
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of Positive Psychology-based Classroom on English Speaking Teaching and Learning of EFL College Students

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ABSTRACT

Positive psychology (PP) insists that a positive environment can promote intrinsic motivation and self-construction. To explore and verify whether a positive classroom environment in English speaking teaching can enhance EFL college students' classroom engagement and boost their speaking proficiency and examine the practice of applying a PP-based positive classroom environment to spoken language teaching of EFL college students, this research takes two English classes in Z University as the research objects, employing PP as the theoretical framework to create a positive classroom environment, adopting a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, and conducts a comparative experiment for one semester. The research finds that speaking teaching of EFL college students based on a positive classroom environment can enhance EFL students' classroom engagement and boost their speaking proficiency. To go a step further, this research, based on the teaching practice, summarizes the methods and strategies of creating a positive classroom environment and provides a teaching sample for reference, thus offering theoretical support and practical recommendations for speaking teaching and learning of EFL college students.

KEYWORDS

Positive Psychology (PP); classroom environment; EFL college students; English speaking teaching and learning

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1. Introduction

Foreign language learners struggle more to speak than read or write the target language due to negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, tension and so on. It's particularly true for Chinese English learners due to the deeply rooted traditional conservative teaching style of the nation. The traditional Chinese classroom environment makes it difficult to arouse EFL students' motivation for verbal expression. On this matter, both educational and psychological experts have done relevant research and unanimously believe that positive psychology (PP) is more conducive to stimulating learners' learning interest and initiative, especially in issues related to speaking learning (Derakhshan, 2022a; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014; Mercer, 2020). According to the Guidance to College English Teaching (2022) released by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, the requirement for speaking ability in college English teaching includes four aspects, namely, communicating fluently in English and discussing a certain topic concerning the current learning process; Communicating with people from English speaking countries on daily topics; Preparing for familiar topics and give a brief speech for 5-10 minutes with a clear expression of ideas and basic accuracy in vocabulary and intonation; Using basic conversation strategies in conversations.

It is rather challenging to achieve the goals above under the exam-oriented teaching situation in China. English teaching and learning in China put more emphasis on hard knowledge input rather than practical output ability. In the traditional English-speaking classroom, teachers mainly teach textbook knowledge monotonously with little teacher-student interaction; EFL students lack meaningful speaking practice contexts and are hence disinclined to learn to speak English. Furthermore, traditional classroom

teaching pays little attention to EFL students' mental development. EFL college students (Chinese college English learners are usually freshmen and sophomores) who have just entered adulthood cannot give full play to their subjective initiative in the English classroom due to anxiety and lack of motivation to speak. Their average speaking proficiency in English is rather weak. Even if EFL students achieve high grades in written English, their speaking skills remain inadequate. There is an urgent need for teachers to optimize the current speaking teaching and find a more systematic and practical teaching model to improve EFL students' speaking proficiency.

2. Literature review

PP was first formally proposed by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2014) in their monograph *Positive Psychology: An Introduction*. They (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) emphasized the importance of human virtues and positive forces in PP. According to the International Positive Psychology website's home page, PP is defined as "scientific research that focuses on positive qualities and positive power and is dedicated to the prosperity of individuals and society"¹. As can be seen, PP places a premium on the positive factors of people themselves and advocates for the development of human potential and advantages to promote individual and social development. PP was introduced to second language learning thereafter. Among PP-related studies, emotional traits such as perseverance, creativity, and self-esteem draw most of the attention, with research objectives being learners' emotions or personal traits. Only a very few scholars keep their eyes on the environmental perspectives. Even if there are, most of them are at the theoretical level.

The classroom environment is largely defined as the shared perception of the environment by students and sometimes teachers (Fraser, 2012). Ambrose et al. (2010) define the classroom environment as the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical conditions in which students learn. It is usually equated with "classroom atmosphere", "classroom psychology", and "learning environment". The study of the classroom environment is based on Lewin's psychodynamic field theory (Lewin, 2013), which proposes that human behavior is the product of the interaction between human internal factors and the external environment.

