Analyzing the Use of Motivational Strategies by EFL Teachers in Oman

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Abstract

The inability of many Omani EFL students to motivate themselves to learn English can be attributed to socio-cultural factors that are beyond the control of the individual learner. A nationwide survey of representative EFL teachers in Omani schools, colleges and universities was conducted in an attempt to analyze the importance that EFL teachers attach to the use of specific strategies for motivating students to learn English; and also to establish how often they use these strategies in their teaching practice. The present research is a modified replication of Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study. The 286 participants in the present study rated the 48 strategies according to importance and the frequency with which they employed the strategies in their teaching contexts. The results were analyzed in terms of the most and least important motivational strategies, those most frequently and infrequently used, and the relationship between *importance* and *frequency* of use. The results indicate that EFL teachers in Oman overwhelmingly endorse the use of 48 motivational strategies. Moreover, the most favoured strategies among the teachers are those related to the teacher's personal performance in the classroom.

KEY WORDS: Learner motivation, motivational strategies, EFL in Oman, EFL teachers' motivational strategies

Introduction

Conventionally, the learner, the teacher, and the instructional materials are the most recognizable ingredients in the teaching of a second/foreign language. However, there are other important factors which normally operate less overtly and sometimes invisibly in the background. These include the following: educational policies, course administration, teaching methodologies, the objectives of learners, extramural language exposure, and the availability of learning centres and libraries (e.g., Al-Mahrooqi & Asante, 2010; Fahmy & Bilton, 1992; Issan & Gomaa, 2010; Schacter, 1999). All these factors are either tangible or measurable and can be decreed into action, engineered by management planning, or implemented with budgets. There is, however, one missing ingredient which researchers and practitioners consider so important that all the other factors might be futile without it. This ingredient is *motivation*–the force which drives learners to make optimal use of the available learning resources and achieve their learning objectives (Kimura, Nakata, & Okumura, 2001). "Motivation serves as the initial engine to generate learning and [it] later functions as an ongoing driving force that helps to sustain the long and usually laborious journey of acquiring a foreign language" (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007, p. 153). Being a psychological construct, learner motivation serves as the oil that lubricates the other parts of the language-learning mechanism and enables them to move freely and thus produce results.

Motivation, according to Dörnyei and Ottó (1998), is "the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalised and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out" (p. 65). This comprehensive definition touches upon every aspect of the construct that is relevant to the present study.

Thus, in the present study, motivation is the dynamic stimulus within an individual which activates mental and physical activity, creates desires and realizes them with or without success.

The recognition of the critical importance of motivation in adult language education dates back to the middle of the twentieth century or even earlier. Gardner and Lambert (1959) observed that an aptitude for languages is not the sole factor responsible for successful second-language learning. According to them, achievement in an L2 is enhanced by the ability of the learner to adopt certain behaviour patterns which are characteristic of another culture–the culture of the target language speakers. In the absence of the sometimes overpowering or even unavoidable opportunities for motivation to learn engendered by submergence in a target language environment, the language teacher becomes one of the best sources of motivation (Burns, 2010; Cheung, 2001).

EFL practitioners often employ traditionally recognized motivational strategies in the classroom, although in theory there are no limits to the number of possible strategies. Depending on the background of the students and classroom circumstances, a teacher may employ strategies that are specific to language instruction, or even to the teaching of any subject. The motivational strategies available for teachers to choose from are derived from individual experience or formulated from research findings. Klavas (1994), for example, advocates motivational strategies based on taking the individual learning styles of the students into account, while Schacter (1999) recommends the use of technology-rich environments to motivate students for increased achievement in all subject areas. den Brok, Levy, Brekelmans, and Wubbles (2005) recommend "proximity" in the interpersonal behaviour of the teacher towards students, while Cheung (2001) supports the use of popular

culture in the classroom to enhance student motivation. In contrast, others have proposed multiple, broad strategies, each of which subsumes a large number of potential microstrategies. Thanasoulas (2002) proposes four broad themes for developing a framework for motivation, using Dörnyei and Ottó's (1981) process-oriented model. Each of these themes is sub-categorized into a taxonomy of microstrategies, many of which are explored in the present study. Ultimately, it is the individual teacher's prerogative to adopt the recommended strategies or devise new ones around popular or prescribed themes. According to Dörnyei (2001), the range of motivational strategies is so wide in terms of choice and effectiveness that it is virtually inconceivable that at least one or other among them would not be effective in any situation.

Rationale for the study

Positive attitudes to a target language have been associated with a strong impetus for language competence (Dörnyei, 2001). In the EFL context of Oman, there are unique challenges that face the English language teacher with regard to student motivation (Al-Issa, 2010; Burns, 2010). EFL learners normally learn English for utilitarian reasons, including meeting school requirements, college-admission requirements, or the increasingly competitive requirements of the private-sector job market in urban areas (Fahmy & Bilton, 1992).

Suleiman (1993) points out that the failure of Arab EFL learners to achieve adequate levels of bilingual proficiency in Arabic/English can be attributed to the degree of compatibility or incompatibility of the two cultures, as well as to cultural attitudes and linguistic differences between the two languages. The degree of incompatibility between the Arabic language and

culture and the English language and culture has great potential for dampening the motivation of some learners (Al-Mahrooqi & Asante, 2010; Burns, 2010).

The national language of Oman is indisputably Arabic, which is held in very high esteem by the citizenry. Arabic is the language of the Holy Quran and Islam is the national religion. This is consistent with the observation by Parker (1986) that Arabs are in love with language as it is linked to their identity and religion (Altwaijri, 2004; Omran, 1988). Not only is Arabic the official language of government business, but it is also the language spoken in most Omani homes (Al-Mahrooqi, 2003; Farquharson, 1988). Moreover, Omanis predominantly read Arabic newspapers and watch Arabic television.

