Motivational Strategies in EFL Listening Classes: Teachers' Rational Choices and Students' Responses

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Abstract

Motivational teaching strategies (MTS) are pivotal in shaping learning outcomes. This study explored the practice of MTS and learner responses to them within the unique socio-cultural context of Vietnam. In particular, this research analyzed English teachers' motivational strategies in teaching listening and their alignment with students' responses. Quantitative data was gathered using a 40-item questionnaire and was organized into ten categories of MTS. Qualitative data collected from in-depth interviews aimed to gauge teachers' rationale for their chosen strategies and students' responses to those strategies. The teachers' chosen MTS revealed that the highest emphasis was on boosting learners' self-confidence in listening lessons while the lowest was on clear task presentation. This demonstrates a spectrum of pedagogical choices rooted in socio-educational insights and cost-benefit considerations as explained by the Rational Choice and Self-Determination theories. Results also indicated that the students had a strong, positive acceptance of the chosen strategies, acknowledging that these strategies not only fostered their cognitive development in listening skills but also nurtured a socio-emotional environment conducive to learning. The bicultural teaching approach, integrating English and Vietnamese, was also perceived as particularly effective, demonstrating nuances in teachers' pedagogical choices. Furthermore, students exhibited an active role in co-constructing their learning experiences, moving away from traditional, passive learning. The findings suggest that EFL teachers should adopt strategies that intertwine cognitive development with socio-emotional well-being, while policymakers should be encouraged to root teaching methodologies in both global best practices and local cultural considerations.

Keywords: motivational teaching strategies, listening lessons, rational choice theory, self-determination theory, student responses

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1. Introduction

Listening as a foundation of communication plays a pivotal role in language learning. Despite its significance, listening remains a very challenging skill for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to master (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016) due to its inherent complexities of decoding multiple sounds concurrently and deducing meaning from diverse accents and intonations (English, 2017). Consequently, learners often find themselves grappling with anxiety and demotivation, which hinders the development of effective listening skills (Bang & Hiver, 2016). Given the complexities involved, the pedagogical strategies employed by EFL teachers are paramount in either facilitating or debilitating the listening process. Motivation, as highlighted by Ryan and Deci (2022), emerges as a central determinant of successful learning. Yet, despite its undeniably crucial role, limited empirical research has been dedicated to examining the motivational strategies specifically tailored to teaching listening skills in EFL contexts.

In recognizing this lacuna in current academic literature, this study aimed to investigate the motivational strategies employed by EFL teachers during listening lessons. It examined teachers' pedagogical practices and students' consequential responses. An exploration into the rational choices made by EFL teachers, juxtaposed with students' responses, can offer valuable insights that might foster a deeper understanding of classroom dynamics and suggest pedagogical practices to ensure optimal outcomes for EFL learners. In other words, this study attempts to understand how EFL teachers employ motivational strategies to boost activeness in learning, based on the premise that the more motivated the students are, the more effective and autonomous they become.

Literature Review

Understanding the nuances of MTS in EFL listening classes necessitates a comprehensive review of existing literature. This review delves into the foundational understanding of motivation in language learning, the unique challenges of EFL listening, and the pedagogical strategies adopted to foster motivation in EFL listening classrooms.

2.1 Motivation in Language Learning

Gardner (1988) and Dörnyei (1998) are pioneers in illuminating the role of motivation in language learning. Gardner's socio-educational model posits that integrative and instrumental

motivation are primary driving forces for language acquisition. While integrative motivation is a desire to become part of the cultural community of the language speakers, instrumental motivation is related to pragmatic benefits such as career advancement. Recent studies have pointed to a more dynamic nature of motivation, suggesting it is not just dichotomous but multifaceted (Waninge et al., 2014).

