

# Factors Influencing EFL Students' Motivation to Communicate in Flipped Learning: A Mixed Methods Case Study of an English Debate Course in China

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## Abstract

This study examines the impact of flipped learning on motivation to communicate among EFL college students enrolled in an English debate course in China, framed by Achievement Goal Theory and Constructivist Learning Theory. A sample of 64 second-year English majors from a university in Sichuan was divided into experimental and control groups. Over 16 weeks, the experimental group experienced flipped learning, while the control group engaged in conventional blended learning. Data were gathered through pre- and post-treatment motivation questionnaires and a focus group interview. An Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses. Results revealed that the experimental group showed significant improvements in General Motivation ( $p = .005$ ), Performance Goals ( $p = .004$ ), and Social Goals ( $p = .026$ ), although no significant change was observed in Mastery Goals ( $p = .116$ ). Notably, while Social Goals slightly improved in the experimental group, they declined in the control group. Qualitative analysis uncovered three main themes: Student Engagement, Collaboration and Interaction, and BP Debate Exercise. These findings suggest that flipped learning enhances motivation more effectively than conventional blended learning, providing valuable insights for future EFL education research in China.

**Keywords:** Flipped Learning, Blended Learning, Motivation, English Debate, EFL Teaching.

### **Introduction**

EFL educators face significant challenges in boosting students' motivation to communicate effectively, particularly in identifying instructional strategies that develop communicative competence and high proficiency levels (Huda, 1999; Li, 1998; Nunan, 2003; Orafi & Borg, 2009). The complexities of researching spoken language, including data collection and transcription, further complicate these efforts (Römer, 2011). To overcome these obstacles, the adoption of innovative instructional methods is crucial.

Debate has proven to be an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing communicative competence in EFL contexts. Beyond improving oral proficiency and critical thinking, debate significantly motivates students to communicate by empowering them to articulate their viewpoints on diverse issues (Goodwin, 2003; Kennedy, 2007; Akerman & Neale, 2011; Alasmari & Ahmed, 2012; Zare & Othman, 2013; D'Souza, 2013). This makes debate a promising strategy for fostering motivation in oral communication.

As technology reshapes education, flipped learning has emerged as a transformative approach that combines traditional teaching with online resources, thereby enhancing student engagement and reshaping educational practices (Zheng et al., 2016; Voogt & Knezek, 2008). While research on the impact of flipped learning on language skills is growing, few studies have specifically examined its influence on motivation to communicate within English debate courses (Sergis et al., 2018). Existing research often addresses general EFL contexts, overlooking the unique demands of debate, such as critical thinking and structured argumentation (Mok, 2014; Abeysekera & Dawson, 2014).

In China, where enhancing English proficiency is a national priority (Bolton & Graddol, 2012), EFL learners still struggle with oral communicative competence (Xing & Bolden, 2019; Liao, 2020). Recent data indicate that fewer than 1% of the population is proficient in English, with an average IELTS speaking score of 5.6, ranking China mainland 38th out of 40 regions (IELTS performance for test takers, 2022). Consequently, educational reforms have increasingly focused on developing oral skills (Liu, 2005; Liu et al., 2021). The introduction of the "FLTRP Cup" English Debate Competition in the 1990s marked a significant integration of debate into English education, leading to the establishment of debate courses across universities (Yang, 2021).

Despite these advancements, many EFL classrooms in China still depend on traditional teaching methods, often neglecting modern technologies (Wang, 2017). The Ministry of Education has emphasized integrating AI and digital resources to enhance educational outcomes (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2024). With the increasing role of online learning (Allen & Seaman, 2017; Means et al., 2009; Bates, 2015), this study explores the integration of flipped learning in English debate courses. Addressing challenges such as limited class time and large class sizes (Chen & Goh, 2011; Iwashita & Li, 2012), the study aims to increase student participation and motivation to communicate. By engaging deeply with course content outside of class, flipped learning facilitates enriched in-class discussions and fosters a more interactive learning environment, holding significant potential to transform EFL debate education.

## Literature Review

This review explores the role of flipped learning pedagogy in EFL contexts, particularly within debate courses, emphasizing its impact on students' motivation to communicate. It examines three main areas: the role of motivation in EFL learning, the pedagogical benefits of debate, and the integration of flipped learning in teaching debate.

### *Motivation in the EFL Context*

Motivation, a critical component of language acquisition, encompasses interests, goals, values, and beliefs that drive learners' behaviors (Kazdin, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In educational settings, motivation represents students' willingness to engage with learning materials (Colman, 2015; Colquitt et al., 2000). Achievement Goal Theory, a prominent framework in motivation research, classifies goals into mastery (focused on personal improvement) and performance (centered on social comparison) orientations, both of which shape learning behaviors in significant ways (Ames, 1992; Elliot & McGregor, 2001). However, research findings on the relationship between these goals and academic achievement remain inconsistent, pointing to a need for more domain-specific investigations (Grant & Dweck, 2003; Linnenbrink, 2005). Additionally, social influences, such as family and peer support, have been shown to profoundly affect motivation (Urduan & Giancarlo, 2000).

In EFL learning, motivation is a key determinant of language proficiency and long-term success (Gardner et al., 1985; Dörnyei, 2007). Gardner's concept of integrative motivation emphasizes the importance of genuine interest in the language and culture, which fosters sustained engagement in language learning. Meanwhile, Dörnyei's strategies for maintaining motivation provide practical approaches for keeping learners invested in their progress (Dörnyei, 2007). Nevertheless, these theoretical models often lack empirical research focused on specific EFL student groups, highlighting a gap in applying motivation theories to diverse and targeted EFL populations.

