom observations revealed a degree of fit between espoused beliefs and motivational practices. At the start of both observed classes, for example,

Li explained how topics related to the course and business world. She also linked success in job interviews or future careers with the acquisition of certain high frequency phrases or sentence patterns.

However, there were also apparent tensions between Li's espoused beliefs and classroom practices, regarding, for example, learner autonomy. In interview, Li acknowledged the importance of empowering students and "letting them take control." In both her observed sessions, however, Li exercised tight control over the flow of teaching and learning. She was observed to check her watch frequently, timing every section of her lesson, with group discussions limited to finding easily located answers in reading texts; when invited to participate, students were asked to keep their contributions short and simple. When this was highlighted in SRIs, Li verbalized another belief that seemed more powerful:

It (letting students take control) would be ideal, but classes do not always work like that . . . The classroom should be led by the teacher. We cannot let students do whatever they want. Anyway, teachers teach, students learn.

This belief that teachers should be at the center is also evidenced by her limited interaction with students. During her observed classes, she talked most; students spoke only when asked to. She stayed behind the podium mostly and there was no personal interaction with students. When this behavior was highlighted in SRIs, Li attributed it to contextual factors, including time constraints and large class size:

Although I know my students would like some lead and say in the classroom, I just don't have enough time. I have to lead the students so that we can move faster to cover everything. We don't have time for chit-chat . . . If everyone speaks for one minute, that's a 50-minute class finished already. I couldn't afford to let them pull the class in different directions. I have to do more talking and keep discussions short.

The use of non-authentic teaching/learning materials suggests another tension between Li's beliefs and practices. Although Li reported believing that authentic materials can motivate students, in her class she stuck to obviously dated course book materials (first published in 1983). Her SRIs revealed that this was an intentional choice:

I know readings are dated and activities are not so relevant. But at least, this is a published course book, which means it is more authoritative and trustworthy. I don't want to mislead my students with materials from other sources . . . like the Internet . . . what if it is not written in correct English, like Japanese English?

Li did not seem aware that her overarching belief about *authentic* English appears to be at odds with her belief about using authentic materials as a motivating

strategy. In her mind, only English “used by native speakers” and “official English, like BBC or VOA English” is authentic, while “English used by non-native speakers” may mislead students. Feeling that she has to look for extra materials in *authentic* English (in her sense) clearly adds to the difficulty of providing materials to motivate students. She reported already finding this challenging with classes, where “students have varied levels of language ability and subject knowledge.”

Further to the issue of materials, Li was observed to use black and white PowerPoint slides. When asked to reflect on the motivational use of these materials, Li explained:

I don't believe in the power of them. In fact, I wouldn't use PowerPoint if there were not such an assessment item in the Teacher Evaluation . . . I strongly disagree with the use of entertainment in the classroom, too. But I have to occasionally use it so as to please my students . . . I don't think learning needs so much fun. Learning needs a lot of hard work and painstaking effort. We should not give students the wrong idea.

Li seemed fully aware of this tension between belief and practice. The pressure of having to please the students and fulfil institutional requirements forced her to use some motivational techniques that she did not believe in at all.

4.3. What are Gang's espoused beliefs about student motivation?

Like Li, Gang acknowledged the importance of motivation in L2 attainment. In his opinion, motivated students “participate in activities,” “long for challenges,” “make frequent eye contact” and are “curious and interested.” However, Gang also emphasized the important role that teachers play in motivating students and, interestingly, the impact of student motivation on him:

Teachers are the center of the class. They lead . . . The influence is mutual. If I'm not in a good mood, my students will feel that . . . I cannot motivate my students without motivating myself first. I think they can feel my passion. My students have a strong impact on me as well. Sometimes they ignore my jokes and bury their heads in their smart phones. I feel like a clown and the whole class could be ruined.

4.4. To what extent do Gang's motivational practices in the ESP classroom fit his espoused beliefs, and which factors might explain any gaps identified?

