



Does Teaching Experience Matter More Than Qualifications? A Pragmatic Inquiry into Tanzanian EFL Teachers' Choice of Motivational Strategies

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Abstract: *Motivating learners to acquire English as a foreign language (EFL) remains a persistent classroom challenge, and while teachers' use of motivational strategies is known to enhance learner engagement, the pragmatic question of whether teachers' demographic characteristics, particularly teaching experience versus formal educational level, actually predict their strategic choices has received scant empirical attention, especially in under-researched African contexts like Tanzanian primary schools. This study pragmatically examined the association between teachers' teaching experience and educational level with their self-reported selection and use of 35 motivational strategies derived from Dörnyei's (2001) taxonomy. A quantitative survey was conducted involving 100 English language teachers proportionally sampled from 20 primary schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania. Data were collected using a validated Likert-scale questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = .966$) and analysed using chi-square tests at $\alpha = .05$ to determine statistically significant associations. The results demonstrated a striking pragmatic asymmetry: 15 motivational strategies were significantly associated with teaching experience ($p < .05$), particularly those requiring nuanced classroom judgment such as maintaining motivation, enlisting active task participation, personalising learning goals, and promoting cooperation over competition. In contrast, only 8 strategies showed significant association with educational level, mostly limited to creating basic motivational conditions like showing care and organising extracurricular activities. These findings pragmatically indicate that years of classroom interaction, not formal degree attainment, substantively shape teachers' ability to select and deploy a wider, more sophisticated range of motivational strategies. The study offers an empirical contribution by providing the first systematic evidence from Tanzanian primary EFL contexts and a theoretical contribution by demonstrating that Dörnyei's framework yields different demographic patterns than those reported in Western or Asian settings. Practically, the findings suggest that policy investments in teacher retention and subject-specialised deployment may yield greater motivational returns than merely upgrading qualifications. The study concludes that teaching experience is a stronger pragmatic predictor of motivational strategy choice than educational level, and recommends that teacher deployment guidelines be revised to assign English instruction by subject expertise, alongside structured mentoring programmes for novice teachers to accelerate strategy acquisition.*

Keywords: *Motivational strategies; Teaching experience; Educational level; EFL primary education; Tanzania*

1.0 Background Information

Motivating learners to learn a foreign language (FL) has long been considered a cornerstone of successful language education. Even when learners possess exceptional cognitive abilities, a lack of adequate motivation can severely limit their ultimate achievement in FL learning (Dörnyei, 2005). Empirical evidence consistently shows that learners with stronger motivation tend to perform better academically, persist longer through challenges, exert greater effort, and achieve deeper learning outcomes (Zhou, 2018). Given the centrality of motivation, the teacher's ability to motivate learners is not merely an asset but a necessity for successful FL teaching (Dörnyei, 1998). Teachers shape the learning environment and directly influence how much learners

engage and learn through motivational interventions (Hornstra *et al.*, 2015; Singh, 2021). Such interventions entail the deliberate selection and application of motivational strategies, defined as motivational influences consciously exerted to achieve systematic and enduring positive effects on learners' motivation (Dörnyei, 2001).

The positive impact of motivational strategies on learners' language learning motivation has been well documented across diverse contexts, including Tanzania (Alrabai, 2014; Bamuhiga & Kimambo, 2025b; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). However, despite this acknowledged importance, studies have consistently reported that teachers' perceptions and use of motivational strategies vary considerably



(Bamuhiga & Kimambo, 2025b; Omar *et al.*, 2020; Wong, 2014). Among the multiple factors accounting for this variation, teachers' demographic characteristics, particularly teaching experience (length of service) and educational level (qualification), have emerged as both influential and intensely debated variables. Some scholars argue that teaching experience and educational level are significantly associated with teachers' motivational strategy choices (Uştuk, 2018), while others contend that no such association exists (Perez & Pulana, 2022; Solak & Bayar, 2014).

This debate carries substantial practical weight. In Tanzania, primary school English teachers enter the profession with diverse educational qualifications ranging from certificates and diplomas to bachelor's degrees and above, and they also accumulate varying years of experience teaching English (Nanai, 2023). Yet, available Tanzanian studies have primarily focused on the impact of motivational strategies on learners' motivation and the general factors influencing teachers' strategy choices (Bamuhiga & Kimambo, 2025a, 2025b). No traceable research has systematically examined the association between teachers' demographic characteristics, specifically experience and education level, and their actual choice and use of motivational strategies in Tanzanian primary EFL classrooms. Moreover, the international debate remains unresolved, with studies from different settings producing contradictory findings. For instance, Hsu (2009, cited in Solak & Bayar, 2014) found that experienced teachers possess deeper knowledge of which strategies suit learners' abilities and needs, while Al-Mahrooqi *et al.* (2012) reported that novice EFL teachers are often less aware of the range of available strategies and unsure how to select appropriately. Conversely, Solak and Bayar (2014) and Zulkifli and Kutty (2022) found no significant relationship between teaching experience and motivational strategy use. Similarly, while Uştuk (2018) reported that educational background moderately affects teachers' perceived importance of motivational strategies, others such as Perez and Pulana (2022) found that educational level had no significant effect.