### *Debate as a Pedagogical Tool in EFL*

Debate is widely recognized as an effective method for enhancing oral communicative competence, critical thinking, and structured argumentation (Bellon, 2000). It fosters linguistic proficiency and builds confidence, while also motivating students to engage actively with relevant and contemporary issues (Kennedy, 2007; Roy & Macchiette, 2005; Zahra & Suganda, 2021). Studies have shown that debate-specific motivations often include social and career-related factors, as highlighted by Hill (1982) and Jones (1994); however, the generalizability of these findings is limited due to small sample sizes (Kuper, 2000).

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that debate has a positive impact on motivation and speaking proficiency in EFL settings, leading to higher student engagement and improved learning outcomes compared to traditional teaching methods (Yang & Rusli, 2012; Zare & Othman, 2015). Despite these advantages, research on the specific effects of debate on English speaking skills and communication motivation remains scarce, often constrained by limited sample sizes and short study durations. Consequently, there is an urgent need for more diverse, large-scale, and longitudinal studies to gain a comprehensive understanding of debate's impact on EFL learners.

### *Flipped Learning in EFL Contexts*

Flipped learning shifts content delivery outside the classroom, prioritizing active and collaborative learning during class sessions (Berrett, 2012; Milman, 2012). Research indicates that this pedagogical approach enhances student engagement, autonomy, and motivation, especially in EFL settings (Campillo-Ferrer & Miralles-Martínez, 2021; Zheng et al., 2020a). Additionally, flipped learning has been shown to boost self-efficacy and engagement across various educational levels (Han, 2015; Lee & Wallace, 2018). Critical motivational factors include the requirement for pre-class preparation and the integration of technology, both of which are associated with increased student motivation (Kirmizi & Komec, 2020).

Despite the benefits of interactive, technology-driven flipped learning, significant challenges remain. These include an increased student workload, resistance to new learning methods, and the necessity for effective strategies to ensure student preparation and engagement (Bishop & Verleger, 2013; Gianoni-Capenakas et al., 2019; Sharp, 2016; Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018; Chang et al., 2022). Other obstacles involve technological barriers and the need for clear, structured guidance (Mellefont, 2016; Wang, 2017; Milman, 2012). Furthermore, some students struggle to adapt to the self-directed nature of flipped learning, finding it difficult to manage their learning independently (Zainuddin & Halili, 2016; Martínez-Jiménez & Ruiz-Jiménez, 2020).

Nevertheless, advancements in technology, including collaborative platforms and AI tools in flipped learning, present new opportunities to further enhance student motivation. Yet, more research is needed to evaluate their effectiveness and impact on motivation in EFL contexts (Putri et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2023).

### *Implementation of Flipped Learning in Debate Instruction*

Incorporating a flipped learning strategy into EFL debate instruction enhances its effectiveness by enabling students to engage in pre-class preparation and allocate class time to active debate practice (Tsai & Chiang, 2018; Chen, 2021). Research suggests that technology-enhanced flipped learning fosters critical thinking and communication skills, making it well-suited to the interactive demands of debate (Rosas-Maldonado et al., 2020; Hicks, 2011). However, traditional teaching methods remain prevalent in many Chinese universities, often diminishing the effectiveness of debate instruction and underscoring the need for modernized, blended approaches (Ross et al., 2010; Kang, 2019).

Blended instructional models, such as the SPOC (Small Private Online Course) framework, offer flexible, phased structures that facilitate debate preparation and engagement (Zhang, 2020). Although these models provide increased flexibility, they often lack extensive experimental validation. The limited number of studies specifically examining flipped debate instruction reveals a gap in understanding how this approach affects students' motivation and oral communicative competence.

Despite the promise of flipped learning in boosting EFL student motivation, particularly in debate contexts where active communication and engagement are crucial, existing research has certain limitations. These include a heavy reliance on self-reported data, varied methodologies, and the predominance of short-term studies. This study seeks to address

these gaps by examining the impact of flipped learning on motivation within EFL debate courses. A customized flipped classroom model has the potential to better integrate independent preparation with in-class practice, offering valuable insights for the integration of technology to foster student-centered debate learning.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### *Achievement Goal Theory*

Achievement Goal Theory applies to English debate by examining how different goal orientations influence students' motivation and learning outcomes. A supportive yet competitive environment can motivate students to refine their debating skills, build confidence, and view debates as opportunities for personal growth. Tailored feedback and assessment methods aligned with students' goal orientations further enhance motivation, engagement, oral communicative competence, and overall learning satisfaction.

Elliot and McGregor's (2001), model of Achievement Goal Theory categorizes student goals along two dimensions: mastery versus performance and approach versus avoidance. Mastery goals emphasize self-improvement, while performance goals focus on obtaining external validation (Linnenbrink, 2005). This framework has significantly influenced research on motivation by demonstrating how these orientations affect learning outcomes (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Meece et al., 2006) and accounting for the impact of social and cultural factors on goal-setting (Meece et al., 2006; Pintrich, 2000). The distinction between approach and avoidance goals results in four types: mastery-approach, performance-approach, performance-avoidance, and mastery-avoidance (Ariani, 2021). Research indicates that mastery-approach goals typically lead to positive learning outcomes (Jagacinski et al., 2010; Tian et al., 2017), whereas performance-avoidance and mastery-avoidance goals are linked to negative effects (Peixoto et al., 2016). This study employs the Inventory of School Motivation (ISM) developed by McInerney et al. (2001) to measure students' motivation in English debate, focusing on mastery, performance, and social goals (Ganotice et al., 2012; King & Watkins, 2013; Leung & Lo, 2013).

