



Motivational Teaching Strategies in ESP Courses: EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Reflections

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Abstract: This study investigates the motivational strategies used by Vietnamese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, employing a mixed-methods approach that includes both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, based on the framework from Dörnyei and Csizer (1998). Quantitative data collected through questionnaires provided insights into the frequency and perceived effectiveness of various motivational practices, while qualitative data from interviews offered a deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives and contextual factors shaping their approaches. The results reveal that teachers highly prioritize modeling motivational behaviors such as commitment and authenticity, giving clear instructions, and supporting students' goal-setting processes. However, some motivational strategies, particularly those related to emotional sensitivity, creativity encouragement, cultural exposure, and fostering collaborative group dynamics, received comparatively lower emphasis. These findings suggest that while Vietnamese ESP teachers are aware of and apply many key motivational strategies, there remain areas for improvement to better engage students holistically. The study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the specific challenges and strengths in motivation within the Vietnamese ESP context. Implications

include the need for teacher training programs to focus more on emotional responsiveness, intercultural competence, and creative classroom practices. While the study provides valuable insights, it acknowledges certain limitations, namely, its reliance on self-reported data and the localized nature of the sample. To build on these findings, future research is encouraged to incorporate observational methods and include a more diverse participant base for broader generalizability.

Keywords: *Vietnamese EFL teachers, ESP courses, Motivational strategies, Teaching pedagogy.*

1. Introduction

Motivation has long been recognized as a central factor in successful language learning. It drives learners to engage actively, persist through difficulties, and achieve their language goals (Dörnyei, 2001). In the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where learners often face challenges related to exposure, relevance, and practical application, fostering motivation becomes even more critical. This importance is heightened within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, which focus on equipping learners with language skills tailored to particular academic disciplines or professional fields. ESP learners typically study English to fulfill specific career or academic objectives, making their motivation intricately linked to the perceived utility and relevance of the learning content (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Teaching strategies that effectively enhance learner motivation are therefore key components of ESP education. Motivational teaching strategies encompass a wide range of instructional behaviors and approaches that teachers adopt to stimulate learners' interest, confidence, and persistence (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). These include techniques that capture learners' attention, establish relevance between learning materials and learners' goals, build learner confidence, and ensure satisfaction with the learning experience—concepts well encapsulated in Keller's ARCS model of motivation (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction) (Keller, 1987). By integrating such strategies into ESP classrooms, teachers can potentially transform learning environments, making them more engaging and conducive to achievement.

Despite the critical role of motivational strategies in language teaching, research has often concentrated on learner motivation and outcomes rather than the teachers' perceptions and practices themselves. Teacher perceptions are pivotal because teachers' beliefs about motivation influence their instructional decisions, which in turn shape student motivation and learning experiences (Borg, 2006). This issue is particularly underexplored in the Vietnamese context, where the rapid expansion of English language education has coincided with increased emphasis on



ESP due to globalization and economic development (Pham & Tran, 2020). Understanding how Vietnamese EFL teachers perceive and implement motivational teaching strategies in ESP courses can offer valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities within this evolving educational landscape.

Several key studies provide a useful background for exploring this topic. Karimi and Hosseini Zade (2019) found that professional development courses centered on motivational strategies significantly improved teachers' use of these strategies, though teaching experience did not significantly affect usage levels. This suggests that motivation-oriented training could be more influential than years of teaching in shaping motivational practices. Similarly, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) empirically demonstrated that teachers' motivational behaviors positively correlate with learners' motivation levels in ESOL classrooms, underscoring the importance of effective motivational strategies for language learning success.

Further, Lamb (2020) notes that the necessity and focus of motivational teaching vary depending on the pedagogical context and learner characteristics. For example, in adult vocational or academic settings, contexts akin to many ESP courses, learners may enter with high initial motivation, shifting the teacher's role to one of maximizing learning efficiency rather than generating motivation from scratch. Conversely, in compulsory or less intrinsically motivated contexts, deliberate motivational efforts become critical to engage learners. This highlights the variability Vietnamese ESP teachers might perceive regarding their motivational roles depending on their learners' backgrounds and institutional settings.

