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The effects of teacher-pertinent factors and teacher motivation on Hong Kong English teachers' motivational strategies

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' motivational support is crucial for the enhancement and maintenance of English learners' motivation, yet there has been little enquiry into the factors which drive English teachers to use motivational strategies. Although considerable research has shown links between student and teacher motivation, the assumption that motivated teachers make more frequent and thoughtful motivational efforts has been largely untested. This study, analysing journal and interview data collected from 13 Hong Kong English teachers over a semester, aims to uncover how English teachers' motivational behaviour is shaped by teacher-pertinent factors, and how these factors reflect different facets of teacher motivation. Preparation workload, teaching style, peer sharing, and various self-benefits were found to be influential factors originating from the teachers. The notions of intrinsic teacher motivation, ideal teacher selves, work satisfaction, and demotivation were manifest in the teachers' responses. The findings have implications for school management, teacher trainers, English teachers, and researchers.

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1. Introduction

Motivation has been a frequently investigated construct in research on English learning, owing to the practical importance of mastering English and the hardships it entails. Earlier studies on English learning motivation tended to adopt Gardner and Lambert (1972) social psychological perspective, emphasising learners' attitudes towards English-speaking communities and the resultant learning behaviour. However, the pivotal role played by the English classroom in shaping learners' motivation should not go unheeded, and the English teacher in the classroom exerts substantial influence on learners' motivation as one of their 'significant others' (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 131). The motivational impact brought by the English teacher's personality, behaviour, and teaching style is delineated in Dörnyei's (1994) situational framework of second language (L2) motivation. Apart from conducting good teaching, the English teacher is expected to enhance learners' motivation and sustain their goal-related behaviour (Guilloteaux, 2013). These purposeful interventions are often referred to as motivational strategies. They are used proactively and consciously within the English teacher's 'explicit control', and largely determine the motivational character of the classroom (Dörnyei & Muir, 2019, p. 729). Following Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) pioneering study on Hungarian English teachers' motivational strategies, a series of similar studies has been conducted in diverse educational settings in the last two decades. The majority of them have adopted Dörnyei's (2001) influential framework (see Lamb, [2017] for a summary). This framework recommends 102 motivational strategies for 1) creating basic motivational conditions, 2) generating initial motivation, 3) protecting the motivation, and 4) promoting positive self-evaluation. These four goals correspond roughly to the phases of preaction, action, and post-action proposed in Dörnyei and

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Ottó's (1998) process model of language learning motivation, so Dörnyei's framework boasts not only comprehensiveness but also theoretical soundness.

Notwithstanding the increasing prevalence of out-of-class learning, English learners still spend considerable time in classrooms, and their attitudes and persistence are constantly influenced by their teachers' motivational interventions. What drives English teachers to employ or favour certain strategies is worth investigating, and according to Lamb (2019), it is one of the three pressing questions which guide future research on motivational strategies. As English teachers need to address numerous concerns as well as 'non-motivational considerations', it is unlikely that they randomly adopt strategies from any frameworks or lists (Yang & Sanchez, 2022, p. 510).

One intuitively crucial factor is the perceived importance or effectiveness of the employed strategies. A series of studies (e.g. Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Guilloteaux, 2013; Wong, 2014) have ranked motivational strategies in terms of their frequency of use and perceived usefulness. Some investigated strategies were found to have similar frequency and usefulness rankings, implying that a strategy's frequency of use and perceived usefulness are positively correlated. Granted, English teachers may consider student characteristics and benefits before applying motivational strategies, yet their motivational behaviour is unlikely to be driven solely by student-pertinent factors. Other factors such as English teachers' beliefs, skills, knowledge, workload, and energy – apparently more teacher-pertinent – may also impact strategy implementation (Glas, 2016; Lee, 2015; Ye & Hu, 2024). It is hence an oversimplification to view English teachers' motivational efforts as entirely altruistic.

As student-related factors may not adequately explain English teachers' motivational interventions, research on factors originating from teachers is warranted. One sensible assumption is that English teachers' motivational techniques are affected by their understanding of the notion of motivation. Indeed, Japanese and Chilean English teachers' perspectives on motivation were found to impact their capabilities to motivate learners (e.g. Cowie & Sakui, 2011; Glas, 2016). In Hong Kong, however, such impact was reported to be minimal (Lee, 2015). Given the meagre research and inconclusive findings, it seems unconvincing to suggest English teachers' perspectives on motivation as the primary predictor of their motivational efforts.