A number of other fundamental claims have been made by researchers about the historical reasons for a lack of motivation among Arabs to learn foreign languages. For example, Fahmy and Bilton (1992) note that while the governments may vigorously pursue socio-economic development, a fear exists that the spread of English could result in cultural degradation and social disorder. They also contend that in the early stages of Oman's development, an educational policy framed by the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States was adopted in English language education, and that the goals of this policy also indicate a fear that the Western culture could malignly influence schoolchildren's native language and culture. Although increasing globalization has elevated the status of English as an international language, many Arabian Gulf youth remain oblivious to the importance of English (Moody, 2009).

Additionally, while the situation is gradually improving through the effects of economic globalization and the Internet, it is worth noting that EFL in Oman is not well-supported by

local conditions, namely the absence of an adequate English-speaking environment (Burns, 2010). Students are therefore unable to attain the levels of motivation required for successful learning of the English language (Al-Issa, 2010). The best efforts of the ELT section of the Ministry of Education in the provision of a continually-revised curriculum, textbooks written specifically for Oman, and heavy investments in teaching manpower seem to yield only marginal gains (Moody, 2009). In 1998, the Ministry of Education introduced a phased overhaul of the educational system called Basic Education. This new system gave English a major status enhancement which resulted in a 55% increase in instructional hours for the first 10 years of schooling–from a total of 541 hours to 1,200 hours (Oman Ministry of Education, 2006). And, yet this enhancement has apparently not yielded gains that are proportionate to the huge investment, judging by the performance levels of graduates of Omani secondary schools (A-Mahrooqi & Asante, 2010).

The situation is not different even in the tertiary education institutions. Huge sums of money are spent by the educational authorities on human resource, free textbooks, computers laboratories, and classroom teaching aids; yet our classroom experience with second-year university students indicates that the returns under-represent the investment (Al-Kathiry, 2011; Moody, 2009). It would then seem logical for EFL practitioners to turn their spotlight on the student. Assuming that students comply with all the minimum requirements of a course of study, how much is left at the teacher's disposal to help boost the learning of the students to acceptable levels?

Aim of the study

When all the physical or concrete variables that could yield gains in students' language learning have been exhausted, then it may be logical to turn to the psychological variable of motivation. Since motivation is psychological, the tendency is to view it solely in relation to the student's own efforts or interest. However, in this study, the pursuit of motivation is confined to the potential or ability of the teacher to inspire, influence, and persuade the students to take their studies seriously and achieve their learning objectives. The main purpose, therefore, was to carry out, in Oman, a modified replication of the study (see the following sections) conducted by Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) on English language teachers in Taiwan. In the study, a sample of 387 Taiwanese English teachers rated 48 motivational strategies according to the importance they attached to them and how frequently they employed them. In the current replication of the Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study, a number of modifications were introduced in the instruments, the sampling technique, the data collection procedures, and data analysis. These modifications are explained in more detail in subsequent sections.

Significance of the study

Whereas there exists a small amount of research into the use of motivational strategies in the ESL/EFL classroom worldwide, there is a dearth of published studies of the use of such strategies in Oman. Perhaps, only one such study in the Arabian Gulf was carried out in the Saudi context by Alrabai (2010). A number of publications analyze and describe motivational strategie, suc as, Brown (2001), Cranmer (1996), Dörnyei (1994), Oxford and Shearin (1994) and Williams & Burden (1997) (see Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). Yet the amount of research focused on motivating learners requires the researchers' attention (Alrabai, 2010; Dörnyei & Csizér 1998). Further, Good and Brophy (1994) note that "motivation [in the classroom] did

not receive much scholarly attention until recently" (p. 212). There exist a number of studies based on Far Eastern contexts, conducted in countries such as Indonesia (Kassing, 2011) and Taiwan (Hsu, 2009). Since there appears to be no prior study of this type conducted in Oman, the present study may well be a timely endeavour. The findings of the study will add to the pool of existing research, offering an insight into the Omani EFL context and teacher-based motivational practices inside the classroom.

Methodology

In this modified replication of Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study, some changes were implemented in the data collection and analysis, sampling technique and instrumentation in an effort to enhance the reliability of the results. A description of the participants, the instrument, data collection and analysis is presented below.

Participants

The target population comprised EFL practitioners in Oman teaching at various levels of proficiency in public schools, colleges and universities in all regions of the country. The "snowball" sampling technique employed by Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) was considered unreliable for this kind of data collection, at least in the context of Oman. This method requires the identification of a number of "key informants" who were subsequently asked to introduce other possible informants. The technique was found unlikely to guarantee a representative sample or a high questionnaire return rate. A stratified sampling method was therefore adopted because it was considered more effective and economical in time and effort in the data collection process. Besides, stratified sampling allows a variety of criteria to be applied in sample selection.

Educational institutions were selected for this survey on a proportional basis from the following main cities of the various regions of Oman: Muscat, Nizwa, Sohar, Buraimi, Ibra, Sur, Salalah, and Khasab. The number of teachers in the institutions was taken into account to ensure that institutions with very small ELT sections or departments were excluded from the sample. A count of English teachers in all first and second-cycle schools in Oman was obtained from the Ministry of Education, and only institutions with five or more teachers were selected. Government schools in Oman follow two separate educational systems, one called Basic and the other called General. In the Basic Education System, students start learning English in the first grade. This system comprises 12 years of study divided into two cycles: Cycle One (for grades 1-5) and Cycle Two (for grades 6-12). Some cycle-one schools follow a co-educational system, while others follow a gender-segregated system. The General Education System begins teaching English in grade 4, and the schools are all single-sex. In addition to the count of teachers, then, participant schools were chosen according to the following criteria: region and city where the institution was located, type of school (Basic or General Education), grade levels, and gender of the students.

It is worthy of note that only EFL teachers in government-owned first and second-cycle schools were covered in our study, although the tertiary-level institutions included both privately-owned and government-owned institutions. This was necessitated by the fact that an overwhelmingly large proportion of Omani students attend government schools while, at the same time, most private schools which cater to Omani students follow the same curriculum as the government schools and are regulated by the Ministry of Education. A small, unrepresentative group of urban Omani students also attend private schools that used English as the medium of instruction. The tertiary level institutions targeted in this study included one

public university, three private universities, and the higher technical colleges (which are distributed across the various regions of Oman).