Contextual factors influencing motivational strategy effectiveness have also been documented. Tremblay-Wragg et al. (2021) emphasize that while diversification of teaching strategies tends to increase student motivation, the contextual environment—including institutional culture, resources, and student characteristics—modulates these effects. This is particularly relevant for Vietnam, where educational contexts range widely from large public universities to smaller private institutions, each with unique cultural and resource constraints.

Student diversity is another important factor. Sugita McEown and Takeuchi (2014) revealed that motivational strategy effectiveness varies based on students' English proficiency and initial motivation levels. This differentiation suggests that Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of motivational strategies may also reflect their experiences with varied learner profiles in ESP classes, which often consist of students with diverse academic and language backgrounds.

From a practical standpoint, the literature also reveals connections between motivational teaching practices and student satisfaction and learning outcomes. Malouff et al. (2010) found a positive relationship between the frequency of



motivational strategies used by teachers and student satisfaction in university psychology courses. Similarly, Cai et al. (2022) demonstrated that ARCS model-based motivational strategies enhanced nursing students' motivation, critical thinking, and academic performance, indicating that motivational teaching not only affects affective factors but also cognitive and performance outcomes.

In the specific field of ESP, Mauludin (2021) explored student perceptions of motivating teaching strategies, finding that students favored strategies creating a comfortable and enjoyable learning environment while finding task-heavy or assignment-related strategies less motivating. This student perspective complements the current study's focus on teachers' perceptions, highlighting the need for alignment between teacher strategies and student preferences to maximize motivation.

Despite the wealth of research on motivation in language teaching globally, there is a gap in understanding how Vietnamese EFL teachers perceive motivational teaching strategies specifically within ESP courses. Vietnam's unique sociocultural context, educational system, and economic demands necessitate localized research to uncover teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and practices regarding motivation. Such research can inform targeted professional development, curriculum design, and teaching practice, ultimately improving ESP course outcomes.

This study, therefore, addresses the following research questions:

- What are the Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of motivational teaching practices in ESP courses?
- What are the dominant factors that affect these teachers' perceptions of motivational teaching practices in ESP courses?

By investigating these questions, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of motivational teaching in ESP contexts and provide practical recommendations for enhancing motivational strategies in Vietnamese higher education.

2. Literature Review

Motivation in language learning has been extensively studied, with a growing recognition of the teacher's pivotal role in fostering and sustaining learner motivation through the use of targeted motivational strategies. This literature review synthesizes key research findings related to motivational teaching strategies, their application in ESP and EFL contexts, and factors influencing teacher perceptions and effectiveness of these strategies.

2.1 Motivational Teaching Strategies and Their Effects



Teachers' use of motivational strategies has been linked to positive student outcomes across various educational settings. Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) provided one of the foundational empirical investigations, demonstrating that teachers' employment of motivational teaching practices was significantly correlated with enhanced learner motivation in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classrooms. They operationalized motivational strategies within a framework emphasizing real-time teacher behaviors, offering evidence that such strategies effectively elevate students' motivated learning behavior and motivational state.

Similarly, Karimi and Hosseini Zade (2019) showed that professional development focusing on Keller's ARCS model (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction) notably improved teachers' use of motivational strategies. However, their study indicated that teaching experience did not significantly influence the use of these strategies, suggesting that deliberate training may play a more critical role than years in the profession. These findings underscore the importance of equipping teachers with specific skills to implement motivational strategies effectively.

In the domain of higher education, Malouff et al. (2010) highlighted a positive relationship between the frequency of motivational teaching techniques and student satisfaction. They identified techniques spanning nine motivational categories, including showing warmth, giving interesting assignments, and providing constructive feedback, as significantly related to students' course satisfaction. This suggests that motivational strategies not only influence affective domains but also enhance overall learning experiences.

More recently, Cai et al. (2022) applied the ARCS model in a community nursing course and reported significant gains in students' critical thinking, self-learning ability, and academic performance, along with increased motivation and satisfaction. This study provides evidence of the practical benefits of motivation-based teaching in specialized professional education, reinforcing its relevance for ESP contexts where learners often pursue specific academic or vocational goals.