Another potential determinant of English teachers' motivational interventions is the teachers' own motivation. Teacher motivation is complex because on the one hand, teaching is human behaviour which can be described with self-determination theory, expectancy-value theories, and other prominent motivation theories; on the other hand, teachers are believed to possess a unique set of motivational dispositions. It is frequently assumed that teacher motivation comprises a main intrinsic constituent and career-related temporal aspects, and is susceptible to stress, low autonomy, limited intellectual challenge, and other negative contextual factors (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) describe teacher motivation as a combination of altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic reasons to teach. Pennington (1992) conceptualises English teacher motivation with the notion of work satisfaction. The moral and social values of teaching tend to bring the most satisfaction, whereas dissatisfaction is frequently ascribed to promotion and pay. Doyle and Kim (1999) view English teacher motivation as teachers' intrinsic interest in helping students minus dissatisfaction caused by mandated curricula, directives, materials, and assessments.

Despite the different conceptualisations of teacher motivation, the relationship between teacher and student motivation has been confirmed by research. Teachers who have high expectations about students' potential and feel assured of teaching success often bring positive effects on students' self-concept, aspiration, and interaction (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Teachers' passion and enthusiasm can enhance students' enjoyment in class and interest in the content (Wild et al., 1992), and the positive effects can extend beyond the lessons (Patrick et al., 2000). Notwithstanding these encouraging findings, it is premature to conclude that motivated English teachers tend to employ motivational strategies more frequently and thoughtfully. For one thing, showing high expectations and enthusiasm accounts for only a small portion of Dörnyei's (2001) recommendations or all practical motivational strategies. For another, it is not impossible that some English teachers rely mainly on their personality and charisma, rather than well-planned motivational practices, to maintain students' motivation.

Previous studies on the relationship between teacher and student motivation have shed little light on how teacher motivation propels English teachers' use of motivational techniques. One exception is

Bernaus et al. (2009), which examined not only teacher and student motivation but also teachers' motivational behaviour in Catalanian English classes. Teachers who reported higher motivation to teach English were perceived by their students as more noticeable users of motivating strategies. Certain features of this study, however, may limit its generalisability. The 26 investigated strategies, including assigning homework, using grammar exercises, and following the student's textbook, were adopted to 'help students acquire competencies related to the use of the language' (p. 29). There was a possibility that the enhancement of student motivation was merely a secondary purpose if not an incidental outcome. This may explain the uses of the terms 'motivating strategies' (p. 25) and 'teaching strategies' (p. 29) rather than 'motivational strategies'. Further, the short questionnaire employed in this study, comprising only 12 broad statements, could hardly capture the diversity and complexity of English teacher motivation.

The dearth of studies on the relationship between English teachers' motivation and their in-class motivational behaviour is evident in Lamb's (2017) comprehensive review of research on the motivational dimension of language teaching. Bernaus et al. (2009), regarded by Lamb as 'a rare attempt' (p. 329), is the only example cited. In fact, attempts to account for teachers' motivational behaviour with teacher motivation are also scarce in fields beyond applied linguistics. In Han and Yin (2016) non-language-teaching-specific review of teacher motivation research, only one study of this type is cited: a study by Taylor et al. (2009) on the relationship between physical education teachers' motivational strategies and several facets of their motivation.

In sum, English teachers' uses of motivational strategies are driven by a body of factors. Neither student-related concerns nor teachers' views on motivation have proven to be decisive. There may be a close yet underresearched relationship between English teachers' motivational behaviour and their own motivation. After all, language teachers who are flexible, enthusiastic, and approachable in their teaching are often highly motivated themselves (Lamb & Wedell, 2015). As it is less feasible to examine all types of factors in a single study, the present study aims to unveil specifically teacher-pertinent factors which determine English teachers' implementation of motivational strategies. The study is guided by the following three research questions:

1. What teacher-pertinent factors affect English teachers' uses of motivational strategies?
2. What is the perceived impact of these teacher-pertinent factors?
3. How are these teacher-pertinent factors related to teacher motivation?

2. Methods

2.1. Research site

This study was conducted at a community college in Hong Kong because of its unique characteristics. Community colleges in Hong Kong, unlike their counterparts in North America, were introduced to rapidly expand the higher education sector and reduce youth unemployment. The majority of community college students in Hong Kong were unsuccessful in gaining direct entry to publicly-funded universities, and regard associate degrees as an alternative route. These students, after experiencing setbacks in previous education, tend to have mediocre motivation. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that teachers at Hong Kong community colleges provide continual motivational support for students.