The research on positive classroom environments began in the late 1920s. It is widely accepted that a positive classroom environment refers to a positive atmosphere in classroom teaching and learning activities. Teachers have PP and good mood and can use specific methods to regulate the psychological state of students' learning so that they can always be in a positive situation; in this situation, they can get active learning and thinking, effective communication and interaction between teachers and students, and achieve excellent teaching and learning results (Huang, 2011).

According to Seligman (2002: 266), "... strong families and communities, democracy, freedom of inquiry, education, and economic safety nets are all examples of positive institutions". To Peterson (2006: 20): "Positive institutions facilitate the development and display of positive traits, which in turn facilitate positive subjective experiences". Schools are unique as institutions and an environment in which educational techniques impact students in the long run. A positive classroom environment is a positive institution based on teacher-student relationships and the application of PP in classroom teaching. In adopting a positive direction, teachers should mobilize all positive factors in the classroom and fully assist students in achieving positive emotional experiences and cultivating positive character traits.

The existing research about positive classroom environments falls into three dimensions: the measurement assessment and construction of classroom environments, factors that influence classroom environments, and the impact of classroom environments on individuals.

The measurement assessment and construction of classroom environments mainly involve the use of classroom environment measurement tools, the design of assessment methods (Brännström et al., 2021), and the construction of classroom environments. Khalfaoui et al. (2021) suggest through a literature review that increased teaching time, supportive teacher-student interactions, peer interactions and friendships, child participation, teacher training in emotionally supportive environments and relationships based on trust between teachers and families, and shared materials between small peer groups and children in terms of classroom structure all contribute to a positive classroom environment for multicultural young children.

For the factors that influence classroom environments, many scholars have focused on teacher-student relationships. The representative study is Gabryś-Barker's (2016) empirical analysis of five in-service English teachers and their EFL students to identify teachers' and students' perceptions of positive classroom environment indicators, the contributions of both teachers and students in a positive classroom climate, and the importance of classroom atmosphere for teachers and students' well-being to explore the role of foreign language classroom environment in promoting foreign language learning, personal development and teacher and

¹ See the website: <http://www.ippanetwork.org/home/>

student well-being. The experiment results demonstrate that a PP-based hypothesis of personal well-being can improve the English classroom environment.

Research on the impact of the classroom environment on individual developmental outcomes has focused on behavioral issues (Kaufmann, 2020; Thornberg et al., 2018), the social-emotional field (Morin, 2020), and the much-vaunted academic achievement, including motivation and classroom engagement (Corkin et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). Viewing the positive classroom environment as consisting of two aspects, namely, the physical environment of the classroom and the role of the teacher as a creator of a positive atmosphere, Al-Obaydi's (2020) research confirms, through an experimental design, that a positive classroom environment plays a crucial role in supporting students to become risk-takers and self-actualized successful language learners. In 2021, Barksdale et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between classroom environment and secondary student achievement by administering the Learning Environment Inventory (LEI) to 428 secondary students from a large Southeast Texas school district. The LEI assessed students' perceptions of the classroom environment regarding cohesiveness, physical background, formality, and satisfaction. Their perceptions of the classroom setting in terms of cohesion, physical surroundings, courtesy, and dignity were assessed using the LEI. Additionally, data were gathered via state assessments and focus groups. While the quantitative findings indicated no relationship between classroom climate and student achievement in mathematics and reading, the qualitative data indicated that relationships, the availability and organisation of classroom resources, the establishment of classroom guidelines, and making students feel safe and cared for in the classroom all influenced student learning.