#### *Constructivist Learning Theory*

Constructivist Learning Theory underpins the blended teaching approach used in English debate courses, combining online and face-to-face learning to maximize student engagement. This theory emphasizes student-centered, experiential learning, advocating for active knowledge construction through engagement with real-world tasks (von Glasersfeld, 1995; Nola & Irzk, 2010). Constructivist approaches encourage students to discover, reflect, and solve problems collaboratively, thereby fostering critical thinking and enhancing motivation (Brownstein, 2001).

In the context of foreign language education, constructivist principles support blended learning by combining online resources with classroom activities for optimal learning outcomes (Ginns & Ellis, 2007; Vaughan et al., 2013). The flipped classroom model is a practical application of constructivist theory. It shifts basic content delivery to pre-class activities, reserving class time for the application and analysis of knowledge (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

This study utilizes the Tai Chi Ring Flipped Classroom Model developed by Zhong et al. (2013), which draws on Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) and comprises four stages:

*Teaching Preparation:* Teachers develop instructional materials and set up the learning environment.

*Knowledge Comprehension:* Students engage in foundational learning through videos and online resources, building the confidence needed for in-depth discussions.

*Application and Analysis:* Students apply their knowledge through group projects and reflective activities.

*Synthesis and Evaluation:* Students perform self-evaluations and peer assessments to consolidate their understanding.

This model fosters collaborative learning and aligns with constructivist principles, supporting EFL students' development in English debate courses.

## **Methodology**

This section outlines the research methods used to examine the effectiveness of flipped learning in an English debate course, focusing on research design, participants, instructional strategies, and data analysis. A mixed methods case study approach provides insights into the impact of flipped learning on student motivation.

### *Research Design*

The study employed an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), consisting of two distinct phases of data collection. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected using a quasi-experimental nonequivalent control-group design. Pre- and post-treatment questionnaire surveys assessed students' motivation. Participants were divided into an experimental group, which received flipped instruction, and a control group, which experienced conventional blended learning methods. Both groups engaged in a blended learning environment comprising 1.5 hours of face-to-face instruction and approximately 3 hours of online learning per week. This design controlled for extraneous variables, facilitating a robust attribution of differences in motivation to the instructional methods employed.

In the qualitative phase, a focus group interview was conducted to explore students' perceptions of the effectiveness of flipped learning. This qualitative data provided a deeper understanding of the quantitative findings, adding richness to the overall analysis.

### *Purpose of the Study and Research Questions*

This study aims to evaluate the impact of the flipped learning strategy on EFL college students' motivation to communicate, comparing it to conventional blended learning. The objectives include assessing the flipped classroom's effectiveness and identifying factors influencing motivation. The research questions are:

1. What effects does the flipped learning strategy have on the motivation of EFL college students in English debate?
2. What factors contribute to different dimensions of motivation among EFL students in this context?

### *Setting of the Study*



This research was conducted at a comprehensive normal university in Sichuan Province, China—a well-established institution with over 40,000 students. The English debate course offered at this university is recognized as a top-level provincial course, supported by a teaching team dedicated to implementing innovative pedagogical practices. Sichuan's rich cultural heritage and geographical diversity contribute to the variety of debate topics and underscore differences in English proficiency among students. These factors make exploring the influences on student motivation particularly significant.

### ***Sampling Procedure***

A purposeful sampling technique was employed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The selection process consisted of three steps: class selection, debate group formation, and focus group interviews. Students were chosen based on suitability (average academic background and completion of an English speech course) and feasibility (ability to participate without disrupting the research). Participants were grouped by English speech test scores into teams of four, ensuring a mix of proficiency levels: one Intermediate High (H), two Intermediate Mid (M), and one Intermediate Low (L) speaker.

Following the quantitative phase, two debate groups from the experimental group were selected for focus group interviews—one group showing the highest improvement and the other the lowest. This qualitative phase involved eight students: two high achievers, four medium achievers, and two low achievers, to explore perceptions of the flipped learning approach's impact on motivation to communicate.

### ***Participants of the Study***

The study included 64 second-year English majors from a public university in Sichuan, China, divided into two classes of 32 students each. Both classes, taught by the same instructor, comprised students aged 19-20 with at least eight years of English study, varying in proficiency. The groups were balanced in terms of gender and proficiency, categorized into Intermediate High, Intermediate Mid, and Intermediate Low based on rankings. Students were included based on their commitment to participate throughout the study and access to the required technology for online resources. Those with prior debate training or current competition involvement were excluded to focus on students new to debate.

### **Instrumentation**

#### ***Motivation Survey***

To evaluate students' self-perceptions of motivation to communicate, pre-treatment and post-treatment surveys were conducted alongside debate tests. The post-treatment survey, administered at the experiment's conclusion, provided insights into students' experiences and addressed Research Question 1. By then, students had become familiar with the British Parliamentary (BP) debate format, allowing them to articulate their perceived improvements and overall impressions of the course as indicators of enhanced motivation.

The questionnaire, piloted with third-year English majors, was adapted from the Inventory of School Motivation (ISM) by McInerney et al. (2001) and consisted of 33 positively worded items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). The instrument comprised eight scales, each containing 3 to 5 items, and reflected dimensions such as task, effort, competition, social power, and affiliation. It assessed first-order factors

that defined three second-order factors: general mastery, general performance, and general social factors, alongside a third-order factor of general motivation. Data were collected from participants who completed the surveys at both the beginning and end of the experiment.

This structured approach enabled a comprehensive evaluation of students' motivation, helping to assess the flipped classroom's impact on their learning experiences in English debate. The correlations between these factors are illustrated in Figure 1.