2.2. Participants

The participants of this study were 13 Cantonese-speaking teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) at the aforementioned community college, recruited by both purposive and snowball sampling, with the approval of the college director. They all possessed postgraduate degrees and tertiary teaching experience ranging from one to nine years, and were teaching a variety of courses during data collection. The participants' pseudonyms, educational and professional backgrounds, and teaching duties are shown in Table 1. Ethical measures including collecting informed consent, guaranteeing confidentiality, and ensuring voluntary participation were taken.

Table 1. Profiles of teacher participants.

Pseudonym	Tertiary teaching experience	Highest qualification	Teaching duty
Teacher A	5 years	PhD	EAS
Teacher B	8 years	MA	EAS, PECS
Teacher D	3 years	MA	EAS, EWC
Teacher F	8 years	MEd	PECS
Teacher G	6 years	MA	EAS, PECS
Teacher J	7 years	MEd	EAS, EWC
Teacher L	9 years	MA	EAS
Teacher M	4 years	EdD	EAS, PECS
Teacher P	7 years	MA	EAS, PECS
Teacher R	8 years	MA	AEG
Teacher S	1 year	MPhil	EWC
Teacher T	7 years	MA	EAS, PECS
Teacher W	8 years	PhD	EAS

AEG: Analysis of English Grammar.

EAS: English for Academic Studies.

EWC: English for Workplace Communication.

PECS: Practical English for College Students.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

The data collection lasted one semester. The first adopted instrument was reflective journals, which would allow the participants to record their experiences and perceptions at their own pace. The 13 teachers each wrote two reflective journals – one in Week 7 and another in Week 12 – to describe several recently used motivational strategies. Guidelines and prompts were provided for them to stimulate their reflections and direct their attention to the topics being researched (see [Appendix A](#)). The three areas covered in the journal guide were teachers' knowledge of motivational strategies, details of strategy use, and outcomes. The journals were written in English with no word limit. Whenever more elaboration was deemed necessary, the investigators asked follow-up questions via email. A total of 26 journals were collected. The reported motivational behaviour was classified into eight macrostrategies (see [Appendix B](#)), and they bore a close resemblance to the recommendations in Dörnyei's (2001) influential framework.

A week after the end of the semester, individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit deeper insights into language classroom pedagogy and motivation. The aims were to ascertain various teacher-pertinent factors which fuelled the uses of the strategies recorded in the journals, and to compare the impact of those factors (see [Appendix C](#) for sample interview questions). The interviews were conducted in Cantonese Chinese and audio-recorded. Each interview lasted 30 minutes to nearly an hour. During the interviews, the investigators kept encouraging open-ended discussion and additional comments instead of accepting a first answer as a complete response. As a result, varied and extended responses were collected from the participants despite the uses of seemingly closed interview questions.

Qualitative thematic analysis was adopted in this study. The interview recordings were transcribed and then translated into English. The English transcripts were sent to the teachers for checking. NVivo was used to code the interview and journal data. Since little research has been undertaken to elucidate the impact of teacher-pertinent factors on motivational behaviour, or the relationship between the factors and teacher motivation, no attempt was made to validate or challenge any existing theoretical frameworks. Instead, the first investigator reviewed the transcripts following the guidelines from Corbin and Strauss (2015), and eventually generated six factor-related themes:

1. Preparation workload
2. Teaching style
3. Peer sharing
4. Self-benefits
5. Previous English learning and teacher education
6. Perspectives on motivation

The two investigators then coded independently half of the transcripts and journals. Agreement and disagreement over all the codes assigned under the six factor-related themes and selected facets of

Table 2. Teacher-pertinent factors affecting uses of motivational strategies.

Factor	Impact on motivational strategies	Relationship with teacher motivation
Preparation workload	High	Stress
Teaching style	Moderate	Possible language teacher selves
Peer sharing	Moderate	Intrinsic motivation, work satisfaction
Self-benefits	Moderate	Intrinsic motivation, possible language teacher selves, work satisfaction, stress
Previous English learning and teacher education	Low	/
Perspectives on motivation	Low	/

teacher motivation were numerically calculated. The level of agreement was 73%. After further discussion and reading of related research literature, the two investigators coded the remaining transcripts and journals. The level of agreement rose to 90%, which was higher than the 80% threshold suggested by Smagorinsky (2008). Lastly, the two investigators resolved via discussion the remaining differences.

