Instructor verbal immediacy in the EFL classroom: Does it matter?

Xian Chen[1,2,*], Shameem Rafik-Galea[2]

[1] *Taizhou University, Zhejiang, 318000, China*

[2] *SEGi University, Petaling Jaya, 547810, Malaysia*

* Corresponding author: Xian Chen, 812984158@qq.com

ABSTRACT: Teaching English in a monolingual context is often daunting for many EFL instructors and teachers. Studies have shown that instructors are pivotal in driving students' learning motivation. However, how EFL instructors teach, including how their verbal immediacy behavior impacts learners, often goes unnoticed. Instructor verbal immediacy is a significant factor in motivating learners to learn, especially in the EFL classroom. This paper presents findings investigating the relationship between instructor verbal immediacy behaviors and learner-state motivation in an EFL classroom in China. A cross-sectional survey design was used to gather data among undergraduates majoring in English at a public university in Southeast China. The results showed that EFL instructors displayed medium to high levels of verbal immediacy and that EFL instructors' verbal immediacy behaviors exhibited a significant correlation with EFL learners' state motivation. The findings also revealed the two verbal immediacy behaviors as significant predictors of EFL learning motivation: using humor in class and praising students' work, actions, or comments. Therefore, instructor verbal immediacy behaviors should be effectively integrated into EFL pedagogy to enhance EFL students' language learning motivation.

KEYWORDS: instructor immediacy; verbal immediacy; state motivation; psychological wellbeing; EFL learning; EFL pedagogy

1. Introduction

The crucial function of motivation in learning a foreign language has been verified by earlier studies (Khan et al., 2023c; Todaka, 2020; Xaypanya et al., 2017). Motivation provides the internal stimulus necessary for optimal learning. A variety of context-specific factors impact learners' motivation. Teachers are among the most crucial elements affecting students' motivation and other psychological elements (Rezapour and Fazilatfar, 2023; Meng, 2021; Bouras and Keskes, 2014). Cirocki et al. (2019) identified six categories of instructor strategies that improved learner motivation in EFL pedagogical contexts. These strategies include modeling appropriate teacher behaviors, fostering a positive classroom and group environment, selecting and implementing pedagogical activities, promoting the attractiveness of learning, emphasizing self-evaluation, and fostering learner autonomy. Among these six instructional tactics, teachers' exhibition of appropriate behaviors was most effective in enhancing learner motivation. According to Ahmadi-Azad et al. (2021), EFL teachers' helpful, friendly, and understanding behaviors enable them to be closer to students by encouraging, supporting, and listening to their needs, thereby boosting autonomous learning motivation. Therefore, it is the responsibility of EFL teachers to not only transfer knowledge but also to inspire students' motivation through their adept and positive

interpersonal behaviors.

Immediacy on the instructor's part is a critical communication skill for forging strong bonds with students. Immediacy behaviors are those verbal and nonverbal signs expressed during the teaching process to establish close instructor-learner relationships. Despite diverse determinants of motivation, instructors' immediacy behaviors were proved to be the most critical factor contributing to EFL learning motivation (Megawati and Hartono, 2020; Gholamrezaee and Ghanizadeh, 2018). The immediacy behaviors displayed by English teachers can create a more personal learning environment where students feel more supported and encouraged, increasing their motivation to learn the language (Shakir, 2021). Some researchers tend to lay more emphasis on the nonverbal portion of instructor immediacy behaviors when considering the verbal and nonverbal components of instructor immediacy behaviors (Fauzan, 2018; Bambaeeroo and Shokrpour, 2017; Hsu, 2010; Meesuwan, 2022). However, when it comes to EFL education, verbal immediacy is crucial to foster motivation and facilitate learning. EFL instructors' verbal immediacy practices, which include calling out names, encouraging class debate, rewarding students' accomplishments, and asking easy-to-difficult questions, are essential for motivating students and fostering their interest in the learning process (Guo et al., 2022). Because the demotivation of EFL students has always been a challenge for instructors (Li, 2021; Paziresh et al., 2022), teachers' display of verbal immediacy behaviors is one of the approaches to addressing the demotivational issue. Therefore, the present study aims to examine EFL instructors' verbal immediacy behaviors and how effectively they can forecast EFL students' motivational outputs to enhance learner psychological benefits and optimize EFL learning.

2. Literature review

2.1. Instructor verbal immediacy

Educators use practical interpersonal skills to achieve various objectives, including immediacy, which refers to the degree of proximity between the communicators (Derakhshan, Eslami, et al., 2022). Immediacy signals improve the teacher-student relationship in education by conveying intimacy, liking, and interpersonal connection (Zhang and Witt, 2016). According to Dong et al.'s (2022) analysis of immediacy behaviors in instructional communication, instructor immediacy behaviors elicit the psychological closeness between instructors and learners.

It has been demonstrated that verbal and nonverbal behaviors convey instructor immediacy (Teo et al., 2022; Kalat et al., 2018; York, 2013). Verbal immediacy behaviors describe verbal cues that, among other things, demonstrate empathy, encouragement, emotions of care, and a desire to engage pupils in conversation. In contrast, nonverbal immediacy signs include facial and vocal expressions, body position, gestures, movement, and eye contact used to connect with students (Ballester, 2015).