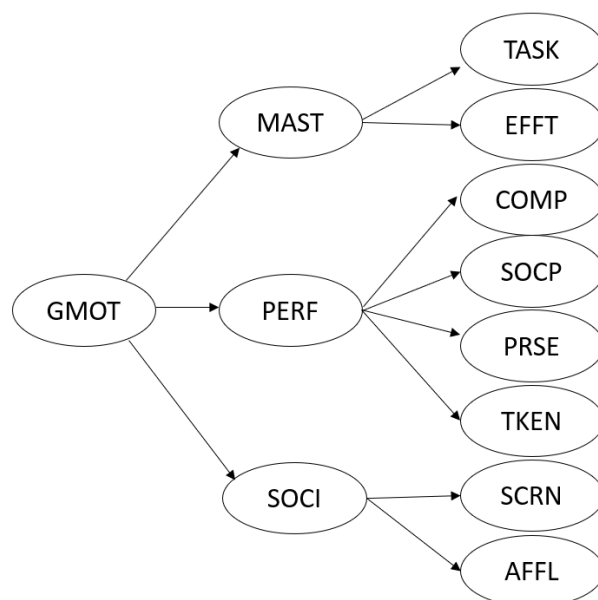


Figure 1 The Inventory of School Motivation (ISM)

(Source: adapted from McInerney et al., 2001)

Note: TASK = Task; EFFT = Effort; COMP = Competition; SOCP = Social Power; PRSE = Praise; TKEN = Token; SCRN = Social Concern; AFFL = Affiliation; MAST = Mastery; PERF = Performance; SOCI = Social; GMOT = General Motivation

The Motivation Survey Instrument is crucial for exploring students' motivational dynamics in flipped debate classes. It goes beyond simple assessments of overall motivation by examining specific dimensions, offering a nuanced understanding of the factors driving student participation. Subscales such as Task, Effort, Competition, Social Power, Praise, Token, Social Concern, and Affiliation reflect a holistic approach, assessing students' preferences, attitudes, and behaviors in debates.

This structured approach allows for a comprehensive evaluation of students' motivation, shedding light on how various motivational dimensions influence their participation and performance in EFL debates. By capturing these nuances, the instrument can identify areas for potential interventions to boost student motivation and engagement.

### *Focus Group Interview*

In the final stage of the research project, eight students were purposefully selected for Phase 2 based on criteria derived from previous quantitative results. The focus group interview was designed to provide insights into Research Question 2. Participant selection involved two steps: first, students were grouped by English proficiency, with each group comprising one Intermediate High (H) speaker, two Intermediate Mid (M) speakers, and one Intermediate Low (L) speaker. Second, two debate groups from the experimental group were



chosen for the interview—one with the highest improvement in debate test scores and the other with the lowest.

The focus group format created a comfortable environment for open discussion, reducing student anxiety and fostering cooperation and peer feedback. This setup considered the varying proficiency levels, helping to minimize potential communication challenges. Although interaction can lead to honest responses (Krueger & Casey, 2014), it may also result in social desirability bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), where participants echo others' beliefs rather than sharing their own. The researcher was mindful that one participant's views might not represent the entire group's attitudes.

Following Krueger and Casey's (2014) guidelines, the interview included an introduction, transition, key questions, and concluding remarks. A set of open-ended questions about the implementation of the flipped classroom and its impact on students' motivation to communicate was developed, informed by a thorough literature review and quantitative data analysis. The 50-minute focus group interview, guided by the Inventory of School Motivation (ISM) (McInerney et al., 2001) and the Tai Chi Ring Flipped Classroom Model (Zhong et al., 2013), was videotaped for analysis.

*Instructional Design*

The study lasted 16 weeks and consisted of three stages: pre-intervention (1 week), while-intervention (14 weeks), and post-intervention (1 week). Table 1 outlines the procedures for both the experimental and control groups.

Table 1  
*Research Framework*

Pre-Intervention		While-Intervention	Post-Intervention
Week 1		Week 2-15	Week 16
<b>Motivation Survey</b> (pre-treatment)	<b>English Debate Classes</b> (Flipped Learning vs Conventional Learning)	<b>Motivation Survey</b> (post-treatment)	<b>Focus Group Interview</b> (Flipped Learning group only)

In the quantitative phase, a quasi-experiment compared an experimental group employing flipped learning pedagogy with a control group using conventional blended learning. Both groups followed the same lesson plans focused on debate skills and motions, maintaining a consistent debate schedule. The flipped learning approach adhered to the Tai Chi Ring Flipped Classroom Model (Zhong et al., 2013), emphasizing diverse resources and interactive formats to foster student engagement.

The conventional blended learning group formed debate teams to conduct British Parliamentary (BP) debates. After the teacher provided detailed explanations of debate skills, students analyzed motions, researched information, developed arguments, and prepared for debates, receiving targeted teacher support as needed. Each week, a designated group presented in class, ensuring that every team presented at least twice during the semester.

The teacher offered feedback following each presentation. Non-presenting groups recorded their debates and uploaded them for later evaluation, with the teacher providing delayed assessments of individual performances and overall summative evaluations of class debates. These activities were carefully aligned with the course objectives.

#### *Conventional Blended Learning Activities*

*Teaching Preparation:* The teacher designs course content (e.g., PPTs, videos, test questions), plans activities (tasks, groupings, assessments), and sets up the teaching environment (equipment, online platforms). (Before class)

*Classroom Teaching:* The teacher explains debate skills and announces the weekly debate motion. (35 minutes)

*Classroom Practice:* Students analyze motions, research, and prepare debates, with teacher support. The selected group presents, and peers provide feedback. Debates are recorded. (55 minutes)

*After-Class:* Students access MOOCs and materials to reinforce the topic. Non-presenting groups record and upload their debates. The teacher evaluates performance and provides feedback, while students submit reflective journals. (After class)

The flipped learning inverted the traditional learning approach by having students learn theoretical knowledge and debate rules outside of class. This arrangement allowed for in-class time to be devoted to practice, discussion, and feedback. The researcher developed a series of activities for the experimental group that aligned with the course objectives.