3. Results and discussion

Six teacher-pertinent factors, with varying associations with teacher motivation, were discussed and evaluated by the teacher participants (see Table 2). First, preparation workload was categorised as a high-impact factor because the majority of the teacher participants reported it as a moderate to strong influence on their motivational behaviour. Second, the three moderate-impact factors either had a modest effect on over half of the participants or were cited by a few participants as robust. Lastly, the two low-impact factors, scarcely mentioned or elaborated on, were perceived to have little influence. The results, taken together, indicate that teacher-pertinent factors are numerous and influential. It is advisable that future research which aims to provide a more comprehensive account of teachers' motivational techniques consider the aforesaid factors within teachers.

3.1. Preparation workload

The most influential factor, reported by all but one of the participants, was the time and effort required to prepare for a motivational strategy. Teacher T admitted to avoiding unfamiliar strategies that might require too much preparation (Excerpt 1); Teacher F preferred strategies which could also help him meet external requirements without inducing extra workload (Excerpt 2); Teacher A would resort to familiar and perhaps less effective strategies if time was insufficient (Excerpt 3); and Teachers L & M reported that strategies specific to an academic English course were more familiar to them, thus requiring less preparation (Excerpts 4 & 5). Excerpt 3 also hints that some English teachers will seek help from colleagues and other sources when planning their motivational interventions. These additional factors will be discussed in later sections.

Excerpt 1 (interview)

Teacher T: I will not consider a strategy if it is too unfamiliar to me and it takes me too long to get prepared.

Excerpt 2 (journal)

Teacher F: This strategy happens to align closely with the college's requirement of providing constructive and timely feedback. Using it allows me to accomplish two goals without dedicating extra time and effort, which works well for me.

Excerpt 3 (interview)

Teacher A: There are different topics to teach every week, and administrative duties too. It also takes much time to set tests and assignments. All these reduce the time for preparing motivational techniques. Sometimes I really run out of ideas, and if time permits I will look for sources and ask my colleagues for help. If not, I can only use the strategies I am familiar with, which may not be the most effective.

Excerpt 4 (interview)

Teacher L: If there is inadequate time, I can only follow the course outline and the textbook... Also, I have taught English for Academic Studies many times, so I am more comfortable with the strategies specific to

that course. A lot of notes and PowerPoint files were provided for teaching that course too. If it is another course, I may not do so that well.

Excerpt 5 (interview)

Teacher M: As long as I get to continue to teach English for Academic Studies and its content does not undergo major changes, these strategies remain useful and little work is required to revise or renew them.

These excerpts showed that the teacher participants might abandon strategies which greatly increased their workload, or opt for more readily usable strategies with lower motivational effectiveness. Attempts to reduce changes and adopt routine techniques regardless of the situation are typical defence mechanisms exhibited by teachers whose motivation is undermined by stress (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998). The participants' perception of preparation workload as the most influential factor implies a close relationship between English teachers' stress and motivational behaviour. Therefore, the assumption that English teachers' motivational behaviour is mainly driven by student needs is untenable. Studies examining the frequency of use and perceived usefulness of motivational strategies without considering teachers' own concerns may be prone to yield skewed findings.

3.2. Teaching style

Three participants regarded teaching style as a significant factor. They employed motivational strategies which aligned with their deep-rooted beliefs about what constitutes effective English learning. Teachers R and T showed preference for more teacher-oriented and controlled classrooms, and regarded exceeding freedom with disfavour (Excerpts 6 & 7). They both had high awareness of their teaching principles and their resultant choices of strategies, which confirmed their judgement that teaching style was an important factor.

Excerpt 6 (interview)

Teacher R: I adopt teacher-oriented pedagogy mostly, so the interaction between me and my student is led by me. I rarely use competitions. Students have to be reminded of what to do and stopped from digressing. What I do is to let students carry out focused discussion and walk around them and chip in.

Excerpt 7 (interview)

Teacher T: While I provide much freedom for my students, a precondition is that I keep most things under control. If you let students decide everything, the class can get disorganised quickly. The strategies I use have to fit my teaching plan well, so they are likely to be strategies that I have tried, or that does not take up too much class time.