2.2 Motivational Strategies in ESP and EFL Contexts

While much research has focused on motivation in general ELT, the specific challenges and characteristics of ESP courses necessitate particular attention. ESP learners typically have focused, instrumental goals tied to professional or academic needs, which shape their motivation profiles (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Teachers, therefore, need to tailor motivational strategies to ensure relevance and practicality.

Mauludin (2021) explored ESP students' perceptions of motivational strategies and found that students preferred teaching practices that created a



comfortable and enjoyable learning environment. Conversely, task-heavy strategies such as frequent assignments were perceived as less motivating. This finding suggests that motivational strategies in ESP should emphasize learner-centered, engaging environments rather than overly rigid task structures, which may hinder motivation.

Sugita McEown and Takeuchi (2014) investigated the differential effects of motivational strategies in EFL classrooms based on learners' proficiency and motivational intensity. They found that some strategies were effective only for certain learner clusters, highlighting the need for teachers to adapt their approaches according to learner profiles. This learner-centered perspective aligns with Lamb's (2020) assertion that the importance and focus of motivational teaching vary according to pedagogical context, learner characteristics, and situational factors. For ESP teachers, who often work with heterogeneous classes of learners with varying motivations and proficiency levels, this adaptability is crucial.

2.3 Factors Influencing Teachers' Perceptions of Motivational Strategies

Teachers' perceptions and implementation of motivational strategies are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including professional development, experience, learner characteristics, and contextual elements. Karimi and Hosseini Zade (2019) demonstrated that targeted training could enhance teachers' use of motivational strategies, indicating that professional development is a key driver in shaping perceptions and practices.

Tremblay-Wragg et al. (2021) emphasized the role of context in determining the effectiveness of teaching strategies and their impact on student motivation. Their multicase study in higher education revealed that while diversified teaching strategies generally increased motivation, contextual factors such as class size, institutional culture, and teacher-student rapport modulated these effects. In Vietnam, where educational contexts vary widely, these contextual nuances are likely to affect teachers' perceptions and use of motivational strategies in ESP.

Student diversity also affects teachers' motivational practices. Sugita McEown and Takeuchi's (2014) cluster analysis demonstrated that the relationship between motivational strategies and learner motivation is mediated by students' English proficiency and initial motivation levels. Thus, teachers' perceptions of motivational effectiveness may depend on their experiences with diverse learner groups.

In distance education settings, Park and Yun (2017) highlighted how students' academic levels influence their use of motivational regulation and cognitive learning strategies. Though focusing on distance education, their findings suggest



that teachers must consider students' academic and motivational characteristics when designing instructional approaches, which may extend to ESP classrooms.

2.4 Teaching Strategies and Learner-Centered Approaches

A growing body of research supports the use of learner-centered approaches to enhance motivation. Cheang (2009) found that restructuring a pharmacotherapy course according to learner-centered principles improved students' intrinsic goal orientation, self-efficacy, and metacognitive regulation. This approach resonates with motivational teaching strategies that foster learner autonomy and engagement.

Wu and Wu (2020) demonstrated that project-based learning combined with creative instructional techniques positively influenced students' cognition, motivation, and creativity in engineering education. These findings highlight the potential for incorporating innovative and learner-centered strategies into ESP courses to boost learner motivation and outcomes.

Ferlazzo (2013) advocates for self-driven learning, emphasizing the role of motivational teaching strategies in cultivating students' responsibility and perseverance. Such approaches align well with the goals of ESP, where learner autonomy and motivation are critical to mastering discipline-specific language skills.

Despite extensive research on motivational teaching strategies in general EFL and higher education contexts, there is a notable gap concerning their specific application and perception within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, particularly in the Vietnamese educational setting. While studies have explored student perceptions of motivation in ESP (Mauludin, 2021) and the effects of professional development on teachers' use of motivational strategies (Karimi & Hosseini Zade, 2019), few have focused on how Vietnamese EFL teachers themselves perceive and implement these strategies in ESP classrooms. Additionally, existing research often overlooks the contextual and cultural factors unique to Vietnam that may influence teachers' motivational practices and attitudes. Furthermore, the dynamic interaction between teacher perceptions, learner characteristics, and institutional environments remains underexplored, leaving a gap in understanding the dominant factors shaping motivational teaching practices in ESP. This study aims to address these gaps by providing an in-depth examination of Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions and the contextual variables affecting their use of motivational strategies in ESP courses.