In terms of English Language Teaching (ELT), the research concentrates on connecting the classroom environment to learners' emotions and personalities and the relationship between the environment, personality, emotions, and academic performance in English. Khajavy, MacIntyre and Barabadi (2018) aimed to explore the relationship between emotions, classroom environment and willingness to communicate, using a double latent multilevel analysis with more than 60 classes of secondary school students in Iran. The results showed that a positive classroom environment helps to foster students' enthusiasm and enjoyment of learning while also reducing their anxiety. Furthermore, foreign language enjoyment was essential in increasing memory strength at both the student and classroom levels, while pressure decreased memory strength only at the student level. In order to investigate the effect of grit on high school students' foreign language performance and the role of foreign language enjoyment and classroom environment in this process, Wei et al. (2019) took 832 high school students as objects to survey grit using foreign language enjoyment, and classroom environment scales. The data were analyzed in conjunction with the student's final exam results one month later to assess the relationship between grit and foreign language enjoyment, classroom environment as well as foreign-language performance. The results showed that grit directly contributed to students' foreign language performance, and foreign language enjoyment can indirectly improve foreign language performance. Li et al. (2021) sought to examine the combined effect of trait emotional intelligence and the classroom environment on these two emotions to better understand the integrated function of person-environment factors in the production of second language emotions. The results showed that foreign language emotion is more influenced by the classroom environment and less influenced by trait emotional intelligence, providing critical insights for scholars and teachers researching the interplay of learner-internal and learner-external emotional components.

In summary, previous research on classroom environments is generally experimental, covering many areas, with the most applied research in teaching. Research directions primarily focused on elucidating the relationship between classroom environments and learners' emotions, character, and academic performance to improve students' educational achievement or competence in a particular area. However, the research on the application of positive classroom environments in teaching is mainly technical, demonstrating the positive effects of positive classroom environments in subject teaching from a macro-systemic perspective, and lacks detailed research on the process and impacts of constructing positive classroom environments supported by PP to conclude a positive classroom environment teaching model applicable to a given aspect of teaching in one specific subject.

Based on the foregoing characteristics and shortcomings of the research on classroom environment, this study aims to systematically examine the application of a PP-based positive classroom environment to college English speaking teaching and learning. Specifically, based on the main theories of PP, the four steps of a positive classroom environment teaching are used to give full play to the roles of students and teachers, and a positive classroom environment is built as research cases. Finally, through the analysis of the experimental results, the study clarifies the specific teaching model based on a positive classroom environment and the effectiveness of a positive classroom environment in English speaking teaching and discusses practical, specific implementation measures based on the theoretical and empirical results.

3. Methodology

Holding the hypothesis that teaching college English speaking based on a positive classroom environment can enhance EFL students' classroom engagement and boost their English speaking proficiency, this research is designed to measure the degree and the scale of the improvement. With PP (Csikszentmihalyi and Seligman, 2000) as the theoretical framework, positive emotional experience, positive character traits, and positive institutions are taken into consideration in the research paradigm. Specifically,

Positive emotional experiences are classified into sensory enjoyment and psychological pleasure. Positive character traits mainly include joy, grit, immediacy, immunity, grit, resilience, self-determination, optimism, commitment, connectedness, love, courage, creativity, spirituality, virtue, mindfulness, concern for the future and other positive character traits (Budzińska & Majchrzak, 2021; Derakhshan, 2022b; Dewaele, 2015; MacIntyre et al., 2016, 2019; Wang, Derakhshan, & Pan, 2022; Seligman, 2011). Positive institutions include but are not limited to the state, society, work unit, school, and family. According to PP, the construction of these institutions should be favourable to fostering and developing people's positive strengths and traits.

3.1 Research objects

This experiment lasts one semester, from September 2022 to January 2023. 201 sophomore EFL students in two classes taught by the author at Z University served as objects in the experiment. Class A is a 96-student experimental class (EC). Class B is a 105-student control class (CC). The pre-experiment test shows that the two classes had roughly the same proficiency in English speaking and could therefore be used as parallel classes for the experiment. English speaking is taught in the EC based on a positive classroom environment. In contrast, English speaking is taught in the CC based on a traditional teacher-oriented teaching mode. The two classes' teaching rate remains consistent.