Teacher B repeatedly disapproved of motivational techniques with little conspicuous relationship with the English course content, citing gags and physical activities as examples. She rated practicality and relatedness of strategies as important factors in her strategy selection, and later confirmed that they were manifestations of her teaching style (Excerpt 8).

Excerpt 8 (interview)

Teacher B: The second most important factor is the practicality and relatedness of the strategies... I don't use gags and physical activities that are just for fun. Why should I use them if they elicit nothing but only laughter among students?

Investigator: Can I say that your emphasis on practicality and relatedness is one facet of your teaching style, which determines what strategies you use?

Teacher B: Precisely.

Though only three teachers discussed the factor of teaching style, it appeared to have a screening effect: If a certain motivational strategy was incompatible with their teaching style, it would be dismissed regardless of its potential motivational effect. This phenomenon is consonant with Maeng and Lee's (2015) conclusion that English teachers who have established more rigid philosophy of teaching and are apprehensive of class disorder may use a narrower range of motivational strategies. The strong reported effect of teaching style on motivational behavior is also congruent with Kubanyiova's (2009)

perspectives on teacher motivation: English teachers' desire to use motivational strategies compatible with their deep-rooted teaching style can be a manifestation of their ideal language teacher selves.

3.3. Peer sharing

Some teacher participants' motivational practices were influenced by peers during teacher training and employment. Teacher R recalled learning numerous strategies in the certificate of education programme, and the bulk of the knowledge came from his classmates rather than teachers (Excerpt 9). Similarly, Teacher L had learnt a specific motivational strategy from a classmate of her bachelor's degree, which became a regularly used strategy in her subsequent teaching (Excerpt 10).

Excerpt 9 (interview)

Teacher R: Many of them were learnt when I did the certificate of education. I discussed a lot with my classmates, and we shared our teaching plans, from which I could find some useful strategies... A bit knowledge came from the teachers. Most came from my classmates.

Excerpt 10 (journal)

Teacher L: I learnt this motivational strategy from a classmate while I was reading for my degree. She was teaching part-time, and she told me several times how this strategy had helped her keep her students engaged and excited.

Sharing among colleagues was also reported to impose some effect. Teacher A cited strategies introduced by her colleagues as a reliable source, probably because she preferred using strategies which her colleagues had tried and approved of (Excerpt 11). Teacher L agreed that her colleagues, similar to her university classmates, affected her strategy use, and one of her colleagues even gave her materials that facilitated the use of certain strategies (Excerpt 12).

Excerpt 11 (interview)

Teacher A: They are mainly introduced and shared by my experienced colleagues. When they tell me that certain strategies are effective, I may try some of them... effective strategies that I have heard, often during my colleagues' sharing... I am more inclined to use strategies which have been tried and found effective by people I know.

Excerpt 12 (interview)

Teacher L: What my colleagues introduce to me also affects my strategy use... colleagues in a vocational institution, and also colleagues in a university. One colleague gave me a CD and told me how to employ certain strategies with it.

The participants' willingness to autonomously learn new motivational strategies from peers in collegial and supportive groups could have been fuelled by their intrinsic motivation to teach, as autonomy and relatedness to others are fundamental human needs leading to self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The findings here also implied that the participants' motivational practices could beget work satisfaction on the levels of ability utilisation and co-workers, based on Pennington and Riley's (1991) classification: the participants took the opportunities to apply strategies learnt earlier (ability utilisation), and the exchanges of insights into effective motivational techniques were probably facilitated by a coherent and supportive group of colleagues (co-workers). It is evident that the reported factor of peer sharing is closely related to certain facets of teacher motivation.

3.4. Self-benefits

More than half of the teacher participants showed awareness of how they could benefit from employing motivational strategies. The reported self-benefits included a cooperative and productive atmosphere, fun and enjoyment, knowledge and skill enhancement, and positive formal evaluation from students.

Motivational strategies may reduce boredom and student idleness in English classes, and thus increase the likelihood of meeting the teaching and learning outcomes. This was regarded as a self-benefit by several teacher participants, probably because they felt relieved and satisfied to see their students stay engaged and receptive (Excerpts 13 & 14). Teacher T believed that motivational strategies

could make his students follow the teaching plan more closely and pose less resistance (Excerpt 15). Such student behaviour, as illustrated earlier in Excerpt 7, was endorsed in Teacher T's teaching style.

Excerpt 13 (interview)

Teacher A: With effective L2 motivational strategies, students' attitudes will be more positive and they will show more interest, which is a delight to the teacher... The whole teaching process will be smoother, and there will be less hardship to the teacher... The classroom atmosphere and teaching efficiency will be enhanced.