2.2 Motivational Strategies in EFL Classrooms

Motivational strategies have been defined as techniques that promote learner enthusiasm, sustain interest, and foster positive attitudes toward language learning (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Lamb et al., 2019). Among these, creating a supportive classroom environment, designing engaging tasks, and providing constructive feedback emerge as pivotal (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). The inclusion of authentic materials, technology, and tasks promoting autonomy has also been shown to spur motivation (Nunan, 2003). In this current study, a set of MTS has been modified as follows.

Classroom management is fundamental to establishing an environment conducive to learning. Marzano et al. (2003) posit that effective classroom management, characterized by a well-organized and disruption-free environment, can increase student engagement and motivation. When students perceive the class as being organized and free from disruptions, they feel more motivated to engage. Praise and recognition are essential elements in student motivation. To Deci et al. (1999), positive feedback reinforces intrinsic motivation. Recognizing efforts, in particular, encourages a growth mindset, wherein students believe that their abilities can develop through dedication and hard work (Dweck, 2008). Bandura (2014) emphasizes the role of self-efficacy in learning, resulting in more task engagement and better learning outcomes. By bolstering self-confidence in listening lessons, teachers can significantly enhance student participation and comprehension.

Additionally, being attentive to learners' emotions is essential. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis underscores the importance of a low-anxiety environment for effective language acquisition. When students feel at ease, they are more receptive to input, a prerequisite to language acquisition. Task presentation impacts learners' motivation to engage. Willis and Willis (2013) argue that clear instructions, contextual relevance, and authentic purpose can significantly increase students' motivation to undertake listening tasks. Locke and Latham (2002) find that setting specific and challenging goals can boost student performance.

When learners have a clear task purpose with a high demand for task execution, their commitment and motivation to achieve those goals are intensified. The engagement theory (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998) suggests that learners are best engaged when tasks are interactive, relevant, and challenging. Those listening tasks that are stimulating and resonate with students' interests promise opportunities to enhance learner motivation.

Furthermore, cultural integration in language lessons can drive motivation. Being exposed to aspects of the target language culture, learners gain a deeper appreciation and interest in the language (Kramsch, 2014). Cooperative learning strategies verify the importance of group dynamics in academic success (Johnson & Johnson, 1986). A cohesive group, bound by shared norms and values, can provide mutual support, thereby boosting individual members' motivation and performance. Moreover, autonomy cannot be underrated. Benson (2016) defines learner autonomy as students taking charge of their learning. Encouraging autonomy not only empowers students but also fosters a deeper sense of responsibility and commitment to their learning. An autonomous learner is intrinsically motivated to seek opportunities to learn because of genuine interest.

In short, MTS, as elucidated in the literature, encompasses a diverse range of techniques, from classroom management to enhancing collaborative learning and fostering autonomy. These strategies emphasize the multifaceted nature of motivation in the classroom, highlighting the interconnectedness of environment, task design, feedback, group dynamics, and individual learner characteristics. Using these strategies, teachers can significantly enhance learner motivation, thereby facilitating higher learning outcomes.

2.3 Teaching Listening: Challenges and Strategies

Listening is an important skill in language learning, and at the same time, it involves paramount challenges. Unlike reading, where learners can pace themselves, listening happens in real-time, making it inherently challenging. Additionally, Field (2004) noted that diverse accents, speeds of speaking, and background noises make EFL listening more intricate. Consequently, many learners often feel overwhelmed, leading to anxiety and demotivation (Elkhafaifi, 2005). The unique nature of listening as a receptive skill demands specialized teaching strategies such as metacognitive awareness (Cikrikci & Odaci, 2016) or strategy explicit instruction (Ngo, 2019).

2.4 Student Responses

The use of MTS calls for students' perception, as the students' views shape the success of a chosen strategy. Zhou's (2012) study indicates that students' cultural backgrounds, prior experiences, and individual personalities play significant roles in how they perceive and react to various motivational strategies in terms of their compliance, resistance, or negotiation with those used.

