Teachers' Selection and Enactment of Context-Appropriate Pedagogies: Re-Conceptualising Motivational Strategies in the English Language Classroom

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Abstract

Over the decades, extensive research efforts have been directed towards classifying and evaluating motivational teaching behaviours. Recent calls in motivational research, however, have emphasised the need to investigate teachers' perspectives on how they develop effective motivational strategies so that implications for motivational teaching are firmly grounded in real-life practices. This paper reports on a qualitative case study which explored how two IELTS teachers in a private language school in China selected and enacted motivational strategies that they perceived as context-appropriate. Background interviews, classroom observations, and post-lesson stimulated recall interviews were used to gain insight into the participants' motivational practices and rationales. The findings indicate that, despite the close correspondence between the teachers' enacted practices and theory-based motivational strategies defined by researchers, the teachers exhibited agentic capacities in managing a range internal and external mediators which enabled them to develop strategies that served concurrent pedagogical purposes and responded to the perceived multidimensional particularities and exigencies of their teaching contexts. Thus, The study moves beyond restricted analyses of the motivational implications of teaching techniques; rather, it argues for the need to appreciate the full complexity of teaching practices and re-conceptualise motivational strategies as multi-purpose and the study of them as pedagogically holistic.

Keywords: Motivational strategies; Context-appropriate pedagogies; IELTS; China

Motivational teaching strategies, generally defined as instructional techniques that teachers deploy to generate, enhance, and maintain student motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), have

been found to have effects on students' overall motivation (Moskovky et al., 2012), specific motivated language learning behaviours (Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012), and language learning achievement (Alrabai, 2016). Extensive research efforts have been directed over several decades towards classifying and evaluating motivational teaching behaviours (see review by Lamb, 2017). Recent calls in motivational research, however, have emphasised the need to investigate teachers' perspectives on how they develop effective motivational strategies (Lamb, 2017, 2019) so that recommendations and teacher development programmes for motivational teaching are "firmly rooted in and scrutinised by front-line experience" (Hennebry-Leung, 2020, p. 195). Drawing upon research on motivational teaching and context-appropriate pedagogies, the present study aimed to explore the process of selecting and enacting appropriate motivational strategies by tracing the motivational practices and rationales of two IELTS (International English Language Testing System) teachers in a private language school in China. The findings offer insights into the complex process of developing appropriate pedagogies in language classrooms.

Literature Review

Motivational Strategies

In the second language acquisition literature, motivation is generally used to refer to what drives a learner to initiate and sustain efforts in L2 learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). As synthesised by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), existing motivational theories and frameworks can be categorised into four main types: social psychological, cognitive-situated, process-oriented, and social-dynamic. Collectively, they describe motivation as a complex and multifaced construct that is open to the influence of teachers' practices. For example, Keller's (2010) Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction, and Volition (ARCS-V) theory states that five dimensions in the classroom have a positive influence on student motivation: engaging students' attention (Attention), relevant to students' interests and styles (Relevance), promoting students' confidence regarding success (Confidence), stimulating students' sense of satisfaction (Satisfaction), and supporting students in acquiring self-regulatory skills (Volition).

Decades of research on student motivation have left teachers with an extensive range of motivational instructional practices to refer to (see Lamb, 2017 for a comprehensive review). For example, Dörnyei (2001) developed a taxonomy of 102 motivational strategies, organised according to when in the teaching process they would be deployed. Similarly, Keller (2010) presented 63 instructional techniques grouped under the categories of the ARCS-V theory.

While these lists provide valuable summaries of practical knowledge of motivational teaching (Hadfield & Dörnyei, 2013), there are growing concerns over the universality of researcher-developed strategies. A number of quantitative studies have revealed cross-cultural differences in teachers' perceived importance and frequency of using researcher-defined motivational strategies. Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) found that, compared to teachers in Hungary, teachers in Taiwan believed appreciating students' efforts to be more crucial in the learning process than creating interesting classes. Such differences were attributed to the Confucian culture which emphasises learning as being serious and involving hard work as well as to pressure from high-stake testing. Similarly, several mixed methods and qualitative studies which allowed teachers to report freely on their motivational practices cited teachers' adoption of motivational strategies beyond established frameworks. For example, Lamb et al. (2017) found that teachers

in Indonesia regarded the strategic use of L1/L2 as having motivational effects – a strategy that had not been documented in researcher-defined frameworks.

The importance of context is further highlighted in studies that evaluated the effectiveness of motivational strategies (e.g., see review by Stroet et al., 2013). Wong (2014), for instance, found that among the 25 strategies from Dörnyei's (2001) taxonomy that were frequently used in secondary classrooms in China, only six were recognised by both teachers and students as being effective. Sugita and Takeuchi (2014) showed that even within the same Japanese university the perceived effectiveness of motivational strategies reported by students varied depending on when they were used during the academic semester and on students' pre-existing level of motivation and proficiency. More recently, Ucar & Kumtepe's (2019) quasi-experimental research in an online learning environment reported that, although the experiment group who used motivational strategies based on the ARCS-V model showed significantly higher gains in motivation, no significant differences were found for strategies used in the volitional competence dimension. One reason, Ucar & Kumtepe (2019) argue, is that, because learners are expected to play an active role in online learning environments, strategies on volition in this context become slightly redundant. All these findings thus caution against the uncritical acceptance of prescribed and decontextualised motivational strategies.

Context-appropriate Pedagogies

Findings emerging from motivational research seem to concur with those in the general field of English language teaching. Theoretically-based teaching methodologies have been available for decades. However, it has been increasingly acknowledged that there is no one method of teaching English that is universally effective for diverse teaching contexts (Bax, 2003; Hu, 2002; Kumaravadivelu, 2006, 2012).