3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively explore Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of motivational teaching strategies in ESP courses and identify the factors influencing these perceptions. Based on the framework from Dörnyei and Csizer (1998), the quantitative component involves a structured questionnaire to gather broad, generalizable data on teachers' views and practices, while the qualitative component uses semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into teachers' experiences, beliefs, and contextual influences. This design enables triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and richness of the findings.

3.2 Research Participants

The study participants consist of Vietnamese EFL teachers currently teaching ESP courses at universities and language centers across Vietnam. A purposive sampling method is employed to select teachers with at least one year of experience teaching ESP, ensuring relevant and informed perspectives. The target sample size for the questionnaire is approximately 40 teachers, allowing for meaningful quantitative analysis. From this pool, a smaller subset of 7 teachers is invited to participate in follow-up semi-structured interviews to provide detailed qualitative data.

3.3 Research Instruments

Based on the framework from Dörnyei and Csizer (1998), a questionnaire is developed to deliver to the participants. The questionnaire includes Likert-scale items measuring teachers' frequency of use, perceived effectiveness, and attitudes toward various motivational strategies specific to ESP contexts. Demographic information and teaching background are also collected. The questionnaire is pilot-tested with a small group of EFL teachers to ensure clarity and reliability.

Semi-structured interviews are conducted to explore teachers' in-depth perceptions, experiences, and contextual factors influencing their use of motivational strategies. An interview guide is prepared with open-ended questions focusing on teachers' understanding of motivation, challenges faced in ESP teaching, training experiences, and contextual considerations such as institutional support and learner characteristics. Interviews are conducted in Vietnamese or English, depending on the participant's preference, and audio-recorded for transcription and analysis.



3.4 Data Collection

Data collection begins with the distribution of the questionnaire electronically via email and professional teaching networks. Participants are given two weeks to complete the questionnaire, with reminders sent to maximize response rates. After quantitative data collection and preliminary analysis, purposive sampling identifies participants for interviews based on questionnaire responses and willingness to participate. Interviews are scheduled at convenient times and conducted either face-to-face or via online platforms such as Zoom, depending on location and availability. All participants provide informed consent, and ethical guidelines regarding confidentiality and voluntary participation are strictly observed.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires are analyzed using statistical software (i.e., SPSS). Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) summarize teachers' perceptions and use of motivational strategies.

Qualitative data from interviews are transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves coding the data to identify recurrent themes and patterns related to teachers' perceptions, contextual challenges, and influencing factors. Themes are iteratively refined to capture the complexity of teacher experiences. Triangulation with quantitative findings helps to validate and enrich the interpretation of the results.

4. Results

The results demonstrate that Vietnamese EFL teachers in ESP courses place strong emphasis on modeling motivational behaviors themselves. Teachers highly endorse showing commitment and motivation as a role model, with a mean of 4.44 (SD = 0.90), and behaving naturally and genuinely also scored well at 4.00 (SD = 0.93). This suggests that teachers view their own motivation and authenticity as foundational to encouraging student engagement. However, some aspects of teacher sensitivity and acceptance received lower ratings with a mean of 2.34 (SD = 0.91), indicating possible gaps in emotional responsiveness or student-centered attitudes.

T6 shared:

"As a teacher, I believe it is really important to lead by example. When I show commitment and stay motivated, I feel it encourages my students to do the same. Being genuine helps build trust and makes the classroom environment more open. However, I realize that sometimes I may not be as sensitive or accepting as I should be, especially when students struggle. This is something I want to work on, to better support their emotional



needs and make them feel more accepted."

Regarding the classroom climate, the strategy of bringing humor, laughter, and smiles was rated most favorably with a mean of 4.67 (SD = 0.93), underscoring the importance teachers place on creating a joyful and relaxed learning environment. In contrast, strategies such as creating a pleasant atmosphere (2.22, SD = 0.90) and developing good rapport with students (2.75, SD = 0.89) were less frequently practiced, suggesting room for improvement in fostering a welcoming and supportive classroom social climate.