2.5 Theoretical Frameworks

Rational Choice Theory (RCT)

RCT originally stemmed from economic thought but has been applied to sociology and education, as highlighted by Davis (2023). At its core, RCT suggests that when faced with decisions, people will think rationally and choose options that give them the best benefits while reducing potential losses or costs. In this study, RCT proposes that EFL teachers make decisions on choosing specific strategies after careful thought. They aim to pick methods promoting the highest levels of student motivation. This study thus uses the lens of RCT to understand the deliberate and logical selection of MTS by teachers in listening lessons.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is an approach to understanding human motivation, behavior, and well-being. In essence, SDT proposes that for individuals to achieve optimal development and functioning, their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be satisfied. Autonomy refers to one's agency in making decisions and being the initiator of their actions. Competence involves feeling effective and capable in one's actions, while relatedness pertains to a sense of connection and belongingness with others. In education, SDT suggests that teachers' choices of motivational strategies are most effective when they address these fundamental needs. Strategies empowering students to take charge of their learning, offering choices, and allowing self-directed activities address the need for autonomy. Those providing constructive feedback, setting achievable challenges, and recognizing students' progress cater to the need for competence. Furthermore, strategies that promote group work, collaboration, and peer interaction can satisfy the need for relatedness. In this study, SDT is used to explain why teachers might opt for certain strategies over others. For instance, those placing a premium on autonomy might be inclined to allow students more

latitude in choosing their learning resources or tasks, whereas those emphasizing competence might frequently deploy a combination of challenging activities followed by constructive feedback.

The review above suggests a need for an investigation into Vietnamese EFL teachers' use of motivational instruction strategies. Specifically, the following central questions will be answered.

RQ1 What motivational strategies do EFL teachers employ when teaching listening skills?

RQ2 Why do EFL teachers choose to employ these motivational strategies when teaching listening skills?

RQ3 How do students respond to those strategies used by their teachers?

2. Research Method

3.1 Participants

Sixty-five EFL lecturers in a higher education institute in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam were involved in the study. The distribution and demographics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants in the survey (N=65)

Variables	Categories	N	Percentage
Gender	Male	16	24.6%
	Female	49	75.4%
Qualifications	B.A	19	29.2%
	M.A	44	67.7%
	PhD	2	3.1%
Teaching Experience	<5 years	28	43.1%
	>5 years and <10 years	26	40.0%
	>10 years and <15 years	6	9.2%
	>15 years	5	7.7%

The data reveal that the teaching profession in this context is predominantly female. Most participants have qualifications up to a Master's level, with less than ten years of teaching experience. Six teachers from among the sixty-five volunteered for individual semi-structured interviews. Their selection was based on their interest, as expressed at the end of the

questionnaire, and their overall scores. Table 2 provides the demographics of the teacher interviewees.

Table 2

Teacher participants in interviews (N=6)

Variables	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D	Teacher E	Teacher F
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female
Qualifications	M.A	M.A	M.A	M.A	M.A	M.A
Teaching Experience	>5 & <10	>10 & <15	>5 & <10	>5 & <10	>15	<5

This table reveals that most of the interviewed teachers were female, all with Master of Arts degrees and diverse teaching experiences. In addition, six EFL students who were taught by the aforementioned teachers voluntarily participated in the semi-structured interviews. Their basic details are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Student participants in semi-structured interviews (N=6)

Variables	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Fields of Study	Accounting	English Studies	Hotel Management	Hotel Management	Hotel Management	English Studies

As per the data, all student participants were female. Their fields of study varied, with most pursuing Hotel Management. This study garnered participation from a wide range of participants in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta, offering a robust foundation for subsequent analysis and discussion.

3.2 Design of the Study

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to provide an understanding of teachers' choices of motivational strategies in teaching EFL listening skills. The decision to use this approach was informed by the need to corroborate quantitative survey data with contextual insights from interviews. The primary data was from the questionnaire, while complementary qualitative data from the successive interviews helped to confirm the findings.