3.2 Research instruments

In order to create a positive classroom environment and identify the effectiveness of a positive classroom environment in speaking, teaching and learning of EFL college students, the research adopts questionnaires, interviews and tests as research instruments.

3.2.1 Questionnaire

This experiment carries out two questionnaires to understand the current classroom environment and EFL students' English speaking learning situation. One questionnaire is carried out among all the EFL students in the EC and CC before the experiment. There are questions in the questionnaire involving the following three dimensions in English speaking class: students' emotional experiences, students' character traits and teacher-student relationship. After the experiment, another questionnaire is conducted among the EFL students in the experimental class. The content is the same as that of the first questionnaire to investigate whether the English-speaking classroom environment is conducive to the acquisition and development of positive emotional experiences and positive character traits and whether the teacher-student relationship has been improved. The reliability and validity data of the questionnaire are analyzed, which proves the feasibility of the questionnaire.

3.2.2 Interview

This experiment conducts two interviews, a pre-experiment interview and an in-experiment interview. Before the experiment, to ascertain students' emotional experiences, students' character traits and the teacher-student relationship in the current English speaking classroom environment, interviews with EFL students in the EC and CC are undertaken. Due to the large number of EFL students in each class, the students were divided into four levels, with 10 students selected for interviews at each level. 40 students are chosen for interviews. During the experiment, 40 students from the EC are interviewed again to ascertain their adaptation to the current positive English speaking classroom environment teaching, which aspects of the positive classroom environment have improved students' speaking proficiency, and whether they are willing to continue their English speaking class in this way. Simultaneously, the experimental approach would be adjusted in response to the interview results.

3.2.3 Test

In order to examine the application effect of a positive classroom environment in English speaking teaching, the speaking test of the CC and the EC was carried out. The speaking test was conducted twice. The one conducted before the experiment was to understand the current English speaking proficiency of the EFL students in the two classes. The other test conducted after the experiment tests the effectiveness of a positive classroom environment in speaking, teaching and learning of EFL college students. The comparison of the results of the two tests was also to test whether the classroom environment was conducive to the improvement of EFL college students' English speaking ability. The researcher formulated the evaluation criteria for the two speaking tests after consulting the relevant requirements of the Curriculum Standard and working with the English teachers in the same faculty. Students' speaking test scores were graded based on their test recordings. The tests have a high degree of reliability and objectivity. Students' test scores before and after the experiment were analyzed and calculated by the data statistics software SPSS27.0 to test whether language speaking teaching and learning based on a positive classroom environment can improve EFL students' speaking test scores.

3.3 Research procedures

Based on the experimental design, with quantitative and qualitative research as the research method, the research undergoes the following procedures in data collection and data processing.

3.3.1 Pre-experiment investigation

In order to be fully prepared for the research, especially to address issues that arise during the coming research process, the pre-experiment investigation is conducted to size up the basic situation of the research objects. The tools for investigating the research objects mainly include questionnaires, interviews and pre-experimental tests. The questionnaire is distributed to the EFL students in the EC before the experiment, aiming to get to know the current situation of their English speaking ability, main problems and needs in English speaking teaching and learning and to collect data for targeted teaching activities, make more targeted improvements in English speaking classroom teaching. Stratified sampling was conducted for EFL students before the experiment, and semi-structured interviews were conducted for some of them. More detailed understanding of EFL students' specific problems, the ideal English-speaking class in their mind, and the kind of help they need to get to improve the teaching design. The test before the experiment is to compare whether there is a significant difference in the EFL students' speaking proficiency in the two classes and whether it can be regarded as a parallel class for experimental research. The collected performance data was archived for comparative analysis with post-experimental scores to find whether they have made progress.

3.3.2 Experiment implementation

The implementation of the experiment is realized through the actual teaching process. This section describes how to design teaching activities based on the principles of PP, adopt a pedagogical approach and adjust the experimental methods from time to time through observation and reflection on the teaching effect.