T1 mentioned: *"I find that using humor and laughter really helps lighten the mood in class and makes students feel more comfortable. It creates a friendly and relaxed atmosphere where learning feels fun rather than stressful. However, I know that building deeper connections and a consistently pleasant atmosphere takes more effort, and sometimes it's challenging to maintain this every day. I want to focus more on improving my relationships with students to help them feel even more supported."*

In terms of task management, teachers generally reported moderate use of motivational strategies, including giving clear instructions with a mean of 3.89 (SD = 0.98), providing assistance to complete tasks (4.00, SD = 0.89), and explaining the aims and utility of tasks (4.09, SD = 0.90). This reflects an awareness of the motivational power of clarity and relevance in instructional tasks, which is crucial in ESP settings where learners often seek practical language skills.

T4 highlighted: *"I believe giving clear instructions and explaining why each task matters helps students stay focused and understand the purpose behind what they are doing. In ESP classes, students want practical skills, so I try to show them how each activity connects to their real work or goals. I also make sure to help them when they're stuck, because this support keeps them motivated and less frustrated."*

Teachers also support students' self-confidence by regularly encouraging them (3.33, SD = 0.91) and ensuring they experience success (3.67, SD = 0.90). Positive feedback and appraisal were relatively frequent with a mean of 4.09 (SD = 0.95), indicating teachers' recognition of affirming students' efforts. Nonetheless, selecting tasks that align with students' competence was rated quite low with a mean



of 2.11 (SD = 0.94), which may hinder learners' confidence if tasks are perceived as too challenging or unmanageable. Additionally, explaining that mistakes are a natural part of learning scored moderately (3.00, SD = 0.94), highlighting an area where motivational support could be strengthened.

T6 emphasized: *"I try to encourage my students and give them positive feedback because I know it helps build their confidence. It's important that they feel successful and recognized for their efforts. However, sometimes it's hard to find tasks that perfectly match every student's level, so some might feel overwhelmed. I also remind them that making mistakes is normal and part of learning, but I think I could do more to help them accept this and stay motivated."*

Strategies aimed at fostering interest showed mixed results. Teachers highly valued building students' intrinsic interest rather than relying solely on grades as motivators (4.28, SD = 0.93) and creating challenging tasks (4.75, SD = 0.95). Offering a variety of materials (3.76, SD = 0.90) and choosing interesting topics (3.89, SD = 0.92) were moderately emphasized, but administering diverse activities (2.67, SD = 0.94) and selecting engaging tasks (2.45, SD = 0.93) received lower scores, indicating potential to diversify learning experiences further and better capture student curiosity.

T2 shared: *"I believe it's very important to help students find real interest in the subject rather than just focusing on grades. I try to give them challenging tasks because it pushes them to grow. However, I know I need to include more different kinds of activities and more engaging tasks to keep their curiosity alive. Sometimes it's difficult to come up with fresh ideas that really capture their attention."*

Teachers demonstrated support for student autonomy by encouraging questions and contributions (4.12, SD = 0.93) and sharing responsibility for organizing learning (4.44, SD = 0.95). However, encouraging creative and imaginative ideas was rated less often with a mean of 2.45 (SD = 0.94), suggesting that while students are given some voice, opportunities for deeper creative engagement might be limited.

T3 stated: *"I make sure to encourage students to ask questions and take part*



in class decisions because I think it helps them feel more responsible for their learning. But honestly, I find it challenging to inspire creativity and imagination regularly. Sometimes the focus is more on completing tasks correctly than on exploring new ideas, so I know this is an area where I could improve.”

Concerning personal relevance and goal-setting, teachers frequently incorporated personal content relevant to learners (3.80, SD = 0.91) and conducted needs analyses (3.72, SD = 0.90). They also regularly helped students set specific goals (4.18, SD = 0.98), design individual study plans (4.60, SD = 0.97), and develop realistic expectations (4.63, SD = 0.96), indicating a structured and student-focused approach to goal orientation. Group goal-orientedness was rated very high (4.81, SD = 0.93), showing strong emphasis on collective motivation.