#### *Flipped Learning Activities*

*Teaching Preparation:* The teacher designs course content (PPTs, videos, test questions), plans activities (tasks, groups, assessments), and sets up the learning environment (equipment, online platforms). (Before class)

*Knowledge Comprehension:* Students review course content through videos, online courses, and research, preparing for the debate topic. (Before class)

*Application Analysis:* In class, the teacher announces the debate motion. One group *presents* while others act as judges. Each round includes 15 minutes of preparation, 40 minutes of presentations, and 35 minutes of feedback. All debates are video-recorded. (90 minutes)

*Synthesis Evaluation:* Students refine their speeches, upload recordings, and the teacher provides delayed evaluations. Students submit reflective journals. (After class)

Currently, only a few courses for English debate are available on major MOOC platforms in Chinese universities. This study based its flipped learning and conventional blended learning approaches on a selected open online debate course and other relevant materials.

#### *Data Analysis*

The study utilized pre- and post-treatment motivation questionnaires and focus group interviews to evaluate changes in students' motivation. Statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS software with 12 alpha values. Before the experiment, a pretest assessed participants' English speaking proficiency, confirming that average debate competence was comparable between the experimental and control groups.

After the 14-week treatment, SPSS analysis revealed that the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher post-test motivation across several dimensions. An independent samples t-test was employed to compare debate performances, accounting for one independent variable and independent samples. Random assignment ensured group comparability, allowing any performance differences between pre- and post-tests to be attributed to the teaching model.

Qualitative data from focus group interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Van Manen's method. This involved coding responses and organizing codes into themes. Manual coding was used to identify keywords that captured participants' meanings, with Van Manen's selective reading approach highlighting relevant phrases. Similar codes were grouped iteratively, allowing new themes to emerge. Supporting quotes were color-coded, and final themes were developed to address the research question. Data reliability was enhanced through external experts' consensus on common codes and key themes.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

*Research question 1: What effects does the flipped learning strategy have on the motivation of EFL college students in English debate in China?*

This section addresses Research Objective 1 and Research Question 1. The study's first objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of the flipped classroom strategy in enhancing the motivation of EFL college students in China, particularly in the context of English debate. The motivation surveys aimed to measure changes in scores across distinct scales of motivation from the pre-treatment to the post-treatment phases, thereby determining any improvements. Additionally, the study sought to examine the differences in scores between the experimental and control groups.

#### *Descriptive Statistics of Motivation Survey Results*

Table 2 presents a summary of the motivation survey results, showing mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) values for general and specific motivational scales in both pre-test and post-test phases for the experimental (Flipped Learning) and control (Conventional Blended Learning) groups. This comparison allows an examination of motivational changes within each group over the study duration, focusing on general motivation and specific scales, including Mastery (Task, Effort), Performance (Competition, Social Power, Praise, Token), and Social (Concern, Affiliation). The analysis aims to highlight patterns in motivation and the potential impact of each instructional approach on participants' motivation.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of Motivation Survey of Experimental and Control Groups*

Group	Scale	N	Pre-test		Post-test	
			M	SD	M	SD
<b>Flipped Learning</b>	<b>GMOT</b>	32	102.8125	13.84811	110.8125	18.36623
	<b>MAST</b>	32	30.1562	5.26773	32.0000	6.18531
	<b>PERF</b>	32	44.1250	6.66115	50.0313	10.51722
	<b>SOCI</b>	32	28.5313	4.77213	28.7813	5.22855
<b>Conventional Blended Learning</b>	<b>GMOT</b>	32	102.4375	12.72523	104.5000	9.28752
	<b>MAST</b>	32	29.7500	4.36999	30.6250	3.88338
	<b>PERF</b>	32	44.5313	7.01144	46.6250	4.88414
	<b>SOCI</b>	32	28.1563	4.34117	27.2500	3.14181

Note. GMOT= General Motivation; MAST = Mastery; PERF = Performance; SOCI = Social.

Table 2 compares motivation survey results for the Experimental (Flipped Classroom) and Control (Conventional Blended Learning) groups, highlighting key trends. The Flipped Classroom group showed notable gains in general motivation (GMOT), with an increase from M=102.8125 (SD=13.84811) pre-treatment to M=110.8125 (SD=18.36623) post-treatment, surpassing the Control group's progress (Pre: M=102.4375, SD=12.72523; Post: M=104.5000, SD=9.28752).

For specific scales, the Flipped Classroom group improved in 'mastery goals' (MAST) from M=30.1562 (SD=5.26773) pre-treatment to M=32.0000 (SD=6.18531) post-treatment, outperforming the Control group (Pre: M=29.7500, SD=4.36999; Post: M=30.6250, SD=3.88338). In 'performance goals' (PERF), the Experimental group increased from M=44.1250 (SD=6.66115) to M=50.0313 (SD=10.51722), compared to the Control group's more modest rise (Pre: M=44.5313, SD=7.01144; Post: M=46.6250, SD=4.88414).

However, while the Flipped Classroom group had a minor improvement in 'social goals' (SOCI) (Pre: M=28.5313, SD=4.77213; Post: M=28.7813, SD=5.22855), the Control group saw a slight decline (Pre: M=28.1563, SD=4.34117; Post: M=27.2500, SD=3.14181). These results highlight the positive impact of the Flipped Classroom on motivation across scales, suggesting the need for focused efforts to boost 'social goals' (SOCI) for balanced motivation in EFL college English debate.