Rather than following prescribed practices, teachers need to develop appropriate pedagogies which are grounded in the realities of their distinct teaching contexts. Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) explain that the term 'appropriate' "encompasses both a global, societal, and a local, individual meaning" (p. 210). Appropriate pedagogies, therefore, must fit both the larger societal conditions and norms, and the specific learning situation and learners' needs. Kumaravadivelu (2006) expressed a similar view when he proposed the post-method principle of 'particularity', which states that the construction of meaningful pedagogy requires a critical understanding of "local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities" and exigencies (p. 37). Similarly, Tikly and Barrett (2011) propose 'relevance' as one of the principles of quality education, advocating for pedagogical practices which aim to achieve learning outcomes that are "meaningful for all learners, valued by their communities and consistent with national development priorities in a changing global context" (p. 10).

Some recent studies have adopted this perspective and explored how teachers seek context-sensitive local pedagogies. For example, Liu's (2022) autobiographical study illustrated how the shifting societal and policy settings in China from the 1980s to 2010s influenced one teacher's adoption of different teaching methodologies. Slaughter and Cross's (2021) qualitative study showed how some Australian English language school teachers' use of translanguaging practices was responsive to changes in the classroom situation and their students' sociolinguistic profiles. Balchin and Wild's (2022) study, combining online survey and interview data with English language teachers in Malaysia, reported how the local context influenced teachers' choice and use of technology. For example, although several teachers

viewed the learning platform Kahoot in a positive light, some teachers were less convinced of its suitability due to the slowness of the Internet connection in their context.

Central to context-sensitive pedagogies is the conceptualisation of teachers as agentic decision makers who are capable of generating professional knowledge from their macro and micro contexts, and of adapting their pedagogical approaches accordingly. Teachers are no longer viewed as 'passive technicians' who merely learn and enact knowledge generated by theorists, but both as 'reflective practitioners' who are aware of and question their own beliefs about teaching and the multiple levels of teaching context, and as 'transformative intellectuals' who are socio-politically conscious and can connect pedagogical theory and practice to wider social issues (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). This paradigmatic shift in teachers' role forms the main premise of this study. Thus, rather than focusing on describing, categorising, or evaluating teachers' observable motivational behaviours, this study aims to understand motivational strategies from teachers' perspectives.

Internal and External Factors Mediating Teachers' Practices

Within the language teaching literature, this shift to conceptualising teachers as knowledge producers and critical decision makers in their own teaching situations has given rise to burgeoning literature on teachers' development of appropriate pedagogical practices. One way of shedding light on teachers' decision-making processes while developing context sensitive pedagogies is through disentangling the multiple factors that influence these processes and pedagogies. These factors, as summarised by Ur (2013), include both external contextual factors, such as characteristics of the learner population (e.g., age, level, and relative heterogeneity) and expectations and/or demands of stakeholders (e.g., parents, the local Ministry of Education), and psychological factors internal to the teachers, such as their own preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. In their literature review on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices, Buehl and Beck (2015) identified a range of internal and external supports and hindrances which influence the enactment of beliefs in practice. Internal factors include other beliefs, experience, knowledge, and self-awareness and self-reflection, while external factors operate at multiple contextual levels and comprise classroom factors (e.g., class size, time, student ability); school factors (e.g., school culture, administration, school resources, colleagues, and students' families); and district-, state-, and national-level factors (e.g., education-related policies, curriculum standards, testing and accountability). Within the field of assessment feedback in higher education, Evans (2013) classified the mediators shaping feedback practice into 15 categories, including personality, gender, culture/ethnicity, social and cultural capital, previous experience and schema, cognitive style, knowledge of the students, and awareness of other contexts which learners engage in. These lists of factors, though valuable as heuristic tools for investigating the multiplicity of factors mediating practice, were developed from reviews of the literature rather than from empirical research.

Within language education, empirical studies have confirmed the influence of internal and external factors on teachers' pedagogical decisions. These decisions concern, *inter alia*, communicative language teaching (CLT) (Walsh & Wyatt, 2014), task-based language learning (Carless, 2004), and autonomy-oriented pedagogy (Kuchah & Smith, 2011). For example, Walsh and Wyatt (2014) found that, while teachers' implementation of CLT was influenced by their own beliefs of CLT principles, they also adjusted their approach based on the needs and learning styles of their specific group of learners and on the pressure of

achievement tests. Sanchez et al. (2018) focused on pre-service language teachers' development of contextually appropriate pedagogies during their practicum in state sector schools located in peripheral urban areas. Their analysis revealed a complex interplay of internal and external factors facilitating or hindering teachers' pedagogical decisions and practices. While the student teachers' prior educational experiences, beliefs about learning, and pre-teaching observations and critical reflections facilitated the development of contextually appropriate pedagogies, other factors (e.g., their limited teaching experiences and fear of expressing their opinions) constituted obstacles in their efforts to create and enact innovative pedagogical practices which they perceived as suitable for their teaching contexts.

Despite the increasing interest in how teachers develop socially situated and sensitive pedagogies, research specifically on how they select and enact context-appropriate motivational strategies appears to be limited. There are a few notable exceptions. Lee's (2015) interview study with three Hong Kong community college English teachers had a particular focus on factors other than understanding of motivation that impacted on the teachers' use of motivational strategies. Results indicate that students' proficiency level, the teachers' teaching experience and teaching style, and preparation time were among the most decisive factors that influenced the teachers' perceived appropriateness and feasibility of motivational strategies in their context. Likewise, Glas (2016) identified a range of internal and contextual factors mediating teachers' motivational teaching behaviours, but she also illustrated how these factors interact in the "space of manoeuvre" (p. 442). For example, her findings show how a teacher with external freedom of choosing class materials and internal capacity of using her cultural repertoire to address her students' concerns was able to select and adapt songs as a motivating tool for her students. On the other hand, a teacher who had a static vision of motivation perceived her students' lack of interest as stemming from their low socio-economic background. This perception, together with an institutional culture that was hostile to innovation, restricted the teacher's use of motivational strategies. In a more recent paper, Nakata et al. (2021) used narrative inquiry to explore how one language teacher-researcher developed her agency as she strove to develop appropriate motivational strategies in her classroom. The narratives showed how the teacher's agency evolved as a result of her interaction with relevant theoretical knowledge and her dialogues with students, colleagues, and herself (her past, present, and future selves). These studies successfully delineate the complexities involved in developing appropriate motivational practices, and highlight that, as 'reflective practitioners' and 'transformative intellectuals', teachers need to deal with multiple internal and external factors that may both afford and constrain their pedagogical decisions.

