

# Exploring Students' Flipped Learning Experiences in an Undergraduate English Debate Course: Qualitative Insights for Innovative EFL Teaching in China

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## Abstract

This study examines the experiences of EFL students with flipped learning in an undergraduate English debate course, providing qualitative insights into innovative teaching practices in China. It explores the impact of the flipped classroom model on student motivation and engagement. Thirty-two second-year English majors from a public university in Sichuan, China, participated in a 16-week flipped learning program. Data were collected through semi-structured focus group interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Six key themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: student engagement, teacher roles, collaboration and interaction, instructional materials, BP debate exercises, and technological challenges. The findings indicate that the flipped model enhances student motivation and engagement, promotes collaborative learning, and supports effective technology use. However, challenges such as time management, technological skills, limited teacher guidance, and peer collaboration were also identified. This study offers insights into using flipped learning in debate courses and provides practical recommendations for educators aiming to integrate technology and innovative methods, particularly in the context of generative artificial intelligence.

**Keywords:** Flipped Learning, Motivation, Student Engagement, English Debate, Innovative EFL Teaching.

## Introduction

The demand for innovative teaching methods in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is increasing as educators address the challenges of the 21st century. (Hughes, 2010; Eaton,

2010). English proficiency has become essential for global competitiveness, making the need for enhanced student engagement and enriched learning experiences more pressing than ever (Sulaiman & Ambotang, 2017; Pawlak & Waniek-Klimczak, 2015). However, traditional approaches often fail to meet the dynamic needs of contemporary learners (Butler, 2005; Huda, 1999; Nunan, 2003; Orafi & Borg, 2009). This highlights the importance of adopting innovative strategies to support diverse learning styles and needs (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; Römer, 2011). Among such strategies, debate has proven to be a valuable pedagogical tool, fostering critical thinking, language proficiency, and student engagement in EFL contexts (Goodwin, 2003; Kennedy, 2007; Akerman & Neale, 2011; Alasmari & Ahmed, 2012; Zare & Othman, 2013). Research shows that debate can significantly boost student motivation, making it particularly effective in language learning (Walker & Kettler, 2020; D'Souza, 2013).

Integrating technology into debate instruction has the potential to optimize learning outcomes, especially in countries like China, where English debate courses are often brief (8-16 weeks), with large class sizes and limited instructional time (Archambault & Crippen, 2009). These challenges underscore the need for innovative teaching methods and further research to enhance debate education in such contexts.

Technological advancements have transformed education, creating new opportunities to enhance learning (Zheng et al., 2016; Means et al., 2009; Sari & Wahyudin, 2019). The flipped classroom model, which blends traditional teaching with online resources, has garnered attention for its potential to revolutionize educational practices (Voogt & Knezek, 2008; Sergis et al., 2018). However, research on the flipped classroom in EFL debate courses remains limited (Mok, 2014; Abeysekera & Dawson, 2014), and most studies focus on short-term, quantitative outcomes, lacking qualitative insights into student engagement and performance (Hung, 2014). Additionally, the optimization of technological tools in debate courses has been insufficiently explored (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015).

In China, where English proficiency is increasingly emphasized, educational reforms have called for innovative strategies to improve learning outcomes (Bolton & Graddol, 2012; Pan, 2015; Gong et al., 2020). Over the past decade, national and international debate competitions have driven the integration of English debate courses into the curriculum at many Chinese universities (Tian, 2019). The 2018 "National Standards for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Ordinary Colleges and Universities" highlighted the importance of English debate courses for English majors (Yang, 2021), stimulating research on effective teaching strategies and curriculum development in these areas.

The Chinese Ministry of Education has also endorsed the use of digital learning tools and AI technologies to cultivate digitally literate educators (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2024). Despite this, many EFL classrooms still rely on outdated pedagogical models that fail to fully engage students (Wang, 2017). To address this, this study integrates the flipped classroom model with AI-driven tools into English debate courses, aiming to enhance student motivation and engagement—particularly in the context of large class sizes and limited instructional time (Chen & Goh, 2011; Iwashita & Li, 2012).

Despite growing recognition of debate as a tool for enhancing communicative competence, there is limited research on effective methods for teaching debate in EFL

contexts, particularly in China. This gap highlights the need for more dynamic and engaging instructional strategies. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how the flipped classroom model—an increasingly popular pedagogical approach—can be adapted for EFL debate courses, an area that remains underexplored. While the flipped classroom has been used in various subjects, student perspectives on its impact in EFL debate are largely absent. This research seeks to capture students' real-world experiences, offering insights into its effectiveness, challenges, and potential to enhance engagement and learning outcomes.

