

# *The Effects of Student-centered Teaching Methods on the Motivation of English Language Learning*

Wanyi Liang<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, City University of Macau, Avenida Padre Tomás Pereira Taipa, 999078, China  
a. H20090101362@cityu.mo

\*corresponding author

**Abstract:** In recent years, student-centered teaching methods have received increasing attention. Many educators and researchers advocate a shift from a purely teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach to teaching and learning. The study aims to explore the effects of student-centered teaching methods on the English learning motivation of college students majoring in English in Chinese universities. This study used questionnaires to investigate the effects of four teaching activities (group discussion, presentation, debate, and role-play) on the motivation to learn English. Furthermore, this study reveals the influence of teaching activities on language performance, and explores oral skills, English vocabulary use and English performance in English learning. It is found that the above four activities can improve the motivation of Chinese college students to learn English to some extent. The research results show that applying student-centered teaching methods is conducive to improving the motivation of Chinese college students in English language learning. Selecting teachers' teaching methods is crucial to improve students' motivation to learn English. This paper aims to improve students' motivation to learn English. It gives some suggestions to teachers for four activities, which are speech, group discussion, debate, and role-playing, to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Based on the evaluation from participants, it is suggested that a clear purpose in a teaching activity should be addressed in a teaching context.

**Keywords:** Student-centered teaching methods, Motivation, English learning, Language performance

## 1. Introduction

A student-centered teaching methodology aims to transfer the emphasis from the teacher to the student, emphasizing active learning, student participation, and the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In a teacher-centered classroom, the teacher plays a central role, while learners are passive recipients of knowledge. In contrast, student-centered teaching methods view students as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of new information [1]. Meanwhile, the teacher is involved in learning and guides the learners [2]. Several factors contribute to the change from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach to teaching and learning. Firstly, numerous studies have shown that student-centered instructional methods increase student engagement and critical thinking skills. For example, Freeman et al.'s meta-analysis

involving 225 studies found that student-centered instructional approaches resulted in higher examination scores and lower failure rates than traditional lecture-based methods [3].

Second, the changing of requirements from employers also relates to the shift of teaching methods in language classrooms. Also, proper teaching methods can train students' practical skills for their future career development. In addition, technological advances have played an essential role in facilitating the shift to a student-centered approach in the college classroom. Digital tools and online platforms provide interactive and collaborative learning experiences that allow students to engage with course materials, collaborate with peers, and receive immediate feedback. Consequently, based on the evidence from the development of teaching methods and the practical use of knowledge, the student-centred teaching approach seems to be transparent between classrooms and post-classroom usage.

Language learning is a complex process, and learners often face various challenges in developing language skills. These difficulties can be reflected in language pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary acquisition. For example, Ellis emphasized that language learners often struggle with complex grammatical features [4]. Besides, learning a new language requires the accumulation of an extensive vocabulary. Remembering and using new words effectively can be a challenge. Nation points out that learners face difficulties in retaining and recalling vocabulary items, especially when encountering low-frequency or contextually ambiguous words [5]. Proper teaching activities are essential to language learners. Specifically, Freeman and Soto, M. argued that language learners benefit from well-designed instructional activities that promote active engagement, collaboration, and meaningful communication. In other words, they noted that teachers need to plan activities that encourage learners to use language meaningfully and purposefully and create an enabling environment for language development [6]. For English classes in China, since neither the students nor the teachers are native speakers of English, teaching style plays a vital role in increasing students' motivation [7]. Motivation is defined by Gardner as "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language" [8]. In language learning, motivation drives individuals to engage in language-related activities, persist in facing challenges, and seek opportunities for improvement [9]. Consequently, a motivated learner is more likely to be engaged in a teaching activity and any language-related activities, which may further improve their language learning.

Deci and Ryan suggest that learners exhibit higher motivation levels when they have autonomy in their language learning [10]. In self-regulated learning, Zimmerman describes autonomy as an essential component of self-directed learning. He states that autonomous learners can set goals, monitor progress, and adjust their strategies accordingly [11]. Research has shown that self-directed learners are more intrinsically motivated to learn a language. Noels et al. found that learners with more autonomy demonstrated greater interest, enjoyment, and engagement in language learning tasks [12]. As mentioned previously, there is a correlation between teaching activities and learning motivation; it is essential to identify the boosting level in different teaching activities. Many studies have examined the effects of student-centered instruction on language proficiency, cognitive development, and engagement, but research on motivation to learn has been neglected. This study aims to explore the effects of a student-centered teaching approach on the English learning motivation of Chinese English primary college students.

## 2. Methodology

The study uses a questionnaire survey to investigate how a student-centered teaching approach affects English language learning motivation. Four teaching activities are chosen to be studied: presentations, group discussions, debates, and role-playing activities. The participants are Chinese college students

whose major is English. The questionnaire was released through social media platforms, and 109 valid questionnaires were collected, and it consisted of 64 women’s responses and 45 men’s responses.

