A Comparative Study between Experienced and Novice Iranian EFL Teachers’ Perceptions about Motivational Strategies and their Employment in Classroom Practices

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Abstract

Although most studies have investigated the use of motivational strategies in EFL learning environment (Cheng & Dornyei, 2007; Dornyei & Csizér, 1998), few researchers examined the difference of motivational strategies used between novice and experienced teachers. Therefore, this study investigated novices and experienced EFL teachers’ beliefs about the importance of motivational strategies and their use of these strategies in classes. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed in the study. The participants were 60 teachers (Novice teachers, N=28; Experienced teachers, N=32) who taught at two different levels, pre intermediate and upper-intermediate. They were given a questionnaire in which they rated 48 motivational strategies on a 6-point Likert scale. Besides the questionnaire survey, eleven English teachers participated in the observations. Three classes of each teacher were observed to gather data on their observed motivational behaviors in the classroom. The results indicate that time limitation and the lack of good teaching experience are the hurdles that novice teachers need to overcome. The most favored strategies among the teachers are those related to the teacher’s personal performance in the classroom. To conclude, teachers’ teaching belief, and instructional style are likely to differ between teachers with different teaching experiences.

Keywords: Motivational strategies, novice teachers, experienced teachers

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Motivational strategies that teachers use in classes centered on different aspects of the language learning process. Many novice teachers sometimes do not know how to manage classroom environment, how to ask right questions, and how to enhance students’ learning motivation; hence, they seldom feel more confident and experience a sense of achievement in teaching environment (Boles & Troen, 2002). Some of the most important studies into novice and experienced EFL teachers e.g., Gatbonton (2008) were dealing with their pedagogical knowledge as reflected in classroom behavior. In her study with four novice and
four experienced ESL teachers she used quantitative and qualitative methods in order to examine the teaching thought processes of them with different teaching experience. The main conclusions from her study were that experienced teachers were more aware of their learners’ classroom behaviours: they focused more on learners’ behaviours and needs in general, they were able to detect when learners were listening and working on particular activities, and they paid more attention to learners’ positive reactions in the classroom.

**Statement of the Problem**

The study of the definition of motivation, its theoretical aspects, components and dimensions, different models of motivation have received attention by social psychologists and educationalists in literature. However, no studies have been carried out on teachers’ perceptions of motivational strategies versus their actual use of motivational strategies. Many students who have positive attitudes towards learning English become demotivated after a few months of study and their interest to learn went away. This situation creates problems in the classrooms in terms of both instruction and classroom management. Therefore, this study was to examine if teaching experience is connected with teachers’ beliefs about the importance of motivational strategies and their use of these strategies in classes.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to compare novice and experienced teachers’ use of motivational strategies in classroom and to look at beliefs of novice and experienced EFL teachers about the importance of motivational strategies and at their actual use of these strategies in class. This study also compared the teachers’ self-reports on the frequency of use of motivational strategies in class with their actual use of motivational strategies to see if the teachers’ perception of their use of motivational strategies coincided with their motivational practices in class.

**Research Questions**

- Is there any significant difference between novice and experienced teachers with regards to their self-reported motivational strategy perceptions?

- Is there any significant difference between novice and experienced teachers in their actual classroom-based use of motivational strategies?

**THEORETICAL GROUNDWORK**

Research into experienced and novice EFL teachers aimed at understanding the nature of differences between them, as well as understanding the nature of becoming experienced. Becoming experienced does not only mean accumulating knowledge and experience over
years, but also experiencing changes in motivation, metacognition, cognitive structure and personal points of view (Akbari & Tajik, 2009). Some of the most important studies into novice and experienced EFL teachers (e.g., Gatbonton, 2008) were dealing with their pedagogical knowledge as reflected in classroom behavior. In her study with four novice and four experienced ESL teachers Gatbonton (2008) used quantitative and qualitative methods in order to examine the teaching thought processes of teachers with different teaching experience. The main conclusions from Gatbonton’s study were that experienced teachers were more aware of their learners’ classroom behaviors: they focused more on learners’ behaviors and needs in general, were able to detect when learners were listening and working on particular activities and they also paid more attention to learners’ positive reactions in the classroom. On the other hand, novice teachers were more preoccupied with learners’ negative reactions, as well as with the appropriateness of instructional strategies, which can be explained by the fact that novice teachers still feel insecure while teaching and thus are more sensitive to learners’ reactions.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

