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## **Discrepancies Between Rural Students' and English Teachers' Perceptions of Motivational Strategies**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the differences between first-year junior high school students from rural areas and their English teachers regarding beliefs about the importance of motivational strategies and perceptions concerning frequency of use. Eighty-nine students and their three English teachers from a rural junior high school in central Taiwan participated in this survey. The results indicate that these rural students and their teachers had different perceptions of the ten domains of motivational macrostrategies, elaborated in Dörnyei and Csizér's survey. The results also show that the rural students are fond of learning in a pleasant environment, whereas teachers consider recognizing students' effort as the priority. Concerning frequency, students and teachers had similar perceptions of the motivational macrostrategies teachers used. Findings also indicate that strategies regarded as important are underutilized in the classroom, though there seems to be a slight difference between what teachers believe and what they actually do. Implications and suggestions for motivating learning are articulated in this study for the rural EFL teaching and learning context.

*Keywords:* Rural high school, EFL, student motivation, motivational strategies

### **Introduction**

The Government of Taiwan has put great efforts into implementing English curricula from elementary to the university level. English is closely linked to individual instrumental success. However, in an educational climate that is test-oriented, such as that of Taiwan, English teaching focuses on vocabulary training and grammatical rules practice. The use of English in the real world has been consistently neglected. Due to contextual and cultural factors, teachers in Taiwan play a crucial role in English education. Teaching not only has an impact on schooling outcomes, but also influences students' learning achievements (Huang, 2014).

Rural school students are often disadvantaged, and rural teachers usually face severe challenges, not only due to resource constraints but also related to the students themselves. The transitional process from elementary school to junior high school is another problem. English teaching and learning for elementary school children is usually fun and enjoyable. When students continue their studies at the junior high school level, English study becomes test-oriented to prepare for the high school entrance exam. Under such circumstances, students who find it difficult to adapt to the new environment may give up learning easily. Rural students, in particular, are at a risk of low motivation and lack of academic success due to their disadvantaged social status and limited access to resources (Hardré, Crowson, Debacker & White, 2007). In order to eliminate the gap between rural and urban schools, technology appliances such as interactive white-board, computer-assisted teaching has been widely applied. Yet, studies that focus on educational technology applications point out that

technological functions cannot directly enhance students' learning efficacy; teachers' strategies are vital (Kulik & Kulik, 1991; Vanels, 1990).

### **Motivational Strategies**

Motivating students to learn is a complex and challenging issue that teachers need to face daily (Dörnyei, 2001). Studies have focused on the development of effective classroom motivational strategies (William & Burden, 1997; Dörnyei, 2001; Brophy, 2004). Nearly two decades ago, Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) conducted an empirical study with 200 English teachers in Hungary to consider the importance and the frequency of motivational strategies. Based on their Ten Commandments for motivating learners, Dörnyei (2001) provides a framework of more than 100 motivational strategies that are categorized into four stages: creating, generating, maintaining, and encouraging learner motivation.

However, the success of implementing such a well-defined framework for effective application in the classroom is affected by a variety of contextual factors, such as learners' level of motivation (Hiromori, 2006), level of language proficiency (Sugita & Takeuchi, 2010), and teachers' perceptions of strategy importance (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). In Cheng and Dörnyei' study, 387 English teachers in Taiwan were examined and ranked according to a list of motivational strategies according to the importance perceived and frequency of use while teaching. The results indicated a mismatch between the strategies teachers perceived to be important and the frequency of the use of those strategies. This led to the underutilization of strategies deemed important.

To obtain feedback from learners about their perspectives of motivational strategies, Bernaus and Gardner (2008) investigated 31 English teachers and 694 students in Spain on the perceived use and the effect of the same 26 motivational strategies in the classroom. Their findings show that students and teachers only agreed on the frequency of some strategies. The results suggest a disagreement between teachers' and students' preferred motivational strategies. A similar study in Korea involving 27 English teachers and over 1,300 students was conducted to evaluate the effects of motivational strategies on student EFL motivation in classrooms (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). Through a range of instruments, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei find a strong relationship between teachers' motivational teaching practices and their students' motivation in the classroom. This also indicates that students' motivation can be improved through the use of motivational strategies.