In his observed classes, Gang practiced many espoused beliefs, e.g., regarding the use of relevant material, which he felt was important: “providing them with authentic materials or real-world activities is motivating.” In one session, he replaced the course book reading with a more recently published report, and in

the other session, he redesigned two course book activities to make them more related to the real world. One activity, for example, drew upon the yearly local trade fair and invited students to write an invitation letter to clients for a real exhibitor; this replaced the course book activity that asked students to write an invitation letter to an imagined Italian sportswear company.

He also suggested that students could be more motivated if teachers “link their grades with their effort.” In his observed lessons, he gave an extra credit to groups who excelled in an activity, provided positive feedback for progress and effort rather than correctness, and rewarded a team by inviting them to post their assignment on a class blog.

He also regarded learner autonomy as vital, suggesting that teachers should give students the opportunity to contribute and should value their input. For example, he reported encouraging students to find readings to share with teammates and to pool interesting ideas, articles and learning resources through the class blog.

In Gang's view, a relaxing class atmosphere with positive relationships helped motivate students, as “this helps reduce the pressure of language learning.” He played English pop songs with strong beats before each observed class and started his classes informally chatting with students. Impressively, given class size, he knew most students' names, while they addressed him casually “Gang Ge” (Brother Gang), which is not typical in Chinese classrooms. Gang moved around the classroom, exchanging opinions with students during activities.

However, tensions were observed between Gang's espoused beliefs and practices, mostly relating to supporting learner autonomy. For Gang, teachers should “allow students to decide how they learn” since these “adults” “know very well what they need and what they should do.” Nevertheless, when describing the teacher's role, he used the expressions: “center,” “lead” (as quoted above), “boss,” “control;” these suggest teacher-centeredness and clashing beliefs.

Gang claimed he was “constantly fighting against the students over the control of the class,” and conflict was apparent in an authentic reading observed. Gang replaced the course book reading text with a recently published report he intended to use as in-class reading material with self-designed follow-up activities. However, students immediately complained the report was too long, so he assigned it as homework for a quiz next time. Again, students complained that it was too difficult and they did not have time; Gang finally agreed not to quiz them. While this incident echoes Li's concern about finding suitable authentic material, it also reflects Gang's struggle regarding autonomy and control. He rationalized his practice afterwards:

It is an interesting report. I didn't expect them to complain about it . . . Students misbehave when they are given autonomy . . . I don't want them to hate me . . . Forcing them to read won't work.

Conflict between his desire to control the flow of teaching and wish to motivate through authentic use of relevant material caused Gang difficulty in following through his plans. This was also evident after a warm-up activity in which Gang compared an on-campus basketball team with the Lakers and played a short Lakers video. The animated students clearly wanted to discuss further but Gang stopped them abruptly and proceeded with a reading activity from the course book. Reflecting on this behavior, he attributed it to the following:

Students have contradictory expectations. They want to get a good mark, and they want to have fun. I have to decide what's good for them. If we waste too much time, there's no way we could cover everything . . . students may fail their exams! They won't blame themselves for not working hard enough. They will blame me for not being a good teacher.

His teacher-centeredness seemed the product of his need for effective classroom management; learner autonomy seemed desirable but not feasible. Gang claimed: "without constraints" he could be more flexible with his motivational strategies and "let students take control."

4.5. What are Yan's espoused beliefs about student motivation?

While Yan's beliefs about motivation were similar to Li's and Gang's, she was more confident about the possibility of motivating learners, arguing this role is crucial due to the heavy reliance Chinese students place on teachers. "You have to convey what you believe important to students." She maintained: "You model for them. You help them grow and become independent." Students, in turn, motivate teachers: "When students look at you with inquisitive eyes, when they respond actively to your questions, you will be more passionate about teaching."

For Yan, a key motivating factor is "a strong interest in communicating with the world, different cultures and different people." She also felt "a positive attitude," "relevance," "autonomy," expectancy of success, students' self-confidence and intrinsic interest were crucial. Teachers had a role in nurturing motivation: "Don't demotivate them. Convince them they are doing great . . . Learning this course can help them, contribute to their success."

4.6. To what extent do Yan's motivational practices in the ESP classroom fit her espoused beliefs, and which factors might explain any gaps identified?