2.2. Functions of verbal immediacy

Instructor immediacy behaviors strongly contribute to positive psychological factors and impede learner-related adverse psychological outcomes. Instructors' appropriate display of immediacy behaviors was proved to heighten learner motivation, attitude, academic engagement, the feeling of belonging, and willingness to communicate and alleviate anxiety (e.g., Mayor, 2020; Derakhshan, 2021; Wijaya, 2017; etc.). Accordingly, teachers can be active agents in the learning environment and, therefore, able to employ immediacy behaviors to meet the requirements of their students. By putting educators psychologically closer to learners, verbal cues can be used to convey immediacy. Based on Gorham's (1988) extensive research on the verbal immediacy behaviors communication course instructors exhibited,

S. A. Furlich (2016) identified a set of specific instructor verbal immediacy behaviors such as using personal examples for lesson explanation, using humor, providing positive feedback, asking for students' perception towards the relevant tasks, and asking questions or encouraging students to talk, which promoted student learning. By classifying teacher verbal immediacy behaviors into the three categories of promoting students' oral participation, exhibiting rapport with students, and exhibiting self-disclosure, Gholamrezaee and Ghanizadeh (2018) provided a more comprehensive understanding of those verbal cues. There are two prominent features related to verbal immediacy behaviors. Firstly, those verbal cues' essence is to cater to students' feelings. Using verbal immediacy behaviors to signal enthusiasm and connection with students, instructors can make learners feel more valued and supported in their learning process (Dalonges and Fried, 2016; Fatima et al., 2023). In addition, those verbal cues can illustrate the more individualized instruction, which can be demonstrated in behaviors such as giving personal disclosure or experiences and individual feedback (S. Furlich, 2013; Khan et al., 2023a). Those verbal cues featured by learner feeling orientation and individualization can pave the way for close teacher-student relationships and an intimate learning atmosphere. Previous empirical studies have found that instructor verbal immediacy behaviors are related to a set of positive learning outputs such as enhanced engagement, motivation, satisfaction with the instructor and course, and willingness to talk (Ge et al., 2019; Liu, 2021; Zhang and Witt, 2016; etc.).

2.3. Learner state motivation

To accomplish their objectives, learners must be motivated, consciously or unconsciously (Girón-García and Gargallo-Camarillas, 2020). Motivation serves as an internal catalyst for success. Regarding learner motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can be regarded as the classical motivational types, with the former elicited out of students' inner interest in learning activities and the latter primarily independent of the learning task itself and fueled by external reinforcement, such as reward or recognition (Diseth et al., 2020).

Besides the classical types, researchers have examined learner motivation from both the trait and state perspectives. State motivation is distinguished from trait motivation in that state motivation, as opposed to trait motivation, which shows learners' stable tendency towards learning, is the present desire for learning brought on by the arousal of interest and delight in the particular contexts (Van Iddekinge et al., 2018). The distinction between trait and state motivation was also underlined by Goldman et al. (2017). According to him, trait motivation refers to learners' consistent attitude towards general education, whereas state motivation is learners' attitude towards specific learning assignments or particular courses at hand. According to Kawagoe et al. (2020), learners who exhibit state motivation exhibit perseverance and engagement sparked by the current tasks or the learning environment.

State motivation is context- and activity-specific, based on particular pedagogical practices. Souders (2019) proposed that environmental and social contextual factors can be an antecedent to state motivation. Despite the durable feature of trait motivation, learners' state motivation, which is stimulated by various educational elements, determines how much they learn (Shakir and Khan, 2021). According to Mahmud and Yaacob (2007), state motivation can fluctuate over time and mainly depends on learners' attitudes and views of their instructors teaching specific courses and other contextual circumstances. Verbal immediacy behavior is among teacher-related variables associated with state motivation (Megawati and Hartono, 2020; Hussain et al., 2021). Immediacy behaviors used by instructors may enhance learners' state motivation, thereby leading to improved learning outcomes (Kalat et al., 2018).

2.4. Immediacy/motivation relationship models

The relationship between immediacy and motivation has been validated in diverse instructional settings and educational disciplines. Zhang and Oetzel (2006) proposed their immediacy/motivation relationship model by integrating three U.S.-generated models. Their study asserted that teacher immediacy, directly and indirectly, impacts cognitive learning, which is first mediated by affective learning and subsequently by motivation. By testing the different models in Chinese instructional classrooms, the final integrated model is context-specific and explanatory for the immediacy/motivation relationship. Ghanizadeh (2018) developed a holistic model that merged the qualitative data collected via interviews and observations. Their model indicated the path from instructor immediacy to various learner variables, including affective, cognitive, and perceptive factors. Frymier et al. (2019), by comparing the self-determination theory-based hypothesized model with the alternative models in their empirical study, supported the model of the immediacy/relatedness/motivation/learning relationship. According to them, there is a path from instructor immediacy to instructor relatedness, learner motivation, and learning, with instructor relatedness and learner motivation as sequential mediators. According to Vareberg et al. (2020), the immediacy/motivation relationship model was reflected in the path from instructor verbal immediacy to perceived immediacy, learning motivation, and affective feelings towards the courses and contents.

The most striking finding in their model was that affective enhancing variables, such as motivation, were among the most often reported consequences of immediacy. The immediacy/motivation relationship models show that motivational enhancement is amongst the highly mentioned learner outcomes evolved from instructor immediacy. According to the models, the immediacy-triggered motivation can then facilitate affective and cognitive learning. Therefore, instructor immediacy plays a crucial role in pedagogy since it can facilitate learning by arousing psychological well-being, such as enhanced motivation.

2.5. Immediacy/psychological output relationship in Chinese EFL education

EFL education has penetrated Chinese schools and universities nationwide. Learner psychological factors, including motivation, enjoyment, and anxiety, can all directly impact learning English in the Chinese EFL context (Wang, 2023; Zhang, 2022; Yu and Zhou, 2022). Therefore, positive psychology in EFL learning is an essential way to success for Chinese EFL learners.