One strategy does not fit all students, and contextual elements will influence a given group (Bandura, 1997; Black & Deci, 2000). As Reeve (2005) puts it, motivation is a process, not simply a goal to reach. Students come into a classroom with a variety of past learning experiences. Their motivation can be dramatically influenced through complicated interactions with their teachers, schools, societies, and many other contextual factors inside and outside the classroom (Hardré, Sullivan & Roberts, 2008). Traditionally, teachers play a major role in knowledge delivery, and they decide what and how to teach. Therefore, among the influential factors mentioned, teachers are the most dominant element. Teachers, therefore, make a difference in student motivation (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008).

The relationship between students and teachers in rural schools is different from the student-teacher relationship in an urban setting. Teachers in a rural setting are not only educators, but also noticeable members of the community. Hence, teachers can have an even greater motivation affect than students' peers (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008). It is suggested that a gap exists in rural schools between students' learning and achievement and their teachers' expectations of what students can achieve with motivation (Hardré & Sullivan, 2009). In addition, there is no study of motivational strategies in the Taiwanese rural junior high school

context. This study, therefore, examines the connection between teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to student perceptions.

### Research Questions

1. What are rural students' perceptions of the importance of motivational strategies and how often teachers use them?
2. What are rural teachers' perceptions of the importance of motivational strategies and the frequency with which teachers use them in teaching?
3. Do rural students and teachers perceive the importance and frequency of the use of motivational strategies similarly or differently?

### Methodology

This study compares students' and teachers' perceptions of the use of motivational strategies from two perspectives. One is to explain the importance of the strategies teachers perceive as motivational for students to learn. The other perspective focuses on the frequency of the use of motivational strategies in the classroom. In rural areas, teachers largely affect rural student motivation, as mentioned earlier. Hence, this study examines both students' and teachers' perceptions of motivational strategies.

### Participants

One participant identified a rural junior high school located in central Taiwan, which was chosen for this study. Originally, this effort was designed as part of a three-year study to examine rural junior high school students' motivational change regarding English learning at school. As such, only first year junior high school students and their English teachers participated in this study.

A total of 89 first-year junior high school students from four classes took part in this study. The class size is small and gender balanced (Table 2). Four English teachers who are responsible for teaching these four classes were recruited. The background information of these classes and of the English teachers is presented in Tables 1 and 2. These three English teachers (one male and two females) were the English teachers of these four classes. As shown in Table 1, these teachers have been teaching English at the current school for years. They were all English-majors in their BA degree.

Table 1  
*Teachers' Profile*

Teacher	Gender	Age	Educational level	English majors	Teaching experience	Teaching in current school
ET01	M	41	BA	Yes	Over 10 years	Over 10 years
ET02	F	34	BA	Yes	Over 10 years	8 years
ET03	F	44	BA	Yes	10 years	10 years

Table 2  
*Students' Profile*

Class	No. of students	Gender		English Teacher
		Male	Female	
Class 101	22	12	10	ET01
Class 102	22	12	10	ET03
Class 103	21	11	10	ET02
Class 104	24	13	11	ET03

### Instrument

To compare students' and teachers' perspectives on motivational strategies, two questionnaires containing the same questions were employed for both students and teachers. The only difference between these two sets of questionnaires was the rating scales. The first asked participants to use a 5-point scale ranked from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important) to rate the importance of the 28 motivational strategies. This survey is designed to collect data on how both students and teachers perceive the importance of motivational strategies. For the second questionnaire, students were asked to rate the frequency of teachers' use of each motivational strategies in class using a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). This questionnaire was carried out to rate the frequency of each motivational strategy teachers used and how frequently students experience each motivational strategy used in class.