Additionally, the study examines how modern educational technologies, especially artificial intelligence, can be integrated into the flipped classroom to improve EFL debate instruction. By exploring the role of AI tools in personalizing learning, providing real-time feedback, and optimizing teaching strategies, this research aims to expand the possibilities of flipped learning in the digital age.

### Literature review

This literature review explores the flipped classroom model in ESL/EFL contexts, emphasizing its effectiveness in enhancing student motivation and engagement. It also examines the role of debate in fostering critical thinking, argumentation, and communicative competence in ESL/EFL classes. The review then focuses on the tailored application of the flipped classroom in EFL debate instruction, addressing its unique demands, and concludes by considering how technological advancements and contemporary methodologies influence the integration and success of flipped learning in modern education.

#### *Flipped Classroom as a Teaching Strategy*

The flipped classroom model replaces traditional lectures with pre-class multimedia content, allowing in-class time for interactive activities (Brame, 2013; Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Bishop & Verleger, 2013). This approach fosters a collaborative learning environment, enhancing participation and outcomes (Brame, 2013; Berrett, 2012). By utilizing ICT, it promotes both knowledge acquisition and face-to-face interaction (eCampus News, 2011; Roehl et al., 2013). As a form of blended learning, it shifts lectures outside the classroom, enabling in-class collaboration (Strayer, 2012; Rizos et al., 2023). Pre-class assignments use multimedia resources, while in-class activities foster active engagement and provide immediate feedback. Post-class assessments, such as quizzes, reinforce learning and track progress (Hamdan et al., 2013).

The flipped classroom has gained popularity in higher education due to benefits like improved class time utilization and enhanced learning opportunities (Karabulut-Ilgu et al., 2017; Sergis et al., 2018; Tourón & Santiago, 2015; Galindo-Dominguez, 2021; Mehring & Leis, 2018). Meta-analyses show significant improvements in academic performance and student engagement (Lo & Hew, 2017; O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). However, challenges persist, including increased student workload, resistance to change, and the need for effective student preparation (Blair et al., 2015; Bishop & Verleger, 2013; Missildine et al., 2013; Gianoni-Capenakas et al., 2019; Sharp, 2016; Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018; Chang et al., 2022). Technological barriers and the need for clear guidance are also concerns (Mellefont, 2016; Wang, 2017; Milman, 2012). Research on its benefits and limitations is mixed (Butt, 2014; Marlowe, 2012; Moffett & Mill, 2014; Davies et al., 2013), indicating the need for further optimization.

In the EFL context, the flipped classroom has improved outcomes in areas like English idioms (Chen Hsieh et al., 2017), speaking proficiency (Hung, 2017; Li & Suwanthep, 2017), writing skills (Ahmed, 2016), reading comprehension (Abaeian & Samadi, 2016), pronunciation (Zhang et al., 2016), and translation abilities (Shu, 2015). Chen Hsieh, Wu, and Marek (2017) found significant gains in EFL students' speaking and listening skills. The model supports active learning and aligns with the communicative approach, which prioritizes meaningful communication in authentic contexts (Richards, 2005). Pre-class materials allow students to engage at their own pace, reducing anxiety and building confidence. However, research on its use in English debate courses remains limited.

Most studies focus on the flipped classroom's impact on grades and effectiveness, with fewer examining learners' emotions, attitudes, and strategies. The model's potential to shift students from passive learners to active participants is significant, fostering motivation, self-confidence, innovation, and teamwork—critical factors in higher education. This study aims to assess the flipped classroom's impact on motivation and engagement in English debate for EFL students in China and understand their perceptions of the approach.

Although Confucian-heritage traditions emphasize teacher authority and passive student roles (Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001), evidence suggests Chinese students can adapt to interactive, student-centered teaching (Littlewood, 2000; Iwashita & Li, 2012). This research seeks to integrate traditional values with modern educational reforms by combining active learning, collaborative engagement, and self-regulated learning principles, while considering the technological, pedagogical, and motivational factors for the successful implementation of the flipped classroom in EFL education in China.

#### *The Use of Debate in ESL/EFL Classes*

Debate, a traditional method for exploring truth and civic duties (Trapp et al., 2016), is defined as a formal discussion in which opposing arguments are presented and evaluated (Oxford Languages, 2024). This interactive form of communication fosters diverse viewpoints and serves as an effective pedagogical tool for developing linguistic, academic, and soft skills, while also promoting positive affective outcomes (Freeley & Steinberg, 2013; Želježič, 2017; Rosas-Maldonado et al., 2020).