3.3 Instruments: Procedures and Validation

A questionnaire and interviews were employed to explore the teachers' use of MTS in listening lessons and to understand the reasons behind their choices and students' responses to the strategies used. A literature-based self-designed 40-item questionnaire was employed to survey teachers' motivational strategies in teaching listening. The questionnaire was in a five-point Likert Scale format. The questionnaire was structured into ten distinct clusters or categories related to motivating language learners in listening lessons and validated by a panel of EFL experts. Feedback was sought regarding the relevance and comprehensibility of the items. Proper modifications were incorporated to refine the questionnaire. Finally, a pilot test was conducted with a group of EFL teachers to verify the validity of the instrument, that is, to ensure that needed information could be gathered. Details of the clusters are displayed in Table 4.

Semi-structured interviews delved deeper into the reasons behind teachers' choices of specific motivational strategies and deciphered how students responded to those strategies in their listening lessons. For teachers, the interview questions explored their experiences, beliefs, and reasons for selecting certain motivational strategies over others. Students were interviewed to gauge their experiences with the strategies employed, specifically their compliance, resistance, and negotiation with the teaching techniques applied to them. Questions were reviewed by experienced researchers familiar with motivational strategies to ensure the questions' validity regarding their clarity, purpose, and objectivity. Interview questions were piloted on a few teachers and students, not the study participants, to ascertain the question quality. A rigorous validation process involving expert consultations and pilots on research instruments aimed to assure the quality of the data collected.

Both interviews with teachers and students were performed in Vietnamese for ease and accuracy of expression. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and reviewed many times by the authors. Prominent relevant answers were selected, translated into English, and presented in the Results section.

4. Results

4.1 EFL Teachers' Choices of Motivational Strategies in Teaching Listening

Table 4 presents the results from the Descriptive Statistics test regarding teachers' choices of MTS.

Table 4

Teachers' choices of MTS (N=65)

Clusters	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Demonstrating proper classroom management behavior to motivate learners	2.40	4.80	4.10	.49
Recognizing students' efforts and praising their success in listening lessons	1.50	5.00	4.12	.72
Promoting learners' self-confidence in listening lessons	2.14	5.00	4.32	.53
Creating a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in listening lessons	1.25	5.00	3.90	.64
Presenting tasks properly in listening lessons	1.60	5.00	3.87	.68
Increasing the learners' goal-orientedness in listening lessons	1.67	5.00	4.13	.67
Making the learning tasks stimulating in listening lessons	1.25	5.00	4.00	.63
Familiarizing learners with L2-related values in listening lessons	2.00	5.00	3.93	.62
Promoting group cohesiveness and setting group norms in listening lessons	1.25	5.00	4.08	.69
Promoting learner autonomy in listening lessons	2.00	5.00	4.22	.57
Total	1.78	4.85	4.08	.47

Overall, the teachers' strategies and their underlying rationales are revealed in the light of Rational Choice and Self-Determination Theories. The emphasis on promoting learners' self-confidence in listening lessons (M=4.32) dovetails with SDT's focus on competence, amplifying intrinsic motivation. RCT's analysis frames this as teachers identify the outsized benefits of student engagement. The emphasis on group cohesiveness (M=4.08) and the championing of learner autonomy (M=4.22) respectively highlight SDT's core tenets, with RCT offering a cost-benefit rationale. This balance of benefits and costs is evident again with the recognition of students' effort (M=4.12). SDT complements this view by spotlighting the nurturing of students' intrinsic need for competence, while RCT sees it as a strategic boost to morale offsetting any potential costs. Garnering a high mean score (M=4.10), the value of proper classroom management cannot be understated. Within the RCT's and SDT's frameworks, such management can be seen as curating an environment ripe for maintaining interactions that are indispensable for language acquisition. Concurrently, SDT underlines that such structured atmospheres ensure that the intrinsic motivational needs of students remain unimpeded by chaos. The economic perspective of RCT persistently shows, whether it is the strategy of enhancing goal orientation in listening lessons (M=4.13) or making learning tasks stimulating (M=4.00). Both of these strategies reflect a harmonious blend of teachers' socio-cultural understandings and SDT's intrinsic motivational needs. Moreover, the strategy of acquainting