The questionnaire items were adapted from Cheng and Dörnyei's study (2007). Considering students' psychological development, some items were deleted and translated into the student's native language, Chinese. For the final version of the questionnaire, there are 28 motivational strategies consisting of the ten important motivational macrostrategies (Table 3).

Table 3

#### *Component strategies*

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#### Macrostrategies

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#### **Proper teacher behaviour**

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- (1) Establish good relationship with students
  - (9) Show your enthusiasm for teaching
  - (24) Be yourself in front of students
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#### **Recognize students' efforts**

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- (5) Make sure grades reflect students' effort and hard work
  - (19) Monitor students' progress and celebrate their victories
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#### **Promote learners' self-confidence**

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- (7) Make clear to students that communicating meaning effectively is more important than being grammatically correct
  - (27) Provide students with positive feedback
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#### **Create a pleasant classroom**

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- (2) Bring in and encourage humor
  - (8) Create a supportive classroom so students will take risks
  - (10) Use a short and interesting opening actively to start each class
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#### **Present tasks properly**

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- (12) Give good reasons to students about why a particular task is meaningful
  - (22) Give clear instructions by showing examples
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#### **Increase learners' goal orientation**

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- (13) Help students develop realistic goals about learning English
  - (15) Encourage students to set personal learning goals
  - (21) Find out students' needs and build them into the course
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#### **Make learning tasks stimulating**

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- (6) Introduce various interesting topics
  - (16) Break the routine by varying the presentation format
  - (25) Make tasks challenging
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#### **Familiarize learners with L2-related values**

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- (4) Increase the amount of English you use in the class
  - (11) Invite native speakers to class
  - (14) Familiarize students with the cultural background of the English language
  - (20) Encourage students to use English outside the classroom
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#### **Promote group cohesion and group norms**

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- (3) Ask students to work toward the same goal
  - (18) Let students suggest class rules
  - (23) Encourage students to share personal experiences and thoughts
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#### **Promote learner autonomy**

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- (17) Encourage students to find their mistakes by themselves
  - (26) Encourage learning from classmates in small groups
  - (28) Give students choices about how and when they will be graded
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### **Procedure**

The data was collected in mid-October 2015, nearly two months after the new semester started and before the mid-term exam period. The three teacher participants completed hard copies of the survey, while students' questionnaires were administered in person.

### **Data Analysis**

All 56 motivational strategy scales (two sets of questionnaires) were turned into numbers and entered into an SPSS file for initial quantitative analysis. To effectively analyze the results, all component motivational strategy items were classified into the ten macrostrategies listed in Table 3, as mentioned above. The means of each group of macrostrategy were computed. Descriptive statistics were calculated to display the order of the ten macrostrategies from both students' and teachers' perspectives. Finally, comparisons of relationships between the two sets of questionnaires as well as between the two groups of participants were carried out.

### **Results**

This section presents the data on the teachers' and their students' perceptions of motivational strategies.

#### *Rural students' preference of teachers' motivational strategies*

Table 4 displays the statistical results concerning the importance and frequency of ten macrostrategies from students' perspectives. Students deemed that creating a nice and pleasant leaning environment (M=3.94) is the most important thing teachers should do. Having proper behaviour (M=3.80) while teaching is considered as the second most important, while making learning tasks fun and stimulating (M=3.77) is the third. Thus, for these rural students, a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom with a nice teacher presenting learning tasks clearly and encouraging them are the most important three macrostrategies perceived by these rural junior high school freshmen.