First, in the designing of teaching activities, both the EC and the CC have English-speaking classes once a week according to the curriculum arrangement. Teachers dig into the mapping points of traditional Chinese culture in speaking topics in textbooks, cultivate EFL students' cross-cultural communication ability, and help them improve their speaking proficiency. Teaching materials and content are double checked to ensure the degree of difficulty is fit for EFL students' level. The topics selected for EC and CC are identical. The pace of the teaching progress is consistent for both classes.

Second, in the adoption of teaching methods, the EC conducts English speaking teaching based on a positive classroom environment, focusing on listening and speaking teaching activities. The teaching process includes four steps: situational introduction, knowledge preparation, group cooperation, and result presentation. The CC adopts the traditional teaching method of the English speaking classroom, and the teacher mainly teaches the textbook's content.

Third, at the stage of observation and interview, in order to ensure the smooth operation of the experiment, the teacher needs to observe the changes and reactions of EFL students closely and check whether they are developing in the expected direction. Once deviating from expectations, the teacher needs to find the causes of problems in time and adjust teaching strategies. In order to timely understand the EFL students' adaptation to the positive environment of a speaking classroom, interviews should be conducted during the experiment. A stratified sampling method is also adopted to select some of them in the experimental class for interviews. Their feedback about teaching and learning would be collected regularly to adjust the teaching effect in the experimental class.

3.3.3 Post-experiment conclusions

At the end of the experiment, the result of the experiment was collected by questionnaire survey and post-experiment test. The questionnaire survey aims to understand whether EFL students' attitude towards English speaking has been positively changed, whether their speaking level has been dramatically improved, whether their opinions about each stage of the teaching are positive, to provide constructive suggestions for the future English speaking teaching at college. At the end of the experiment, both the EC and CC are given a post-experiment test. The test papers are selected randomly to score. The result data are analyzed with SPSS27.0. The purpose is to verify whether applying a positive classroom environment in speaking teaching and learning of EFL college students is conducive to their English speaking learning, whether PP-based English speaking teaching is more effective than the traditional one, and how effective it is.

4. Results and discussion

The result of the application of PP to English speaking teaching can be examined using questionnaires, interviews, and English speaking proficiency tests based on a comparative analysis between EC and CC. The data are mainly collected to show the ways of creating a positive classroom environment through a teaching case and the effect of engaging in positive classroom teaching.

4.1 The creation of a positive classroom environment

In order to show the way to conduct a successful, positive classroom environment based on English-speaking class, the teaching steps are elaborately presented with a case study of teaching English speaking in the classroom.

4.1.1 Designing teaching steps

Traditional English-speaking teaching focuses mainly on indoctrination and pays little attention to EFL students' positive character traits or experiences. The positive classroom environment speaking teaching mode based on PP is teacher-led and student-centered. The teaching process consists of four steps: situational introduction, knowledge preparation, group cooperation, and result presentation.

(1) Situational introduction

In order to stimulate EFL students' learning motivation and fully mobilize their existing knowledge and experience, the teacher will create meaningful situations to lead in speaking topics, including the exchange of life experiences between teachers and students, discussions on social news and hotspots related to learning topics, so that students can understand that the topics are closely related to themselves, and combine textbook knowledge with social reality.

(2) Knowledge preparation

Knowledge preparation mainly includes different ways to present knowledge in the context of teacher-student interaction to assist students in expanding their thinking and enabling students to output. These include knowledge foreshadowing, cultural comparison and demonstration guidance.

(3) Group cooperation

Under the condition that the average level of English speaking in each group is equal, the 96 EFL students are divided into 10 English speaking learning groups, and a scoring system for speaking group classroom operation is formulated. The groups are encouraged to help each other, group members can move around, and the teacher gives necessary help and encouragement during the discussion.