learners with second language-related values (M=3.93) shines a light on the accentuation of socio-cultural assimilation in linguistic pedagogy. Strategies such as creating a pleasant classroom atmosphere (M=3.90) emphasize SDT's fundamental need for relatedness while aligning with the idea of socio-cultural interactions for language learning. RCT suggests that such strategies actively work to minimize the 'costs' of student anxiety, thus maximizing learning dividends. The clarity in task presentation (M=3.87) underscores the spotlight on socio-educational interactions and SDT's validation of catering to learners' competence needs. Here again, RCT postulates a tangible reduction in the 'cost' of potential confusion, promoting enriched outcomes. In essence, through the bifold lens of SDT and RCT, a rich picture of pedagogical choices rooted in deep socio-educational insights, intrinsic motivational needs, and astute cost-benefit evaluations is revealed.

4.2 Reasons for EFL Teachers' Choice of Strategies Used

The teachers' responses in the interviews displayed a deep understanding of the various challenges their students encounter while mastering listening skills, echoing the insights they captured on socio-cultural and educational features in their teaching context. Teacher A's statement about the role of practice in *"enhancing both motivation and efficacy in listening"* suggests the significance of regular social interactions. From the SDT perspective, pressures that the students face could potentially erode their intrinsic motivation, as Teacher F's emphasis on *"continuous practice"* seems to be implicitly addressed. Moreover, the RCT's principles manifest themselves when Teachers A and F weigh the 'cost' of neglecting these issues against the 'benefits' of ensuring students' language proficiency. Furthermore, the value of practice as a tool for motivation aligns with the focus on repetitive interactions for language acquisition. Teacher F's highlight on the importance of *"continuous practice"* showcases the need for consistent social interactions. Through the lens of SDT, such continuous engagement can bolster students' sense of perceived competence. When teachers, such as Teacher A, spotlight the 'cost' of inadequate practice and the benefits of regular engagement, this dovetails with the cost-benefit considerations of RCT.

Teacher B's strategy of altering student perceptions towards difficulties in listening is described as a *"strategic play"*, where the challenges can be viewed as driving forces for more effort in learning experiences. In her words, *"Altering perceptions is half the battle."* Furthermore, Teacher D's commentary on understanding the students' feelings — *"I see their*

struggles, and my approach is meant to alleviate them" — is deeply rooted in the SDT's emphasis on understanding students' emotional states and needs for relatedness. Both teachers' observations and strategies can be seen through the RCT lens, where they evaluate emotional 'costs' and act to reduce them for enhanced outcomes.

The influence of prior personal learning experiences on teaching strategies provides a rich backdrop for teachers' choice in action. Teacher B's reference to seeking effective listening practices during her student years and its impact on her current approach — *"It shaped my approach"* — is a testament to this. From the SDT, Teacher D's voice on autonomy and her reflection, *"Internal motivation was my beacon during challenging linguistic phases. I want to instill that in my students,"* showcases the crucial role of autonomy in motivating language learners. The balancing of past 'costs' with present and future 'benefits' in these personal insights is a clear application of RCT.

The teaching strategies, informed by students' proficiency levels, resonate with teachers' chosen determination regarding customer-tailored socio-educational experiences. Teacher C's declaration, *"Every class is unique; their needs shape my approach,"* and Teacher D's description of her approach as *"cyclical"* are indicative of this personalization. From the SDT's perspective, meeting students at their competence levels can significantly enhance motivation. These insights, especially Teacher F's data-driven approach — *"I assess proficiency levels at the onset and then dive into strategies"* — are indicative of RCT's cost-benefit analysis in action.