In each of the surveyed educational institutions, the participants answered the questionnaires in the presence of the researchers. Participants in the surveyed schools were invited on the spot with the help of the principal, and they normally included all those EFL teachers who were readily available. The college or university participants were invited in advance by their deans or directors. During the administration of the questionnaires, all participants at each institution were comfortably seated together and briefed about the purpose of the study. The researchers remained on hand to clarify any uncertainties about items in the questionnaire.

In all, 286 teachers, comprising 159 females and 127 males, participated in the study. In terms of educational attainment, they ranged from higher diploma to doctorate-degree holders, while their teaching experience ranged from 5 to 25 years. In order to avoid possible confusion, the number of respondents for each questionnaire item is provided in the results section since some participants failed to respond to all the questions.

Research Instruments

As a modified replication, the current study has attempted to avoid potential pitfalls through minor modifications to the two original questionnaires used by Cheng and Dörnyei (2007). For instance, statements or examples were appended to a few of the items or questions to clarify apparently vague terms for the sake of participants who might misunderstand or misinterpret them (see appendices). This clarification was necessitated in part by the results of the pilot study conducted prior to the current survey to test the validity of the two questionnaires and elicit opinions about the clarity and comprehensibility of the questionnaire

items. Twenty EFL teachers at Sultan Qaboos University's English Language Centre participated in the pilot survey, and their responses and comments were taken into account in modifying the questionnaires. The researchers also included a section which asked for participants' background data, including gender, years of teaching experience and academic qualifications. Though this extra information was not a part of the original questionnaires, it was considered to have potential value if it became apparent that there might be a positive relationship between some of these variables and the teachers' choice of motivational strategies or the frequency of use thereof.

Research questions

The study explored the following questions in relation to the over-riding aim:

1. What are the most important and the least important motivational strategies employed in the Omani EFL context?

2. What are the most frequently and the least frequently employed motivational strategies in the Omani EFL context?

3. What are the relationships, if any, between the importance accorded by teachers to individual motivational strategies and the frequency with which they employ these strategies in EFL classrooms in Oman?

Procedure

Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) used the same questionnaire for two purposes: first, to determine how EFL teachers would rate each strategy in terms of *importance*, and second, to determine the *frequency* of use of the same strategies. The researchers retained all forty-eight items of each of the replicated study. Besides, participants were asked to rate the motivational strategies on a 5-point Likert-type scale according to the options: 1=Not Important,

2=Somewhat Important, 3=Important, 4=Very Important, and 5=Vital. The first questionnaire (see Appendix A) was then withdrawn from the participants and replaced by the second (see Appendix B), which required them to rate the same motivational strategies on a 5-point Likert-type scale according to how frequently they employed these strategies in their teaching: 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Often, 4=Very Often, and 5=Always.

Furthermore, whereas Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) administered a Chinese version of the questionnaires, the English version was administered in the Oman study because all the participants were English teachers, although the majority was speakers of languages other than English. As a safeguard against misunderstanding, however, the participants were encouraged to ask questions whenever they were in doubt. It is important to note that the numbers (1-5) assigned to the response scales have no quantitative significance (i.e., using ordinal scale). Also, the researchers printed serial numbers on the importance and frequency questionnaires, and made sure that each participant received two questionnaires of matching numbers to enable accurate correlation of results from both. The questionnaires were administered anonymously in order to encourage honest responses. The participants were also assured in an introductory briefing that their individual responses would be given confidential treatment.

Data Analysis

It should be recalled that this study seeks answers to research questions relating to the most important and least important motivational strategies (including macrostrategies), the most frequently and least frequently employed strategies, and the relationships, if any, between the importance and frequency of use of the strategies or macrostrategies. Ordinal data in this section is analyzed according to the research questions. To address research questions

relating to the importance and frequency of use of the 48 motivational strategies employed in the study, descriptive statistics (i.e., range, mean, and standard deviation) were calculated for each of the two sets of 48 items, according to the EFL practitioners' responses, on a 5-point Likert-type scale. In tables 1 and 2 below, the data is not rank-ordered (according to mean value) to make it easier to make item-by-item comparisons between the *perceived importance* and the *frequency of use* of each of the strategies. Moreover, it is pertinent to note that the means for the items have different n-sizes, because only the available data for each item was used in the calculations, as some participants did not respond to all of the items. However, the n-size variation is not significant, and the means and correlations calculated would not be mathematically influenced by the n-size variation. It is also relevant to mention that the data from both questionnaires is not normally distributed except for a small number of items. However, this type of data distribution is usually expected for responses on a Likert-type scale.

Results

The 48 strategies were placed in the same 10 clusters which Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) categorized according to content similarity. For the most part, Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) clusters had satisfactory internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's reliability coefficient. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as well, to enable a comparison between results of the replication and the replicated study itself. In addition to comparisons between the results of this study and those obtained from Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study, some relevant comparisons were made with Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) study as well. The ordinal data obtained yielded some interesting findings.

Reliability of the strategy clusters

Cronbach's internal consistency reliability coefficient was calculated in order to find out if the items were related in terms of participants' responses. With regard to importance, only four of the ten categories were above 0.60, while only two were less than 0.50. However, in terms of frequency, six of the ten clusters yielded an Alpha of 0.60 or above. In Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study both importance and frequency yielded alpha coefficients of 0.70 for seven out of the ten clusters. What is interesting though is that two of the three clusters with the lowest Cronbach's alpha score in the replicated study are the same as the lowest two in the Omani study, these being 'create a pleasant classroom climate' ($\alpha = 0.41$) and 'present tasks properly' ($\alpha = 3.75$). Cheng and Dörnyei argued that since the items are behavioural rather than attitudinal, a low coefficient value for some of them is natural since responses are very likely to be heterogeneous. It must be added, however, that it is unlikely that all surveyed teachers would use all the micro-strategies under each cluster with the same frequency; nor is it likely that they would attribute to all of them, without exception, the same importance. Capitalizing on what Cheng and Dörnyei noted, more uniformity or homogeneity can be expected with regard to attitudinal items, but heterogeneity is to be expected of behavioural items.