(4) Result presentation

The group's discussion results are mainly displayed through various activities such as scenario demonstrations, game competitions, and interview reports. Teachers give positive evaluations and guidance based on EFL students' development so that they can fully feel their contribution to the speaking classroom.

4.1.2 Performing teaching design

Taking *Unit 2 College - The Ladder to Success?* in Course Book 2 of *New Horizon College English (Reading and Writing)* as a case, this part specifically explains the teaching mode of college English speaking based on a positive classroom environment.

(1) Teaching Aims

① Linguistic Ability

Engage EFL students in pondering on the importance of studying the humanities; Enable EFL students to elaborate and present their viewpoints in expository writing.

② Learning Ability

Help EFL students identify information about the problem, the solution, and the evaluation of the solution when learning materials are organized in the problem-solution pattern.

③ Thinking Ability

Enable EFL students to read an argument on the benefits of studying liberal arts. EFL students can actively participate in classroom activities and share their ideas to develop their innovative thinking and improve their critical thinking.

④ Cultural Ability

Enable EFL students to understand the differences between liberal arts and natural science subjects; Let EFL students understand why liberal arts are essential in advanced education.

(2) Teaching key points

Guide EFL students to list supporting points to make an advantage/disadvantage argument more convincing and improve the accuracy and fluency of speaking in a positive classroom environment.

(3) Teaching difficult points

① Help EFL students acquire positive emotional experiences and develop positive character traits

② Cultivate EFL students' cultural awareness

(4) Teaching methods

Task-Based Language Teaching, Interactive Learning, Audio-Lingual Method, Situational Language Teaching

(5) Teaching procedures

Step 1 Situation introduction

Suppose your university got a deep budget cut due to the economic recession. As a result, the school is planning to cancel many classes in the humanities and social sciences in order to save the courses which will boost students' prospects of landing a job. As liberal arts majors, you want to appeal to the Curriculum Committee that it's dangerous and harmful to cancel the liberal arts courses. How to make your voice heard?

Step 2 Knowledge preparation

- 1) Understanding the advantage/disadvantage argumentation
- 2) Language focus: prosperous, dominant, speculate, thereby, breakthrough; stand up for, in favor of, be liable to.

Step 3 Group cooperation

Task1

The teacher plays a video of a conversation between two foreign students discussing how to choose a major.

Students watch the video and work in groups to summarize the different sentence patterns concerning advantages and/or disadvantages.

Through the real situation, students can learn how to show advantages and/or disadvantages.

Task2

The teacher showed three different situations of job interviews. Students need to discuss with their group members to choose or create their favourite situation and think about what they will do and how they will do it under that situation. After that, they will use the target language of this lesson to perform it in front of the class. In order to get a good point, they would try to make their performance vivid and creative.

Step 4 Result presentation

There will be about six groups showing their performance in front of the class. After each group's performance teacher will make positive comments timely and encourage the whole class to be confident to give their ideas in English.

(6) Teaching design justifications

The teaching aims of this class refer to the three pillars of PP (positive emotional experiences, positive character traits, and positive institutions). The teaching activities are carried out to help students obtain positive emotional experiences, develop students' positive character traits, and create an equal and collaborative relationship between teacher and students.

By creating meaningful situations that are close to students' real life and include traditional cultural elements, students' motivation for English-speaking learning is stimulated; Students' knowledge gaps are filled through teacher-student interaction; Students' speaking output anxiety is reduced through group activities; The implementation of the grading system improves students' self-efficacy. The teacher-student relationship in the classroom is harmonious, the students have an excellent emotional experience, and the students' positive character traits have been developed. It shows a positive classroom environment can encourage students to speak English confidently and improve students' English speaking ability.

4.2 The effect of a positive classroom environment

The result of the data analysis shows the effect of a positive classroom environment in English-speaking teaching from the following aspects. It verifies the research hypotheses.