Given this unresolved debate and the absence of empirical evidence from Tanzanian primary EFL contexts, a pragmatic inquiry is warranted. Rather than asking whether demographic characteristics matter in principle, a pragmatic approach asks: *which* demographic characteristic matters *more* for teachers' actual strategy choices, experience or formal qualifications? This question is not merely academic. If teaching experience proves more influential, then policy efforts should prioritise teacher retention, subject-specialised deployment, and mentoring for novice teachers. If educational level matters more, then upgrading qualifications becomes the primary lever. Thus, this study pragmatically examined the association between teachers' demographic characteristics and their choice of

motivational strategies in Tanzanian EFL primary classrooms. Specifically, the study determined how teachers' teaching experience and educational level are associated with their selection and use of motivational strategies, answering the following research questions:

- i. How are teachers' years of teaching experience associated with their choice and use of motivational strategies?
- ii. Does teachers' educational level influence their selection and use of motivational strategies?

2.0 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Foundations of Motivational Strategies in EFL

The study of motivational strategies in foreign language (FL) learning gained prominence with the cognitive-situated approach, which emphasised the critical role of the learning environment in shaping learners' motivated disposition (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). The term "motivational strategies" encompasses two distinct aspects: first, instructional interventions that teachers deliberately employ to enhance learner motivation; second, self-regulatory strategies that learners purposefully use to manage their own motivation levels (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). Given that this study focuses on teachers' demographic characteristics in relation to their choice of strategies, the former aspect is adopted. Accordingly, motivational strategies are conceptualised as classroom practices teachers use "to consciously generate and enhance learner motivation, as well as maintain ongoing motivated behaviour and protect it from distracting and/or competing action tendencies" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 103).

Several taxonomies of motivational strategies exist, but the most comprehensive and systematically compiled framework is provided by Dörnyei (2001). This taxonomy has been widely validated and serves as a robust basis for assessing teachers' classroom practices in stimulating learners' motivation to learn English (Erdil-Moody & Thompson, 2020). Dörnyei's (2001) framework proposes 102 motivational strategies organised into four interrelated stages based on their timing and function within the teaching-learning process: (1) creating basic motivational conditions, (2) generating initial motivation, (3) maintaining and protecting motivation, and (4) encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 107).

2.2 The Four-Stage Motivational Strategies Framework

Stage 1: Creating Basic Motivational Conditions. Dörnyei (2001) argues that motivational strategies cannot operate in a vacuum. Before learners can generate motivation to learn a foreign language, foundational conditions must be established. These include appropriate teacher behaviours, a



positive teacher-learner relationship, a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere, and a cohesive learner group with constructive group norms.

Stage 2: Generating Initial Motivation. While young learners are often perceived as possessing inherent curiosity, compulsory schooling and curriculum content driven by societal priorities frequently dampen this natural enthusiasm (Dörnyei, 2001). This stage focuses on establishing learners' eagerness and enthusiasm toward upcoming learning content through strategies such as promoting instrumental language values, making materials relevant, increasing success expectancy, and enhancing goal-orientedness.

Stage 3: Maintaining and Protecting Motivation. Generated motivation is vulnerable to distracting influences that emerge during the learning process. Maintaining motivation requires strategies such as delivering tasks in motivating ways, helping learners set specific goals, encouraging collaboration, and improving self-confidence through controlled success experiences (Dörnyei, 2001).

Stage 4: Encouraging Positive Retrospective Self-Evaluation. After task completion, learners reflect on their performance. This stage involves helping learners maintain a positive outlook regardless of achievement levels, viewing mistakes favourably, attributing failures to insufficient effort rather than ability, and receiving consistent, constructive feedback.

2.3 The Demographic Debate: *Experience Versus Qualifications*

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the learning environment and are primarily responsible for motivating learners (Hornstra *et al.*, 2015). However, teachers differ in how they motivate learners, and the strategies they employ vary considerably (Hornstra *et al.*, 2015). One basis for this variation is teachers' demographic characteristics (Hardré & Sullivan, 2008).

Teaching Experience. Hsu (2009, cited in Solak & Bayar, 2014) found that experienced teachers possess deeper knowledge of which motivational strategies suit learners' abilities and needs. Consequently, years spent teaching English inform which strategies experienced versus novice teachers employ. Al-Mahrooqi *et al.* (2012) reported that novice EFL teachers are often less informed about the range of available motivational strategies and, even when aware, remain uncertain about which strategies to deploy. Uştuk (2018) similarly found that teaching experience moderately affects teachers' perceptions of the significance of motivational strategies.