In ESL/EFL contexts, debate enhances language proficiency and communicative competence by engaging students in activities such as researching, constructing, and delivering arguments (Ginther, 2012; Zafar, 2011; Wang, 2014). This process boosts fluency, confidence, and participation in active learning (Somjai & Jansem, 2015; Onen, 2016; Alasmari & Ahmed, 2012; Zhang, 2016, 2018). Additionally, debate supports literacy (Mirra et al., 2016) and fosters civic awareness by encouraging respect for diverse perspectives (Hlavacik et al., 2016; Shapiro & Brown, 2018; Zorwich & Wade, 2016).

Despite its global benefits (Akerman & Neale, 2011; Yang & Rusli, 2012), debate remains underutilized in many classrooms and is often perceived as suitable only for privileged students, with limited research extending beyond English-speaking contexts (Aclan & Aziz, 2014). Furthermore, studies on debate as a formative assessment tool are scarce (Bennett, 2019), highlighting the need for robust empirical investigations. For instance, while Tian (2019) emphasizes the educational value of British parliamentary debate, practical

applications are often underexplored, and research such as Dehham (2021), may not fully address university students' needs.

Challenges in English debate courses include adapting Western traditions to different cultural contexts (Tian, 2019), assessing short-term communicative competence (Lin, 2021), and refining pedagogical models (Yang, 2021). Some studies have proposed methods for enhancing debate education, such as effective teaching strategies (Lin, 2019), curriculum design (Chen, 2012), and instructional processes (Huai, Wang & Yuan, 2013). However, concerns about validity and the need for expert validation persist (Wang, 2020).

Recent research on debate assessment and peer feedback highlights the importance of organizational structure and strategy (Yang & Lee, 2016; Lin, 2018), though it often lacks broader applicability. Most studies focus on communication skills and vocabulary acquisition in debates (Aclan et al., 2014; Aclan et al., 2015; Rosas-Maldonado et al., 2020), indicating a need for further research that explores student perspectives in depth.

Although existing research primarily examines the British parliamentary debate format, gaps remain in specific teaching methods and pedagogical design. Future studies should investigate effective in-class debate activities to provide actionable insights for educators. This study aims to evaluate a specific model's impact on English debate teaching, offering practical guidance for instructional design.

#### *Implementation of Flipped Classroom in EFL Debate Teaching*

Debate enhances critical thinking, argumentation, and oral communicative competence (Rosas-Maldonado et al., 2020). Integrating the flipped classroom model into EFL debate courses can further develop these skills. Pre-class preparation—such as argument research and topic analysis—equips students for active debates and peer evaluations, thereby boosting motivation and improving debating abilities by making learning more engaging (Tsai & Chiang, 2018). Hung (2014) notes that flipped classrooms significantly enhance student motivation, particularly in language learning, where practical application is essential.

Traditional teaching often restricts the extensive preparation and self-directed learning necessary for effective debate. Blended learning has emerged as a solution, offering greater flexibility and improving teaching effectiveness in English debate (Kang, 2019). Zhang (2020), proposed the use of the SPOC (Small Private Online Course) model across pre-debate, during debate, and post-debate stages to enhance learning outcomes. Despite these advancements, detailed experimental research and practical implementations remain limited.

While studies on flipped classrooms in English speech courses (Gong, 2018) provide valuable insights, debate presents unique challenges. Further research is needed to explore students' perceptions and the specific effectiveness of flipped classrooms in developing debate skills (Gimeno-Sanz, 2023). Liu and Sukavatee (2019), reported positive effects of flipped learning on critical thinking, but their findings were limited to high school contexts. Woodward and Padfield (2021), discussed flipped learning without empirical data, while Gimeno-Sanz (2023), noted positive student feedback, though reliance on surveys weakens the robustness of the data.

Given the distinct demands of debate—such as critical thinking and structured argumentation—it is crucial to determine whether the benefits observed in general EFL contexts apply to debate courses. Moreover, evidence on how flipped classrooms enhance motivation and engagement in debate settings is necessary. Comparative studies between flipped and traditional teaching methods in debate courses are scarce yet vital for assessing their impact on students' motivation and engagement.

This study aims to address gaps in instruction and preparation, enhancing student motivation and engagement while optimizing the integration of technology and pedagogical strategies for flipped learning in debate contexts.