Observed motivational practices that seemed to fit beliefs included emphasizing relevance. For example, Yan was seen to share her personal business experiences with students, once when demonstrating through a job interview how to

respond tactically to tricky questions, and then when reflecting on pragmatic failure in a cross-cultural business meeting. Afterwards, she explained the benefits of sharing her own experience with students:

I'm not in any way implying that my life is perfect. But through sharing my experience, students may get a better understanding of what the real business world is like. That's something they don't get from the course book or classroom learning. In a way, students may see my experience as an extension of theirs. They may have a vision of what their life could be and see a lot more possibilities.

She also gave students "real-life cases or examples for them to analyze" to engage them in active thinking and encourage them to apply what they had learnt to real-world problems. Yan replaced a job interview listening activity in the course book with a recent BBC video, which had subtitles and was easy to follow. She also used real-world examples to either explain or make her point. An example was a quote from Steve Jobs "Stay hungry, stay foolish," which was to explain the word "stay" in "stay alert." The questions for group discussions were usually analytical. When she gave feedback, she focused not only on what students did well, but also on areas in which they could further improve.

Yan developed positive relationships with students, which helped her better understand their needs, and also created a relaxing class atmosphere. Unlike Li and Gang, Yan used (technology-enabled) peer assessment for students' group assignments to encourage teamwork skills and autonomy. Little tension was identified between Yan's beliefs and practices, except for her use of grades as a motivational technique. In her class, students were given a very clear assessment system, with every participation, presentation and activity graded, even though she had earlier expressed her strong objection towards the use of grades.

We are manipulating students, in a very bad way . . . It's just a number. At the end of the day, you need something that can really interest you and satisfy you. This makes your life meaningful. I don't think a high GPA can do it for you.

Her practice, however, was shaped by institutional requirements and social reality:

The syllabus has decided everything . . . (including) how students are assessed. Their grades rather than their ability or their passion decide which scholarship they get, what jobs they find, which overseas university they go to. This needs changing.

She admitted that "no one operates in an ideal environment" and other contextual factors, including mixed-ability students, large class size, and time pressure, "may have minor influences on [her] motivational practices." Then she added: "We can always find a way out."

5. Discussion

Before discussing our findings, we should acknowledge the limitations of our research. These include the small sample size, restricted by the location of the study, and the limited number of observations, restricted by time available for data gathering. Furthermore, our use of Dörnyei's (2007) framework to analyze observed lessons could be seen as reflecting an etic perspective, which can only partially capture the dynamics of teachers' cognitions and practices (Burns et al., 2015). With that in mind, we now discuss our findings in relation to the literature.

5.1. The espoused beliefs of three Chinese ESP teachers about student motivation

As is evident above, the three teachers appear to have quite different espoused beliefs about L2 learner motivation and the teacher's role in supporting this or not and to what extent through the motivational process (Dörnyei, 2001). Li appears to hold a Gardnerian view that L2 motivation is largely innate, and, like teachers in Cowie and Sakui (2012) and Hennebry-Leung (2020), believes the teacher can have a limited impact. Despite this, she identifies characteristics of a motivating ESP course that resonate with the partly Western-influenced literature (cf. Bastürkmen & Bocanegra-Valle, 2018; Chen, 2005; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998); it should be relevant, and related to practical needs, incorporating authentic activities and learner-centered group work. She is aware that students need to feel autonomous and efficacious and can be supported through a positive relationship with the teacher. All of this suggests Dörnyei's (2001) macro-strategies, and yet she is ambivalent about actually using these strategies herself to support learning. She also believes in the importance of rewards, which relates to the Chinese assessment culture (Hennebry-Leung, 2020; Wong, 2014), and in the need for students to apply dedicated effort, which suggests Confucian values (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007).