Educational Level. Regarding formal qualifications, Uştuk (2018) reported that educational background moderately influences teachers' perceived importance of motivational

strategies. However, Perez and Pulana (2022) found that the highest level of education does not significantly affect teachers' motivational strategy use. Solak and Bayar (2014) similarly reported no significant difference in strategy use between experienced and novice teachers.

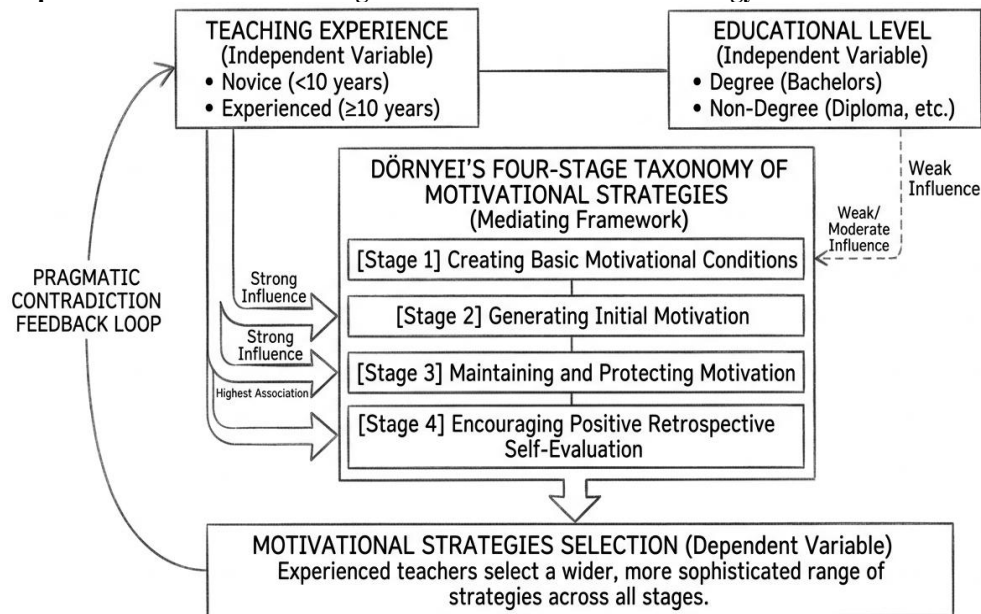
The Pragmatic Contradiction. These contradictory findings indicate a pressing need for context-specific, pragmatic inquiry. Furthermore, Soraya (2020) observed that even when teachers select similar strategies, implementation varies by demographics. For example, male and female teachers implemented the same enjoyment strategies differently, male teachers used unique jokes while female teachers employed flatter humour. This suggests that demographic characteristics shape not only *which* strategies teachers choose but also *how* they enact them.

2.4 Conceptual Framework: *The Experienced-Teacher Advantage Model*

Drawing on the theoretical foundations above and the pragmatic need to resolve the experience-versus-qualifications debate, this study proposes the **Experienced-Teacher Advantage Model** (see Figure 1). The model posits that teaching experience operates as a stronger predictor of motivational strategy selection than educational level, particularly for strategies requiring situated classroom judgment, learner responsiveness, and adaptive implementation. Educational level, while relevant for creating basic motivational conditions, does not substantively differentiate teachers' ability to deploy strategies across all four stages of Dörnyei's (2001) framework.

In general, the theoretical framework guiding this study rests on three core assumptions. First, motivational strategies are not universally applied but are shaped by teacher characteristics, particularly those developed through extended classroom experience. Second, Dörnyei's (2001) four-stage taxonomy provides a comprehensive and valid structure for categorising and comparing teachers' strategic choices across demographic groups. Third, the pragmatic question of whether experience or qualifications matters more requires empirical testing within specific contexts, given the contradictory findings reported in different educational settings. This study, therefore, operationalises these assumptions by testing the association between teaching experience and educational level with the choice of motivational strategies among Tanzanian primary school EFL teachers.

Figure 1: Experienced-Teacher Advantage Model for Motivational Strategy Selection



3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Context

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the association between teachers' demographic characteristics (teaching experience and educational level) and their choice of motivational strategies in Tanzanian EFL primary classrooms. The quantitative approach was appropriate because it allows for statistical testing of hypotheses regarding associations between categorical variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study was conducted in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania, which at the time of data collection had 98 primary schools. Morogoro was purposively selected due to its urban-rural mix and the variability in teacher qualifications and experience typical of Tanzanian primary education contexts (Nanai, 2023).