*Comparison of Effects Within Groups*

The first research question aimed to investigate whether the Flipped Classroom and Conventional Blended Learning strategies exert any influence on the motivation of EFL undergraduates. The corresponding null hypothesis is articulated as follows:

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the motivation survey scores before and after in both groups.

Table 3 presents the results of paired samples t-test for the experimental and control groups.

Table 3

*Comparison of Mean Scores of Motivation Pre-treatment and Post-treatment Within Experimental Group and Control Group*

Group	Dimensions	Paired Differences					
		Mean	SD	SD Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
EG: Pre-Post	GMOT	-8.03125	3.20770	.56705	-14.163	31	.000
	MAST	-1.84375	1.62856	.28789	-6.404	31	.000
	PERF	-5.90625	4.45305	.78720	-7.503	31	.000
	SOCI	-.25000	.91581	.16189	-1.544	31	.133
CG: Pre-Post	GMOT	-2.06250	4.18089	.73908	-2.791	31	.009
	MAST	-.87500	1.18458	.20941	-4.178	31	.000
	PERF	-2.09375	2.69240	.47595	-4.399	31	.000
	SOCI	.90625	1.76634	.31225	2.902	31	.007

Note. EG = Experimental Group (Flipped Learning); CG = Control Group (Conventional Blended Learning), GMOT= General Motivation; MAST = Mastery; PERF = Performance; SOCI = Social.

Result: Ho1 was rejected ( $t(31) = -14.163, p = .000 < .05$ ) EG

( $t(31) = -2.791, p = .009 < .05$ ) CG

However, H01 was rejected for general motivation (GMOT) and the two scales of mastery goals (MAST) and performance goals (PERF), while it remained intact for the social goals (SOCI) scale.

Table 3 shows that the Flipped Learning group had significant pre- to post-treatment increases in GMOT, MAST, and PERF ( $t(31) = -14.163; -6.404; -7.503, p = .000 < .05$ ). Their pre-treatment means ( $M = 102.8125, 30.1562, 44.1250; SD = 13.84811, 5.26773, 6.66115$ ) rose to post-treatment means ( $M = 110.8125, 32.0000, 50.0313; SD = 18.36623, 6.18531, 10.51722$ ), indicating significant improvement. Similarly, the Conventional Blended Learning group saw increases in GMOT, MAST, and PERF ( $t(31) = -2.791; -4.178; -4.399, p = .009; .000 < .05$ ), with pre-treatment means ( $M = 102.4375, 29.7500, 44.5313; SD = 12.72523, 4.36999, 7.01144$ ) increasing post-treatment ( $M = 104.5000, 30.6250, 46.6250; SD = 9.28752, 3.88338, 4.88414$ ).

Notably, 'Social goals' (SOCI) showed only a slight improvement in the Flipped Learning group ( $t(31) = -1.544, p = .133 > .05$ ; Pre-treatment:  $M=28.5313, SD=4.77213$ ; Post-treatment:  $M=28.7813, SD=5.22855$ ) and a slight decrease in the Control group (Pre-treatment:  $M=28.1563, SD=4.34117$ ; Post-treatment:  $M=27.2500, SD=3.14181$ ).

#### *Comparison of Effects between Groups*

The second null hypothesis is also to answer the first research question:

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the motivation survey scores between the experimental and control groups.

To test the second null hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was conducted to assess the impact of flipped classroom and conventional blended learning strategies on the motivation of EFL college students. Table 4 presents the summary statistics for the independent samples t-test, specifically focusing on the post-treatment scores of motivation survey.

Table 4

*Results of Independent Samples T-test for the Scores of Motivation at Post-test*

Group	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>EG (GMOT)</b>	110.8125	18.36623	-1.735	62	.005
<b>CG (GMOT)</b>	104.5000	9.28752		62	
<b>EG (MAST)</b>	32.0000	6.18531	-1.065	62	.116
<b>CG (MAST)</b>	30.6250	3.88338		62	
<b>EG (PERF)</b>	50.0313	10.51722	-1.662	62	.004
<b>CG (PERF)</b>	46.6250	4.88414		62	
<b>EG (SOCl)</b>	28.7813	5.22855	-1.420	62	.026
<b>CG (SOCl)</b>	27.2500	3.14181		62	

Note. EG = Experimental Group (Flipped Learning); CG = Control Group (Conventional Blended Learning), GMOT= General Motivation; MAST = Mastery; PERF = Performance; SOCl = Social.

Result: Ho2 was rejected in the **GMOT** ( $t(62) = -1.735, p = .005 < .05$ )

failed to be rejected in the **MAST** ( $t(62) = -1.065, p = .116 > .05$ )

was rejected in the **PERF** ( $t(62) = -1.662, p = .004 < .05$ )

was rejected in the **SOCl** ( $t(62) = -1.420, p = .026 < .05$ )

Table 4 shows that the flipped classroom group had higher mean scores compared to the conventional blended learning group: GMOT (M = 110.81), MAST (M = 32.00), PERF (M = 50.03), and SOCl (M = 28.78; SD = 18.37, 6.19, 10.52, 5.23, respectively) versus GMOT (M = 104.50), MAST (M = 30.63), PERF (M = 46.63), and SOCl (M = 27.25; SD = 9.29, 3.88, 4.88, 3.14).

Significant differences favoring the Experimental Group were found in General Motivation (GMOT), Performance Goals (PERF), and Social Goals (SOCl), while no significant difference was noted for Mastery Goals (MAST). These findings highlight the influence of instructional approaches on specific motivational aspects among EFL college students.

In summary, the second research objective (RO2) was partially met. Although no significant effect was observed for MAST between the two groups, notable effects were found in GMOT and the other two motivation scales. Additionally, significant improvements were seen in pre- and post-treatment scores within the flipped classroom group.