Table 4

*Student perception of importance and frequency survey results (N=89)*

Macrostrategies (ranked according to importance)	Importance		Frequency	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
4. Create a pleasant classroom	3.94	0.79	2.06	0.70
1. Proper teacher behaviour	3.80	0.77	2.59	0.87
7. Make learning tasks stimulating	3.77	0.80	2.45	0.96
2. Recognize students' efforts	3.75	0.82	2.70	0.94
5. Present tasks properly	3.71	0.84	2.71	0.98
6. Increase learners' goal orientation	3.68	0.85	2.76	0.81
10. Promote learner autonomy	3.46	0.74	2.34	0.76
3. Promote learner self-confidence	3.42	0.86	2.62	0.85
8. Familiarize learners with L2-related values	3.29	0.84	2.02	0.54
9. Promote group cohesion and group norms	3.20	0.75	2.41	0.77

However, for the frequency aspect, students seemed to perceive their teachers' use these strategies less often. The three most frequent uses of macrostrategies are "Increase learners' goal-orientedness" (M=2.76), "Present tasks properly" (M=2.71), and "Recognize students' efforts" (M=2.70). Unlike student perception of the important strategies listed in Table 4, students perceived the frequent use of motivational strategies seemed to be very different from the importance of the macrostrategies they perceived. One significant result obtained from students' perspectives among the frequent aspect: only "Create a pleasant classroom" ( $p < 0.05$ ) was significantly different.

### Rural Teachers' Use of Motivational Strategies

The results of teachers' views of the importance and frequency of the macrostrategies are displayed in Table 5. Generally, these three rural teachers had similar considerations and use in terms of the importance and frequency of the ten macrostrategies.

Table 5.

*Teacher perception of importance and frequency survey results (N=3)*

Macrostrategies (ranked according to importance)	Importance		Frequency		Rank
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1. Recognize students' efforts	4.33	0.58	4.00	0.87	2
1. Promote learners' self-confidence	4.33	0.29	3.83	0.76	3
3. Proper teacher behaviour	4.22	0.69	4.11	0.77	1
3. Create a pleasant classroom	4.22	0.19	3.56	0.51	7
3. Increase learners' goal orientation	4.22	0.38	3.67	0.67	5
6. Present tasks properly	4.17	0.76	3.83	0.29	3
7. Promote group cohesion and group norms	4.11	0.19	3.67	0.33	5
8. Make learning tasks stimulating	3.78	0.19	3.50	0.00	8
8. Promote learner autonomy	3.78	0.19	2.56	0.96	9
10. Familiarize learners with L2-related values	3.67	0.14	2.50	0.33	10

However, teachers seemed to have a different perception of what they think and what they actually use to “create a pleasant classroom.” This macro-strategy is among the top five most important macro-strategies. However, teachers seem to underuse this macrostrategy while actually teaching in class.

### Students' Perspective vs. Teachers' Perspective

In this section, a comparison between rural students' and teachers' perspectives of macrostrategies is presented. Tables 6 and 7 show the means of importance and frequency of each type of macrostrategy for these two groups. The overall mean (3.60) obtained from the students was lower than that obtained from teachers (4.10). In fact, students and teachers shared similar perceptions about the importance of the ten macrostrategies. The difference obtained a significant value in the t-test, as shown in Table 6. Only the strategy ‘promote group cohesion and group norms’ was perceived to be significantly different ( $p=0.04$ ) between rural students and their teachers.

Table 6.  
*Comparison between teachers and students (Importance)*

Importance of Macrostrategies	Students	Teachers	<i>p</i>
	Mean	Mean	
<b>All strategies</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>4.10</b>	
Proper teacher behaviour	3.80	4.22	
Recognize students' efforts	3.75	4.33	
Promote learners' self-confidence	3.42	4.33	
Create a pleasant classroom	3.94	4.22	
Present tasks properly	3.71	4.17	
Increase learners' goal orientation	3.68	4.22	
Make learning tasks stimulating	3.76	3.78	
Familiarize learners with L2-related values	3.29	3.67	
Promote group cohesion and group norms	3.20	4.11	0.04
Promote learner autonomy	3.46	3.78	