In contrast, both Gang and Yan seem to believe that the teacher has a central role in motivating learners through the use of macro-strategies (Dörnyei, 2001), and indeed both recognize the reciprocal nature of teacher and student motivation (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). These teachers evidently appreciate that "motivating' is an intensely interactive process," forged from the dynamic, mutual engagement of teachers and learners (Lamb, 2017, p. 132). Yet, reflecting on their own reciprocally motivating relationships with learners, these teachers recall different kinds of experiences. Both refer to eye contact, Yan positively in terms of learners' "inquisitive eyes," Gang negatively, recalling eye contact lost through his failed jokes, with students then burying their heads in their smart phones, leaving him feeling like a clown. It is possible that Gang's apparent insecurity in his relationships with students, as evident here, may partly reflect

the uncertain status of ESP teachers in Chinese universities, particularly those teachers who are without a background of working in business (Tao & Gao, 2018).

In some ways, Gang's and Yan's espoused beliefs mirror those of Li. Like her, they both declare that relevance is important in an ESP context (Kember et al., 2008), report valuing authentic materials and activities that stimulate learners to engage (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), indicate that positive relationships are important and support learner autonomy (Bastürkmen & Bocanegra-Valle, 2018), for example through incorporating peer assessment, as Yan does, or encouraging students to maintain a class blog, as seen in Gang's self-reported and observed practice. This latter practice could be an indication of proactive autonomy (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). However, Gang also talks about teachers being "the center of the class," which suggests reactive autonomy that can be linked to traditional notions of the Chinese teacher's role (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). Cultural values also surface in his (and Li's) self-reported practices of rewarding student effort.

As to Yan, like Li, she emphasizes the importance of self-confidence in learners, indicating she develops this by helping them feel they are succeeding. Of the three, Yan's understanding of motivation seems the most sophisticated. For example, as with a teacher in Lee (2015), she appears familiar with the concept of international posture (Yashima, 2002) in stressing learners will need to be able to communicate in intercultural contexts in the future, and also alludes to the notion of ideal L2 selves (Dörnyei, 2009). She is also the most positive about the beneficial effects of motivational strategies on student learning.

5.2. The extent to which their motivational practices in the ESP classroom fit their espoused beliefs, and the factors which might explain identified gaps

As the narrative above suggests, the degree of fit between motivational practices and espoused beliefs varies among the teachers, with the greatest harmony observed in Yan's work. She appears to have "a cohesive, student-centered approach to motivation," a quality also possessed by teachers from Hong Kong in Hennebry-Leung's (2020, p. 205) study. Particular strengths of Yan's teaching, besides the positive rapport and evident relationship-building, include effective use of authentic materials that stimulate learners' curiosity and skilful drawing on her real-world business experience. Similarly, for ESP teachers in Tao and Gao (2018), drawing on real-world business experience in their own materials design and teaching is crucial, with one reporting that such experience makes him feel "more emboldened" to teach ESP (p. 7). Like these teachers in Tao and Gao (2018), Yan's drawing on her own business experience may have contributed to her developing a clearer sense of her own professional identity.

The only tensions observed in Yan's work relate to her use of grades as a motivational technique, which she dismisses afterwards as "manipulating" practice shaped by institutional requirements and social reality. Though she struggles against these influences, for example through autonomy-supportive peer assessment, the assessment culture (Wong, 2014) is too strong to ignore.

This assessment culture also seems to have shaped the work of Li and Gang, who both appear deeply concerned about covering the material rapidly, like the Chinese ELT teacher in Lamb and Wedell (2015). In these cases, espoused beliefs regarding learner autonomy, group work and participation do not appear to be realized in the classroom, with Li keeping a tight control over classroom flow and Gang quickly curtailing an authentic discussion about basketball the students seem to enjoy due to pressure of time. Tensions are highly evident.