Rank order of the importance items

The more prominent findings about *importance* are those obtained in this section, as the clusters were ranked according to the importance attached to each of their items by the respondents. The mean rating for each strategy was calculated, as was the average of the means for each of the clusters. In Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study, the researchers had to manipulate the analysis procedure since some items received very low means and the standard deviation was 2.5. These items were excluded from the cluster calculations in their

study, because they were considered outliers and if included would disproportionately reduce the mean of the cluster. This was not necessary in the current study since no item under any of the 10 clusters had a standard deviation higher than 1.26.

The following is an analysis of the perceptions of EFL teachers in Oman regarding the importance of the investigated motivational strategies in comparison with Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) and Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) studies. However, before any attempt to describe the data set for each strategy cluster, it is useful to look at the data holistically (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for *importance* items

No	Strategy	N	Range	Mean	SD
1	Bring in and encourage humour	286	4	3.7	.98
2	Show students you care about them	287	3	4.5	.64
3	Allow students to get to know each other	286	4	3.6	.94
4	Familiarize students with the cultural background of the target language	287	4	3.3	1.01
5	Explain the importance of the class rules	287	4	3.9	1
6	Give clear instructions by modelling	287	4	4.2	.84
7	Invite senior students to share their English learning experiences	284	4	3	1.09
8	Monitor students' progress and celebrate their victory	287	4	4	.89
9	Remind students of the benefits of mastering English	286	4	4	.88
10	Encourage students to set learning goals	287	4	4	.84
11	Design tasks that are within the students' ability	287	4	4.2	.82
12	Introduce various interesting topics	286	3	4.2	.69
13	Make tasks challenging	286	4	3.7	.87
14	Teach self-motivating strategies [e.g., remembering inspiring stories etc]	286	4	3.6	.99
15	Make sure grades reflect students' effort and hard work	285	4	4.1	.88
16	Let students suggest class rules	286	4	2.8	1.09
17	Show your enthusiasm for teaching	287	3	4.4	.75
18	Break the routine by varying the presentation format	287	3	4.2	.77
19	Invite-English speaking foreigners to class	286	4	2.7	1.13
20	Help students develop realistic beliefs about English learning	285	4	3.5	.92
21	Use a short and interesting opening activity to start each class	286	4	3.7	.99
22	Involve students in designing and running the English course	285	4	2.7	1.12
23	Establish good rapport with students	286	4	4.3	.83
24	Encourage peer teaching and group presentation	286	5	3.8	.88
25	Give good reasons to students as to why a particular task is meaningful	285	4	3.6	.97
26	Find out students' needs and build [respond to] them into curriculum	284	4	3.9	.84
27	Encourage students to create products [e.g., posters, magazine]	285	4	3.5	.98

28	Encourage students to try harder	286	4	4.1	.84
29	Give students choices in deciding how and when they will be assessed	281	4	2.7	1.16
30	Create a supportive classroom climate that promotes risk-taking	283	4	3.7	.98
31	Display the class goal in a wall chart and review it regularly	283	4	2.7	1.19
32	Introduce authentic cultural materials	285	4	3.5	1.02
33	Make clear to students that communicating meaning effectively is more important than being grammatically correct	285	4	3.7	.96
34	Provide students with positive feedback	286	3	4.4	.68
35	Ask students to work toward the same goal	282	4	3.4	1.11
36	Teach students learning techniques	285	4	3.9	.94
37	Adopt the role of a 'facilitator'	285	4	3.9	.88
38	Encourage students to use English outside the classroom	285	4	4.2	.79
39	Increase the amount of English you use in the class	188	4	4.1	.86
40	Share with students that you value English [learning] as a meaningful experience	283	4	3.8	1
41	Avoid social comparison [e.g., socio-economic status, tribe, etc.]	285	4	3.8	1.20
42	Promote effort attributions [e.g., encourage risk-taking]	284	4	3.7	.89
43	Make tasks attractive by including novel and fantasy elements	286	4	3.4	1.06
44	Encourage students to share personal experiences and thoughts	285	4	3.9	92
45	Present various auditory and visual teaching aids	284	3	4	.83
46	Recognize students' effort and achievement	286	4	4.3	.72
47	Be yourself in front of students	285	4	4.1	1.02
48	Allow students to assess themselves	283	4	3.5	1.07

Set a personal example with your own behaviour

The importance of setting an example with one's own behaviour is virtually indisputable. In order to motivate students, teachers have to provide a role model for them. In addition to showing them that they care about their learning and progress, they have to demonstrate enthusiasm for teaching and cultivate rapport with them by being themselves rather than being overly formal. In so doing barriers are broken and an atmosphere of ease permeates the language classroom. Rapport could be established in several ways, including sharing teachers' views about the value of EFL. It has to be noted here that the strategy most highly rated is *show students you care about them* because it summarizes and encapsulates the other microstrategies under this cluster. The microstrategy with the lowest mean (i.e., 3.8) in this cluster is *share with students that you value English as a meaningful experience*. This is not surprising as teachers tend to focus on presenting the materials related to the curriculum, and schools often discourage wasting class time on personal anecdotes. The other four strategies included in this cluster have nothing to do with sharing personal views or anecdotes, and these yielded means of above 4.0.

The most interesting finding regarding this cluster is that it ranked first in this study as it did in the two preceding studies (i.e., Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998), confirming the importance of teachers as role models across cultures and affirming the vital role of the teacher in language learning classrooms. Recent research, in fact, has demonstrated the important role of the teacher's interpersonal behaviour in motivating students (e.g., den Brok et al., 2005). Taking an authoritarian role was not found to be desirable in the language classroom (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997).