4.2.1 Enhancing EFL Students' classroom engagement

Through the comparative analysis of the questionnaires before and after the experiment and interviews before and during the experiment, this section demonstrates how a positive classroom environment enhances EFL students' English speaking classroom engagement.

4.2.1.1 Result Analysis and Discussion of pre- and post-experiment Questionnaires

Before the experiment, the EFL students in EC and CC were examined on their psychological status of them in English-speaking classes. 201 questionnaires were distributed, and 201 were retrieved. The survey shows that, first of all, the relationship between teachers and students in the English speaking classroom is unequal, and there is less interaction between teachers and students, which does not reflect the students' dominant position in the classroom and does not reflect the interaction and communication of English speaking. Second, English speaking classes tend to teach according to textbooks. The teaching content is relatively simple. It mainly covers mechanical exercises and lacks meaningful context. Third, EFL students' participation in classroom activities is low. They lack the confidence to speak English and generally think that they have low proficiency in English. In addition, although EFL students have certain anxiety in English speaking learning, they have a strong need to change the situation. They hope to get more opportunities to speak and improve their English verbal ability through rich classroom activities.

After a semester's experimental teaching, a post-experiment questionnaire is distributed to the EFL students in EC. A total of 105 copies were distributed, and 105 copies were retrieved. The questions of the questionnaire aim to test whether the positive emotional experience has been achieved on a larger scale, whether positive personality development has been promoted, and whether the teacher-student relationship in the speaking language classroom has been improved. Accordingly, the questions mainly cover these aspects.

The questionnaire results show, first, the teacher-student relationship in the speaking class has been improved after the experiment, and the class has been transformed into relatively student-centered. Second, a positive classroom environment enhances EFL students' interest in verbal expression, and the teacher respects their willingness to speak. When working in groups, EFL students' anxiety about verbal expression decreases, their willingness to speak increases, and opportunities for speaking become more, which indicates that through a positive classroom environment, the emotional experience of the EFL students can improve speaking teaching. Meanwhile, the classroom environment is also optimized, and personality development has been achieved. That is to say, this new English speaking teaching mode has a positive impact on EFL students' speaking learning. The English speaking classroom, based on the theory of PP, improves the speaking classroom atmosphere, harmonizes the teacher-student relationship, and enhances the communication and cooperation between teachers and students. All of these contribute to the enhancement of students' classroom engagement.

4.2.1.2 Result Analysis and Discussion of pre- and in-experiment Interviews

Before the experiment, this study used the method of stratified sampling to conduct interviews with 20 EFL students selected from EC and CC, mainly to understand the teacher-student relationship, positive emotional experience, and positive character traits development in the EFL students' current English speaking classroom, and to design English speaking teaching activities according to the interview results.

The pre-experiment interview results show that English speaking class is mainly a teacher-centered lecture-giving process. Students take notes of the teacher's speech in the classroom, and they admit that their participation in English speaking classes is low. There are rather few opportunities for speaking participation. EFL students think that the current teaching content of English speaking classes is outdated. They hope to strengthen their knowledge through teacher-student interaction in English-speaking classes. Teachers are expected to choose teaching content connected with students' life, integrate it into traditional Chinese culture, and adopt a variety of teaching activities to provide students with more opportunities to speak in real situations.

During the experiment, interviews were conducted with 20 EFL students solely in EC to understand their opinions and adaptability to the PP-based English speaking class. The interview results show that these students generally expressed their expectations and curiosity about the content of each speaking class and their willingness to take the speaking class. EFL students' classroom engagement is enhanced. Group work reduces the tension and anxiety in speaking. EFL students expressed their concern for cross-cultural communication, role-playing, and group reporting activities of group cooperation in class. In response to the problems reflected by the EFL students in the interviews, future English speaking classes should enroll immediate students' performance feedback and evaluation. Interaction between teachers and students should be strengthened, and cooperation, communication and learning among group members should be promoted.