### *Flipped Learning in the Intersection between Methodology and Technology*

The expansion of communication networks and accessible educational resources has shaped essential traits for 21st-century learners (Bezanilla et al., 2019). Devices like tablets, smartphones, and virtual platforms have become integral to daily life (Gündüz & Akkoyunlu, 2019). The rise of AI, including models like ChatGPT, is reshaping educational philosophies and tools (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Celik, 2023), though concerns about data privacy and ethical AI usage persist (Nottingham et al., 2022).

The flipped classroom model must adapt to these technological advancements. Successful implementation in virtual learning environments requires rebuilding student-teacher connections and addressing learners' needs (Ferdin et al., 2020). Classroom disengagement has prompted many higher education instructors to modernize their teaching strategies (Rabidoux & Rottmann, 2018). Scholars such as Chapelle and Sauro (2017), Barnawi and Al-Hawsawi (2017), and Röhl et al. (2013) advocate for student-centered active learning strategies, including the flipped classroom model, arguing that these approaches are more effective than traditional methods reliant on rote memorization and passive lectures. However, merely incorporating technology without rethinking teaching principles may limit student engagement and instructional quality.

This study investigates students' perceptions of flipped learning at the intersection of methodology and technology, aiming to provide recommendations for creating a truly student-centered, deep-learning-focused flipped classroom model.

### **Methodology**

This section outlines the research methods used to investigate the effectiveness of the flipped classroom model in an English debate course, including research design, participants, instructional strategies, and data collection techniques. By utilizing qualitative methods, the study aims to provide deeper insights into how flipped learning impacts student motivation and engagement specifically in the context of English debate.

### **Research Design**

This study examined the flipped classroom model's effectiveness on students' learning experiences in an English debate course. Qualitative methods, including unstructured focus group interviews and open-ended questionnaires, were employed to gain insights into students' perceptions of the flipped classroom implementation. This approach enriched the understanding of their motivation and engagement. While quantitative data offers a broad



overview, qualitative data uncovers nuanced explanations (Johnson et al., 2014), facilitating a comprehensive exploration of students' experiences.

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

The purpose of this study is to examine EFL students' perceptions of their learning experiences within a flipped classroom model, focusing on key factors they consider crucial for learning. Successful implementation requires effective collaboration and engagement from both teachers and students.

Motivation and engagement are central themes in educational research, significantly influencing student outcomes, including psychological well-being and academic achievement (Barker, Dowson, & McInerney, 2006). This study aims to explore how flipped learning affects student motivation and engagement in English debate courses, addressing gaps in current pedagogical approaches. The research questions (RQs) are as follows:

- A. How do Chinese EFL students perceive the effectiveness of the flipped classroom in enhancing their learning experiences in an undergraduate English debate course?
- B. What key factors do Chinese EFL students identify as shaping their learning experiences in a flipped English debate course, and how do these factors align with the specific demands of debate?
- C. How does the integration of digital technology within the flipped classroom model impact the learning experiences of Chinese EFL students in an undergraduate English debate course?

### ***Participants and Setting***

This study involved 32 second-year English majors from a public university in Sichuan, China. The class consisted of six males and twenty-six females, aged 19-20, selected for its size, which allowed for the formation of eight-student debate teams. All participants had studied English for at least eight years and possessed similar proficiency levels, having completed a prior semester in an English speech course. Eight students participated in in-depth interviews, while all 32 completed open-ended questionnaires reflecting on their learning experiences over two semesters.

To create balanced debate teams, participants were categorized into three proficiency levels: Intermediate High (H), Intermediate Mid (M), and Intermediate Low (L). Each team included one H, two M, and one L student. Participants with prior debate experience or those involved in competitions during the study were excluded, as were students with exceptionally high or low scores in speech or debate assessments, and those who did not engage with the flipped classroom's online component.

The research was conducted at a prominent teacher education university in Sichuan Province, known for its cultural and geographical diversity, which contributed to variations in students' English proficiency. This diversity enriched the investigation of learning experiences. The university's English speech and debate course is recognized as a top provincial program and is led by a teaching team committed to innovation and experienced in blended learning, making them receptive to exploring new pedagogical methods.