Set a personal example with your own behaviour

A classroom where students feel cared about–where the teacher is enthusiastic about the students' learning and has good relationships with them, and where the teacher is able to be herself or himself in the class–is likely to be with less student anxiety and increased receptiveness to instruction. This reduction of anxiety is a condition necessary for successful language learning (e.g., Krashen's (1981) *affective filter* hypothesis). When students are themselves in the classroom, their *affective filter* is low and their intake is high. Seeing teachers being themselves in class would put students at ease and enhance their comfort zone, thus, increasing their motivation to learn or to gain proficiency. Research has shown that language learning contexts are the most prone to anxiety arousal, and that anxiety is negatively correlated with performance (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre, 1995; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Wei, 2007). Good language learners are less anxious and have more positive attitudes about language learning (Banya & Cheng, 1997).

Promote learners' self confidence

This macrostrategy ranked second in this study, and it ranked third and second in Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) and Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) studies respectively. The similarity of the rank order is indicative of the cross-cultural importance of instilling confidence in the learners about their abilities and their capability of success. While the first strategy focused on the teacher, this second strategy focused on the learner, the two being the most important constituents in the teaching/learning process. The microstrategy rated the highest is *provide students with positive feedback*. Positive feedback alleviates stress and *encourages students to learn and to try harder*–the third microstrategy in this cluster. In order to help them try harder, teachers have to equip students with the right strategies. Stressing positive feedback could lead to the impression that errors are viewed as a developmental stage in the learning process rather than as failure to learn. Thus, students are *encouraged to communicate* (the

fourth microstrategy in this cluster) by providing them with positive feedback on their utterances. Confident students are less anxious about their learning (Banya *&* Cheng, 1997). In their analysis, Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) describe the "can-do-spirit' that teachers can inculcate in their students, further bolstering the importance of teachers' role in language teaching contexts.

Recognize students' effort and celebrate their success

This strategy was ranked second in Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study, which indicates that English teachers in Oman (most of whom are from Asia and the Arab world) and Taiwanese teachers attach similar importance to this macrostrategy, which is linked to the first two. A teacher's recognition of students' effort and celebration of their success shows how much she/he cares about their progress and helps establish good rapport. Furthermore, this microstrategy can promote students' self-confidence and motivate them to try even harder. While the Omani and Taiwanese teachers ranked this macrostrategy second and third in importance respectively, the Hungarian teachers did not consider it important and so it was not among their ten highest rated strategies (i.e., Dörnyei & Csizér's, 1998). The difference in the findings could be attributable to cultural difference.

Present tasks properly

This cluster also ranked highly in the two earlier studies (fifth in the Taiwanese study and third in the Hungarian study). There was agreement among the teachers in all the three contexts regarding the importance of this strategy, despite the variety of participants, especially in the Omani study. Tasks are crucially important because they are the behavioural blueprints designed to elicit linguistic data (Singh, 2006). Hence, it is clear that presenting tasks in a meaningful and appropriate way plays an important role in how students will tackle

them. "The decisive factors determining the quality of learners' task engagement appear to be meaningfulness, personal relevance, a degree of difficulty and structure that allows flexibility in student interaction" (Kubanyiova, 2006, p. 6). Dörnyei (2001) holds that tasks bearing these characteristics are likely to motivate students and encourage their language learning. The importance of these characteristics appears to be endorsed by the participants in the three studies in spite of the cultural divide.

Make the learning task stimulating

This macrostrategy is intimately related to the fourth strategy as it focuses on one of the characteristics that make tasks engaging. Therefore, it is quite natural that it is fifth highest in the rank order of macrostrategies, just one rank below *present tasks properly*. The ranking of this strategy in the Hungarian study was sixth but in the Taiwanese it was seventh. Thus the Hungarian ranking is closer to the Omani one. Stimulating tasks take students' interests into account, and students' interests are closely linked to their lives. Engaging tasks are also adequately but not overly challenging (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994; Kubanyiova, 2006; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). Other characteristics of effective tasks are that they offer some challenge but arouse interest and provide opportunities for using learning strategies (e.g., Ames, 1992). While the participants in the Omani and Hungarian studies attach more importance to this strategy, the Taiwanese do not seem to strongly endorse it. However, they do endorse presenting tasks properly to learners.

Create a pleasant and relaxed climate in the classroom

A relaxed atmosphere lowers students' affective filter, which lowers stress and anxiety, which in turn promotes risk-taking. Well-designed tasks can serve this function. According to Nunan (1989), tasks have to be designed to involve the learner in risk-taking behaviour and

should have a built-in component of evaluation that allows learners to assess their own progress and success without depending on the teacher. Abrar-ul-Hassan (2009) suggests that three mechanisms can ensure students' motivation: ensuring that they are aware of their progress towards their goals; ensuring there is enjoyment in the classroom; and offering lessons that are related to their lives. These three mechanisms are part of this sixth macrostrategy and of the upper five as well.

In this study, this macrostrategy is the first of the five lowest-ranked strategies, but the Taiwanese participants ranked it fourth and the Hungarians second. However, taking the mean value of the component microstrategies of this macrostrategy into consideration (i.e., 3.8), we can easily see that the participants in the Omani context do not really regard the strategies as unimportant. In fact, the mean of this cluster is not very dissimilar to the mean of the fifth one (i.e., 3.8). Thus, teachers in the Hungarian, Taiwanese and Omani contexts perceive this macrostrategy as an important mechanism in motivating language learners.

Familiarize learners with L2-related values

This macrostrategy had a relatively low ranking in all three studies. While it ranked seventh in the Omani study, it was eighth and tenth in the Taiwanese and Hungarian studies respectively. Familiarizing learners with L2-related values is suitable in contexts where integrative motivation to language learning is found among students. However, previous research in these contexts has shown an instrumental orientation among the students. It has to be noted, though, that instrumental motivation has been shown to be the dominant type among college students in Oman (Fahmy & Bilton, 1999) and in Taiwan (Benjamin & Chen, 2003). Dörnyei (1990) found two motivational subsystems in the Hungarian context: instrumental and integrative. Still, Hungarian teachers did not feel that this strategic area was

very important. The endorsement of this strategy among the three groups was limited. Also, a considerable proportion of teachers in the three groups may have considered this aspect irrelevant to their students' academic objectives, and hence could be less inclined or prepared to emphasize the cultural background of the target language. Any or a combination of the above reasons may explain why this strategy was rated the lowest in this cluster. In fact, at the microstrategic level, it is rated the third lowest of all the 48 strategies.