With regard to the frequency of macrostrategies, students' and teachers' perspectives are compared and presented in Table 7. Students seemed to have very different perceptions of their teachers' frequent use of motivational strategies. Again, students did not respond positively to the macrostrategies teachers used. The overall mean obtained from students was only 2.47, whereas teachers obtained a medium overall mean of 3.52. According to teachers' responses, only two macrostrategies, “familiarize learners with L2-related values” ( $M=2.50$ ) and “promote learner autonomy” ( $M=2.56$ ), were reported as seldom used in class. A further t-test was performed to examine the difference between students and teachers. Unsurprisingly, students' perceptions differed from those of their teacher on the frequency of use of these macrostrategies (Table 7). Teachers ranked statistically higher than students. Only three macrostrategies were found with no difference in frequency between students and teachers.

Table 7.  
*Comparison between teachers and students (Frequency)*

Frequency of use of Macrostrategies	Students	Teachers	<i>p</i>
	Mean	Mean	
<b>All strategies</b>	<b>2.47</b>	<b>3.52</b>	
Proper teacher behaviour	2.59	4.11	0.04
Recognize students' efforts	2.70	4.00	0.02
Promote learners' self-confidence	2.62	3.83	0.02
Create a pleasant classroom	2.06	3.56	<0.001
Present tasks properly	2.71	3.83	0.52
Increase learners' goal orientation	2.76	3.67	
Make the learning tasks stimulating	2.45	3.50	<0.001
Familiarize learners with L2-related values	2.02	2.50	
Promote group cohesion and group norms	2.41	3.67	0.006
Promote learner autonomy	2.35	2.56	

A further correlation analysis between the students and their teachers' perceptions of motivational strategies was carried out. A significant result was obtained between teachers' perceptions of importance and frequency. Teachers' perceptions of importance were highly correlated to their frequency of use of motivational strategies ( $r=0.892$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), but no significant correlation was found between students' perceptions of importance and frequency. However, the correlation between students' and teachers' perceptions of frequency is significantly correlated ( $r=0.689$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

Table 8.  
*Correlations of importance and frequency between students and teachers*

	Importance for teachers	Frequency for students	Frequency for teachers
Importance for students	0.113	-0.286	-0.031
Importance for teachers		0.550	0.892**
Frequency for students			0.689*

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

### Discussion

As the results indicate, students had similar perceptions of the importance of macrostrategies. Rural students are shown to be less likely to perceive the frequent use of motivational strategies. This may be because these students are too young to demonstrate great awareness of the motivational strategies teachers apply in class. When this study was conducted, these rural students had just finished their elementary education and had recently entered secondary school. A significant difference is seen in results about the strategy of creating a pleasant classroom. According to the English curriculum, the Taiwan Ministry of Education declared in 2006 that being happy to participate in all classroom activities is one of the English competence indicators for elementary school students. Thus, it is natural that students might expect to learn English in a fun and relaxed environment when they are enrolling in junior high school. However, in order to prepare for senior high school entrance exams, English teaching and learning in junior high school tends to be test-oriented. Teachers need to help students to equip them with important English skills, and they must cover the



material within a limited class period. Hence, creating a comfortable learning environment can be easily neglected by teachers.

As shown in Table 5, the three rural teachers interviewed acknowledged that the importance and frequency of macrostrategies are similar. However, relative to teachers' perceived importance, the macrostrategies seemed to be underused. Three out of ten showed a below average frequency. In particular, two macrostrategies were ranked the lowest in both importance and frequency: "promote learner autonomy" and "familiarize learners with L2-related values," showing that these two macrostrategies were underused. The results are similar to the Taiwan-based study of Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) and the Korea-based study of Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008). As suggested, due to the contextual and cultural difference, learner autonomy may not obtain the same attention compared to other macrostrategies in Taiwan, and unlike Westerner educators, the concept of learner autonomy may have a different definition among Taiwanese teachers (Cheng and Dörnyei, 2007). In fact, in this study, this category of the macrostrategy sets expectations for teachers to encourage students to identify mistakes themselves, to learn from classmates in small groups through small projects, and to give students choices about how and when to be graded. Traditionally, Taiwanese teachers have retained total control over teaching. They are responsible for knowledge transmission. Although the three teacher participants in this study acknowledge the importance of learner autonomy, as affirmed in Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008), they are not ready for a learner-centred class.