Generally, the questionnaire contained a total of 30 questions, and there were six sections. In this survey, a construction in Chinese is provided, and the questions are set to be in English with Chinese translations. Different types of questions are designed in this study. The first question type is a single-choice question to research basic information about the participants. Secondly, for the evaluation of teaching activities, the participants were asked a set of questions that covered the research objectives of this questionnaire. This study uses the Likert Scale Model to measure students’ attitudes toward the targeted teaching activities. For the related questions, 5 answers are provided, and each represents a degree of measurement (see Table 1).

Table 1: The answer for investigating how instructional activities affect participants' English language learning.

Impossible	1
Probably not	2
Uncertain	3
Probably would	4
Definitely would	5

In the data analysis stage, this study used graphical analysis and cross-analysis to understand the impact of one-student-centered teaching methods on motivation to learn English.

### 3. Results

Firstly, according to the survey, most participants (95.4%) received student-centered teaching methods in their teaching contexts. Regarding evaluating the four teaching activities, as shown in Figure 1, among the 109 participants who participated in this questionnaire, about 56.0% of the students thought group activities could stimulate their interest in learning English. Similarly, 57.8% believed that speech activities can motivate English learning. In addition, most (71.6%) of the students believed that debating and role-playing activities could enhance the motivation to learn English.

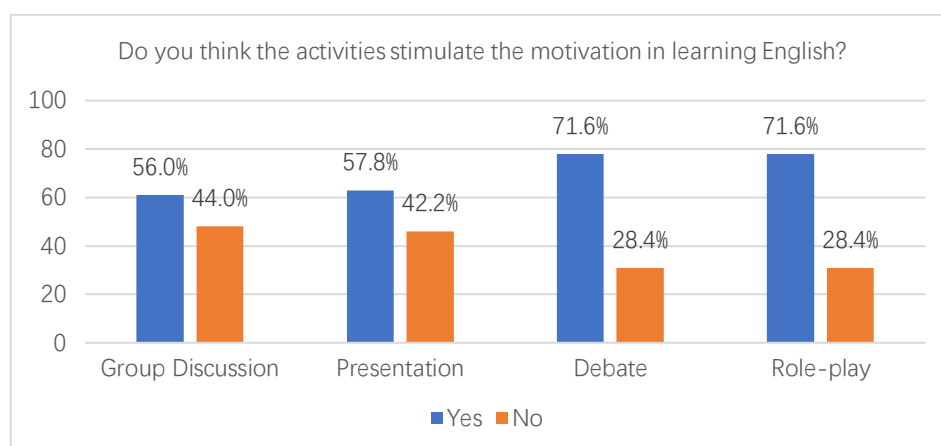


Figure 1: The perspectives on whether the four types of activities influence their English learning motivation

In addition, the questionnaire also addresses how the four student-centered activities affect students' English learning. It is easy to find that the positive impact of group discussion activities on English learning is mainly reflected in "Improvement of oral expression" (60.6%), "Improvement of language organization skills" (58.8%), and "Vocabulary increase" (51.4%). Students found that "Vocabulary increase" (61.5%), "Improvement of oral expression" (60.6%), and "More standardized pronunciation" (58.7%) were the main positive effects of speech activities on learning English. Similar to speech activities, the positive impact of debate activities on English learning is also reflected in "Improvement of oral expression" (64.2%), "Vocabulary increase" (58.7%), and "More standardized pronunciation" (56.9%). The role-playing activity showed some differences from the other three activities. Most of the students (56.0%) thought that the role-playing activity could improve their oral expression skills, and 51.4% thought that the student's language organization and mastery of English vocabulary had improved quite a lot through the role-playing activity. In addition, this study also explored the effects of the four activities on English oral expression, grammatical structure, and other abilities. In terms of oral expression in English, according to Table 2, it can be seen that in terms of "speaking activities", students who answered "probably not" (M=12) and "totally impossible" (M=5) were in the minority a mean score of 3.55. The mean score of the speech activity is much higher than the other three activities, which means that the speech activity is more conducive for students to improve their oral expression skills. While the mean score for role-playing was the lowest at only 3.10 with only a small percentage (39.5%) on the contrary, in terms of expanding vocabulary, the mean score for role-playing (3.72) was the highest of the four activities. This demonstrates that role-playing is a very effective activity for improving vocabulary. Regarding the improvement of English grammatical structures, very few students answered, "probably not" (M=18) and "totally impossible" (M=0), and the mean score was the highest in the qualifying activity at 3.50. Similarly, presentations were the activity that most motivated students to consult English materials on related topics after class, with more than 50% of students believing that presentations "definitely would" (M=33) and "probably would" (M=25) motivate them to read related English materials after class.