The present study aimed to contribute to this emerging body of studies on teachers' perspectives on using motivational strategies, with a focus on one-to-one classes in an online learning environment. Framed by previous research on teaching motivation and appropriate pedagogies, the research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers select and enact motivational strategies which they perceive as contextually appropriate?

2. What contextual and cognitive factors influence teachers' selection and enactment of these strategies?

3. What role do these factors play in defining this selection and enactment?

Methodology

Design and Participants

The study was exploratory-interpretive and followed a within-site (i.e., within one language school), multiple-case design (Creswell, 2013). It involved two cases of individual IELTS teachers (Lydia and Susan, pseudonyms) working at a private language school in China (City Lights, fictitious name). At the time of this study, both teachers were teaching online one-on-one IELTS classes. Given the tight timeline to conduct this study and the study's aim for "generalisable findings" based on thick description rather than a "representative sample" (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 38), the teachers were selected through convenience sampling – both responded timely to our research request made at the end of an online briefing meeting which involved interested teachers from City Lights. The teachers provided voluntary informed consent to participate and for their data to be used for and beyond the immediate purposes of the project.

Both teachers spoke Mandarin as their mother tongue and English as a second language; had obtained the Teacher's Qualification Certificate, a qualification required for teaching at public schools in mainland China; and had taught at City Lights for over a year. Lydia was in her late 20s and had majored in English Education at a local university, a passion she had had since primary school. She had over four years of English teaching experience and currently taught beginner level IELTS listening and speaking. Susan was in her late 30s and, after majoring in Journalism, decided to pursue a teaching career. She now had seven years of English teaching experience and taught beginner and intermediate level IELTS writing and reading.

Data Collection and Analysis

Part of a larger investigation into motivational strategies, the present study adopted multiple data collection methods in three distinct stages:

1. A semi-structured individual background interview (40-45 minutes each) to establish a profile of the teachers' educational and professional background, and explore their perceptions of their institutional contexts and general reflections on their motivational practices. In preparation for the interview, each teacher completed an adapted version of Merrifield's (1993) Tree of Life activity, which encouraged them to reflect systematically on their personal, educational, and professional history using the diagram of a tree.

2. Four two-hour semi-structured online class observations per teacher (16 hours in total) to observe motivational practices in their natural contexts of occurrence (Lewis & McNaughton Nicholls, 2014), and to identify critical incidents illustrating the enactment of motivational strategies. To minimise impact on the naturally occurring events, the role of the researcher (first author) was that of non-participant observer (Curdt-Christiansen, 2019) and her camera and microphone were switched off at all times. The classes were video-recorded using the built-in recording function of Tencent meeting, the digital platform where the online classes took place.

3. A semi-structured stimulated recall interview with the teacher followed each observation (eight interviews in total, 30-65 minutes each) to elicit the teachers' rationales and their introspective and retrospective reflections. Most of the critical incidents explored had been selected by the teachers themselves, which helped to

promote participant agency and empowerment (Sanchez & Grimshaw, 2020). Class audio recordings, generated specifically for this research, and materials, produced and/or used naturally by the teachers in the research context (Sanchez & Grimshaw, 2020), were used in combination to strengthen the stimuli for recall (Gass & Mackey, 2017). To acknowledge and address issues concerning memory decay and post hoc rationalisations of lived experiences (Watson, 2015), the time gaps between class observations and simulated recall interviews were no longer than a day.

The data collected were analysed first within each case and then across the cases. Data analysis followed an abductive approach which involved moving back and forth between inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) procedures (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014), thus facilitating "parallel and equal engagement with empirical data and extant theoretical understanding" and enabling the researcher to find "useful explanation for phenomena" and to theorise the raw data and identify theoretical gaps when "extant theoretical frameworks are unable to account for empirical findings." (Thompson, 2022, p. 1411). Analytic procedures included transcribing the observed critical incidents and interview data, developing a code manual based on published motivational strategy taxonomies and teacher cognition and agency research (deductive), summarising data and identifying codes inductively (inductive), applying the code manual and identifying further codes (deductive), connecting the codes and identifying themes, and corroborating and legitimising the coded themes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The data collection and analysis were cyclical throughout the period of fieldwork and summative once the data collection had been completed.

The first author used to be an IELTS student at City Lights and thus assumed an emic role during the research process as she interacted with the participants and collected the data. The second author adopted an outsider's perspective and was involved in the co-analysis of data and theoretical and methodological discussions. Both researchers engaged in reflexivity as they formed theoretical, methodological, contextual, and empirical understandings and made decisions regarding the study. They acknowledge that findings are not objective accounts of reality, but social constructs that were shaped by their subjective positions and the process of discovery.

The study followed the standards of ethical practice in educational research suggested by the British Education Research Association, including seeking informed consent, explaining the right to withdraw, and using de-identified data and pseudonyms for participants. The broader project received ethical approval from [details removed for peer review process].