Another underused macrostrategy, 'familiarize learners with L2-related values,' indicates the constraints of EFL context, especially in rural area. Due to students' limited English language proficiency, it can be difficult for teachers to use a large amount of English while teaching grammatical rules. In addition, there are often no native speakers available in rural areas to (Cheng and Dörnyei, 2007) speak and encourage students to use English outside the classroom.

The results obtained from students and teachers regarding the importance of macrostrategies reveals a disagreement. Firstly, teachers perceive the macro-strategies of "promote learners' self-confidence" and "recognize students' effort" as the top two most important strategies used to motivate students to learn. In accordance with Cheng and Dörnyei (2007), the endorsement of these two macrostrategies signals that teachers are aware of their role in developing students' concept of doing their best, and that they acknowledge students' efforts in the learning process.

However, from students' perspectives, "promote learners' self-confidence" was ranked as the eighth of the ten macrostrategies. This can be due to students' lack of awareness of the importance of promoting self-confidence. On the other hand, students ranked the macrostrategy of "create a pleasant classroom" as the most important. Anxiety can be a negative factor that hampers learners' motivation (Young, 1999), which can also be true for 13-year-old students. Teachers in this study also recognize the importance of a learner-friendly classroom, and they rank this macrostrategy third.

In general, students and teachers did not perceive the importance of the ten macrostrategies very differently, except for the macrostrategy "promote group cohesion and group norms." In fact, both in Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) and Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008), all macrostrategies obtained a low score. For this study, teachers perceive the importance of learning through collaboration and have students set the class rules. However, in reality, they might have a great teaching workload to cover. In the meantime, lacking related experience can result in students' being unfamiliar with this macrostrategy. As discussed, traditionally, Taiwanese students are passive learners with fewer opportunities to take initiative in class learning activities or to work as a team to achieve the same goal.

In terms of frequency, the results indicate a discrepancy between rural students and their English teachers. In fact, students perceive a low frequency of use of teachers' macrostrategies, this also implies that students do not actually sense their teachers' frequent use of these macrostrategies in class. Interestingly, the top five most frequently used macrostrategies in students' responses are the same as those in the teachers' responses, but in nearly reverse ranking. Teachers' frequency of using macrostrategies is associated with their beliefs. The findings suggest a positive correlation between teachers' beliefs and their teaching practice. However, such correlations are not found from students' perspectives. Consequently, the results also suggest a different perception of these strategies.

### Conclusion

This case study investigates rural student and teacher perceptions towards motivational strategies, and the results illustrate a potential gap between them. The preference pattern of motivational strategies obtained from teachers indicates that teachers' beliefs and practices are similar to those found in Cheng and Dörnyei's (2007) study. However, this also implies that the three rural teachers follow these general rules in teaching, and contextualized factors, such as students' learning experiences, preferences, school setting, and rural features are not included in their use of strategies to motivate students to learn. Rural teachers may need to become aware of students' perspectives of what really motivates them, prioritizing this information over what teachers think is motivating. Mutual communication can be helpful.

In addition, students in rural schools are not equipped with the same learning resources as students in cities. Thus, a flexible curriculum allows teachers to consider students' learning and environmental features, and promote classroom interaction instead of encouraging students to complete everything they have to teach within a limited class period. Teaching in rural schools differs from teaching in city schools. More training and support should be provided to teachers to help their understanding of promoting students' motivation to learn a foreign language.

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