Table 2: The degree of effectiveness of the four activities in improving speaking skills

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>N of items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
<b>Group Discussion</b>	1	3.39	1	5
<b>Presentation</b>	1	3.55	1	5
<b>Debate</b>	1	3.27	1	5
<b>Role-play</b>	1	3.1	1	5

Note: Number of participants= 109; Minimum Score= the lowest score of students' perception result on the questionnaires Maximum Score= the highest score of students' perception result on the questionnaires

Finally, this study also examined how to enhance college students' motivation to learn English in various activities. Regarding group discussion activities, half of the participants (55.1%) agreed that "having a clear purpose and meaning for the activity" is one of the effective ways to enhance motivation in English learning. Also, "The teacher gives help and feedback on the group's discussion" (49.5%) and "Choose the size of the group themselves" (44.0%) were also positive responses to enhance the motivation of English learning during group discussions. In the classroom presentation activities, 45.9% of the participants suggested that "Can use informational aids in presentation" was the most effective way to enhance their interest in learning English in presentation activities. Nearly 50% of the participants thought being "Provided with a topic of interest for debate" could effectively increase the motivation to learn English in debate activities. Finally, 39.5% of students thought that

"Knowing specific situations, characters, and scenarios" could help increase their interest in learning English in role-playing activities.

#### 4. Discussion

As shown in the study, student-centered teaching activities are widely used in language teaching contexts. The effects of such a teaching approach are worth noting. In particular, the student instruction promotes intrinsic motivation. In language learning, students are more likely to develop a sense of autonomy, ownership, and enjoyment when they are given choices, opportunities to express themselves, and control over their learning [13,14]. Second, incorporating student-centered teaching strategies into the classroom raises learning engagement levels. It enables students to digest linguistic information and concepts in more depth, resulting in better knowledge and application of the language. Furthermore, it helps students enhance their self-regulation. A student-centered approach allows students to set their goals, assess the progress, and then reflect on their learning. These metacognitive processes improve students' self-regulations, including self-awarenesses, self-evaluations, and self-adjustments, it is essential for their effective language learning [15,16].

The result of this study is aligned with the findings of Johnson [16] and Pekrun et al. [17] that speech, group discussion, debate, and role-playing help to improve learners' motivation.

The study explores the influence of student-centered activities on English language learning performance, focusing on oral English proficiency, vocabulary expansion, and mastery of grammatical structures. It is clear to see that out of the four exercises, students can acquire spoken English more readily. Presentations offer a focused platform for oral expression, alongside role-playing, group discussion, and debate activities, which are also valuable opportunities for speaking.

As for expanding vocabulary, as shown previously, role-playing activities have been chosen to enhance students' vocabulary in English language learning. By immersing learners in real-life situations, role-playing enables students to understand and use vocabulary in specific contexts, thus improving their comprehension and memorization skills. Such a result is found in other studies, for example, Nagy et al. suggested the effectiveness of different methods for teaching vocabulary, and the contextualized instruction is assumed to be effective. Specifically, they demonstrated that students were more successful in learning new words when encountering them in meaningful contexts rather than through isolated word lists or definitions [18]. Therefore, together with my results, it seems that contextualised teaching activity such as role-playing can improve language learners' language performance.

In addition, this research, also found presentations usually involve structured content and require thorough preparation. Students must organize their thoughts, summarize the main points, and present a coherent narrative. This process encourages using grammatically correct sentences as students strive to express their ideas clearly. In contrast, role-plays, group discussions, and debates may involve more spontaneous and informal language use, resulting in less emphasis on grammatical accuracy. All four of these student-centered activities effectively promote oral expression, English vocabulary, and mastery of English grammatical structures. The reason might be that activities such as speeches and debates, Chinese college students are exposed to content that reflects real-life scenarios, making the learning experience more meaningful. This also dramatically motivates students to learn English.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study found that student-centered teaching methods positively impact Chinese college students' motivation to learn English. Therefore, shifting the center of teaching from teacher-led to student participation is an aspect that deserves significant attention. In English teaching, teachers can use

activities such as presentations, group discussions, debates, and role playing to allow students to increase their autonomy. Which may further increase their motivation.

Besides this paper also provides detailed suggestions for four specific activities. First, when organizing students' group discussions, teachers provide students with detailed objectives of the activity, which can help students clarify the direction of the discussion. Besides, in the student discussion process, appropriate help and feedback can help students clarify the central idea. Secondly, teachers can choose whether or not to allow students to use informational aids, such as PPTs and speeches, in their presentations according to their educational goals. The teacher can either let the students choose their topics of interest or conduct a simple survey of students' interests before assigning the speech questions. Thirdly, if the teacher arranges role-playing activities for the students, try to tell the students in detail about the situations and roles of the performance.

It is worth noting the restrictions of this study. The sampling was from one region, and the student-centered teaching approach is widely used in Macao University. For future studies, it would be interesting to compare the effectiveness of student-centered teaching in other institutions.

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