Results

The collective analysis of interview and observational data across the two cases reveals the teachers adopted an array of strategies to generate, enhance, and maintain the motivation of their learners, including using humour, authentic materials, chatting, enthusiastic voices, real-life anecdotes, praises, motivational messages, personalised goals, elicitation, teaching rationales, and test strategies. These strategies were similar to the micro- or macro-strategies described in Dörnyei's (2001) taxonomy. Furthermore, the analysis uncovered a wide range of internal and external factors influencing the teachers' decisions (see Table 1). While these mediating factors are presented here as discrete categories for analytical clarity, in the participants' rationales they were often intertwined in complex ways. To illustrate the complexities involved in the process of developing motivational strategies that the teachers

perceived as appropriate, examples of motivational strategy enactment are discussed below within each case, along with the teachers' own analytic commentaries. The following conventions are used to locate participant quotes within the data set: background interviews (BI), class observation (CO), and stimulated recall interviews (SRI).

Table 1. Overview of Mediating Factors

Domains	Factors	Sub-categories
External factors	Macro-level context	• Broader socio-cultural context • IELTS test requirements and regulations
	Meso-level context	• Institutional regulations and expectations
	Micro-level context	• Student characteristics, behaviours, needs, expectations, preferences, and circumstances • Online medium • Lesson objectives and procedures • Class length
Internal factors	Experience	• Prior learning experiences • Prior teaching experiences
	Perceptions	• Perceptions of immediate and broader contexts • Perceptions of self
	Beliefs	• Beliefs about student motivation • Beliefs about motivational strategies • Beliefs about English language teaching and learning
	Knowledge	• Knowledge of motivational strategies and their implications • Knowledge of students • Knowledge of institutional and broader contexts • Knowledge of class objectives • Knowledge of IELTS • Knowledge of self
	Identities	• Professional identity • Personal identity
	Emotions	• Positive emotions • Negative emotions

Lydia

Stimulating learning experiences.

Lydia believed that "motivation comes from interesting classes" (BI). It was then not surprising to find that many of her practices were characterised by efforts to make learning experiences appealing to her student. For example, she used humour to "make the student feel that having English classes with me is fun" (SRI2); she adopted authentic materials because they provided "interesting inputs that engage the student" (BI); and she frequently chatted to the student about their everyday lives and personal interests because they could "spice up" her class (SRI1).

Lydia's rationale for specific class scenarios showed that the realisation of these strategies was influenced by her perception of contextual challenges in the classroom. For example, in CO1, after explaining the synonyms and collocations of 'heat', Lydia initiated a conversation about 'Miami Heat' (an American basketball team) which lasted 147 seconds and in which the student engaged actively. This conversation was, Lydia explained, not pre-planned, but a real-time response to the particular class situation:

> Usually I spice up my lesson when I feel the student is not engaging well, which is a clear sign of not being motivated. [...] He has been really quiet for a while. Even when he occasionally responded, it was meaningless ... Apparently, his mind was not with me. So I had to do something interesting to pull him back to my class. (SRI1)

Lydia's impromptu decision to "do something interesting to pull [the student] back to [her] class" was motivated by her interpretation of the student's behaviour ("had been really quiet for a while", gave "meaningless" responses, "his mind was not with me"). Her choice of motivational strategy was also based on her knowledge of the specific student and her own preferences:

> 'Heat' reminded me he likes basketball [...]. We had chatted a lot in previous classes, so I know Miami Heat is his favourite team, so ... [laughs] I always think I'm more than a teacher to my students. To older students like him, I'm like their big sister; and to younger ones, I'm like their mother. I really enjoy chatting with my students. (SRI1)

However, motivation was not Lydia's only concern while enacting this strategy:

> I personally think, when we chatted, we used the word in context, I can help him better memorise the word – 'heat' is a high frequency word in IELTS so it's worthwhile spending time emphasising it. You see in the conversation I said "Miami heat" [in English] instead of "rehuodui" [in Chinese]. But I did make sure the chat did not last for too long, because it would have interrupted my teaching of other things. (SRI1)

Lydia's employment of social chatting, therefore, served more than a motivational purpose. She was aware of the pedagogical implications of social chatting for memorisation, which, together with her belief that high frequency words should be emphasised in an IELTS class, seems to explain why she used "heat" in English in the chat. The way the teacher used social chatting (e.g., the length of the conversation) was shaped, Lydia explained, by her lesson objectives ("my teaching of other things") and her perceived time constraints ("I did make sure the chat did not last for too long"). Overall, the combined influence of diverse factors account for the teacher's spontaneous decision to act as well as her choice and use of a motivational strategy which she considered appropriate for the specific class situation and student.

Fostering positive attitudes towards English and going abroad.

Lydia used strategies which, she believed, had implications for promoting students' positive attitudes towards English and using English outside the classroom. For instance, she deliberately used an enthusiastic voice while teaching because she believed that she could "instil a positive feeling for English in my students by demonstrating that enthusiasm for English myself" (SRI1). She also gave examples of using English in real-life situations because "students are motivated to learn if they see how what they learn can actually be used in real life" (BI), and shared her former students' positive experiences abroad because "real life stories work best for getting students to understand the benefits of going abroad" (SRI2).

Lydia's comments in the BI shows that it was based on her understanding of her students at City Lights and their needs that she deemed a positive attitude towards English and going abroad as a crucial motivating factor:

> One might assume that because all students came here to improve their IETLS scores, to go abroad, [...] they must love English, love foreign countries. But no. I have had students, so many of them, being forced by their parents to go abroad to get "gold-plated" while not seeing the value [of English/going abroad] themselves. Students who failed their college entrance exam [...] had no place to go but to seek opportunities abroad. [...] It's for these students that promoting a positive attitude [towards English/going abroad] becomes especially important. (BI)

Her rationale for some of these techniques revealed that her enactment of these techniques was also in response to the particular classroom situation. For example, in a speaking class about travel and holidays, Lydia shared a former student's travel experience in the UK, and then used examples from this story to illustrate how some model sentence structures can be applied (e.g. "the main activities we enjoyed on holiday were ...", CO2). The teacher first explained that the choice of this motivational strategy had been prompted by this student's behaviour in previous classes, which reinforced her perception that City Lights students lacked a positive attitude towards travelling abroad:

> He used to ask me strange questions. The other day he bought a new Thermos water bottle and asked me: "I heard people in the UK do not drink hot water. Do you think I should take this bottle with me to the UK?" [...] So I can feel he was worried, and sort of, against going abroad. (SRI2)

Her choice of story, in turn, was informed by her awareness of the repertoire of stories available to her.