The value of a collaborative classroom environment is also evidently acknowledged. Teachers E and F's comments on group collaborations and peer interactions — *"Group collaborations provide diverse perspectives, enhancing comprehension"* and the championing of *"peer-generated questions"* — spotlight this. Such environments not only cater to SDT's needs for relatedness and competence but also align with the RCT. The 'benefits' of cooperative learning, as emphasized by these teachers, undoubtedly outweigh the potential 'costs' of individualistic pedagogies.

4.3 EFL Students' Responses to Motivational Strategies Employed

Students' reactions to the motivational strategies used reflect an overall positivity. This generally underscores the interplay between learning and the surrounding social milieu, postulating that individuals grasp concepts through their engagement with peers and their

learning environment. From this perspective, the students' feedback on motivational teaching strategies offers a multi-dimensional response – ranging from compliance, and resistance, to negotiation – situated within a broader socio-cultural landscape. For instance, the compliance level is evident in Student A's feedback, "*These strategies help direct my learning objectives*." The student seems to be accepting and appreciate the teaching methods presented. Similarly, Student B's remark, "*I feel a lot less pressure now,*" demonstrates positive compliance, emphasizing the strategies' capacity to buffer external environmental pressures impacting cognitive processes. However, the nuances of resistance and negotiation are more subtly embedded. While not explicitly stated, one can infer these levels from the depth of their interactions and feedback. Student D's statement, "*It feels like the teacher truly cares about us,*" could hint at prior resistance to traditional teaching methods, now mitigated by more personalized strategies. The feeling conveyed here is of a student who might have been previously disengaged but has now found a reason to connect, indicating a transition from resistance to negotiation. On a cultural front, Student E's appreciation, "*I love how lessons are explained using both Vietnamese and English,*" showcases negotiation. The student is not passively accepting the instructional medium but appreciates the cultural sensitivity embedded within, highlighting the significance of cultural instruments in facilitating understanding. The essence drawn from these reflections is that students are not mere sponges soaking in instruction. Their feedback indicates their roles as active interlocutors, navigating their educational experiences through layers of compliance, resistance, and negotiation. These insights not only vouch for the effectiveness of the implemented strategies but also echo RCT's and SDT's ethos, which view teaching as a rich blend of cultivating relationships, fostering cultural awareness, and disseminating knowledge.

5. Discussion

5.1 EFL Teachers' Choices of MTS

The study's findings offer insights into how EFL university teachers in the Mekong Delta utilize motivational strategies in their listening classrooms. The use of RCT to interpret these strategies underscores the intentional and pragmatic approach teachers adopt in their pedagogical choices. The RCT's lens mirrors some aspects of previous research, while also revealing unique dimensions pertinent to the Vietnamese context. Consistent with prior research in diverse educational settings (e.g., Falout, 2012; Stupnisky et al., 2018), this study

confirms that teachers employ a variety of motivational strategies to optimize students' listening learning. The strategy of recognizing students' efforts and celebrating their success, for instance, resonates with available literature that highlights the importance of positive reinforcement in educational settings (Smith et al., 2017). However, the notable emphasis on strategies such as promoting learners' self-confidence and autonomy reflects the Vietnamese culture. In traditional Vietnamese classrooms, teachers hold a more authoritative role (Ngo, 2017). The observed shift towards fostering learners' autonomy and confidence could be indicative of evolving pedagogical paradigms and cultural dynamics within the nation's education. The strategies favored by the teachers in this study also echo the socio-cultural realities in Vietnam. For instance, the emphasis on creating a pleasant and relaxing atmosphere suggests a deviation from the traditionally rigorous and exam-oriented education in Vietnam (Ngo, 2019). It is the result of a more holistic understanding of students' well-being and a move towards more learner-centered approaches. The strategy of familiarizing learners with target cultural values, with a mean score of 3.93, is also seen as a tendency to increase globalization in Vietnam. As English has increasingly become pivotal for socioeconomic advancement, a cultural impetus to bridge the gap between language proficiency and cultural understanding is needed (Khaydarova & Afruza, 2023). Moreover, the strategy of promoting group cohesiveness is deeply aligned with the Vietnamese cultural value of collectivism over individualism. In Vietnamese culture, communal harmony and cohesion are often prioritized over individual accomplishments (Tan et al., 2018). Hence, setting group norms and promoting collaborative learning could be seen as not only just pedagogical choices but also cultural reaffirmations. To sum up, the findings from this study reflect not only a broader educational research theme but also the cultural values of Vietnam. The interplay of the theoretical frameworks underpinning this current study and the socio-cultural dynamics of Vietnam provides a rich tapestry for understanding EFL teaching strategies in similar contexts.