*Instructional Design of a Flipped Debate Course*

The English debate course was redesigned based on flipped learning principles, drawing from the Tai Chi Ring Flipped Classroom Model (Zhong et al., 2013), which integrates Tai Chi philosophy and Bloom's taxonomy. The model includes four stages: teaching preparation, knowledge comprehension, application analysis, and synthesis evaluation. The simplified version of this model is shown in Figure 1:

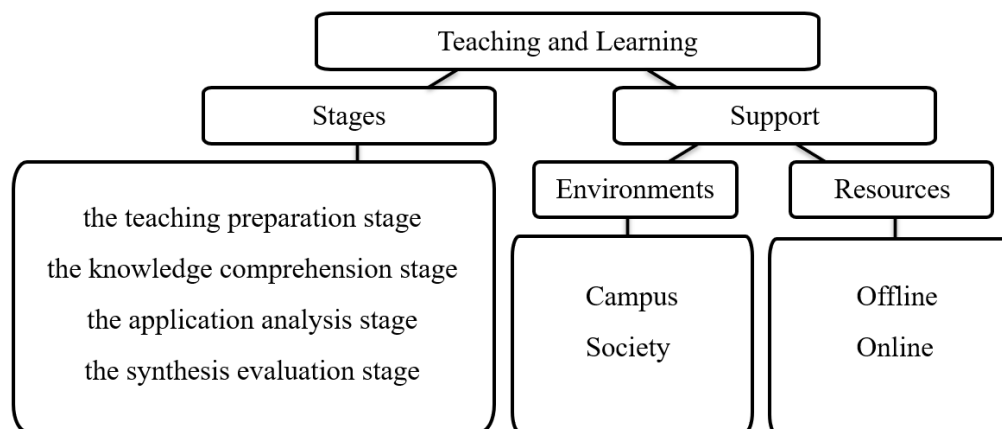


Figure 1 *The Flipped classroom Model of the Study (adapted from Zhong et al., 2013)*

The flipped classroom approach was implemented over 14 weeks, with 90-minute face-to-face sessions each week, complemented by approximately three hours of online learning and discussions. This model reversed the traditional approach by moving the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and debate rules to pre-class activities, allowing in-class time for practice, discussion, and feedback. The researcher designed activities aligned with the course objectives.

*Teaching Preparation* (before the in-person class): The teacher completes the teaching design, including creating course content (PPT courseware, teaching videos, test question banks, etc.), designing teaching activities (themed tasks, grouping mechanisms, activity guides, assessment rubrics, etc.), and preparing the teaching environment (teaching equipment, online platforms, network resources, etc.).

*Knowledge Comprehension* (before the in-person class): Under the teacher's guidance, students initially complete the memorization and understanding of the course content by watching video courseware, participating in online courses, retrieving online resources, and preparing for the debate topic (distinct from the debate motion itself).

*Application Analysis* (90 minutes of in-person class): The teacher announces the weekly debate motion. In the offline classroom, the teacher randomly selects one group to present their debate (each group had at least two presentations in the semester). The other students act as judges alongside the teacher. Each debate round includes 15 minutes of preparation, 40 minutes for presentations (5 minutes per debater), followed by 35 minutes for teacher evaluation, peer evaluation, and instant feedback. All debates are video-recorded.

*Synthesis Evaluation* (after the in-person class): All students refine their speeches after class, record them, and upload them to the online platform. The teacher then performs



delayed evaluations of each group member's performance and conducts a summative evaluation of the overall class debate. All students write and submit a reflective journal for this round of debate.

### Data Analysis

This study utilized data from a focus group interview and an open-ended questionnaire to explore students' experiences. The focus group interview was conducted in Chinese on university premises, audio-recorded, transcribed, and professionally translated, while responses to the open-ended questionnaire were provided in English.

Thematic analysis, based on Van Manen's method, was employed to interpret students' perceptions of the flipped classroom's effectiveness and self-reported improvements in motivation and engagement. This approach involved thematizing meaning to uncover underlying insights from lived experiences (Manen, 2017). An inductive strategy was adopted, starting with data coding and organizing these codes into potential themes to create a thematic map. The author manually coded the data by identifying keywords or phrases that captured participants' intended meanings. Van Manen's selective reading method was used to highlight relevant phrases, and similar or redundant codes were consolidated for clarity.

The analysis was iterative; the author revisited the data to identify new codes. Supporting quotes were color-coded, and codes were further condensed into themes that directly addressed the research questions. To enhance reliability, external experts participated in the analysis, achieving consensus on the most common codes and prevalent themes.