Excerpt 14 (interview)

Teacher J: A self-benefit is that students will feel less bored... The teacher will feel dejected if most students rest their heads on the desks and look at their phones. Good strategies can make students stay attentive and listen intently. That is what makes teaching meaningful.

Excerpt 15 (interview)

Teacher T: A self-benefit is that motivated students are more satisfied and compliant. They are more likely to follow your plan and less likely to question or oppose you.

The participants' success in creating a pleasant classroom atmosphere and retaining students' attention could result in raised work satisfaction on the levels of responsibility and achievement, according to Pennington and Riley's (1991) classification. In addition, the student opposition and rebellion which the three participants tried to avoid were common sources of teacher stress (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). It was hence possible that some participants had been combating the demotivating effect of stress, and their motivational efforts might have been consequently compromised. In other words, Excerpts 13 to 15 bear close relationship to several important components of teacher motivation.

Another reported self-benefit was fun and enjoyment. Teacher G remarked that she enjoyed preparing for strategies which were genuinely fun (Excerpt 16). Teacher S found it self-rewarding to see interesting materials during strategy preparation (Excerpt 17). The inherent fun and enjoyment induced by some motivational strategies were apparently intrinsic motives originating from the educational process itself, which is one important source of intrinsic rewards of teaching (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). These intrinsic motives were likely to be conducive to the participants' motivation to teach.

Excerpt 16 (interview)

Teacher G: Yes. I benefit from the strategies because they are fun and engaging. Sometimes I have a lot of laughs when preparing for the strategies.

Excerpt 17 (interview)

Teacher S: I benefit from finding materials which are inspiring and interesting to me... It is worthwhile to prepare and use motivational strategies even from a personal perspective.

Other self-benefits such as enhanced skills and knowledge were cited. Specifically, the teacher participants gained knowledge about the world and teenagers (Excerpts 18 & 19), enriched their English skills (Excerpt 18), and sharpened their motivational skills (Excerpt 20).

Excerpt 18 (interview)

Teacher R: Using the strategies allows me to know more about current teenagers' needs and thoughts. I also get to enrich my world knowledge. Without adequate world knowledge you will have a hard time following some of the course content. Also, every time I prepare extra materials, I can brush up on some English skills.

Excerpt 19 (interview)

Teacher W: After using some strategies, I know more about what knowledge my students possess or lack, which can help me think of ways to raise their interest and participation. In short, I feel I know the young generation better thanks to some of the strategies.

Excerpt 20 (journal)

Teacher A: The biggest benefit of using this motivational strategy was that I became more adept at it. Now I can use it more confidently, and perhaps in other educational settings.

The English knowledge and motivational skills gained by the participants, according to Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) classification, were subject-related rewards which could strengthen the participants' professionalism and intrinsic motivation. A better understanding of the world and teenagers' characteristics, while not directly related to English teaching, could raise the participants' sense of efficacy. Efficacy, or competence, engenders intrinsically motivated behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and in the context of teaching it pertains to teachers' beliefs about their ability to facilitate student learning (Fives & Alexander, 2004). As regards possible language teacher selves (Kubanyiova, 2009), the abovementioned enhancement probably signalled the participants' recognition of the dissonance between their current and ideal language teacher selves, and their motivation to diminish the dissonance. The reported gains in skills and knowledge, therefore, were likely to signal the enhancement of teacher motivation.

The only reported self-benefit which might be related to career security (Pennington & Riley, 1991) was the prospect of receiving more favourable feedback from students. Teacher J believed that students who appreciated her motivational efforts might rate her more positively in the student feedback questionnaire (Excerpt 21). Since this reported self-benefit was merely a speculation, it was uncertain whether it would eventually enhance Teacher J's work satisfaction as a component of her motivation.

Excerpt 21 (interview)

Teacher J: Students may think that you are a nice and caring person, and probably their feedback in the student feedback questionnaire will be more favourable ... This and more positive student responses in class are the two main benefits.

3.5. Previous English learning and teacher education

Only two teacher participants reported adopting strategies which they had experienced earlier as students, providing examples from secondary (Excerpt 22) and university (Excerpt 23) English learning respectively. The direct imitation of the strategies implied that previous English learning had considerable effect on the two teachers' strategy use.