> I have never been to the UK, so I couldn't give him [my own] real-life examples at that time. [...] Last week one of my former students came back from the UK to spend his summer holiday in China. We had a nice chat about his travelling experiences in the UK. This morning I thought, oh these experiences would be perfect examples for him! So I deliberately used these examples in today's class. (SRI2)

Though Lydia would have possibly preferred to tell a personal anecdote, she knew she lacked relevant experiences and, therefore, made a resourceful use of one of the stories which she had recently learned from a former student. Lydia's selection and use of this motivational strategy additionally served a pedagogical purpose ("I pre-planned to share this story [...] to illustrate how some model sentences on the handout can be put into practice", SRI2) and was informed by her lesson objectives and her teaching style (using stories not as a stand-alone feature but as "an integral part of [her] teaching", SRI2).

Encouraging a positive sense of self.

Lydia perceived some of her feedback practices as motivational strategies, arguing that they helped to promote or maintain students' positive sense of self. For example, she explained that she praised students to "make them feel good about themselves" (BI) and that she softened her corrective feedback "as a means of saving the student's face" (SRI1).

Both strategies were realised in practice in different ways. In relation to praising, Lydia normally used short phrases (e.g., "good job", "well done") to praise her student for nearly

every correct response. On one occasion, however, she was observed to praise the student only twice, and in both instances, she complimented the student for his efforts. For example, Lydia made the following comment when she observed that the student had not made any spelling mistakes in a listening exercise:

> You are a little spelling expert now, aren't you? You see, if you make an effort, you can get what you want. [Name of another teacher] told me you were working really hard on the vocabulary list. Well done and keep going! (CO4)

Lydia's rationale provided some possible reasons for her less frequent, yet more detailed, compliments for this particular student:

> I always feel really happy whenever I see my student progress and ... let's call it my instinct, to praise [...]. [Name of another student] was a music teacher herself and she understood why I praised her. So it was fine simply praising her a lot. [...] But he [the present student] doesn't understand. If I hadn't made my purpose clear to him, it would make him [...] feel too good about himself. [...] Last time his teaching assistant told me he refused to do after-class dictation. [...] he said: "Lydia said I was already doing so well! [...]" [...] If he doesn't revise these words, he would forget them quickly! You see how my praises actually backfired on his motivation? So, although I was really happy for him, I tried not to praise him too much. [...] For him, explicitly explaining that I praised him for his effort is very important. (SRI4)

Lydia tailored her praising practices based on her perception of individual students' understandings of the purposes of praising. She experienced some tensions, however, when she was adjusting her praising practices for the student in CO4. Lydia was "really happy" and had the "instinct" to praise, but at the same time, based on her knowledge of this student and information she had received from a colleague, she knew that too many unspecified praises would "backfire" on the student's motivation and learning efforts. Lydia addressed this tension by prioritising the perceived need to maintain her student's learning efforts over her own habits of praising. It was through her management of this inner tension that Lydia adapted her motivational strategy in a way that she perceived to be effective for the learner.

Susan

Promoting a sense of achievement.

Promoting feelings of achievement was a recurrent theme in Susan's rationales for a range of motivational strategies that she adopted. For example, she presented specific and personalised goals at the beginning of each class to "make students feel the goals are achievable" (SRI2); she deliberately selected materials of an appropriate level of difficulty to increase the student's chances of succeeding (BI, SRIs); she elicited student responses to give students "moments for making small achievements" (BI); and she praised to "celebrate the student's achievement" (SRI1). The episode below provides an example of how Susan elicited the word "debate" from a student:

> S [Susan]: It's something you see in American elections, [...] it's something candidates do ...
> St [Student]: Election? I'm not sure ...
> S: It's also common in [...] university societies? There are two groups of people, each group holds opposite opinions and they ...

St: That ... that is ... debate [in English]! (CO2)

Susan explained how she had made an intentional effort to increase the prospects of successfully eliciting the desired answer from the student:

> Usually I try to elicit things that I know is within the student's knowledge range, so he/she has a higher chance of success. [...] We just talked about 'debate' in IELTS task 2 last week, [...] it's such a crucial word in IELTS so I thought it's a good chance to check whether he remembers. [...] Talking about things on the news, talking about things like university debates, things that the student is familiar with, that's important too, for the student to be able to give the desired answer. (SRI2)

Susan's decision to elicit the word 'debate' was not random. This was mediated by her knowledge that 'debate' is a word that is likely to be "within the student's knowledge range", which was informed by her previous teaching experience with this student ("we just talked about 'debate' in IELTS task 2 last week"); and by her knowledge that 'debate' is "such a crucial word in IELTS". Her reference to American elections and university debate societies as prompts was a conscious choice driven by her knowledge of context ("things on the news", "things that the student is familiar with"). Susan also recognised her use of elicitation in this situation as having a further pedagogical implication ("to check whether he remembers"). The combined influence of these mediating factors motivated Susan to use her preferred motivational strategy in a way that, she believed, had motivational and pedagogical implications for the target student.

Avoiding and addressing feelings of frustration.