In Li's case, her justification for not encouraging participation through speaking, that if everyone spoke for one minute there would be time for nothing else, betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of how closed pair and group work activities can be managed in a language classroom; this suggests espoused beliefs regarding participation, elicited pre-observation, represent mere token adoption (Zheng, 2013). Perhaps exposure to Western-oriented CLT methodology accessed through informal continuing professional development and mediated by the context had led to the formation of peripheral, partially-assimilated beliefs. Perhaps contextual constraints may have influenced another apparent tension in Li's work, her use of the inauthentic course material provided for teachers despite her espoused belief in the need for material that was authentic. Nevertheless, there is also evidence that Li's core beliefs center on traditional views, of both language, with native-speaker models perhaps treated with undue deference in a globalizing world (Lamb, 2004), and her teacher's role. She seems to see this role as a *knowledge-giver* (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007), adopting a Confucian perspective from which she likewise rejects the notion that learning should be fun. Indeed, in stimulated recall, she acknowledges only introducing limited "entertainment" in her classes in an attempt to boost students' teacher evaluation scores; this system of evaluating teachers may be a source of anxiety in an assessment-driven culture in which teachers' social status is being eroded (Gu & Lai, 2012).

Fear of upsetting the students seems also to have contributed to tensions between Gang's espoused beliefs and practices. He tries to motivate the students by creating an informal classroom dynamic and through authentic, relevant materials and activities. However, worry about being negatively appraised for not focusing sufficiently on preparing students for formal assessment in a traditional way produces conflicts within himself, leading to uncertain behavior that may confuse the students. Like Caroline, a teacher in Walsh and Wyatt (2014), Gang's guiding principle seems to be to make the students happy. This suggests a

reactive approach to motivating students guided not by learner needs but by classroom events (Hennebry-Leung, 2020). Gang's situated cognitions reveal that Western-oriented espoused beliefs regarding learner-centeredness and perhaps more deeply-embedded Confucian-oriented beliefs regarding teacher control can both be abandoned if their result is not him being better accepted by the students. The pressures imposed by the context, which may also have been exacerbated by his own lack of real-world business experience, since this could have inhibited the development of a more robust professional identity (Tao & Gao, 2018), therefore seem to create considerable disharmony. These pressures can be acute as he sometimes misjudges the context, expecting learners to accept apparently relevant materials, for example, which they reject due to task difficulty and pressure of time. Having discussed these cases, we now draw conclusions.

6. Conclusions

In exploring gaps between the espoused beliefs of three Chinese ESP teachers and their motivational practices, we have drawn upon pre-observation interviews, classroom observations and SRIs. SRIs (under-employed in this field) have enabled us to gain insights into the three teachers' levels of self-awareness of their classroom practices, the extent to which seemingly competing beliefs appear core or peripheral and the pull of cultural and contextual factors on their situated cognitions. This in turn has allowed us to identify gaps between espoused beliefs and classroom practices and explore apparent cognitive disharmony, which can impact self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985). While a certain degree of synergy between espoused beliefs and practices was observed, perhaps the most striking finding is the crucial role of cultural influences in these Chinese ESP teachers' cognitions about motivation and motivational practices.

Cultural influences, which have perhaps been under-represented in earlier models of teacher cognition (e.g., Borg, 2006, p. 283), interact with mediating contextual and personal factors to shape harmony/disharmony between espoused and situated beliefs and classroom practices. We suggest that where there is harmony, teachers relating positively to their students are more likely to self-confidently and autonomously find ways of helping them, resulting in a sense of well-being associated with self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This insight into the role of cultural influences suggests how Borg's (2006) model can be conceptually applied to Confucius-heritage East Asian countries. There are other implications.

Firstly, College English teachers in China tend to have majored in linguistics, translation or literature (Borg & Liu, 2013), and are likely therefore to have gained competence in the language. However, neither their major nor their subsequent teaching certificate appears to prepare them specifically for English language