Previous studies have validated the relationship between instructor immediacy and learner psychological outcomes in Chinese EFL education. For instance, Derakhshan, Zhang, et al. (2023) studied instructor non-verbal immediacy such as nodding, making eye contact, making acceptable physical contact, moving their bodies in open ways, and smiling among Chinese and Iranian EFL students, which indicated that EFL instructor non-verbal immediacy can predict learners' affective outcomes. Cai (2021) found that teachers' immediacy significantly predicted Chinese EFL tertiary students' willingness to communicate (WTC). Ge et al. (2019) also examined EFL teachers' verbal immediacy behaviors, which induced Chinese adult e-learners' positive emotions, facilitating EFL acquisition.

Despite the related studies on the impact of teacher immediacy in Chinese EFL pedagogy, there still needs to be more research concerning the impact of instructor verbal immediacy on motivation, especially in the Chinese EFL context. Moreover, the previous studies examined instructor verbal immediacy without considering specific verbal immediacy behaviors. Thus, the current study intended to fill the research gap by probing into the relationship between instructor verbal immediacy behaviors and

learner motivational output in the Chinese EFL context, highlighting the predictive roles of specific verbal immediacy behaviors for learner motivation.

2.6. Purpose of the study

The study's primary purpose was to investigate the interplay between instructor verbal immediacy behaviors and learner state motivation in the Chinese EFL pedagogical context. Specifically, it examined the verbal immediacy behaviors of EFL instructors and how well they predicted the motivational mood of EFL learners to identify ways of enhancing EFL learners' motivational outcomes through their EFL instructors' verbal immediacy behaviors. The pedagogical conclusions drawn from the current study were meant to emphasize students' emotional needs and support efficient EFL teaching. To this end, the following research hypotheses were proposed in the present study:

Research hypothesis 1: There can be significant positive relationships between EFL instructors' verbal immediacy behaviors and EFL learners' state motivation.

Research hypothesis 2: Verbal immediacy behaviors of EFL instructors can significantly predict EFL learners' state motivation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

As Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated, a quantitative approach is the most effective if the problem requires discovering variables that impact outcomes or the inquiry of the best predictors for outcomes. The current study employed quantitative research via a questionnaire survey, which focused on the correlational study to examine the relationship between the independent variables of instructor use of verbal immediacy behaviors and the dependent variable of learner state motivation.

3.2. Population and samples

As a probability sampling method, cluster sampling is practical and affordable when working with large populations (Berndt, 2020). Hence, the present study employed cluster sampling by randomly selecting 12 classes (3 from each grade level) from 36 English-major classes from a public university in Zhejiang Province of China. 332 English-major undergraduates (56 male and 276 female students) completed the questionnaire survey, among which 85 respondents were freshmen, 83 were sophomores, 81 were juniors, and 83 were seniors. Their average age was 20.15 (Mini = 18, Maxi = 24, SD = 1.283). For the survey, 48 respondents evaluated male EFL teachers, and 284 respondents evaluated female EFL teachers. Sixteen different EFL-related subjects were referred to by participants, including comprehensive English, English writing, English reading, English conversation, English listening, English grammar, phonetics, audio-visual-oral English, advanced English, English translation, an introduction to linguistics, history and selection of English literature, English speech, history and selection of American literature, computer-assisted translation, and intercultural communication.

3.3. Procedures

The online questionnaire was distributed to English-major students through the Chinese Wenjuanxing website after the end of the fall semester of 2022 under the university's permission. Participants were informed of the research goals and the confidentiality and anonymity of the research data. Participants were also ensured that the survey was based on their willingness and that no adverse consequences were related to their responses. To complete the questionnaire survey, it was required that

students reflect on a specific EFL subject they were enrolled in this semester. Hence, a more comprehensive picture can be captured regarding the immediacy behaviors of EFL instructors in different EFL subjects and their impact on learner motivation. Using five Likert scales, respondents were asked to score their perceptions of their EFL instructors' verbal immediacy behaviors and state motivation and provide demographic data about themselves.

3.4. Instrumentation

The associations between instructor verbal immediacy and learner state motivation were investigated using two measures. The measuring instruments were deemed reliable based on the reliability coefficients for Cronbach's alpha discovered in this investigation. To better understand the study's participants, demographic information was added by the researcher, which included the respondents' age, gender, grade level, and a detailed description of one of the specific EFL subjects they would like to refer to for the survey.

Verbal immediacy. The verbal immediacy measure aims to gauge how students view their instructors' verbal immediacy behaviors. EFL instructors' verbal immediacy behaviors were assessed via Violanti et al.'s (2018) 15-item verbal immediacy scale, a rectified version of Gorham's (1988) verbal immediacy measure. Respondents were required to rate the frequency of their EFL instructors' verbal immediacy behaviors on a five-point Likert scale ranging from never (1) to almost always (5). The scale was reported to have strong construct validity with an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.90 (Violanti et al., 2018). The alpha reliability for the present study was 0.815 (M = 55.06, SD = 9.12).

State motivation. The state motivation measure is intended to examine students' perception of their English learning motivation in the specific EFL subjects taught by the EFL instructors they evaluated above. EFL learners' state motivation was measured based on Vreven and McFadden's (2007) 14-item motivation scale, developed from Christophel's (1990) widely acknowledged state motivation measure. Respondents were asked to rate their motivation to study English on a five-point Likert scale ranging from never (1) to almost always (5). The present study obtained an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.805 (M = 48.00, SD = 9.32).