5.2 Reasons for EFL Teachers' Choices of Motivational Teaching Strategies

When discussing Vietnamese EFL teachers' pedagogical choices under the RCT framework, this current study found different motivational strategies employed by EFL teachers in listening lessons. In addition, teacher's choices of MTS were made by evaluating potential costs and benefits. These findings present a strong correlation with prior studies, enriching the understanding of EFL teaching in Vietnam. Previous studies have shown that

teachers, regardless of cultural context, are motivated by a desire to maximize student outcomes and navigate challenges (Naz & Rashid, 2021). The emphasis on motivation and the promotion of self-study among Vietnamese EFL teachers indicates a nuanced understanding of the challenges their students face, notably the pressure associated with acquiring listening skills. This aligns with Pham and Bui's (2019) study, highlighting the pervasive anxiety of English proficiency experienced by Vietnamese students. The strategies that teachers employ, especially those that emphasize recognizing student efforts and boosting their confidence, mirror findings from other Asian contexts (Song, 2022; Sato, 2019). It is crucial to see a similar emphasis in the Vietnamese context that can be shared with others in Asia. The testimonies of teachers in this current study diverge from earlier accounts of Vietnamese education. Historically, Vietnamese pedagogical strategies were characterized as rote learning and teacher-centered (Abdullah, 2020). However, the current findings suggest a shift to promote learner autonomy, group cohesion, and dynamic classroom atmospheres, which manifests a more student-centered approach to EFL teaching and learning. This suggests an evolving educational landscape in Vietnam that benefits interactive and autonomous learning.

The emphasis on assessing student proficiency levels before determining teaching strategies is noteworthy. Prior studies in other contexts have emphasized the importance of diagnostic assessments to tailor teaching strategies (Jang & Sinclair, 2021). Similarly, in this current study, teachers' recognition of this strategy further solidifies its universal appeal and underscores its importance in EFL teaching globally.

Another intriguing observation is the link between teachers' personal learning experiences and their teaching strategies. While the influence of personal teaching philosophy on pedagogical choices is well-documented (Franklin, 2014), the direct link between teachers' personal experiences as language learners and their current teaching strategies offers a unique dimension because the Vietnamese teachers in this study are EFL learners themselves.

In conclusion, the current findings align with the principles of theoretical frameworks of the study as analyzed in the literature review section, resonate with broader global trends in EFL teaching, and capture the distinct nuances of the Vietnamese EFL teaching context. They highlight the evolving nature of EFL teaching in Vietnam and underscore the sophisticated calculus that underpins teachers' decision-making processes. These insights not only enrich the understanding of the Vietnamese EFL landscape but also offer valuable lessons for EFL teachers in similar contexts worldwide.

5.3 EFL Students' Responses to Their Teachers' Chosen Strategies in Listening Lessons

In the context of EFL teaching, the interplay between teaching strategies and learner responses has paramount importance. The findings in this study support the claim that students' positive responses to motivational teaching strategies are influenced by their social and cultural contexts. These findings were also presented in previous research while accentuating the unique characteristics of the Vietnamese educational landscape. Historically, Vietnamese education was rooted in Confucian traditions which emphasize respect for teachers, the value of education, and the role of communal learning (Truong et al., 2017). The current findings, notably Student D's appreciation of her teachers' care, reflect this tradition. The sense of mutual respect and care mirrors earlier studies that have stressed the importance of teacher-student relationships in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2017). However, the nuance of students such as Student E, who appreciate the integrated Vietnamese and English teaching strategies, adds a new dimension. This bi-cultural approach was suggested in Japan and South Korea as an effective tool to bridge cultural gaps (Im & Kim, 2015; Yamamoto, 2001). Accepting this approach in the Vietnamese context underscores its universal appeal and speaks to the evolving nature of EFL teaching, which values the inclusion of culture into language teaching.