The participants in this study were 60 EFL teachers (Novice teachers, N=28; Experienced teachers, N=32) with different levels of proficiency who were teaching English in institutes. Educational institutions were selected for this survey on a proportional basis from the cities of Sistan and Baluchistan province. Besides the questionnaire survey, researcher randomly selected eleven English teachers to participate in the observations.

**Instrumentation**

*Questionnaire.* The researcher used the original questionnaire proposed by Cheng (2006) to collect data about motivational strategies beliefs and actual use of them between novice and experienced teachers. It includes 48 items rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from hardly ever (1) to very often (6). The items were translated into Persian, and checked for their meaningfulness by the researcher. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the questionnaire was calculated to ensure the researchers of the appropriate timing, and administration procedures, and also to avoid ambiguity and other related problems in the main study.

*Observation.* The observation checklist was compiled from the same questionnaire about the perception of the teachers’ use of motivational strategies that they had filled in (Appendix A). All of the observations were done by the researcher.

**Procedures**

*Design.* In order to guarantee the reliability and validity, two research methods were involved in the study; one is quantitative and the other is qualitative research method. To avoid
subjectivity, questionnaires were used to explore teachers’ beliefs about motivational strategies. Qualitative approach was used which mainly involved class observation to find out the relationship between motivational strategies and teacher’s experience.

To examine the teachers’ perception towards the use of the motivational strategies in classes Cheng & Dornyei (2007) questionnaire was translated into Persian and adapted to the learners. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study to remove any possible source of anxiety. In the second stage, the questionnaire was given to all the participants. In order to explore which strategy the participant teachers actually used to motivate their students, two classes of eleven teachers were selected randomly to be observed. The teachers were informed about the exact time of observations and convinced that the data were used only for the purpose of the study. During the observation procedure the researcher used the same questionnaire that the teachers had filled in about their perception towards the use of motivational strategies.

Data analysis. The 48 strategies were placed in the same 10 clusters which Cheng and Dornyei (2007) categorized according to content similarity. The internal consistency of these scales was tested by means of a reliability analysis by researcher. The data of the study were analyzed through running descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics included the normality of the data, the mean, and standard deviations of each motivational strategies clusters. However, the inferential statistics were t-test for differences between groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Analysis of Data from the Questionnaire

Based on the teachers’ responses to the questionnaire, the following analyses were done.

Analysis of the novice and experienced teachers’ beliefs about the strategies. The analysis was done based on the 48 strategies placed in the same 10 clusters, which Cheng and Dornyei (2007) categorized according to content similarity, called macro-strategies. The final wording of the ten macro-strategies is as follows:

1. Set a personal example with your own behavior.
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
3. Present the tasks properly.
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners.
5. Increase the learners’ linguistic self-confidence.
6. Make the language classes interesting.
7. Promote learner autonomy.
8. Personalize the learning process.
9. Increase the learners’ goal-orientedness.
10. Familiarize learners with the target language culture.

To verify the significant relationship between experienced and novice teachers’ teaching experiences and motivational strategies’ beliefs, independent samples t-test is applied to help rationalize the grouping. After the analysis, as we can see in Table 1, the result of cluster (4) “Present the tasks properly” (t= -3.217, p<.05), (5) “Create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom” (t=-2.110, p<.05) indicated that the average scores on both teaching experience and the motivational strategies’ beliefs had a significant difference.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Categorizations</th>
<th>Experienced Teachers</th>
<th>Novice Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set a personal example with your own behavior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote learners’ self-confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize student’s effort and celebrate any success</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present the tasks properly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make the learning tasks stimulating</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase learners’ goal-orientedness</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote group cohesiveness and set group norms</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarize learners with the L2 culture and L2-related values</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote learner autonomy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Analysis of Data from the Observation

Data collection was organized during classroom observations, which the author carried out in August, 2016. Two classes of each teacher were observed. While selecting the classes, the researcher attempted to choose two classes focusing on different skills (for example one class focused on listening, another one focused on grammar) in order to get better insights into the teachers’ motivational practice.
Analysis of overall novice and experienced teachers’ perception towards the actual used strategies. To verify the significant relationship between experienced and novice teachers’ teaching experiences and actual use of motivational strategies, independent samples t-test is applied to help rationalize the grouping.