Increase the learners' goal-orientedness

This strategy ranked sixth and ninth in the Taiwanese and Hungarian studies respectively. Thus, the Taiwanese teachers seem to attach more importance to this strategy, perhaps because it is linked to task presentation, which ranked fifth, and to making tasks stimulating, which ranked seventh. Judging by the mean value of this cluster in the Omani study (i.e., 3.5), the teachers attached similar importance to this strategy and to the strategy: *familiarize learners with L2-related values* (M=3.5). As was the case in Taiwanese study, the strategy *display the class goals in a wall chart and review it regularly* was ranked the lowest in this cluster in the Omani study. In fact, this was the second lowest strategy among all of the 48 microstrategies.

Promote group cohesiveness

This cluster ranked ninth in the Taiwanese study and did not make the top ten in the Hungarian study. Research has shown the "importance of the dynamics of the learner group in shaping the L2 learning process" (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997, p. 65), and that such issues have not been adequately analyzed in L2 research (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). The findings of the three studies concerning this macrostrategy confirm these claims. According to Dörnyei and Malderez (1997), if utilized effectively in the language class, groups can have

many advantages. First, a group is a larger resource pool than any resources possessed by an individual learner and can be used to accomplish tasks more effectively. Second, a group can help learners adjust their behaviour and attitude by serving as a frame of reference and by providing guidelines and standards against which group members may assess their beliefs and actions. Third, a group can motivate students to work harder and can act as a tool for providing stamina and support. Finally, a group can facilitate language learning by inculcating a sense of responsibility in the learners. Thus, teachers who are more conscious of the importance of groups are more likely to produce positive effects in language learning.

Promote learner autonomy

This is a goal that is becoming increasingly recognized in the contemporary EFL classroom. The literature indicates that "the terms 'autonomy' and 'self-direction' are being used more and more frequently in educational discussion" (Gremmo & Riley, 1995, p. 151; see also, Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Autonomy can be defined as the student's ability to take charge of his or her own learning (Holec, 1981; Kumaravadivelu, 2003). However, Little (1991) holds that self-direction or independence is not really a teaching method, nor is it something that can be done for the learner. Autonomy is related to student-centeredness where the teacher plays the role of facilitator and the learner is responsible for her/his own learning. In the Omani and Taiwanese studies, this macrostrategy is rated the lowest, which means that more teacher-centred approaches are used in both contexts. Perhaps this is the opposite strategy to the one that ranked first, wherein the caring and action come from the teacher, and to the second wherein the teacher is responsible for inspiring and instilling confidence in the learner. According to Benson (2000), learner autonomy is a well-recognized and valued educational objective, but it is not commonly employed in actual teaching practice.

Frequency versus importance ratings

The frequency of use of each of the clusters was calculated to determine whether it reflected or correlated with the importance attached to the component strategies. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (i.e., Spearman's rho) was calculated to find the correlation between the *importance* and *frequency* clusters. Table 2 below shows the clusters rank-ordered in terms of *frequency* and compared to the *importance* ranking.

Table 2. A comparison of macrostrategies

Macrostrategies	Rank order by importance	Rank order by frequency
Set a personal example with your own behaviour	1	1
Promote learners' self-confidence	2	2
Recognize students' effort and celebrate their success	3	4
Present tasks properly	4	3
Make the learning tasks stimulating	5	6
Create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom	6	5
Familiarize learners with L2-related values	7	8
Increase learners' goal-orientedness	8	10
Promote group cohesiveness and set group norms	9	7
Promote learner autonomy	10	9

The table shows that the six highest-ranking macrostrategies in terms of *importance* are also the highest six in terms of *frequency*, although the third and fourth macrostrategies exchange ranks between the two variables while the fifth and sixth swap positions. The ninth-ranked macrostrategy in importance ranks seventh in terms of frequency of use. Incidentally, the two most underused macrostrategies–*promote learner autonomy* (M=3.1) and *increase learners' goal orientedness* (M=3.1) were among the lowest three on the importance scale. However,

their means on the frequency scale as shown in Table 2 were much lower than their means on the importance scale (M=3.5 and 3.4 respectively).

Spearman's correlation coefficient was very strong between importance and frequency (r = 0.9), which indicates that, for the most part, there is a positive correlation between the importance accorded to the strategies and their frequency of use. It suggests that since learner autonomy was not perceived as important and was not used frequently, EFL classes in Oman are more teacher-centred than student-centred, and language learners are more dependent on the teacher in this culture than in some other cultures. The methodology of the current study– separate questionnaires for importance and frequency were assigned and administered in pairs bearing the same serial number for each participant in sequence–also increases the reliability of the data. This was not the case in Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) procedure. Unsurprisingly, their method yielded more marked differences in the rank order of the macrostrategies in terms of importance and frequency.

The ten most important microstrategies

It is equally insightful to examine the ten highest-ranking microstrategies. According to their means, the following are the ten most important:

Table 3. Strategies reported as most important

No.	Microstrategy	Place in clusters	N	Mean	SD
2	Show students you care about them	1	287	4.5	.64
34	Provide students with positive feedback	2	286	4.4	.68
17	Show your enthusiasm	1	287	4.4	.75
46	Recognize students' effort and achievement	3	286	4.3	.72

23	Establish good rapport with students	1	286	4.3	.83
38	Encourage students to use English outside the classroom	7	285	4.2	.79
11	Design tasks that are within the students' ability	2	287	4.2	.82
12	Introduce various interesting topics	5	286	4.2	.69
6	Give clear instructions by modelling	4	287	4.2	.84
18	Break the routine by varying the presentation format	5	287	4.2	.77

It is clear from the rankings of the microstrategies that all except one (*encourage students to use English outside the classroom*) occur in the highest five clusters or macrostrategies, which are:

1. Set a personal example with your own behaviour

2. Promote learners' self-confidence

3. Recognize students' efforts

4. Present tasks properly

5. Make the learning tasks more meaningful.

Similarly, the lowest-ranking microstrategies might offer us an insight into the choice of these strategies. Table 4 below shows the lowest-ranking microstrategies.