3.5. Data analysis

Data were cleaned and screened before proceeding to the hypothesis testing analysis. Firstly, response bias was tested using the independent-sample t-test, which was used to compare the results of the early responses and late responses groups on the dependent variable (English learning state motivation). Since the *p*-value was not significant ($p > 0.05$), it was proved that there were no differences between the early and late answers. Moreover, data were examined with normality analysis, which indicated that the skewness and kurtosis of the 29 items were within the ±2 range; thus, the assumption of data normality was achieved (Gravetter et al., 2020).

The hypothesis testing analysis was carried out to examine if there were any statistically significant correlations between the dependent variable of English learning state motivation and the independent variables of teachers' verbal immediacy behaviors. The present study's research hypotheses were addressed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 26). The researcher used descriptive analysis (means, SD) and referential analysis (Pearson's correlational and stepwise multiple regression tests). Associations between instructor verbal immediacy behaviors and student state motivation were investigated using Pearson's correlational analysis to address the first research hypothesis. To test the second hypothesis, which addresses the potential predictive roles of instructors' verbal

immediacy behaviors for students' state motivation, a stepwise linear regression was conducted for all participants.

4. Results

The present study's research questions were answered using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 26). The researcher used descriptive analysis (means, SD) and referential analysis (Pearson's correlational and stepwise multiple regression tests).

The use frequency of instructor verbal immediacy behaviors was examined through the descriptive analysis of SPSS to examine instructor verbal immediacy use. The three negatively worded items that reflect non-immediacy, namely referring to the class as "our" or what "we" are doing, asking questions that have specific, correct answers, and calling on students to answer questions even if they have not indicated they want to talk, were reverse coded before analysis. As shown in **Figure 1**, the use frequency score of verbal immediacy behaviors ranged from 2.78 to 4.14 (the average score being 3.0 according to the Likert-type scale). This implies the slightly low to moderately high frequency of instructor verbal immediacy behaviors. Moreover, EFL learners perceived that the two most frequently used verbal immediacy behaviors were asking questions or encouraging students to talk and praising students' work, action, or comments, followed by asking questions that solicit viewpoints or opinions and using personal examples or talking about experiences she or he has had outside of class. By contrast, the least frequently used verbal cues included addressing individual students by names, being addressed by his or her first name by the students, and the reverse coded item asking questions with specific, correct answers.
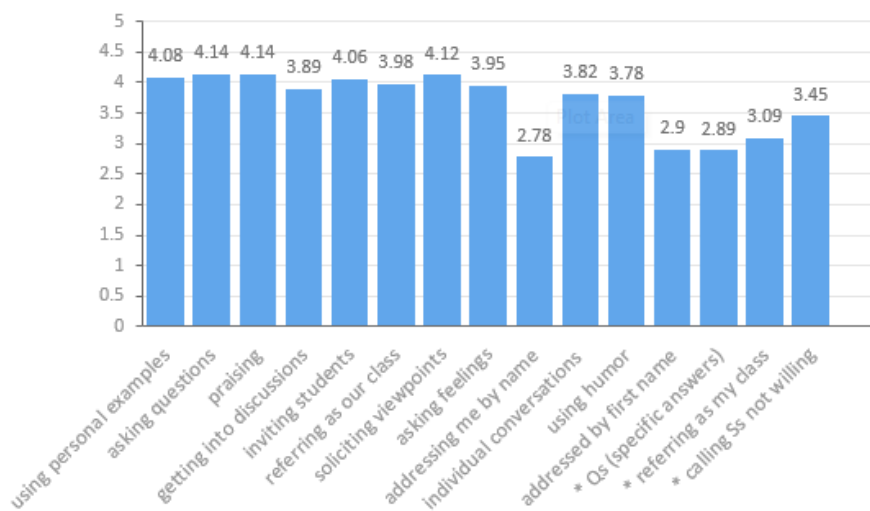

Figure 1. Use frequency of verbal immediacy behaviors.

For the first research hypothesis, Pearson correlational coefficients were computed to examine the relationship between instructor verbal immediacy behaviors and learner-state motivation. As illustrated in **Figure 2**, significant correlations were found between English learning state motivation and ten specific instructor verbal immediacy cues, among which using humor has the highest correlation with state motivation ($r = 0.435$, $p < 0.01$) followed by praising students' work, action or comments ($r = 0.423$, $p < 0.01$) and asking questions or encouraging students to talk ($r = 0.415$, $p < 0.01$).
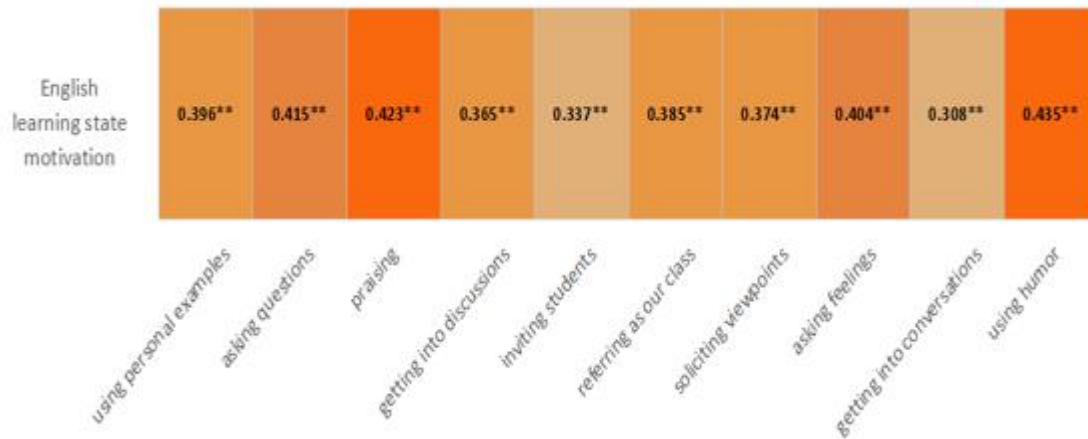
Figure 2. Pearson correlations between EFL instructors' verbal immediacy behaviors and EFL learners' state motivation.