After the analysis, the result of cluster (3) “Recognize student’s effort and celebrate any success” (t= -2.380, p<.05), (6) “Make the learning tasks stimulating” (t=-2.210, p<.05) indicated that the average scores on both teaching experience and the motivational strategies’ actual use had a significant difference.

Table 2

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<th>Strategy Categorizations</th>
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<td>Promote learners’ self-confidence</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize student’s effort and celebrate any success</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present the tasks properly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make the learning tasks stimulating</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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The results show that the proper teacher behavior is the most important and the most frequently used macro strategy the novice and experienced used. This similarity proves that teachers across different cultures believe that being a good role model is the most effective way of motivating students. On the basis of the findings, as for novice teachers who had just completed their training, or who had just commenced teaching and still had very little teaching experience. Therefore, they might focus mainly on maintaining the flow of instructional activities and worrying about the appropriateness of instructional strategies. Therefore, they thought presenting a task properly is more important than promoting learner’s self-confidence; but in actual classroom, they used strategies, which promote learners’ self-confidence more than what they think do.
Finally, the study found the main differences of four macro strategies perceived and used between novice and experienced teachers. The results from applying t-tests show that there were four macro strategies representing significant difference between novice and experienced teachers’ teaching experiences and motivational strategies use; namely: ‘Present the tasks properly, create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom’, ‘recognize student’s effort and celebrate any success’, and ‘make the learning tasks stimulating’.

In accordance to results the macro-strategy which novice and experienced teachers considered as most important strategy and used that more frequently is (Proper teacher behavior). 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. What is more interesting about this macro-strategy is the fact that it ranked first in the other previous studies as well (Al-Mahrooghi et al. 2012; Cheng & Dornyei 2007; Dornyei & Csizer, 1998). This similarity proves that teachers across different cultures believe that being a good role model is the most effective way of motivating students.

The third macro-strategy (Recognize students’ effort) is considered fairly important in the experienced teacher’s context. Both studies in Taiwan and Oman also reported similar findings where they rank second and third, respectively. All three settings agree that teachers’ recognition of student’s effort and success can motivate students to strive harder in learning the language. But there was a totally different situation in the Hungarian study (Cheng & Dornyei, 2007), because no position has been regarded for this macro-strategy which means that its implication is somehow culture-bound.

**CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS**

With regard to ‘make the learning tasks stimulating’, the main difference between novice and experienced teachers was that the experienced teachers adopted more often the role of a facilitator in the sense that they always tried to encourage learners to think and to come up with an answer, rather than only transmitting knowledge. Experienced teachers, not only because they had accumulated most teaching experiences but because they had known what strategies are much suitable for learners; therefore, they could much easily understand how make tasks interesting and avoid the routine by varying the presentation format.

What should be emphasized here is that the frequency of the use of motivational strategies should not be the only criterion for determining if a teacher successfully uses strategies to motivate his/her learners. Thus, teachers’ ability to determine which strategy should be used in a particular moment is also important. This means that teachers who successfully motivate their learners are not necessarily the ones who use motivational strategies with the highest frequency, but the ones who are able to determine which strategy is the appropriate to use in a particular situation. Furthermore, the study also suggests that the frequency of the use of
motivational strategies depends on the culture and the educational system of a particular country. This was proved by the fact that both the novice and the experienced teacher claimed to us motivational strategies in the same order of frequency.

Because of the relatively small sample size (N=60) in this present study, it may be difficult to generalize the findings. Whatever the results might be, it would be necessary to conduct further study among larger and more varied samples of L2 novice and expert teachers teaching in EFL setting in Iran to determine the reliability of the findings among the Iranian L2 teachers in general.

REFERENCES