Table 4. Strategies reported as least important

No.	Microstrategy	Place in clusters	N	Mean	SD
48	Allow students to assess themselves	10	283	3.5	1.07
35	Ask students to work toward the same goal	9	282	3.4	1.11
43	Make tasks attractive by including novel and fantasy elements	5	286	3.4	1.06
4	Familiarize students with the cultural background of the target language	7	287	3.3	1.01
7	Invite senior students to share their English learning experiences	7	284	3	1.09
16	Let students suggest class rules	9	286	2.8	1.09

29	Give students choices in deciding how and when they will be assessed	10	281	2.7	1.16
19	Invite English-speaking foreigners to class	7	286	2.7	1.13
31	Display the class goal in a wall chart and review it regularly	8	283	2.7	1.19
22	Involve students in designing and running the English course	10	285	2.7	1.12

As shown in Table 4, all except the microstrategy *make tasks attractive by including novel and fantasy elements* belong to the lowest four macrostrategies, (7, 8, 9 and 10). These are:

7. Familiarize learners with L2-related values

8. Increase students' goal orientedness

9. Promote group cohesion

10. Promote learner autonomy

Three of the ten least important microstrategies listed above belong to the lowest-rated macrostrategy in importance–*promote learner autonomy*–which also ranks second lowest in terms of frequency. Also, three microstrategies belong to the seventh-ranked macrostrategy, which ranks eighth in terms of frequency. Furthermore, three microstrategies belonging to seventh macrostrategy in importance (*familiarize students with the cultural background of the target culture, invite senior students to share their learning experiences,* and *invite native-speaking foreigners to class*) are related to cultural or administrative issues. The first and the third are related to culture and, as explained earlier, it may be difficult to use them very often in the Omani EFL context. The second might not be possible because students who move to upper grades are often busy with their school schedules and so teachers would not want to inconvenience them or interrupt their learning schedule. In addition, this is not a practice in the Omani context as school administrations tend to maintain rigid boundaries between different classes. Two microstrategies also belong to the eighth-ranked cluster in importance (which is also the least frequently used macrostrategy) while two belong to the ninth-ranked

cluster in importance, which is the seventh lowest on the frequency scale. The relative positions of the highest and lowest microstrategies within the macrostrategies give a clear picture of the consistency of ranking in terms of both importance and frequency.

Limitations

All findings and inferences are based on self-reporting by the participants, and thus, are subject to the inherent limitations of self-reporting. A combination of questionnaires and observations of actual classroom practice could provide more reliable measurements of the frequency with which teachers employ each strategy. Furthermore, it may never be known whether any of the participants could have been influenced by a desire to jump on the bandwagon, so to speak, and give high ratings to many of the strategies simply because the researchers might expect all EFL teachers to routinely employ them.

Implications for classroom practice

Some EFL teachers, especially novices, may be unaware of the wide range of potential motivational strategies at their disposal. Even those who are aware of these strategies are sometimes unsure which ones to choose. The present study has the potential to stimulate or increase the sensitivity of novice EFL teachers, student-teachers, and teacher trainers, particularly in Oman, to these strategies, highlighting those considered most important and used most frequently by a representative sample of EFL teachers. In the present study, the strategy cluster found to be most important and most frequently used was *showing students that you care about them*, which underscores the importance of attending to the psychological aspects of the teacher-learner relationship. The implication of this understanding is that teachers should demonstrate to learners that they care about their learning. Also, teacher-training programs need to emphasize this aspect and offer appropriate guidance to trainees.

Implications for further research

The findings of this study raise a number of pedagogical issues that could be addressed in future research. It would be important, for example, to determine why most teachers in Oman, as represented by the survey participants, appear unenthusiastic about motivational strategies that are dependent on the promotion of student autonomy. Further study may also be required to determine whether it is the attitude of the students themselves to learner autonomy that has shaped the relatively low value that teachers attach to this. Finally, since the EFL teachers in Oman who participated in the current study widely recognize the importance of motivational strategies and actually report using them in their classrooms, what is the impact of these strategies on classroom dynamics?

Conclusion

This study has attempted to shed some light on the extent to which motivational strategies that have been tried and tested in other countries are valued and employed by EFL teachers in Oman. It has also attempted to find a correlation between the perceptions of the teachers about the importance of specific motivational strategies and the frequency with which they employ them in the classroom. It is evident from the results that EFL teachers in Oman overwhelmingly endorse the use of motivational strategies, as do EFL teachers in the Taiwanese and Hungarian studies. They also report using most of the strategies that they endorse. All in all, EFL practitioners in Oman did not find any motivational strategy less than important.

The most prominent of the strategies endorsed by EFL teachers in Oman are related to the teacher's personal performance in the classroom. The macrostrategy *set a personal example with your own behaviour* was consistently the most highly ranked of all ten macrostrategies in the Omani study, the replicated Taiwanese study, and the Hungarian antecedent. Furthermore, the macrostrategy that encourages teachers to *promote learners' self-confidence* ranked second or third in each of the three studies conducted in Oman, Taiwan and Hungary. Such unanimity could be indicative of cross-cultural common standards, at least on some pedagogical issues. Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) noted that the forty-eight strategies were compiled from Western sources. The concurrence of motivational strategies in different cultures could, thus, be the result of common teacher-training practices derived in the world. Another important finding of the study is a strong correlation between the importance of the 48 strategies and the reported frequency of use of the same strategies. This implies that there is a strong indication that EFL teachers in Oman duly employ the motivational strategies they believe in.