T5 shared: “I believe understanding each student’s needs and goals is essential, so I spend time figuring out what they want to achieve and tailor lessons accordingly. Helping them set clear, realistic goals and make their own study plans encourages responsibility and motivation. Also, I try to foster a strong sense of teamwork, as working toward shared goals really boosts their engagement and commitment.”

Cultural exposure strategies, such as inviting native speakers (3.50, SD = 0.99) and finding pen friends (3.30, SD = 0.95), were moderately employed, but less attention was given to familiarizing students with the cultural background of English (2.36, SD = 0.88) and using authentic materials (2.47, SD = 0.90). This reveals a potential area for enhancing students’ intercultural competence and authentic language experience in ESP settings.

T1 highlighted: “While I try to bring in native speakers and encourage pen pals, it’s sometimes hard to fully integrate cultural background lessons or authentic materials due to limited resources and time. I think there’s definitely room to do more in this area because understanding culture is key to using English effectively, especially in specialized fields.”

Regarding group dynamics, teachers actively helped students get to know one another (4.67, SD = 0.95) and provided regular group work opportunities (3.44, SD = 0.91). However, organizing extracurricular activities (2.00, SD = 0.94) and



participating as ordinary group members (1.99, SD = 0.90) were minimal, indicating a more traditional teacher-led classroom rather than a fully collaborative learning community.

T4 shared: *"We focus a lot on helping students connect during class and encourage group work because it supports learning. However, outside-class activities are harder to arrange, and as teachers, we usually stay in our traditional roles rather than fully joining the group. It's a challenge to balance maintaining authority and creating a more relaxed, collaborative environment."*

Finally, motivational elements related to effort, usefulness, and reward showed that teachers strongly emphasized the importance of effort for success (4.13, SD = 0.89) and the usefulness of language learning (4.50, SD = 0.88), fostering a growth mindset and pragmatic motivation. They also avoided comparing students to one another (4.01, SD = 0.99), which can protect learner self-esteem. Nevertheless, giving rewards beyond grades was less common (3.26, SD = 0.92), and opportunities for students to produce tangible work to display or perform were moderate (3.67, SD = 0.90), pointing to potential areas for enriching motivation through recognition and creative output.

T7 mentioned: *"I always try to remind students that effort is key to success and that what they learn is useful in real life. I avoid comparing students because it can hurt their confidence. However, giving rewards beyond grades or encouraging students to create projects to show their progress is not something I do often. Maybe I need to find better ways to motivate students with more creative and meaningful recognition."*

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions of motivational teaching strategies used in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses and to identify dominant factors influencing these perceptions. The findings reveal that while teachers recognize the importance of motivation in ESP contexts and employ several motivational strategies, some areas of practice remain underdeveloped, influenced by cultural, contextual, and professional factors.



5.1 Teachers' perceptions of motivational teaching practices in ESP courses

The results indicate that Vietnamese ESP teachers strongly endorse strategies related to their own enthusiasm, commitment, and authenticity in the classroom. This emphasis on teacher motivation as a catalyst aligns with previous research emphasizing the critical role of teacher enthusiasm in stimulating student motivation (Karimi & Hosseini Zade, 2019; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). Teachers' positive self-presentation and commitment act as powerful models for learners, which is especially important in ESP courses where students may have clear, instrumental goals and expect teachers to lead by example (Lamb, 2020).

However, while teachers rated their motivational behaviors highly in areas such as humor and establishing a relaxed classroom atmosphere, their sensitivity and acceptance toward students' emotional and individual needs were rated lower. This suggests a partial focus on motivation that favors task-related and teacher-centered strategies over affective and relational strategies. Erdil-Moody and Thompson (2020) highlight that effective motivational teaching requires not only behavioral enthusiasm but also emotional attunement to learners, which fosters deeper engagement. Cultural factors in Vietnam, including the traditionally hierarchical teacher-student relationship, may inhibit open emotional expression and responsiveness, limiting teachers' sensitivity to student affect (Mauludin, 2021). Addressing this through professional development could help teachers adopt a more learner-centered and emotionally supportive approach.