3.2 Sampling Procedure and Participants

A proportional quota sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across school performance levels. Based on their academic performance, the 98 primary schools were categorised into three bands: high-performing (31 schools), mid-performing (22 schools), and low-performing (45 schools). Following the recommendation of Ilyasu and Etikan (2021) that a proportionate sample should be obtained from each category to represent key population characteristics, the researcher proportionately selected 20 schools: 6 from the high-performing band, 4 from the mid-performing band, and 10 from the low-performing band. From each selected school, five English language teachers were randomly invited to participate, yielding a total sample of 100 teachers.

As presented in Figure 2, the proportional quota sampling procedure ensured that the final sample of 100 teachers

proportionally represented the performance distribution of all 98 primary schools in Morogoro Municipality. This approach enhanced the external validity of the findings.

Figure 2: Proportional Quota Sampling Procedure

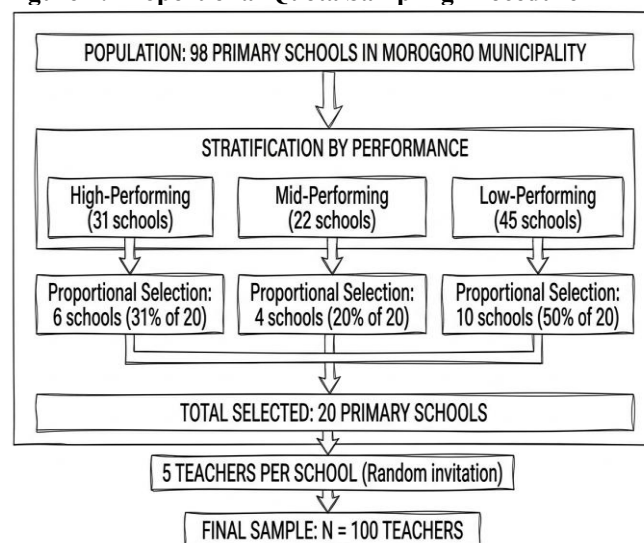


Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participating Teachers (N = 100)

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Teaching Experience	Novice (<10 years)	58	58.0
	Experienced (≥10 years)	42	42.0
Educational Level	Non-degree (Certificate/Diploma)	61	61.0
	Degree (Bachelor's or higher)	39	39.0
Gender	Male	44	44.0
	Female	56	56.0
School Performance Band	High-performing	30	30.0
	Mid-performing	20	20.0
	Low-performing	50	50.0



As shown in Table 1, the sample comprised 58 novice teachers (less than 10 years of experience) and 42 experienced teachers (10 or more years), following Gatbonton's (2008) classification where experienced EFL teachers are those with at least ten years of teaching experience. Regarding educational level, 61 teachers held certificates or diplomas (non-degree holders), while 39 held bachelor's degrees or higher (degree holders). The gender distribution was 44% male and 56% female, and the school performance band distribution mirrored the proportional sampling design (30% high, 20% mid, 50% low).

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that solicited teachers' demographic information and their self-reported frequency of using motivational strategies in English language teaching. The motivational strategies section comprised 35 items derived from Dörnyei's (2001) motivational framework. Specifically, the 35 items represented the micro-strategies within Dörnyei's taxonomy, phrased in the language of indicators to enable teachers to easily recognise what they do to motivate learners in their daily teaching of English. Teachers rated how often they used each strategy on a five-point Likert-type scale: 1 = not used, 2 = rarely used, 3 = sometimes used, 4 = frequently used, and 5 = most frequently used.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Before main study data collection, piloting was conducted at two primary schools (one English-medium and one Swahili-medium) in Morogoro Municipality to check the validity and reliability of the instrument. Piloting is essential to ensure that designed tools function as intended (Mackey & Gass, 2012). Reliability was determined using Cronbach's (1951) alpha coefficient. An alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .966$ was obtained. According to Streiner (2003), alpha values of 0.9 or above are interpreted as excellent, 0.7 to 0.9 as good, 0.6 to 0.7 as acceptable, 0.5 to 0.6 as poor, and below 0.5 as unacceptable. Based on the obtained alpha coefficient of .966, the questionnaire was deemed to have excellent internal consistency and was therefore reliable for the main study.

3.5 Data Analysis

Collected data were quantitatively analysed using SPSS version 20. A chi-square test of independence was employed to analyse the association between teachers' demographic characteristics (teaching experience and educational level) and their choice of motivational strategies. The chi-square test is a statistical method specifically designed to detect associations between two categorical variables (Moore et al., 2013). In this study, the two categorical variables tested were: (a) teachers' demographic characteristics (teaching experience: novice vs. experienced; educational level: degree vs. non-degree) and (b) their selection of each motivational strategy (frequency of use across the five-point scale).