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APPENDIX A

The Use of Motivational Strategies

Dear Colleague:

We are working on a pioneering nationwide project to analyze the use of motivational strategies in EFL teaching in Oman. The goal of this project is to contribute to the effectiveness of EFL instruction in our local context. Your honest input is vital to the study and hence would be highly appreciated. We assure you of the confidentiality of your individual responses.

Thank you very much for your assistance.

Dr Rahma Al-Mahrooqi, Dr Charles Asante, and Dr Shahid Abrar-ul-Hassan,
The Language Center, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat

Section I
(Demographic Information: Please check or write your responses.)

Your School/Institution: _____

Wilayat _____   Region: _____

Educational level you currently teach at: ☐ Primary ☐ Preparatory ☐ Secondary ☐ Tertiary

EFL Proficiency level(s) you regularly teach: ☐ Elementary   ☐ Low Intermediate
☐ Intermediate   ☐ High Intermediate   ☐ Advanced

Your gender: ☐ Male   ☐ Female   Teaching Experience (in years): [   ]

Professional Training/Qualification: (Please write in the institution and year of completion.)

Program	Certificate/ Diploma	Bachelor's	Master's	PhD	Other (Please Specify) …………..
Institution					
Year					

Section II

DIRECTIONS:
Please rate the forty-eight motivational strategies listed in the attached sheets in terms of their *importance* in your EFL teaching. Write a number (1 to 5) that most closely matches your opinion, next to each strategy, using the following 5-point scale:

[1=Not Important,   2=Somewhat Important,   3=Important,   4=Very Important,   5=Vital]

Scale:
   1=Not Important,   **2=**Somewhat Important,   **3=**Important,   **4=**Very Important,   **5=**Vital

No	Motivational strategy	Importance in your EFL teaching
25	Give good reasons to students as to why a particular task is meaningful	
26	Find out students' needs and build them into curriculum	
27	Encourage students to create products	
28	Encourage students to try harder	
29	Give students choices in deciding how and when they will be assessed	
30	Create a supportive classroom climate that promotes risk-taking	
31	Display the class goal in a wall chart and review it regularly	
32	Introduce authentic cultural materials	
33	Make clear to students that communicating meaning effectively is more important than being grammatically correct	
34	Provide students with positive feedback	
35	Ask students to work toward the same goal	
36	Teach students learning techniques	
37	Adopt the role of a 'facilitator'	
38	Encourage students to use English outside the classroom	
39	Increase the amount of English you use in the class	
40	Share with students that you value English as a meaningful experience	
41	Avoid social comparison	
42	Promote effort attributions	
43	Make tasks attractive by including novel and fantasy elements	
44	Encourage students to share personal experiences and thoughts	
45	Present various auditory and visual teaching aids	
46	Recognize students' effort and achievement	
47	Be yourself in front of students	
48	Allow students to assess themselves	

The End

(Adapted from Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007)

APPENDIX B

The Use of Motivational Strategies
DIRECTIONS: **Please rate the forty-eight motivational strategies listed in the attached sheets in terms of their *frequency* in your EFL teaching. Write a number (1 to 5) that most closely matches your opinion, next to each strategy, using the following 5-point scale:** **[1=Never,   2=Rarely,   3=Often,   4=Very Often,   5=Always]**

Scale:
          1 = Never,   2 = Rarely,   3 = Often,   4 = Very often,   5 = Always

No	Motivational strategy	Frequency in your EFL teaching
1	Bring in and encourage humor	
2	Show students you care about them	
3	Allow students to get to know each other	
4	Familiarize students with the cultural background of the target language	
5	Explain the importance of the class rules	
6	Give clear instructions by modeling	
7	Invite senior students to share their English learning experiences	
8	Monitor students' progress and celebrate their victory	
9	Remind students of the benefits of mastering English	
10	Encourage students to set learning goals	
11	Design tasks that are within the students' ability	
12	Introduce various interesting topics	
13	Make tasks challenging	
14	Teach self-motivating strategies	
15	Make sure grades reflect students' effort and hard work	
16	Let students suggest class rules	
17	Show your enthusiasm for teaching	
18	Break the routine by varying the presentation format	
19	Invite-English speaking foreigners to class	
20	Help students develop realistic beliefs about English learning	
21	Use a short and interesting opening activity to start each class	
22	Involve students in designing and running the English course	
23	Establish good rapport with students	
24	Encourage peer teaching and group presentation	

Scale:

1 = Never,   2 = Rarely,   3 = Often,   4 = Very often,   5 = Always

No	Motivational strategy	Frequency in your EFL teaching
25	Give good reasons to students as to why a particular task is meaningful	
26	Find out students' needs and build them into curriculum	
27	Encourage students to create products *[e.g. posters, magazines, videos]*	
28	Encourage students to try harder	
29	Give students choices in deciding how and when they will be assessed	
30	Create a supportive classroom climate that promotes risk-taking	
31	Display the class goal in a wall chart and review it regularly	
32	Introduce authentic cultural materials	
33	Make clear to students that communicating meaning effectively is more important than being grammatically correct	
34	Provide students with positive feedback	
35	Ask students to work toward the same goal	
36	Teach students learning techniques	
37	Adopt the role of a 'facilitator'	
38	Encourage students to use English outside the classroom	
39	Increase the amount of English you use in the class *[Write in N/A if not applicable.]*	
40	Share with students that you value English *[learning]* as a meaningful experience	
41	Avoid social comparison *[e.g. socio-economic status, tribe, etc.]*	
42	Promote effort attributions *[e.g. encourage risk-taking and effort exertion in language-learning.]*	
43	Make tasks attractive by including novel and fantasy elements	
44	Encourage students to share personal experiences and thoughts	
45	Present various auditory and visual teaching aids	
46	Recognize students' effort and achievement	
47	Be yourself in front of students	
48	Allow students to assess themselves	

The End

(Adapted from Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007)