teaching. While in some ESP university contexts, e.g., that of Tao and Gao (2018), a minority of teachers might have an MA in Applied Linguistics or TESOL, even this rarely contains an ESP component (Bastürkmen, 2010). The ESP teachers in this study, none of whom had such a postgraduate qualification, might have benefited from some kind of practical but relatively formalized in-service support, at the very least in employing CLT methodology and in materials design. One teacher might additionally have benefited from theoretical input on language learning motivation and the legitimization of world Englishes (Saraceni, 2015). Ideally, however, the in-service teacher education would also have focused specifically on the ESP context, providing input on the students' subject area and needs, as in Banegas (2018). It could have equipped teachers with ESP materials design and evaluation tools (Bastürkmen, 2010; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998), and oriented them more fully to ESP learners' pragmatic goals (Kember et al., 2008), and how to address them. Such teacher education may have enabled teacher beliefs about learner-centeredness which appear token to be assimilated into practice through awareness-raising that may have initially provoked cognitive dissonance (Golombek, 2015) before harmony was restored; such teacher education may also have facilitated authentic materials being tailored more closely to learners' needs. For the ESP learners at this university, these innovations may well have been motivating. Teachers' connections with the ESP subject area could also have been strengthened outside formal teacher education in various ways, for example through involving teachers without real-world business experience in participating in university-company partnerships; such activities helped ESP teachers in Tao and Gao's (2018) university context to further develop their professional identities. So there are implications here for context-sensitive teacher education.

There are also implications for university administrators. Teachers worldwide experience unnecessary stress, with their needs insufficiently considered by non-academic staff at universities, and this situation can contribute to cognitive disharmony. Here, it appears pressures teachers felt from the students' teacher evaluations could have been reduced. Teachers could also have been provided with up-to-date teaching material, which would have reduced their need to search for their own, and professional development opportunities that encouraged a sharing of ideas that worked, and emphasized reflective processes leading to greater self-awareness; these professional development opportunities could have included mentoring.

Support such as this would increase the likelihood of teachers being able to find ways of more deeply reconciling cultural and contextual issues with espoused beliefs about student motivation and motivational practices. Without such support, College English educators may unfortunately find reconciling tensions between traditional Chinese beliefs and Western ideas about learning and teaching

overtly challenging. It is, therefore, crucial that in approaching this challenge they are self-aware, as our case study data demonstrate. More research is needed, however, and ideally this could employ, besides interviews and SRIs, additional introspective methods such as reflective diaries, in line with a socially-situated approach to language teacher cognition research (Burns et al., 2015) focused primarily on emic perspectives.

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APPENDIX A

Interview guide (semi-structured interviews)

1. How long have you been teaching English?
2. When did you start to teach ESP?
3. What course do you teach this semester?
4. How do you enjoy teaching ESP? Why?
5. Are your students generally motivated to learn ESP?
6. In a few words, how would you sum up your views on what motivation is?
7. What for you are the key characteristics of a motivated learner?
8. Do you think teachers play a role in student motivation?
9. What factors can best motivate your students?
10. How do you motivate your learners in the ESP classroom?
11. How have you come to develop the view you hold today about motivation and its value?

APPENDIX B

Observational instrument

Motivational teaching practice proposed by Dörnyei (2001)		Observed motivational teaching practice		
		Li	Gang	Yan
Creating the basic motivational conditions	Appropriate teacher behavior and a good relationship with learners			
	A pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere			
	A cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms			
Generating initial motivation	Enhancing the learners' language-related values and attitudes			
	Increasing the learners' expectancy of success			
	Increasing the learners' "goal-orientedness"			
	Making the curriculum relevant for the learners			
Maintaining and protecting motivation	Creating realistic learner beliefs			
	Making learning stimulating and enjoyable			
	Presenting tasks in a motivating way			
	Setting specific learner goals			
	Increasing the learner's self-confidence			
	Allowing learners to maintain a positive social image			
	Creating learner autonomy			
Encouraging positive self-evaluation	Promoting cooperation among learners			
	Promoting self-motivating learner strategies			
	Promoting motivational attributions			
	Providing motivational feedback			
	Increasing learner satisfaction			
	Offering rewards and grades in a motivating manner			

APPENDIX C

Interview guide (SRIs)

1. What were you doing here/at this point? Was this your plan before the lesson?
2. Do you remember what you were thinking here? Why did you decide to do this?
3. Were you thinking of any alternative actions or strategies at that time?
4. What were you noticing about the students?
5. How were the students responding to this strategy/activity...?
6. Did any student reactions cause you to act differently than you had planned?
7. Did you have any particular objectives in mind at this point? If so, what were they?
8. Do you remember any aspects of the situation that might have affected what you did?