Regarding the second research hypothesis, the multiple regression analysis was used by entering verbal immediacy items one by one into the independent box and the summative score of the English learning state motivation scale into the dependent box. Stepwise regression was adopted to identify the specific verbal immediacy behaviors predictive of learner state motivation. As reflected in **Figure 3**, among the verbal items, two verbal immediacy behaviors-using humor in class and praising students' work, actions, or comments- were significant predictors for English learning state motivation.
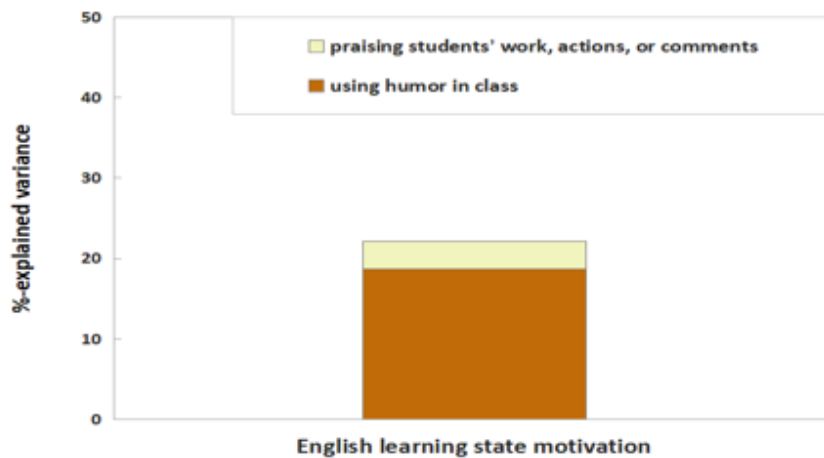

Figure 3. Predictability of verbal immediacy on state motivation through stepwise regression.

Table 1. Stepwise regression model for English learning state motivation.

Verbal immediacy items		DV: English learning state motivation	
		Model 1	**Model 2**
Standardized coefficients Beta weight	Using humor in class	0.435***	0.280***
	Praising students' work, action or comments		0.246***
R value		0.435	0.475
R square		0.189	0.226
Adjusted *R* square		0.187	0.221
F value		76.944	47.974

Notes: ***indicates that standardized coefficients (Beta) were significant at the 0.001 level.

As indicated in **Table 1**, two variables were entered into the regression models. The item using humor

in class accounted for 18.7% of the variation in state motivation (Adjusted $R2 = 0.187$; $R2 = 0.189$; $p < 0.001$). When the instructor's verbal cue of praising students' work, actions, or comments was added, it contributed more to the variation in state motivation (Adjusted $R2 = 0.221$; $R2 = 0.226$; $p < 0.001$). A total of 22.1% of change in state motivation for EFL learning was attributed to combining these two instructor verbal cues.

5. Discussion

The current study demonstrated a significant positive relationship between EFL instructors' verbal immediacy behaviors and English learning state motivation. The verbal behavior of using humor in class significantly predicted English students' motivation, followed by praising students' work, actions, or comments to increase the level of prediction. The following are some implications from this study for raising English learning motivation.

First and foremost, as predicted, EFL learners were more motivated when their instructors employed verbal immediacy behaviors in EFL pedagogy. EFL learning involves not only knowledge acquisition but also psychological arousal as well (Huang, 2022). Verbal immediacy can arouse intimate feelings toward message receivers to reduce the psychological distance between communicators (Romaniuk, 2020). Developing such kind of sense of closeness with their teachers can motivate EFL students. The finding is in line with the empirical studies that found instructors exhibited a variety of verbal immediacy behaviors as a way to increase learner motivation (Hussain et al., 2021; Fallah, 2014; S. A. Furlich, 2016). The results also corroborate Liu's (2021) view that instructors' verbal immediacy boosted students' learning motivation based on a systematic review of the immediacy-motivation relationship in EFL, communication, and other education sectors.

Moreover, the current study found the verbal cue of humor as the most significant predictor for English learning motivation since it accounted for 18.7% of change in motivation and had the highest correlational coefficient with motivation ($r = 0.435$, $p < 0.01$). This finding is consistent with the study of Farnia and Mohammadi (2021), who found the benefits of humor, including how it shortened the barrier between them and their students, eased their tension, increased their recollection of the material, and motivated them more from the perspectives of both EFL teachers and learners in Iranian English language institutes. The result also corresponds with Muhammad and Rahman's (2017) assertion that using humor can help improve communication between instructors and learners and uplift learners by examining lecturers' feelings about employing humor in the classroom. Humor is a powerful teaching technique for increasing intrinsic motivation in English learning by creating a conducive learning atmosphere (Salmee and Arif, 2019).

Furthermore, as found in the study, the verbal cue of praising was another significant predictor for English learning motivation, which, combined with humor, accounted for 22.1% of the variation in motivation. The finding conforms to the study of Peng (2021), which, via the review of empirical studies, demonstrated the positive outcomes of EFL instructors' praise for English learning motivation and involvement. This result is also supported by Mardiah (2020), who found that effective instructor praise featuring conciseness, objectivity, and explicitness can foster a supportive and helpful classroom learning environment and boost learner motivation. In a similar vein, the findings of other researchers (Corpus and Good, 2021; Maclellan, 2005; Titsworth, 2000) also asserted the positive association between instructor praise and learner motivational outcome.