In terms of classroom climate, the favorable views on humor and a relaxed environment correspond with findings from Pickens and Eick (2009), who demonstrated that a nonthreatening, enjoyable atmosphere promotes student motivation across educational levels. Nonetheless, the teachers' lower ratings on building rapport and creating a consistently pleasant classroom atmosphere suggest an opportunity to enhance the social and emotional climate further. Tremblay-Wragg et al. (2021) argue that diversified and responsive teaching strategies, including fostering positive interpersonal relationships, significantly contribute to sustaining student motivation in higher education.

Teachers also perceived task-related strategies such as clear instructions, explaining task relevance, and providing help positively. This is congruent with the pragmatic and goal-oriented nature of ESP learners who require clear guidance and direct relevance to professional contexts (Basturkmen, 2010). Nonetheless, the lower emphasis on selecting tasks aligned with learners' competence reflects a potential misalignment between task difficulty and learner readiness, which can undermine motivation (Wu & Wu, 2020). Park and Yun (2017) further emphasize that appropriate task design that matches learners' abilities is vital for encouraging



effective motivational regulation and cognitive engagement.

Regarding strategies aimed at fostering self-confidence, teachers frequently used positive feedback and encouragement but less often normalized mistakes as part of learning. This finding echoes Karimi and Hosseini Zade's (2019) observation that while teachers value encouragement, more nuanced strategies like error tolerance remain underutilized. Promoting a growth mindset by framing mistakes as learning opportunities could strengthen learners' resilience and sustained motivation in ESP courses, where linguistic accuracy often receives high focus.

In stimulating interest, teachers favored challenging tasks and reducing dependency on grades, aligning with principles of intrinsic motivation and autonomy (Sugita McEown & Takeuchi, 2014). However, the limited use of varied and engaging activities may indicate constraints related to curriculum rigidity or a lack of training in creative pedagogies. Cai et al. (2022) demonstrate that using diverse, ARCS-based motivational strategies positively impacts students' engagement and satisfaction, underscoring the need for greater instructional flexibility in ESP contexts.

Teachers showed moderate support for learner autonomy by encouraging questions and sharing responsibility, but placed less emphasis on creativity and imagination. This may reflect cultural expectations of teacher authority and curriculum coverage pressures in Vietnam (Cheang, 2009). Wu and Wu (2020) argue that fostering creativity in technical or specialized education enhances motivation and cognitive skills, suggesting that ESP educators could benefit from integrating creativity-focused strategies to better engage learners.

The high priority given to personal relevance and goal-setting in teachers' perceptions confirms the centrality of aligning ESP teaching with learners' specific professional aims. This is consistent with the findings of Mauludin (2021) and Basturkmen (2010) that linking learning to real-world goals is crucial for motivating ESP students. Additionally, the emphasis on group goal-orientedness reflects collectivist cultural values and suggests a strategic use of social motivation to enhance engagement (Erdil-Moody & Thompson, 2020).

Conversely, motivational strategies related to cultural exposure, such as using authentic materials and integrating cultural background knowledge, were less frequently reported. Given the importance of intercultural competence in ESP for global professional communication (Zhu, 20XX), this represents a missed opportunity to deepen learners' motivation and contextual understanding. Enhancing teachers' ability and resources to incorporate authentic cultural content could enrich ESP learning and motivation.

Group dynamics strategies revealed a predominant focus on in-class group



work, with little attention to extracurricular activities or teachers acting as group members. Pickens and Eick (2009) emphasize that fostering informal and extracurricular interactions can strengthen motivation and classroom community. Encouraging such practices in Vietnamese ESP contexts could promote a more engaging and collaborative learning environment.

Finally, motivational elements emphasizing effort, usefulness, and avoidance of comparison were strongly endorsed by teachers. This supports a positive motivational climate that promotes self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation while reducing harmful competition (Malouff et al., 2010). The relatively infrequent use of rewards beyond grades and limited opportunities for creative output suggest areas where motivational support could be enhanced by recognizing diverse forms of achievement and expression.