The null hypothesis (H_0) was that there is no relationship between teachers' demographic characteristics and their

choice of motivational strategies. A significance level (alpha) of 0.05 was chosen as the threshold for rejecting or accepting the null hypothesis. If the p-value was less than or equal to 0.05, the association was considered statistically significant, indicating that the motivational strategy was significantly associated with the tested demographic characteristic. If the p-value was greater than 0.05, the association was considered non-significant, and the null hypothesis was upheld.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Approvals were obtained from relevant authorities in the following hierarchical order: the Regional Administrative Secretary's office, the office of the District Municipal Director, the Municipal Education Officer, and the heads of the selected primary schools. Furthermore, written informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers before data collection commenced. Teachers were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings on the association between teachers' demographic characteristics (teaching experience and educational level) and their choice and use of motivational strategies in Tanzanian EFL primary classrooms. The results are organised according to the two research questions guiding this pragmatic inquiry: (1) How are teachers' years of teaching experience associated with their choice and use of motivational strategies? and (2) Does teachers' educational level influence their selection and use of motivational strategies? Teaching experience was operationalised as the number of years a teacher had spent teaching English in primary schools, categorised into novice (less than 10 years) and experienced (10 or more years) following Gatbonton's (2008) classification. Educational level was categorised into degree holders (bachelor's degree or higher) and non-degree holders (certificate or diploma).

4.1 Teaching Experience and the Choice of Motivational Strategies

The chi-square test results revealed that teaching experience plays a significant role in the choice of motivational strategies. Out of the 35 motivational strategies tested, 15 demonstrated a statistically significant association with teachers' teaching experience ($p < .05$). Table 2 presents the complete statistical results of the association between teaching experience and the choice of motivational strategies.



Table 2: Association between Teaching Experience and Choice of Motivational Strategies

S/N	Motivational Strategy	Pearson Chi-Square Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
1	Paying attention and listening to each pupil	11.414	4	.022**
2	Encouraging risk-taking and making pupils accept mistakes as a natural part of learning	10.895	4	.028**
3	Encouraging pupils to personalise the classroom environment according to their tastes	10.342	4	.035**
4	Reiterating the role English plays in the world, highlighting its potential usefulness both for themselves and their community	10.498	4	.033**
5	Making sure that the pupils receive sufficient preparation and assistance	10.079	4	.039**
6	Making the learning tasks challenging	9.690	4	.046**
7	Enlisting learners as active task participants by creating specific roles and personalised assignments for everybody	26.166	4	.000**
8	Explaining the purpose and utility of a task	13.495	4	.004**
9	Providing appropriate strategies to carry out the task	17.089	4	.002**
10	Stimulating the pupils' appetite for the content of the task	18.379	4	.001**
11	Personalising learning goals	16.793	4	.002**
12	Indicating to my pupils that I believe in their effort to learn and their capability to complete the tasks	15.939	4	.003**
13	Promoting cooperation instead of competition	13.838	4	.008**
14	Offering reward for participating in activities that pupils may get drawn into because they require creative goal-oriented behaviour and offer novel experiences and consistent success	15.285	4	.004**
15	Encouraging accurate pupil self-assessment by providing various self-evaluation tools	17.820	4	.001**

Note: Statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Source: Field data (2024)

As shown in Table 2, the 15 motivational strategies significantly associated with teaching experience can be categorised across all four stages of Dörnyei's (2001) motivational framework. The first category (creating basic motivational conditions) includes three strategies: *paying attention and listening to each pupil* ($p = .022$), *encouraging risk-taking and making pupils accept mistakes as a natural part of learning* ($p = .028$), and *encouraging pupils to personalise the classroom environment according to their tastes* ($p = .035$). The second category (generating initial motivation) includes three strategies: *reiterating the role English plays in the world* ($p = .033$), *making sure pupils receive sufficient preparation and assistance* ($p = .039$), and *stimulating pupils' appetite for task content* ($p = .001$). The third category (maintaining and protecting motivation) includes seven strategies, the largest number, comprising: *making learning tasks challenging* ($p = .046$), *enlisting learners as active task participants* ($p = .000$), *explaining the purpose and utility of a task* ($p = .004$), *providing appropriate strategies to carry out the task* ($p = .002$), *personalising learning goals* ($p = .002$), *indicating belief in pupils' effort and capability* ($p = .003$), and *promoting cooperation instead of competition* ($p = .008$). The fourth category (encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation) includes two strategies: *offering reward for creative, goal-oriented activities* ($p = .004$) and *encouraging accurate pupil self-assessment* ($p = .001$).