In addition, the adjusted R square is not large enough ($R2 = 0.221$), which means the model or the

input variables (the two verbal immediacy behaviors using humor in class and praising students' work, actions, or comments) will explain 22.1% of the variation in English learning state motivation. This indicates other predictors for state motivation, as previous studies examined other instructor-related variables such as instructor non-verbal immediacy, instructor support, and instructor care as predictors for state motivation (Liu, 2021; Lin, 2020; Zhao and Li, 2016). There might also be learner-related factors, including learner self-efficacy and learner perceived value of the activity as predictors for their motivational tendency (Ramos Salazar and Hayward, 2018; Kácovský et al., 2023), which shall be further identified in the Chinese EFL context.

The findings proved that EFL instructors' verbal immediacy is critical for motivational enhancement. Using verbal cues, EFL instructors can create a supportive and comforting atmosphere to trigger learning interest and motivation. As the two most predictive verbal cues, instructor humor, and praise can contribute to enhanced learner motivation. Thus, EFL instructors must explore verbal tools like humor and praise to facilitate EFL learning.

6. Conclusion

The present study examines the interplay between EFL instructors' verbal immediacy and state motivation for English learning and identifies the predictive verbal cues for learning motivation. The findings suggest practical implications for EFL instructors. Accordingly, language educators are crucial in leading learners toward psychological well-being. Such findings suggest that EFL educators should be aware of effectively incorporating verbal immediacy into instructional practice. As a result, an environment of rapport can be established in which learning can be facilitated. Generally speaking, verbal immediacy is a way to bridge the psychological gap between instructors and learners so that learners can feel catered, supported, and motivated.

As to the limitation and future direction, firstly, it is related to the geographic and contextual restriction since the participants were selected from one particular institution of higher education. Thus, a larger sample selected from different instructional contexts and age groups in future studies can contribute to a more holistic understanding of the relationship between verbal immediacy and motivation. Furthermore, the present study had an unequal ratio of male to female students. Hence, gender differences shall be further considered to check for any moderating effects exerted by gender. Besides, although the present investigation asserts the noteworthy positive tie between instructor verbal immediacy behaviors and learner motivation in the Chinese EFL context, other instructor variables can still be learning motivation. Future research can take the functions of other instructor factors, such as credibility and clarity, into further consideration to achieve effective EFL instruction.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, XC and SRG; methodology, XC and SRG; software, XC and SRG; validation, XC and SRG; formal analysis, XC; investigation, XC; resources, XC; data curation, XC; writing—original draft preparation, XC; writing—review and editing, XC; supervision, SRG. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

Ahmadi-Azad S, Asadollahfam H, Zoghi M (2021). Teachers' interpersonal behaviors contribute to learners' autonomous and controlled motivation. International Journal of Emotional Education, 13(1), 66-86.

Ballester EP (2015). Verbal and nonverbal teacher immediacy and foreign language anxiety in an EFL university course. Porta Linguarum: revista internacional de didáctica de las lenguas extranjeras, (23), 9-24.

Bambaeeroo F, Shokrpour N (2017). The impact of the teachers' non-verbal communication on success in teaching. J Adv Med Educ Prof. 5(2), 51-59.

Berndt AE (2020). Sampling methods. Journal of Human Lactation, 36(2), 224-226. doi: 10.1177/0890334420906850

Bouras H, Keskes S (2014). Teacher-learner rapport impact on EFL learners' motivation. In International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities. Istanbul, Turkey. Available online: www. Ocerint org/Socioint14_ebook/papers/201. Pdf. Retrieved from https://www.ocerints.org/Socioint14_e-publication/papers/201.pdf (accessed on 2 July 2023).

Cai M (2021). The predictability of Chinese English as a foreign language students' willingness to communicate through teachers' immediacy and Teacher–student rapport. Frontiers in Psychology, 12, 769424. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.769424

Cirocki A, Soto ST, Encalada MAR, Cuenca KVH (2019). Motivational Strategies in the Secondary School EFL Classroom: The Case of Ecuador. Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 16(2).

Corpus JH, Good K (2020). The effects of praise on children's intrinsic motivation revisited. Psychological perspectives on praise. Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9780429327667-7

Creswell JW, Creswell JD (2018). Research design: Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods approaches, 5th ed. SAGE Publications.

Dalonges DA, Fried JL (2016). Creating immediacy using verbal and nonverbal methods. American Dental Hygienists' Association, 90(4), 221-225.

Derakhshan A (2021). The predictability of Turkman students' academic engagement through Persian language teachers' nonverbal immediacy and credibility. J. Teach. Persian Speakers Other Lang, 10, 3-26.

Derakhshan A, Eslami ZR, Curle S, Zhaleh K (2022). Exploring the predictive role of teacher immediacy and stroke behaviors in English as a foreign language university students' academic burnout. Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 12(1), 87-115.

Derakhshan A, Zhang LJ, Zhaleh K (2023). The effects of instructor clarity and non-verbal immediacy on Chinese and Iranian EFL students' affective learning: The mediating role of instructor understanding.

Diseth Å, Mathisen FKS, Samdal O (2020). A comparison of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among lower and upper secondary school students. Educational Psychology, 40(8), 961-980. doi: 10.1080/01443410.2020.1778640

Dong H, Sherer R, Lio J, Jiang I (2022). Teacher Immediacy for Effective Teaching in Medical Education. Medical Science Educator, 32(6), 1535-1539. doi: 10.1007/s40670-022-01672-0

Fallah N (2014). Willingness to communicate in English, communication self-confidence, motivation, shyness, and teacher immediacy among Iranian English-major undergraduates: A structural equation modeling approach. Learning and Individual Differences, 30, 140-147. doi: 10.1016/j.lindif.2013.12.006

Farnia M, Mohammadi S (2021). Exploring EFL teachers' and learners' perception of L2 humor: A case study of Iranian English language institutes. Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 7(1), 151-168.