Excerpt 22 (interview)

Teacher A: And some strategies which my secondary English teachers had used. One example I can recall is using encouragement and showing empathy. I remembered back then it worked quite well when I and my classmates were tired of and somewhat irritated by the incessant exam preparation.

Excerpt 23 (journal)

Teacher T: This motivational strategy was used frequently by one of my university English teachers. I remember it quite well because it was new to me at that time. I don't think any of my secondary English teachers had used that.

While the majority of the participants remembered being introduced to the notion of motivation during their university studies, none of them cited their university education as a major source of explicit knowledge about motivational strategies. As shown previously in Excerpt 9, Teacher R acknowledged that some knowledge was dispersed by his university teachers, yet it was not as substantial as the strategies and other insights shared by his university classmates. Teacher L was the other teacher participant who reported learning strategies from teachers and materials during teacher education, and incorporating them into her English teaching (Excerpt 10).

Previous English learning seemed to have little effect on the participants' motivational behaviour. It can be surmised that most of them when receiving English education long ago, evaluated their teachers' strategies by their motivating power rather than their prospective usefulness in future teaching. The scant influence of teacher training on the participants' strategy use might imply low perceived practicality of the acquired knowledge, as teachers often regard teacher education programmes as overtheoretical, irrelevant, and unrealistic (Markee, 1997).

3.6. Perspectives on motivation

The teacher participants' understanding of motivation seldom exerted strong effects on their strategy use. Most participants, without much hesitation, gave a low priority to understanding of motivation as a

possible factor. Two teacher participants appeared to apply their understanding of motivation directly to their strategy use. However, only a fraction of their understanding was evidenced in their stated exemplar strategies. Specifically, interest and everyday relevance were the only components the two teachers stated when linking their understanding to their strategy use (Excerpts 24 & 25). These two components, even when not associated with motivation, have long been regarded as desirable characteristics of English teaching, so whether the two teachers' strategy use was attributable to their understanding of motivation is questionable.

Excerpt 24 (interview)

Teacher S: I understand that student may be motivated to learn because they find it interesting or useful, so I will prepare teaching materials which are fun and relevant to their life or career...It is mainly my understanding of the interest-related elements of motivation.

Excerpt 25 (interview)

Teacher R: Whenever possible, I make sure that the examples I show to my students are phenomena they will come across in daily life. Sometimes I even refer to Chinese to raise their awareness of some linguistic differences.

Investigator: In other words, information or facts that can interest your students?

Teacher R: Right.

The almost negligible influence of the teachers' understanding of motivation on their motivational practices shows that language teachers' cognitive changes do not always engender behavioural changes (Borg, 2003), and teachers' behaviour in class can remain independent of their perceptions of student motivation (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008). Although teachers' perspectives on motivation is a worthy research topic in its own right, it should not be assumed that expanding and deepening English teachers' understanding will always lead to more frequent and thoughtful motivational efforts.

The teacher participants' familiarity with research-related notions of motivation was disappointingly low. Most participants recalled no theories, frameworks, or studies which affected their motivational behaviour. Only one teacher reported consulting academic literature on motivational practices (Excerpt 26). The other texts cited by the participants were either broad, non-academic articles or merely online resources such as worksheets and language learning tips.

Excerpt 26 (interview)

Teacher W: I learnt some strategies from articles...journal articles, and literature reviews of longer ones...I read an article introducing 10 ways to motivate L2 learners, which I did not really understand. In the discussion with my PhD supervisor, she recalled her teaching and learning experience, and then explained how those strategies were used and exerted an effect.

Presumably, most teacher participants' exposure to empirical studies on motivational strategies had been limited, so they might not have benefitted from recent findings and recommendations. There is a pressing need to ascertain what discourages English teachers from acquiring research-based knowledge and integrating it to their strategy use, because teachers with scarce systematic knowledge about motivational strategies may rely heavily on 'anecdote, experience, and or some version of reasoned guessing' (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008, p. 2072).

4. Conclusion

The indispensable role played by teachers in supporting English learners' motivation necessitates research on what initiates and sustains English teachers' motivational behaviour. This study, utilising reflective journals and interviews, unveiled six teacher-pertinent factors at a Hong Kong community college. Preparation workload, reported by almost every teacher participant, was indisputably the most influential factor. Teaching style, peer sharing, and self-benefits exerted considerable influence. Perhaps unexpectedly, previous education and perspectives on motivation, which have been prominent research foci for years, appeared to have limited impact. These factors are related to various facets of teacher motivation such as stress, possible language teacher selves, intrinsic motivation, and work satisfaction.