Susan favoured using direct error correction in her verbal and written feedback, and recognised this preference as a potential demotivating factor for her students ("frequent correction does mean feelings of frustration appear to be a typical problem", SRI4). In order to avoid or revert the possible demotivating effects of direct error correction, Susan was observed giving motivational messages following her corrections. Below is an example motivational message that the teacher used after her direct correction of grammar and spelling mistakes that the learner had made in a Chinese-English translation exercise:

> Don't worry, this is a tough exercise, it's natural to make many mistakes. Many high school students like you also found this exercise difficult. When [name of former student] first studied with me, she did a lot worse than you in this exercise, but [...] she achieved 7 in her IELTS writing in the end. So, don't be frightened by these red marks; let's revise these grammar structures again and see what we can do with them. (CO1)

Susan uses two main strategies here: (1) naturalising the mistake by sharing the experience of other students with this exercise, and (2) telling a success story of English language learning. The teacher's rationale for the former strategy suggests that her choice was mediated by her perception of this type of student ("usually young girls are thin-skinned"), her belief about English language learning ("learning English is a gradual process where mistakes are normal"), and her own learning experiences ("the positive belief about mistakes kept me motivated to learn"):

> Usually young girls are thin-skinned and they would be easily shut down if I blame them harshly. [...] In fact, usually I don't blame my students for their mistakes because

> I believe learning English is a gradual process where mistakes are normal. [...] I made a lot of mistakes when I first started learning IELTS, but my positive belief about mistakes kept me motivated to learn. I thought it would be motivating for my student to understand this point too, so that in their future learning they will not be demotivated in the face of mistakes. (SRI1)

Susan's rationale for telling a success story shows that her use of this strategy was informed by her prior teaching experience which, though she initially thought it was "just a random memory", had implications for making her motivational message "persuasive" and "relevant".

> It was just a random memory but ... [The student in CO1] was introduced to City Lights by [a formal student], who had done the same translation exercise with me before. [...] By including the example [...] my motivational message would be more persuasive and relevant for [the student in CO1]. (SRI1)

Building a positive student-teacher relationship.

Susan believed that "students are motivated to learn from teachers that they have a good relationship with" (SRI3). Her understanding of a good student-teacher relationship, though not strictly aligned with how student-teacher relationship is commonly depicted in the literature on motivational strategies (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001, pp. 36-39), seems to be framed by her perception of the learning needs and preferences of City Light's students:

> [The students] are paying money to improve their IELTS scores here [at City Lights]. Most of them want the teacher to be the competent knowledge giver in the class – otherwise, they would have chosen to study at home on their own. [...] To build a good relationship with these students, I always try to demonstrate that I have sufficient knowledge to help them improve their IELTS scores quickly. This is the first step for them to respect me and be motivated to learn from me. (SRI3)

In line with this perception, Susan claimed that she made deliberate efforts to demonstrate her professional knowledge of IELTS and English to her students by, for example, explaining her rationale for selecting specific topics or exercises, and teaching them learning and test strategies. These strategies were used in all observed classes.

On one occasion (CO3) Susan was observed to use another strategy which she recognised as having implications for building a student-teacher relationship: having informal chats with the learner on topics unrelated to the subject matter. One of these chats, for instance, was about an American TV series that the student had recently watched. The conversation was initiated by the student and Susan responded actively, engaging in a discussion of the programme's characters and plot. Susan's behaviour in this incident was influenced by her perception of this specific learner:

> Sometimes there are students like him, really extroverted students. They prefer a more casual and personal relationship. [...] I always try to accommodate to their needs in order to motivate. (SRI3)

Susan thus adopted motivational practices which, she believed, responded to the learner's personality and preferred teacher-student relationship. However, further discussion with the teacher revealed that informal personal chatting was not a form of interaction which she felt comfortable with:

I have to admit, it [informal chatting with the student] doesn't go with my introverted personality. [...] I think I'm more comfortable with those who see me as "the teacher" and just want to learn in the class. [...] But it would be so awkward if I just ignored what he said. So I decided to make it a chance for personal relationship, a chance for motivation [...] If I don't have a good relationship with him, he might ask the institution to change the teacher. That wouldn't look good on me as a teacher, would it? (SRI3)

Susan thus experienced some tension between a perceived external factor (the student's preference for informal chatting) and her perception of self ("introverted personality", professional identity as "the teacher" in the classroom). This was in turn accompanied by some emotional dissonance ("more comfortable with...", "awkward"). Susan eventually managed the tension by prioritising her students' preferences over her own. This decision was driven by her intention not only to motivate the student, but also to build her self-image ("that wouldn't look good on me as a teacher, would it?"), which was informed by Susan's perceived institutional regulation that the student could switch teachers freely ("he might ask the institution to change the teacher"). This shows how factors outside the immediate classroom can contribute to shaping teachers' enactments of motivational strategies.

Discussion

The analysis of the teachers' rationales for actual classroom enactments of motivational strategies revealed the complex process which the two teachers underwent as they selected and used strategies which they perceived as appropriate for their contexts. The findings across the two cases shed light on the multidimensionality of appropriate motivational strategies and the ways in which the teachers managed multiple, sometimes conflicting, factors in order to achieve the intended appropriateness. These results offer several important insights into motivational strategies and context-appropriate pedagogies.

The rich descriptive and interpretive data generated by this study show that the teachers' choice and use of motivational strategies were intentional efforts to make the strategies appropriate for:

- The target learner's motivation, language learning needs, and preferences.
- The teacher's beliefs, knowledge, identities, concerns, and personal preferences.
- The specific class objectives, procedures, and mode of delivery.
- The wider institutional and IELTS regulations.

The findings reveal that motivational strategies were often justified by teachers on the basis of their ability to serve more than motivational purposes. For example, in addition to motivational functions, 'social chatting' supported the memorisation of high frequency words, 'telling stories' exposed students to language in context, and 'elicitation' stimulated the recall of key vocabulary. This highlights the need to re-conceptualise motivational strategies as serving multiple situation-specific purposes if we aim to understand the complex ways in which they are selected and enacted, and the roles which they play in language teaching and learning.