Fatima T, Zalfaqar M, Ali Mehdi A, Ahmed S (2023). Investigation of Professional, Spiritual and Emotional Intelligence on Organizational Learning. International Journal of Management Thinking, 1(1), 1-19. doi: 10.56868/ijmt.v1i1.11.

Frymier AB, Goldman ZW, Claus CJ (2019). Why nonverbal immediacy matters: A motivation explanation. Communication Quarterly, 67(5), 526-539. doi: 10.1080/01463373.2019.1668442

Furlich S (2013). Enhancing Online Teaching with Verbal Immediacy through Self-Determination Theory. In: Proceedings of E-Learn 2013--World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education; Las Vegas, NV, USA. pp. 694-703.

Furlich SA (2016). Understanding instructor nonverbal immediacy, verbal immediacy, and student motivation at a small liberal arts university. Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 16(3), 11-22. doi: 10.14434/josotl.v16i3.19284

Ge ZG, Zhang AY, Li YF, Su J (2019). Exploring the impact of teachers' verbal immediacy as an emotion-mediating factor on adult e-learners' language learning. Journal of Educational Technology & Society, 22(4), 77-89.

Girón-García C, Gargallo-Camarillas N (2020). Multimodal and perceptual learning styles affect students' motivation in a digital environment. The EuroCALL Review, 28(2), 23-38.

Goldman ZW, Goodboy AK, Weber K (2017). College students' psychological needs and intrinsic motivation to

learn: Examining self-determination theory. Communication Quarterly, 65(2), 167-191. doi: 10.1080/01463373.2016.1215338

Gorham J (1988). The relationship between verbal teacher immediacy behaviors and student learning. Communication Education, 37(1), 40-53. doi: 10.1080/03634528809378702

Gravetter FJ, Wallnau LB, Forzano LAB, Witnauer JE (2020). Essentials of statistics for the behavioral sciences. Cengage Learning.

Guo H, Gao W, Shen Y (2022). L2 Enjoyment of English as a foreign language student: Does teacher verbal and non-verbal immediacy matter? Frontiers in Psychology, 13, 897698. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.897698

Gholamrezaee S, Ghanizadeh A (2018). EFL teachers' verbal and nonverbal immediacy: A study of its impact on students' emotional states, cognitive learning, and burnout. Psychological Studies, 63(4), 398-409. doi: 10.1007/s12646-018-0467-5

Hsu L (2010). The impact of perceived teachers' nonverbal immediacy on students' motivation for learning English. Asian EFL Journal, 12(4), 188-204.

Huang C (2022). Self-regulation of learning and EFL learners' hope and joy: A literature review. Frontiers in Psychology, 13, 833279. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.833279

Hussain T, Azeem A, Abid N (2021). Examining the correlation between University students' perceived teacher immediacy and their motivation. Psychological Education Journal, 58(1), 5809–5820.

Kácovský P, Snětinová M, Chvál M, et al. (2023). Predictors of students' intrinsic motivation during practical work in physics. International Journal of Science Education, 1-21. doi: 10.1080/09500693.2023.2175626

Kawagoe T, Onoda K, Yamaguchi S (2020). The association of motivation with mind wandering in trait and state levels. PloS one, 15(8), e0237461. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0237461

Kelly S, Rice C, Wyatt B, et al. (2015). Teacher immediacy and decreased student quantitative reasoning anxiety: The mediating effect of perception. Communication Education, 64(2), 171-186. doi: 10.1080/03634523.2015.1014383

Khan TJ, Shaik-Abdullah S, Murad Sani A (2023a). The Impact of English Teachers on ESL Pre-University Students' L2 Reading Motivation in Pakistan. Journal of Advances in Humanities Research, 2(3), 53–68. doi: 10.56868/jadhur.v2i3.152

Khan TJ, Shaik-Abdullah S, Murad Sani A (2023b). Motivation for Reading in English: A Needed Agenda in Pakistan. Journal of Advances in Humanities Research, 2(1), 83-90. doi: 10.56868/jadhur.v2i1.97

Khan TJ, Shaik-Abdullah S, Murad Sani A (2023c). Motivation for Reading in English: A Needed Agenda in Pakistan. Journal of Advances in Humanities Research, 2(1), 83-90.

Li C (2021). Understanding L2 demotivation among Chinese tertiary EFL learners from an activity theory perspective. Frontiers in Psychology, 12, 704430. Li, C. (2021). Understanding L2 demotivation among Chinese tertiary EFL learners from an activity theory perspective. Frontiers in Psychology, 12, 704430.

Lin YY (2020). Support matters Predictors of intrinsic motivation in older learners in Taiwan. Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 60(2), 190-212.

Liu W (2021). Does teacher immediacy affect students? A systematic review of the association between teacher verbal and non-verbal immediacy and student motivation. Frontiers in Psychology, 12, 713978. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.713978

Maclellan E (2005). Academic achievement: The role of praise in motivating students. Active Learning in Higher Education, 6(3), 194-206. doi: 10.1177/1469787405057750

Mahmud Z, Yaacob M (2007). The relationship between teacher's immediacy and student motivation and learning: A literature analysis. Jurnal Pendidikan, 32, 91-101.