*Research Question 2: What Factors Contribute to the Different Dimensions of Motivation Among EFL Students in the Flipped Learning Context of English Debate?*



Chinese EFL students identified five three key themes influencing their motivation: Student Engagement, Collaboration and Interaction, and BP (British Parliamentary) Debate Exercise.

Table 5

Presents each Factor Along with its Associated Sub-Themes, Offering Additional Insights

	Themes	Subthemes
<b>1</b>	<b>Student Engagement</b>	
1.1		Interest
1.2		Desire to win
1.3		Active learning
<b>2</b>	<b>Collaboration and Interaction</b>	
2.1		Interaction with peers
2.2		Feedback from the teacher and peers
<b>3</b>	<b>BP (British Parliamentary) Debate Exercise</b>	
3.1		Significance of the debate exercise
3.2		Topic selection and debate motion decision

### Student Engagement

Student engagement reflects students' interest, desire to win, and active learning, which drive their motivation to learn. Engagement is key to effective learning, and flipped learning consistently highlights its importance in shaping student experiences.

Many students in questionnaires noted issues with the MOOC instructor's style, finding it dull and the videos lengthy. Some admitted rarely watching the videos due to low quality and a lack of engaging content, stressing that video quality, rather than student self-discipline alone, was essential. One student commented, "We would take it seriously if the MOOC teacher spoke well, had strong interactivity, and offered high-quality content, even if the video was 30 minutes long" (#8). Suggestions to improve engagement included video pop-up quizzes, pre-class assessments, and other external interventions.

In face-to-face settings, student engagement was notably higher. The flipped classroom used class time for debate practice, and students actively participated, finding debates engaging and interactive. As one student explained, "The best teacher is one's interests." Familiarity with debate topics was crucial, as students felt more motivated when they understood the subject matter. For instance, they preferred relatable topics like "Should programmed exams be canceled?" over complex ones, as these were easier and more relevant (#7). Starting with familiar topics, teachers could gradually introduce more challenging ones to maintain enthusiasm.

Besides interest, the desire to win also motivated students. Debating encouraged them to express their opinions and strive for high performance. "There's winning and losing in debate, and we all want to win and get good rankings," noted one student (#6, male). This drive fueled their investment in improving debate skills for competition.

Active learning, fueled by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, is essential for effective educational outcomes. Debate classes promoted active participation, motivating students to refine their communication skills, analyze various perspectives, and construct persuasive

arguments. One student shared, "Participating in the debate exercises...refined my oral communication skills and cultivated critical thinking" (#6).

Students valued the autonomy offered by the flipped classroom. "It affords us the flexibility to choose our learning approach," noted a student (#1). Despite design challenges, the flipped classroom fostered an environment that encouraged active learning, though practical issues occasionally affected engagement.

### *Collaboration and Interaction*

Collaboration, the joint effort to achieve a shared goal, involves sharing ideas, resources, and skills, while interaction is the exchange of information among individuals or groups. Most students saw the flipped classroom as enhancing both, and they emphasized collaborative learning's importance. Debates encouraged teamwork, helping students build confidence in expressing ideas and engaging with diverse perspectives. Despite these benefits, students widely agreed that collaboration and interaction—among peers and with the teacher—were lacking in the flipped debate class.

"I think the teacher doesn't interact with us much. In group discussions, it would be helpful if the teacher actively joined in, guiding the student judge groups to analyze materials," shared one student (#3). Many students felt that although the teacher encouraged peer interaction, limited guidance and less stimulating content hindered engagement, especially among students with different learning styles and abilities.

"Our debate group members mostly work on their own," noted a student (#2). Stronger students could prepare alone, while others struggled and focused more on their scripts. Another remarked, "When my group members and I watch MOOC videos, we do it separately. Even in the classroom, there's little interaction; we're mostly busy preparing our individual content." (#4)

Some students suggested selecting debate topics collaboratively, ensuring diverse perspectives and interests. Joint topic selection and pre-class preparation could build foundational knowledge, enhance discussion quality, and foster critical thinking. Feedback, particularly on British Parliamentary debate—a challenging format for EFL students—was seen as essential. Student judges provided feedback, but many students found it insufficient. "The feedback from the student judges relies on their understanding of the topic," shared one student (#1). Others noted that inexperienced or inattentive student judges often missed points, leading to uncorrected mistakes. Students expressed the need for "precise identification of their shortcomings" and expected feedback on argument quality, logic, and presentation style.

"I think after each debate, in addition to student judges, the teacher can also provide rankings and explain the reasons," suggested a student (#5). Timely, constructive feedback from both student judges and the teacher was viewed as vital for refining debate skills and enhancing performance.

*BP (British Parliamentary) Debate Exercise*

The flipped debate course focuses on British Parliamentary (BP) debate practice, a topic extensively discussed in this research. Most students recognized the significance of BP debate exercises and agreed that the flipped classroom provided ample practice time.

Initially, many students struggled with the structured nature of debate techniques and lacked specific knowledge. However, with practice, they improved notably, moving from inexperience to substantial proficiency. As one student stated, "If you don't practice, even if you have watched the videos and studied other materials, you won't know how to debate. Therefore, I believe that practice is the core of debating" (#2).

One student observed, "Approximately 80% of the students may find it challenging to effectively apply the knowledge gained from MOOCs," as they often present techniques like the "slippery slope" with limited context (#5). Practice sessions allowed students to identify weaknesses, seek guidance from experienced peers and teachers, and understand the roles and responsibilities of different debate positions. This hands-on approach boosted their readiness for real competitions, improving both preparation and performance.