In juxtaposition with prior research that primarily focused on the passive role of Vietnamese learners (Nguyen & Stracke, 2021), the current findings reveal a dynamic shift. Student A's proactive orientation of learning goals and Student B's active management of pressure demonstrate the emerging role of Vietnamese students as active constructors of knowledge. This divergence suggests an evolving pedagogy in Vietnam that is informed by global best practices but is also grounded in a distinctive culture.

The current study further supports the centrality of sociocultural principles in teaching and learning. Previous research highlighted the importance of socio-emotional support in promoting effective language learning (Winsler et al., 2014). Student D's experience echoes this sentiment, highlighting the profound socio-emotional dimension inherent in the teaching strategies. Additionally, the appreciation of teaching tools that facilitate interaction, as revealed by Student E, has precedence in research. Vygotsky and Cole (1978) argued for the importance of mediating tools, whether linguistic, material, or behavioral, in shaping cognitive development. This becomes particularly relevant in the current study, as students navigate

the complexities of language learning, bridging cultural and linguistic divides with the aid of strategically chosen teaching tools.

In summary, the current findings show learners' reactions to MTS with different levels of responses and provide insights into the evolving nature of ELT in Vietnam. While they align with global understandings of the interconnectedness of cognitive, cultural, and social facets of learning, they highlight the distinctive nature of the Vietnamese educational context. This dual resonance—global universality and local specificity—offers a holistic understanding of EFL teaching in Vietnam and provides valuable lessons for teachers in similar contexts worldwide.

6. Conclusion

Motivation, a key determinant of learning success, has long been the focus of educational research. In the unique socio-cultural landscape of Vietnam, understanding the effectiveness of motivational teaching strategies in listening lessons becomes particularly crucial. This study embarked on a journey to unveil the intricate dynamics between teacher strategies and student responses in this EFL setting. The current findings illuminate the positive acceptance of motivational teaching strategies by students. These strategies not only facilitate the cognitive development of listening skills but also foster a nurturing socio-emotional environment that resonates with the Vietnamese cultural ethos. The use of bi-cultural teaching methods, integrating English and Vietnamese, further emphasizes the importance of recognizing and incorporating cultural tools in pedagogical practices. Moreover, the current findings reveal that student participants are progressively taking an active role in their learning experiences, shifting away from the traditionally perceived passive stance.

The implications of these findings are manifold. For EFL teachers, there is a clear directive in teaching strategies that respect and utilize the cultural and social nuances of the learners. Prioritizing socio-emotional well-being alongside cognitive development can reinforce learning outcomes. For policymakers and curriculum developers, this study suggests an emphasis on grounding teaching approaches in both global best practices and local sensibilities. Nevertheless, this study recognizes its own limitations. The sample size, though diverse, was limited to a single region in Vietnam. Additionally, the self-reporting data could introduce biases, with participants possibly presenting socially desirable responses. Future studies may expand to include more geographical regions, thus capturing a richer tapestry of

responses. Moreover, a longitudinal approach that tracks students' progress over time by using the ecological system as an underpinning framework might also provide insights into the long-term impacts of these strategies. Furthermore, mixed-methods studies, combining classroom observations with quantitative metrics may offer a broader understanding of the dynamics at play. In summary, this study reaffirms the intricate relationship between teaching strategies, cultural context, and learner acceptance. The Vietnamese EFL landscape, with its rich tradition and evolving pedagogical paradigm, provides a fertile ground for further exploration, offering valuable lessons for other interested educational communities.

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