Mardiah H (2020). The value of teachers' effective praise and feedback to adult learners to create a positive classroom climate. VISION, 16(1). doi: 10.30829/vis.v16i1.714

Mayor E (2020). Nonverbal Immediacy Mediates the Relationship Between Interpersonal Motives and Belongingness. Frontiers in Sociology, 5, 596429. doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2020.596429

Meesuwan S (2022). The Differences in Democratic Attitudes Between Thai Generations with Early Political Experiences Under Different Regimes. Pakistan Journal of Life & Social Sciences, 20(2). doi: 10.57239/PJLSS-2022-20.2.002

Megawati W, Hartono R (2020). The Impact of Teachers' Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication on Students' Motivation in Learning English. English Education Journal, 10(4), 436-448. doi: 10.15294/eej.v10i4.39157

Meng Y (2021). Fostering EFL/ESL students' state motivation: the role of teacher-student rapport. Frontiers in Psychology, 12, 754797. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.754797

Muhammad SA, Rahman S (2017). The use of humor in mathematics teaching and its relationship with students' concentration and motivation. Advanced Science Letters, 23(2), 1012-1015. doi: 10.1166/asl.2017.7476

Paziresh A, Hessamodini N, Jafari Z (2022). Iranian EFL Learners' Perceptions Towards Demotivation in Learning English. Journal of Modern Languages, 32(1), 104-127. doi: 10.22452/jml.vol32no1.6

Peng C (2021). Students' academic motivation and engagement in English as a foreign language classes: Does teacher praise matter? Frontiers in Psychology, 12, 778174. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.778174

Ramos Salazar L, Hayward SL (2018). An Examination of College Students' Problem-Solving Self-Efficacy, Academic Self-Efficacy, Motivation, Test Performance, and Expected Grade in Introductory-Level Economics Courses. Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education, 16(3), 217-240. doi: 10.1111/dsji.12161

Rezapour N, Fazilatfar AM (2023). Iranian EFL teachers' reflective ability, their teaching experience, and learners' motivation: Exploring possible relationships. Reflective Practice, 24(1), 100-112. doi: 10.1080/14623943.2022.2143341

Romaniuk O (2020). The first impression matters. The art of male romantic communication in American media dating culture. Discourse and Interaction, 13(1), 67-91.

Sally FHS (2018). Students' affective learning factors in learning English on teachers' nonverbal immediacy. International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI), 1(3), 140-149. doi: 10.33750/ijhi.v1i3.18

Salmee SA, Arif MM (2019). A study on the use of humor in motivating students to learn English. Asian Journal of University Education, 15(3), 257-265.

Shakir M (2021). Relationship between teachers' non-verbal immediacy behaviors and students' motivation: An evidence from Pakistani ESL classrooms. The Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Peshawar, 29(1), 43-58.

Shakir M, Khan M (2021). The Impact of Teachers' Immediacy Behavior on Students' Motivation: Implications For Pedagogy and Future Research. Webology, 18(5).

Sheybani M (2019). The relationship between EFL learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) and their teacher immediacy attributes: A structural equation modeling. Cogent Psychology, 6(1), 1607051. doi: 10.1080/23311908.2019.1607051

Souders B (2019). What is motivation? A psychologist explains. Positive Psychology.

Teo T, Khazaie S, Derakhshan A (2022). Exploring teacher immediacy-(non) dependency in the tutored augmented reality game-assisted flipped classrooms of English for medical purposes comprehension among the Asian students: Computers & Education, 179, 104406. doi: 10.1016/j.compedu.2021.104406

Titsworth BS (2000). The effects of praise on student motivation in the introductory communication course. Basic Communication Course Annual, 12(1), 5.

Todaka Y (2017). Self-efficacy of English listening skills in Japanese college EFL learners: Quantitative and qualitative analyses. European Journal of English Language Teaching.

Van Iddekinge CH, Aguinis H, Mackey JD, DeOrtentiis PS (2018). A meta-analysis of the interactive, additive, and relative effects of cognitive ability and motivation on performance. Journal of Management, 44(1), 249-279. doi: 10.1177/0149206317702220

Vareberg KR, Luo Z, Westerman D, et al. (2020). For a good class, email: Technologically-mediated out-of-class communication and instructional outcomes. The Internet and Higher Education, 47, 100761. doi: 10.1016/j.iheduc.2020.100761

Vreven D, McFadden S (2007). An empirical assessment of cooperative groups in large, time-compressed, introductory courses. Innovative Higher Education, 32(2), 85-92. doi: 10.1007/s10755-007-9040-1

Wang Z (2023). Psychological factors and production behaviors of Chinese undergraduate EFL learners. PLoS ONE, 18(7), e0288014. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0288014

Wijaya RK (2017). Students' perception of teachers' non-verbal immediacy behavior toward students' attitude and motivation in learning English. ELT Worldwide, 4(1), 75-91.

Xaypanya V, Mohamed Ismail SAM, Low HM (2017). Demotivation experienced by English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in the Lao PDR. The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 26, 361-368.

York D (2013). Investigating a relationship between non-verbal communication and student learning [PhD thesis]. Lindenwood University.

Yu Y, Zhou D (2022). Understanding Chinese EFL learners' anxiety in second language writing for the sustainable development of writing skills. Frontiers in Psychology, 13, 1010010. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1010010

Zhang B (2022). The relationship between Chinese EFL learners' resilience and academic motivation. Frontiers in Psychology, 13, 871554. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.871554

Zhang Q, Oetzel JG (2006). A cross-cultural test of immediacy–learning models in Chinese classrooms. Communication Education, 55(3), 313-330. doi: 10.1080/03634520600748599

Zhang Q, Witt PL (2016). Instructor immediacy. In: Witt PL (editor). Handbooks of communication science: Communication and learning. De Gruyter Mouton. pp. 157-181.

Zhao Q, Li W (2016). Measuring perceptions of teachers' caring behaviors and their relationship to motivational responses in physical education among middle school students. Physical Educator, 73(3), 510.