Findings illustrating the multidimensional nature of teachers' decision-making process are not particularly original, though. Many of the aspects listed above are similar to the "local factors" which Ur (2013, p. 471) argues influence teachers' decisions, including the characteristics and

needs of the learners, the constraints and demands imposed by stakeholders, the backwash effect from assessment procedures, and the professional profile of individual teachers. The influence of multi-level contextual factors on teachers' practices has been widely recognised in theoretical discussions (Buehl & Beck, 2015) and illustrated in empirical research. For example, at a macro level, Liu (2022) showed how the shifting priorities given to different teaching methodologies in the Chinese National English Curriculum Standards changed his own teaching preferences. At a micro level, Feryok and Oranje (2015) illustrated how one teacher used a passport as realia to promote learners' intercultural awareness while maintaining their classroom engagement.

Unlike previous studies, however, the present study increases our understanding of how these multi-level contextual factors influence the development of contextually sensitive pedagogies. The findings show that, rather than constraining teachers' capacity to enact their intentions to motivate (Lee, 2015), contextual factors seemed to provide valuable information which the teachers used to assess and address situational demands (e.g., learner needs and interests). For example, learner disengagement triggered the use of informal social chatting on a topic of interest to the student, while information about a student's refusal to do after-class work shaped the extent to which the teacher used praising with that particular student.

Another consistent pattern across the two cases is that contextual factors were not entirely external to the teacher but were mediated by the teachers' cognitions. To illustrate this mediating relationship, we present below two data-driven schematic representations of the multiple factors which mediated Lydia's and Susan's process of selecting and enacting 'social chatting' as a motivational strategy (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The overlapping positioning of factors indicates their joint influence on the teachers' choice and actions, while the different dash line styles of the bubbles show the different aspects of appropriateness that these factors were related to.

In Figure 1, as shown by the dashed line between the internal and external domains of teaching and the positioning of contextual factors across both domains, the lack of student response was subjectively perceived by Lydia as a sign of lack of motivation; IELTS regulations regarding high-frequency vocabulary were seen as an opportunity for both motivating and vocabulary learning; while lesson time and the need to meet lesson learning objectives were regarded as a constraint on how long Lydia was able use social chatting with the student. It was through the mediation of perception that objective external factors were assigned subjective meanings that may differ from those upheld by researchers. For example, Cheng and Dornyei (2007) assumed that high-stake testing constituted a constraint on teachers' use of motivational strategies to make the class interesting. Yet, Lydia strategically used an IELTS requirement on high-frequency vocabulary to make her class more appealing. We would argue, therefore, that analyses of contextual factors influencing teachers' pedagogical practices are likely to be partial or flawed if they do not include teachers' subjective interpretations of those factors. The selection and use of effective motivational strategies requires not only teachers' access to significant contextual information, but also their capacity to notice and interpret environmental clues, and to critically appraise and respond to them against specific motivational goals.
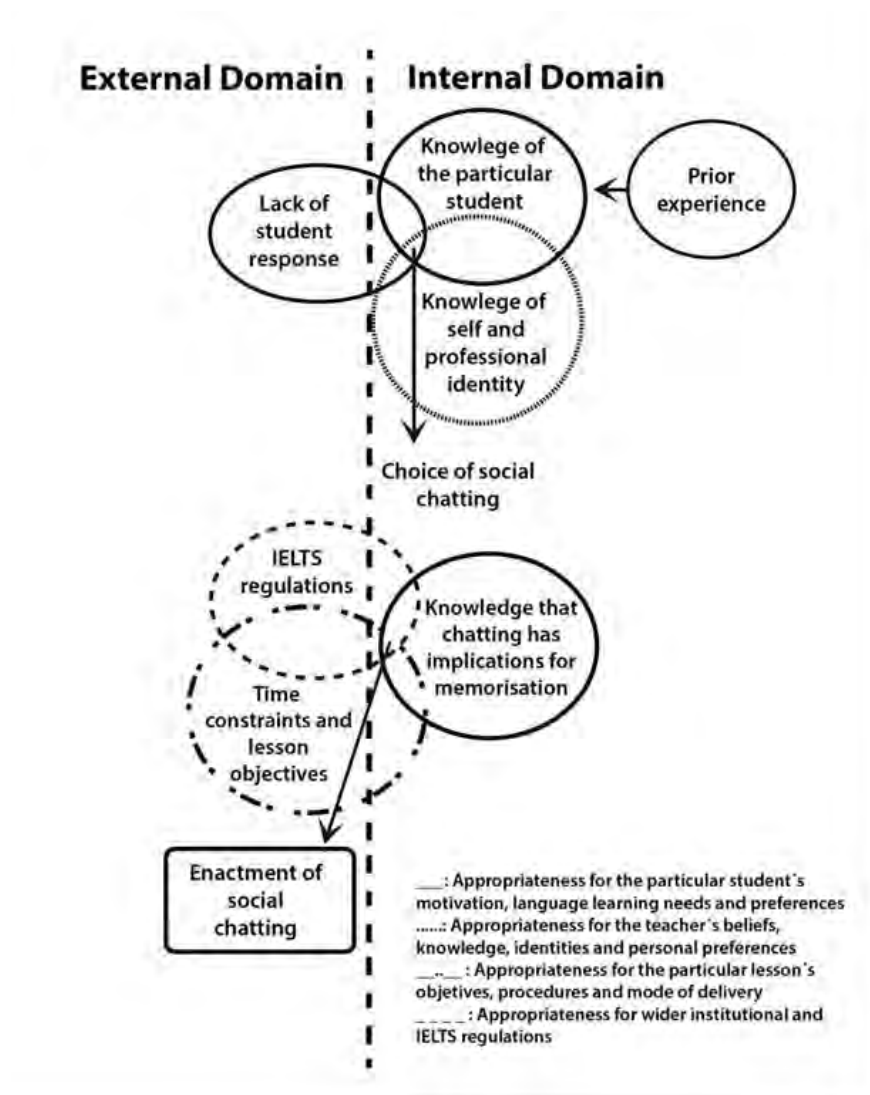
Figure 1. Factors Influencing Lydia's Choice and Use of Social Chatting ('Smooth' Process).