4.2.2 Boosting EFL Students' speaking proficiency

Through the comparative analysis of the tests before and after the experiment, the result demonstrates how a positive classroom environment boosts EFL students' speaking proficiency.

Before the experiment, the English speaking proficiency of EC and CC EFL students was tested. After the test, the EFL students' verbal expression is scored on three dimensions: accuracy of expression (10 points), fluency of production (10 points), and richness of content (10 points). Before the experiment started, both EC and CC took an English speaking test as the collection of the test

data. Based on the experimental data, the difference in the two classes' speaking performance was analyzed to measure whether the experiment could be carried out between the two classes. All EFL students in both classes participated in the test. The total score of the pre-test paper is 30. SPSS27.0 was used to analyze the test results before the experiment and compare whether the two classes could be used as the experiment objects. The pre-experiment test results show that there is little difference between the two classes in terms of content richness, accuracy of expression, and fluency of production. The English speaking proficiency of the two classes is roughly the same.

After a semester's employment of a PP-based classroom environment in EC, the post-experiment test results show that the average score of content richness, expression accuracy and production fluency in EC after the experiment are all higher than before. Apart from these, the expression, pronunciation, coherence and fluency of EFL students' English speaking in EC have been improved compared with that of before the experiment. The comparison of the results in EC before and after the experiment shows the EFL students' verbal expression in EC is richer in content, more accurate in expression, and more fluent in verbal production than before. Therefore, teaching and learning in a positive classroom environment can enrich the content of EFL students' English speaking, enhances verbal accuracy and fluency, and finally improves their English speaking ability.

5. Conclusion

The research result verifies the hypothesis that teaching college English speaking based on a positive classroom environment can enhance EFL students' classroom engagement and boost their English speaking proficiency. The qualitative and quantitative research, the analysis and summary of the data collected from questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and pre-and post-test scores jointly show that English speaking teaching based on a positive classroom environment has played a significant positive role in English speaking teaching. The comparative analysis of the teaching experiment and the results between EC and CC found that English speaking teaching based on a positive classroom environment is more effective than the traditional teaching method.

Teaching English speaking in a positive classroom environment based on PP is a new teaching strategy which changes the traditional English speaking teaching mode and method. As an increasing number of teaching faculties focus on the combination of English speaking learning and the mental development of EFL students, how to widely apply a PP based teaching will be the trend of teaching mode transformation. Expectedly, the positive classroom environment established by the PP framework can also benefit other classrooms.

Appropriate application of a positive classroom environment in English speaking teaching can motivate both teachers and students in the speaking classroom and bring dramatic changes to the classroom teaching effect. To better improve the effect of English speaking teaching, the following suggestions are provided to teachers teaching English speaking at college based on a positive classroom environment.

Firstly, teachers should focus on offering appropriate teaching support, especially enhancing emotional support. Teachers need to enrich classroom activities with an appropriate difficulty level and improve the flexibility and accessibility of the activities so that the teaching activities can fill the gaps in EFL students' knowledge, thus allowing students to experience positive emotions in education and stimulating their learning motivation, which may lead to higher academic performance. Teachers should respect and care for their students and take advantage of group cooperation and score systems to build a harmonious teacher-student relationship. When students feel accepted and supported by teachers and peers, they are more likely to thrive and experience positive adaptations in the classroom environment.

Secondly, teachers cannot neglect classroom management. Teachers can encourage students to work together to develop their performance rules in the English speaking class, such as a specific system of extra points and deductions. Teachers can help students set their own learning goals, focus on their positive feedback, and develop their positive character traits.

Limitations of the study lie in the failure to systematize the specific strategies for creating a positive classroom environment in English speaking teaching. The systematization of the strategies can make the application of them more easily and broadly. In addition, this study fails to illustrate the specialty of applying a positive classroom environment to English speaking courses in contrast with other English courses for EFL college students. In this regard, future research can fall on whether the research result can be applied to other branches of language-skill teaching for EFL learners of different stages.

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