The finding that teaching experience is significantly associated with the choice of 15 motivational strategies, with the majority falling under the maintenance and protection stage, carries important pragmatic implications. Experienced teachers appear to possess a deeper understanding of learners' needs and abilities, enabling them to select strategies that sustain motivation over time rather than merely initiating it. This aligns with Hsu's (2009, cited in Solak & Bayar, 2014) observation that experienced teachers are more knowledgeable about which motivational strategies are suitable for learners given their abilities and needs. Conversely, novice teachers' limited selection of these strategies may stem from inadequate knowledge of the effectiveness of specific strategies in motivating learners. Al-Mahrooqi *et al.* (2012) similarly found that novice EFL teachers often lack awareness of the variety of motivational strategies available and, even when aware, remain uncertain about which strategies to employ.

The present findings contradict previous studies by Solak and Bayar (2014) and Zulkifli and Kutty (2022), which reported no association between teaching experience and motivational strategy choice. This discrepancy may be attributable to contextual differences: the present study was conducted in Tanzanian primary schools where teacher deployment often occurs outside subject specialisation, making accumulated experience particularly valuable. As Lamb (2017) remarked, teachers who dedicate years to teaching develop nuanced responses to classroom demands



through reflective motivational practice. Successful motivational practice involves continuously paying attention to learners' desires, needs, and goals while selecting appropriate strategies. During interviews, teachers in this study mentioned that they are expected to teach any subject regardless of specialisation, leaving insufficient time to focus on English and develop necessary experience. This suggests that teaching experience matters more in contexts where subject-specific teaching experience is otherwise limited.

4.2 Educational Level and Choice of Motivational Strategies

Regarding teachers' educational level, the chi-square results revealed a much weaker association. Only 8 out of the 35 motivational strategies tested demonstrated a statistically significant association with teachers' educational level. Table 3 presents the statistical association between motivational strategies and teachers' educational levels.

Table 3: Association between Teachers' Educational Level and Choice of Motivational Strategies

S/N	Motivational Strategy	Pearson Chi-Square Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
1	Showing pupils that you care about their progress	9.905	4	.042**
2	Sharing with pupils that you value English as a meaningful experience	10.823	4	.029**
3	Keeping parents regularly informed about their children's progress	9.840	4	.043**
4	Encouraging and, if possible, organising extracurricular activities and outings	15.563	4	.004**
5	Stimulating the pupils' appetite for the content of the task	17.398	4	.002**
6	Avoiding face-threatening acts such as humiliating criticism or putting pupils in the spotlight unexpectedly	9.720	4	.045**
7	Promoting cooperation instead of competition	10.493	4	.033**
8	Encouraging accurate pupil self-assessment by providing various self-evaluation tools	14.029	4	.007**

Note: Statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Source: Field data (2024)

As presented in Table 3, the eight statistically significant motivational strategies are distributed across three of Dörnyei's (2001) four stages. Five strategies belong to the creating basic motivational conditions stage: *showing pupils that you care about their progress* ($p = .042$), *sharing that you value English as a meaningful experience* ($p = .029$), *keeping parents regularly informed about children's progress* ($p = .043$), *encouraging and organising extracurricular activities* ($p = .004$), and *promoting cooperation instead of competition* ($p = .033$). Two strategies belong to the maintaining and protecting motivation stage: *stimulating pupils' appetite for task content* ($p = .002$) and *avoiding face-threatening acts* ($p = .045$). One strategy belongs to the encouraging positive self-evaluation stage: *encouraging accurate pupil self-assessment* ($p = .007$).

The finding that degree holders place much attention on creating basic motivational conditions rather than on maintaining or protecting motivation is pragmatically significant. While formal education may heighten teachers' awareness of the importance of establishing a supportive classroom climate, it does not necessarily equip them with

the situated, experience-dependent skills required to sustain motivation once initial interest wanes. This finding contradicts Uştuk (2018), who reported a significant association between teachers' education level and their perceived importance of motivational strategies. The discrepancy may be explained by the distinction between *perceived importance* (what teachers believe matters) and *actual selection and use* (what teachers report doing in classrooms). Teachers may hold favourable perceptions of motivational strategies regardless of education level, but the translation of those perceptions into practice appears to be shaped more by experience than by formal qualification. This aligns with Perez and Pulana's (2022) finding that the highest level of education does not significantly affect teachers' motivational strategy use.

4.3 Synthesis: Experience Versus Qualifications

The pragmatic question guiding this study, whether teaching experience matters more than qualifications, can now be answered with empirical evidence. Table 4 synthesises the findings by comparing the number and types of motivational strategies associated with each demographic variable.