Although this study found that certain reported factors were manifestations of the teacher participants' motivation to teach, it does not suggest a positive correlation between the strength of teacher motivation and the frequency of strategy implementation. Instead, motivated English teachers may be more inclined to adopt varied and tailored strategies, whereas demotives such as stress may lead to ritualised and mechanical strategy use. Therefore, school management and teacher trainers are expected to help English teachers safeguard their motivation, for the benefit of both teachers and learners. Shoaib's (2004) framework of recommendations concerning the enhancement of teacher motivation, comprising the teacher level, the managerial level, and the ministerial/institutional level, is particularly valuable. Likewise, English teachers are advised to explore and employ self-motivating strategies. A compact collection of such strategies is proposed by Corno and Kanfer (1993), which includes reflecting immediately after class, observing other teachers, analysing the sources of anxiety, and more. Falout (2010) also illustrates how teachers can remotivate themselves with practices following three principles: managing emotions, joining communities, and enhancing efficacy.

Another important implication of this study is that if English teachers' motivation to teach is at risk, even a comprehensive list of empirically tested motivational strategies such as Dörnyei (2001) can hardly transform them into thoughtful or critical strategy users. It hence seems imperative that any attempts to inform English teachers of effective motivational strategies be supplemented with a brief introduction to the notion of teacher motivation, and if possible some simple questions for them to evaluate their motivational status. This may urge English teachers who are eager to become versatile motivators but have suboptimal motivation themselves to seek help proactively.

Owing to limited space, this study examines only teacher-pertinent factors which predict English teachers' motivational behaviour. Some reported factors bear close relationship with the intrinsic and personal aspects of teacher motivation. Future studies which elucidate the significance of student-specific, course-specific, institutional, and societal factors are called for, and they will foreseeably reveal how English teachers' altruistic, extrinsic, and career-related motives influence their efforts to raise students' motivation. Also, this study relies on only self-reported data, which may introduce biases and subjectivity, so its findings need to be interpreted with some caution. It is advisable that future studies on teacher motivation and motivational behaviour achieve data triangulation by incorporating classroom observations, as recommended by numerous researchers (Papi & Abdollahzadeh, 2012; Sugita & Takeuchi, 2010; Wong, 2014).

Disclosure statement

There is no potential conflict of interest.

Ethics declaration

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Appendix A. Guide for teacher reflective journals

Please write several motivational strategies which you have used recently. Please cover the three areas specified below. Some prompts are provided for each topic to guide your writing. You are free to include other relevant content.

1. Knowledge of motivational strategies
 - What motivational strategies have you used recently?
 - Where did you learn about these strategies (from colleagues, books, courses, etc.)?
 - Are these strategies specific to English teaching?
2. Details of motivational strategies
 - Were these strategies specific to any course content?
 - How did these strategies correspond to students' needs or any unsatisfactory learning behaviour/performance?
 - How did the strategies correspond to any external requirement?
 - How did you benefit from the uses of these strategies?
 - At what stage of the lesson did you use these strategies?
3. Outcomes
 - Were the strategies effective?
 - Why do you think they were effective/ineffective?
 - What motivated/demotivated behaviour was exhibited by students?
 - How can they be modified so that they are more effective?
 - Will you use them again in the future?

Appendix B. Motivational strategies reported by teacher participants in journals

- Build students' confidence
- Draw students' attention to unique and difficult aspects of English
- Enhance the authenticity of English teaching and learning
- Prepare students for assignments and assessments
- Promote learner autonomy
- Provide students with positive information feedback
- Stress the instrumental values of learning English
- Use group work, games, competitions, and other interactive activities

Appendix C. Sample interview questions

- In your opinion, are your students motivated to learn English?
- Do you believe that you can enhance your students' English learning motivation?
- Where did you learn about the motivational strategies you reported in the journal?
- Has your understanding of English learning motivation affected your uses of these motivational strategies?
- Have any studies, theories, or frameworks affected your uses of these motivational strategies?
- Have you learnt these motivational strategies from your colleagues?
- Have you shared these motivational strategies with your colleagues?
- Have you benefited from using these motivational strategies?
- How much preparation do these motivational strategies require?
- To what extent do these motivational strategies align with your teaching philosophy and style?
- How do you rate the relative impact of all the reported factors on your uses of motivational strategies?