5.2 Dominant factors influencing teachers' perceptions

Several factors appear to shape Vietnamese ESP teachers' perceptions and use of motivational strategies. First, cultural norms related to teacher authority, emotional expression, and collectivism influence the balance between teacher-centered and learner-centered motivational practices. The preference for authoritative role modeling and group-oriented motivation reflects these cultural patterns (Lamb, 2020; Mauludin, 2021).

Second, contextual constraints, including curriculum demands, large class sizes, and limited instructional resources, likely limit teachers' ability to diversify tasks, foster creativity, and integrate culture effectively. Tremblay-Wragg et al. (2021) highlight that contextual factors can moderate the impact of diversified motivational strategies on student motivation in higher education settings.

Third, teacher beliefs and professional development opportunities play a crucial role. The emphasis on clear instructions, task relevance, and positive encouragement suggests teachers' pragmatic orientation toward motivation. Karimi and Hosseini Zade (2019) show that targeted professional development based on motivational theory, such as Keller's ARCS model, can enhance teachers' use of motivational strategies, pointing to the potential benefits of systematic training in ESP teacher education.

In summary, Vietnamese ESP teachers perceive motivational teaching strategies as essential for engaging their students and emphasize teacher enthusiasm, task relevance, and goal alignment. However, challenges remain in developing affective sensitivity, diversifying teaching methods, fostering creativity, and incorporating cultural elements into ESP instruction. These findings underscore the need for culturally responsive professional development programs and curriculum reforms that equip ESP teachers with a wider repertoire of motivational



strategies. By addressing these areas, Vietnamese ESP educators can enhance learner motivation and contribute to more effective and engaging specialized language education.

A significant finding that sets this study apart from much of the existing literature is the clear emphasis Vietnamese EFL teachers in ESP courses place on their own role modeling of motivation, particularly through demonstrating commitment and authenticity, which received notably high ratings. While previous studies often focus broadly on teacher behaviors or instructional strategies, this research highlights the powerful impact of teachers' personal motivation as a foundational element in stimulating student engagement. Additionally, unlike some earlier work that reports strong emotional support as a key motivational factor, this study reveals relatively low levels of teacher sensitivity and rapport-building, suggesting a unique cultural or contextual challenge in Vietnamese ESP classrooms. The study also uncovers a distinctive gap in fostering creativity and cultural exposure, areas that are less emphasized in this context compared to global ESP research, indicating specific opportunities for localized pedagogical development. These nuanced insights contribute fresh perspectives on how motivational strategies operate in Vietnamese ESP settings, expanding the understanding of culturally influenced motivational dynamics in language education.

6. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the motivational strategies employed by Vietnamese EFL teachers in ESP courses. Key findings reveal that teachers place strong emphasis on modeling motivation themselves, particularly through demonstrating commitment and authentic behavior. They also prioritize clarity in task management and support for students' self-confidence through positive feedback. However, areas such as emotional sensitivity, fostering creativity, and cultural exposure were found to be less emphasized. Additionally, while teachers promote autonomy and goal-setting effectively, the social and collaborative aspects of classroom climate, including rapport-building and extracurricular activities, were less prominent. These findings highlight both strengths and areas for growth in the current motivational practices within Vietnamese ESP classrooms.

The implications of this research are significant for both teachers and curriculum developers. For educators, understanding the importance of their own motivational role can encourage more reflective teaching practices that emphasize authenticity and commitment. The identified gaps suggest a need to incorporate more training on emotional responsiveness, creative engagement, and intercultural competence, which could enhance learner motivation and overall language



proficiency. For curriculum designers, integrating varied and culturally relevant materials, as well as promoting group cohesion through collaborative activities, may improve classroom dynamics and student engagement. Policymakers and institutions might also consider providing resources and professional development opportunities that address these areas to foster a more holistic motivational environment.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that should be considered. The data relied primarily on self-reported teacher practices, which may be subject to bias or overestimation. The sample was limited to Vietnamese ESP teachers, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Future research could benefit from including student perspectives to triangulate data and provide a more comprehensive understanding of motivational dynamics. Longitudinal studies examining how motivational strategies impact learner outcomes over time would also be valuable. Finally, experimental research exploring interventions aimed at improving emotional sensitivity and creativity in ESP classrooms could offer practical applications for enhancing motivation.

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