Table 4: Comparative Synthesis of Motivational Strategies Associated with Teaching Experience and Educational Level

Dörnyei's (2001) Stage	Strategies Associated with Teaching Experience (n)	Strategies Associated with Educational Level (n)
Creating Basic Motivational Conditions	3	5
Generating Initial Motivation	3	0
Maintaining and Protecting Motivation	7	2
Encouraging Positive Self-Evaluation	2	1
Total	15	8

Source: Author's synthesis from Table 2 and Table 3



As shown in Table 4, teaching experience is associated with more than twice as many motivational strategies (15) as educational level (8). Moreover, the distribution across Dörnyei's (2001) stages reveals a pragmatic pattern: educational level is associated primarily with Stage 1 (creating basic conditions), while teaching experience is associated robustly with Stage 3 (maintaining and protecting motivation), which requires ongoing classroom judgment, learner responsiveness, and adaptive implementation. This finding strongly suggests that teaching experience matters more than formal qualifications for selecting a wider, more sophisticated range of motivational strategies in Tanzanian EFL primary classrooms.

4.4 Discussion of Pragmatic Implications

The finding that experienced teachers select strategies across all four stages, particularly those for maintaining motivation, indicates that years of teacher-pupil EFL classroom interaction inform teachers about what strategies are appropriate to enhance pupils' motivation. Experienced teachers likely develop what Lamb (2017) terms "reflective motivational practice", continuously attending to learners' desires, needs, and goals while selecting strategies. Novice teachers, by contrast, appear to select strategies more experimentally, still testing which approaches work with their specific learners.

The limited association between educational level and strategy choice suggests that degree holders and non-degree holders do not substantially differ in their strategic selections beyond creating a positive classroom climate. This finding carries important policy implications: investing in teacher qualifications alone may not yield differentiated motivational practices. Instead, structured opportunities for experience accumulation, particularly through subject-specialised deployment, may be more effective.

Furthermore, as Soraya (2020) observed, even when teachers select similar strategies, implementation varies by demographics. The present study focused on strategy *selection* (what teachers report using), but future research should examine whether experienced and novice teachers differ in *how* they implement the same strategies. It is further deducible from these findings that the choice and use of motivational strategies cannot be universalised, as teachers' varied demographics lead them to employ some strategies more than others.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

This study set out to answer a pragmatic question that has divided second language acquisition scholars for nearly two decades: do teachers' demographic characteristics, specifically teaching experience and educational level, actually shape their choice of motivational strategies in EFL classrooms, and if so, which characteristic matters more?

Drawing on a sample of 100 English language teachers from 20 primary schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania, and employing chi-square analyses of 35 motivational strategies derived from Dörnyei's (2001) taxonomy, the study provides clear empirical evidence that teaching experience is substantially associated with motivational strategy choice, while educational level has little or no significant association. Specifically, 15 out of 35 strategies were significantly associated with teaching experience ($p < .05$), compared to only 8 strategies associated with educational level. More importantly, the distribution of these associations across Dörnyei's four stages reveals a telling pragmatic pattern: educational level was primarily associated with Stage 1 strategies (creating basic motivational conditions, such as showing care and organising extracurricular activities), whereas teaching experience was robustly associated with Stage 3 strategies (maintaining and protecting motivation, such as enlisting learners as active task participants, personalising learning goals, and providing appropriate task strategies). This finding is theoretically significant because it demonstrates that the type of motivational strategy, not merely the number, differs qualitatively by demographic characteristic. Experienced teachers do not simply use more strategies; they use strategies that require situated classroom judgment, ongoing learner responsiveness, and the ability to sustain motivation over time rather than merely initiate it. Novice teachers, by contrast, appear to select strategies that are more general, less differentiated, and concentrated in the initial stages of the motivational process.

The empirical contribution of this study is threefold. First, it provides the first systematic, traceable evidence from Tanzanian primary EFL contexts on the association between teacher demographics and motivational strategy choice, thereby filling a significant geographical and institutional gap in the literature. Prior studies have predominantly been conducted in Western, Asian, or Middle Eastern settings (Arabai, 2014; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Wong, 2014), and the present findings demonstrate that contextual factors, particularly teacher deployment practices where instructors are required to teach outside their subject specialisation, may amplify the importance of experience relative to qualifications. Second, the study empirically resolves a longstanding contradiction in the literature by showing that previous null findings (e.g., Solak & Bayar, 2014; Zulkifli & Kutty, 2022) may have resulted from treating motivational strategies as an undifferentiated aggregate. When strategies are disaggregated by Dörnyei's (2001) stages, experience effects become visible precisely where theory would predict them: in strategies requiring adaptive, context-sensitive implementation. Third, the study advances theoretical understanding by demonstrating that Dörnyei's taxonomy is not merely descriptive but has predictive demographic sensitivity. The framework can therefore be used not only to



inventory what teachers do but also to predict which teachers are likely to do what, based on their experience profiles.