Students emphasized the importance of a democratic approach to topic selection, suggesting collective voting or judging to choose diverse, meaningful debate motions. They preferred collaborative preparation, proposing that all students contribute to researching, brainstorming, and compiling evidence. This approach fosters critical thinking, teamwork, and a sense of responsibility.

One student proposed, "A group of students could receive the debate topic a week in advance, analyze and set the background. This group would also serve as judges, with the practice topic announced a day in advance, allowing for strong transferability. The session would then include material sharing and practical exercises" (#8).

**Discussion**

This study finds that the Flipped Classroom approach notably enhances motivation among EFL college students in English debate, with the Flipped Classroom group showing significantly higher general motivation compared to the modest increase observed in the Conventional Blended Learning group. In particular, mastery and performance goals improved more in the Flipped Classroom group, though gains in social goals were minimal, suggesting a need for targeted interventions to fully address this aspect of motivation.

These findings add to the literature by affirming the Flipped Classroom's effectiveness in boosting motivation, aligning with prior studies by Berrett (2012), Milman (2012), and Strayer (2012), on its role in active learning and engagement. Results also support research by Bellon (2000), Kennedy (2007), and Roy & Macchiette (2005), on debate's benefits for critical thinking and linguistic skills, while the observed gains in mastery and performance goals echo findings by Ames (1992), Kaplan et al. (2002), and Linnenbrink (2005) on motivation's role in academic success. Additionally, this study aligns with Chen Hsieh, Wu, & Marek (2017), Hung (2014), and Mehring (2016), in showing improved speaking proficiency and motivation within flipped learning contexts.

While social goal improvements were minimal and not statistically significant, this aligns with Vygotsky's (1997), emphasis on social interaction in language learning, suggesting that enhancing social engagement may require specific strategies (Saleh, 2013; Losada et al., 2017).

The study offers several implications for future research and practice. First, to enhance social goals, targeted interventions are essential. Secondly, given the challenges in motivation measurement noted by Phoeun & Sengsri (2021), the study developed tools specifically for the EFL debate context. Lastly, larger-scale and longer-duration studies are recommended to validate the long-term effects of the Flipped Classroom on motivation and oral communicative competence, thereby enhancing the applicability of these findings.

In conclusion, this study supports the Flipped Classroom as an effective approach to enhance motivation in English debate courses, with marked improvements in general motivation, mastery, and performance goals. Minimal gains in social goals suggest an area for further research to achieve a balanced development of motivation. Future studies can build on these insights to deepen our understanding of the Flipped Classroom's impact in EFL learning contexts.

### **Conclusions**

This study explores the transformative effects of the flipped classroom model on English debate learning for EFL college students. Modern information technology enhances education by offering flexible tools, abundant resources, and opportunities for personalized instruction. Students benefit from an interactive learning environment that broadens academic perspectives, fostering a more adaptable and innovative educational system.

While the flipped classroom model promotes interactivity and accessibility, it also presents challenges. Educators may resist due to perceived departures from traditional methods, and students might struggle with unfamiliar approaches. Privacy and information security concerns further highlight the need for adherence to relevant regulations. To maximize the model's potential, educators should balance technology with traditional methods, ensuring quality teaching while supporting student development. The continuous adoption of student-centered methods—emphasizing collaboration, inquiry, and active engagement—is essential for fostering an impactful educational environment. Ongoing professional development for educators is crucial to tailor content effectively and create personalized learning experiences.

The study highlights the flipped classroom as a highly effective method for enhancing EFL college students' motivation to communicate. It contributes to educational transformation by fostering not only content knowledge but also critical skills like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving—skills increasingly valued by employers. Aligned with Eaton's (2010), educational goals, the flipped classroom equips learners with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills relevant to real-world contexts. Graduates with a strong foundation and a commitment to lifelong learning are well-positioned for career success. Additionally, the study provides detailed teaching procedures, offering a practical guide for educators implementing the flipped classroom in English debate courses. These adaptable activities are designed to improve oral communicative competence.

For the flipped classroom to be effective, EFL teachers must transition from traditional roles to facilitators, creating a supportive, student-centered learning environment. In English debate instruction, the research emphasizes the importance of timely, constructive feedback, especially in the early stages, to refine students' argumentation and delivery skills. Providing such feedback is crucial for maintaining student motivation and preventing frustration, which can lead to classroom management issues. Furthermore, the study advocates for incorporating collaborative group tasks, reflecting EFL students' preference for teamwork. Interaction and cooperation are vital for developing communicative competence. Allowing students to choose debate topics and providing ample preparation time further enhance the quality and engagement of classroom debates.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the flipped classroom approach boosts student motivation, proving more effective than traditional blended learning. Integrating this strategy into AI-supported educational environments could further amplify its impact.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies should focus on enhancing the accessibility of digital resources in EFL settings. Scalable platforms can offer equitable access to high-quality materials, particularly for students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Research should explore personalized content delivery methods for English debate courses, adapting to individual progress and learning styles. These models could enhance student engagement and improve communicative competence in language learning.

Further investigation into hybrid education models that blend face-to-face and digital learning experiences could strengthen EFL debate instruction. Additionally, leveraging educational big data analytics to identify at-risk students and provide tailored support could enrich EFL learning environments. The integration of AI tools for interactive learning is another promising area. Advanced AI technologies, coupled with human-machine collaboration, can enhance interactive sessions by offering personalized support in English debate training and fostering a more comprehensive educational ecosystem.

In summary, these recommendations outline specific pathways for advancing flipped classroom research in EFL education. By focusing on student engagement, instructional quality, and integrated learning environments, future studies can expand upon this study's findings, promoting an evolving, responsive flipped classroom model that meets the diverse needs of EFL learners.

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