In addition, the analysis of mediating internal and external factors indicates that the process of developing context-appropriate strategies is not always smooth. On the one hand, as illustrated in Figure 1, most of the rationales provided by the teachers were indeed characterised by a smooth process where the teachers' selection and enactment of motivational strategies were shaped by multiple factors which reinforced one another by providing complementary perspectives on the perceived appropriateness. On the other hand, both teachers also experienced incidents in which they resolved tensions among conflicting factors. Figure 2 illustrates how Susan prioritised the perceived preference of her student for social chatting (top right bubble) over her own perception of self as introverted (shadowed bubble), resulting in her use of a strategy which seemed appropriate for her student but not for her own perceived personality. Not surprisingly, this 'rugged' process involved emotional dissonance ("more comfortable with…", "awkward"). The relationships among multiple influential factors on teachers' practices are, therefore, unpredictable, aperiodic, dynamic, and emerge 'in real time in the immediate temporal and spatial context' (Burns & Knox, 2011, p. 12).
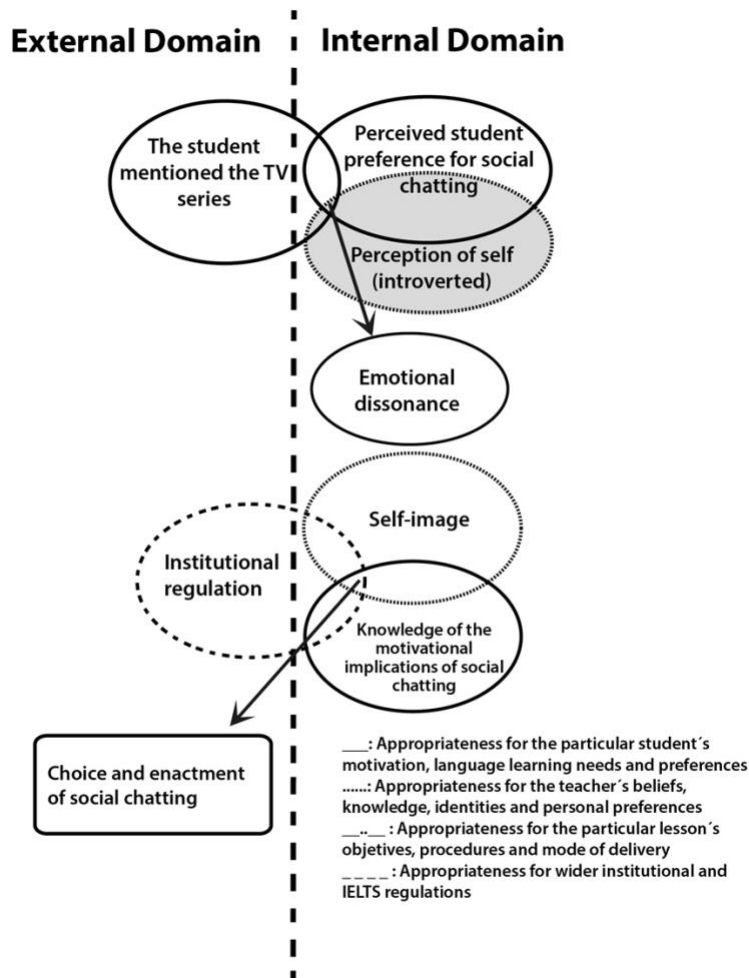
Figure 2. Factors Influencing Susan's Choice and Use of Social Chatting ('Rugged' Process)

The insights emerging from this study show that, for both teachers, developing context-appropriate motivational strategies was not a process of following prescribed practices, but one which involved the analysis and subjective interpretations of their local contexts, their awareness of multiple mediators and dimensions of appropriateness, and strategic skills to manage and resolve cognitive dissonance. They also provide evidence of teacher agency in action, conceptualised as the ability "to be reflexive, be intentional, self-regulate, be goal-oriented, make choices, be strategic, and take concrete actions" (Miller, 2016, p. 349), and suggest that, while it is important to build lists of motivational teaching techniques, it is also equally important to facilitate teachers' agentic capacities to make strategic decisions in their own situations. As argued by Littlewood (2013), "the final determinant of successful language teaching is of course not the conceptual frameworks with which theorists and researchers work but the frameworks of theories, beliefs, and assumptions with which teachers work in their specific classrooms" (p. 15).

Conclusion

In this paper we set out to report on a study which investigated how in-service IELTS teachers selected and enacted context-appropriate motivational strategies. The findings presented here show that the teachers made intentional efforts to make their motivational strategies suitable for the perceived multidimensional particularities and exigencies of their local pedagogical contexts. The analysis of this multidimensionality revealed that motivational strategies served multiple situation-specific purposes, which highlights the need to re-conceptualise these strategies as multi-purpose and the study of them as pedagogically holistic. The findings also indicate that teachers managed a wide range of internal and external mediators, at times conflicting, and numerous dimensions of appropriateness as they chose and used motivational strategies which they perceived as situationally suitable. The role of the teacher was, therefore, not that of an implementer of prescribed motivational techniques, but that of a critical and agentic practitioner who made decisions informed by the external and internal factors which influenced their practices.

This study thus provides teachers and teacher educators with a functional and holistic understanding of how and why motivational strategies are selected and used, and highlights the importance of viewing teachers as agentic decision makers. The results can also be used productively in teacher education contexts to promote teachers' self-awareness of the multiple factors underlying their motivational teaching practices.

This was a small-scale study involving two participants in their unique settings. Limited generalisation is therefore warranted to other contexts and practitioners. Furthermore, having focused on teachers' subjective perspectives, this investigation provides no evidence of whether the motivational strategies adopted by the teachers achieved their intended purposes. A more encompassing approach which includes other relevant stakeholders (e.g., students and parents/carers) would provide compelling evidence on how and why teachers' agentic efforts to develop context-appropriate pedagogies truly matter.

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