The policy implications of these findings are substantial and actionable. In Tanzania, as in many low- and middle-income country contexts, educational reform has often prioritised teacher qualification upgrading, for example, requiring degree-level entry or providing in-service certification, as the primary lever for improving instructional quality. The present findings suggest that this policy emphasis may be misdirected, at least with respect to motivational strategy use. Degree holders and non-degree holders did not substantially differ in their selection of most strategies, particularly those for maintaining and protecting motivation, which are critical for sustaining learner engagement over an academic term or year. Policymakers should therefore consider complementing qualification-focused reforms with strategies that deliberately cultivate teaching experience in subject-specific ways. The most direct policy recommendation arising from this study is the revision of teacher deployment guidelines for pre-primary and primary schools in Tanzania. Current guidelines allow school administrators to assign teachers to teach any subject regardless of their area of specialisation, which fragments subject-specific experience accumulation. A teacher trained in English may be assigned to teach mathematics, Kiswahili, or social studies in one year and English the next, resetting the accumulation of subject-specific pedagogical content knowledge. The revised guidelines should incorporate a clear directive that, to the greatest extent possible, teachers should be deployed to teach subjects aligned with their initial training and that such assignments should be maintained consistently over multiple years to allow experience to develop. This recommendation is not merely administrative; it is empirically grounded in the finding that experience effects are strongest for strategies requiring nuanced, learner-responsive judgment.

An additional policy implication concerns initial teacher education and induction. If teaching experience matters more than qualifications, then pre-service programmes alone cannot adequately prepare teachers to select and deploy a full range of motivational strategies. Teacher training institutions should therefore embed structured opportunities for reflective motivational practice throughout the curriculum, including extended practicum experiences with mentoring focused specifically on motivation maintenance strategies. Moreover, novice teachers in their first five years of service require targeted professional development that explicitly addresses the gap identified in this study: how to move beyond creating basic motivational conditions toward maintaining and protecting motivation over time. Such professional development should be practice-based, involving video analysis, peer observation, and coaching rather than decontextualised workshops. School-based

mentoring programmes that pair novice teachers with experienced colleagues who demonstrate strong Stage 3 strategy use could accelerate the acquisition of experience-dependent motivational competence.

The study also carries implications for educational research methodology. The finding that only 8 out of 35 strategies were associated with educational level, while 15 were associated with experience, suggests that future studies should avoid treating demographic characteristics as interchangeable or aggregating all strategies into a single scale score. Researchers should disaggregate both independent variables (distinguishing experience from qualifications, and within experience, possibly distinguishing early, mid, and late career stages) and dependent variables (distinguishing strategies by their position within Dörnyei's stages). Furthermore, the study's use of a chi-square test to examine associations at the individual strategy level rather than relying solely on composite means offers a more sensitive analytic approach that future replication studies should adopt.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample, while adequate for chi-square analysis, was drawn from a single municipality, and caution is warranted in generalising to other regions of Tanzania or to other national contexts. The study relied on self-reported frequency of strategy use, which may be subject to social desirability bias; teachers may overreport strategies they perceive as expected. Future research should complement self-report data with classroom observations and learner perceptions to triangulate findings. Additionally, the study treated teaching experience dichotomously (novice vs. experienced), which may obscure finer-grained differences, such as whether the experience-effect is linear or whether it plateaus after a certain number of years. Future studies with larger samples should examine experience as a continuous variable or as a multi-category ordinal variable. Longitudinal research would also be valuable to determine whether the observed differences between novice and experienced teachers reflect genuine experience-driven development or cohort effects (i.e., whether newer teachers were trained differently).

The study concludes with three actionable recommendations for practice. First, primary school English teachers should allocate deliberate time to connect with their learners to understand their motivational needs, as Dörnyei (2001) articulated, by accepting learners, listening and paying attention to them, and being available for personal contact. This recommendation applies equally to novice and experienced teachers, but for novices, structured tools such as learner motivation inventories or brief individual check-ins may be necessary to scaffold what experienced teachers do more intuitively. Second, given that degree holders in this



study predominantly selected strategies for creating basic motivational conditions, continuous in-service training must be provided to equip all teachers, regardless of qualification, with balanced skills across all four stages of motivational strategy use. Training should explicitly address the maintenance and protection stage, which was the most experience-sensitive but also the most critical for sustained learner engagement. Third, and most importantly, the guidelines for teacher deployment in pre-primary and primary schools must be revised to include a mandatory section directing implementers at school, ward, and district levels to allocate teaching subjects to teachers based on subject expertise and to maintain those assignments consistently over time. Without this structural change, experience in teaching English cannot accumulate, and the advantage that experienced teachers currently demonstrate will remain unavailable to novice teachers regardless of how many qualifications they obtain. In sum, this study provides strong empirical evidence that when it comes to motivating young EFL learners, what teachers do in the classroom over years of practice matters more than the degrees they hold on their classroom walls.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

I hereby declare that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the research and findings presented in this paper.

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