### Findings and Interpretations

This study aimed to assess the impact of the innovative instructional method on EFL learners and to address identified issues through qualitative data. It also sought to explore learners' authentic perspectives, offering insights to inform the development of a systemic flipped classroom model. The qualitative analysis of focus group interviews and open-ended questionnaires revealed six key themes: student engagement, teacher roles, collaboration and interaction, BP (British Parliamentary) debate exercises, teaching aids and instructional materials, and technological issues. These themes and their subthemes are summarized as follows:

*Student Engagement:* Degree of attention; Interest; Desire to win; Pressure to try; Active learning

*Teacher Role:* The prompter; The resource; The assessor; The organizer; The tutor; The participant

*Collaboration and Interaction:* Interaction with the teacher; Interaction with peers; Feedback from the teacher and peers

*BP (British Parliamentary) Debate Exercise:* Significance of the debate exercise; Topic selection and debate motion decision; Preparation and study of debate materials; Preparation form and time for the debate motion; Participation of non-debaters during the debate

*Teaching Aids and Instructional Materials:* MOOC platform; Internet-powered apps; Supplementary resources; Testing materials

*Technological Issues:* Learning management software; ChatGPT; Digital literacy; Overload and distractions

In the following sections, these themes are discussed in depth, drawing on excerpts from both interviews and questionnaires to highlight the diverse experiences and perspectives of the students. Although the themes are presented separately, some overlap may occur due to the richness of the qualitative data. In the analysis, 'I' denotes students who participated in the focus group interviews, while 'Q' represents those who responded to the open-ended questionnaires.

*Research question 1: How do Chinese EFL students perceive the effectiveness of the flipped classroom in enhancing their learning experiences in an undergraduate English debate course?*

Analysis of interview and questionnaire responses reveals that, despite facing specific design and operational challenges in both offline and online formats, Chinese EFL students recognize the value of flipped learning. As one student noted, "It affords us the flexibility to choose our learning approach, whether we delve into fundamental knowledge first or jump into practice right away" (Q #11). This sentiment underscores that the flipped classroom fosters an active learning environment through independent study complemented by in-class practice. However, negative emotions stemming from practical implementation can hinder student engagement and learning outcomes.

Several challenges were identified, including limited acquisition of debating knowledge, insufficient peer support, subjective feedback from classmates, and inadequate teacher guidance. One student expressed discomfort with the subjectivity of peer evaluations, particularly when classmates lack judging experience: "When I don't know much about a topic, it can be challenging to gather information and grasp debate points. Without effective guidance and constructive feedback from the teacher, it becomes challenging for me" (Q #31).

Addressing these challenges is vital for enhancing meaningful engagement in the flipped classroom. A thorough analysis of students' authentic experiences, including the roles of teachers and collaboration among peers, is essential for understanding their challenges and needs.

*Research question 2: What key factors do Chinese EFL students identify as shaping their learning experiences in a flipped English debate course, and how do these factors align with the specific demands of debate?*

Chinese EFL students identified four key factors that shape their learning experiences: Student Engagement, Teacher Role, Collaboration and Interaction, and BP (British Parliamentary) Debate Exercises. Each factor includes several sub-themes that provide further insight.

### **Student Engagement**

Student engagement encompasses the attention, curiosity, interest, and enthusiasm learners bring to the educational process, reflecting their intrinsic motivation to succeed. In flipped learning environments, engagement is pivotal to students' learning experiences and outcomes. Analysis of interviews and questionnaires highlighted five critical sub-themes influencing engagement: degree of attention, interest, desire to win, pressure to try, and active learning.

Students exhibited varying levels of attention during debate classes, especially online. The complexity of debate, with its intricate rules and extensive preparation, often overwhelmed those with average oral communicative competence. Initially, some students were reluctant to engage with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and supplementary materials, viewing debate as uninteresting. However, the introduction of assignments motivated them to participate, demonstrating how the flipped classroom model can encourage proactive learning. As one student noted, "When the teacher throws assignments our way... we realize we need to study and prepare on our own" (translated I #7).

The quality of the MOOC significantly influenced student attention and engagement. Many found the instructional style dull, citing lengthy videos as barriers to effective learning. One student remarked, "We would take it seriously if the MOOC teacher spoke well, had strong interactivity, and offered high-quality content" (translated I #8). Suggestions for enhancing engagement included improving video quality and implementing better management strategies, such as quizzes and pre-class assessments.

Students' motivation to engage in debate largely depends on their familiarity with and interest in the topics presented. When a topic resonates personally or is easily comprehensible, students are more likely to engage actively. For instance, a student noted that "debating whether to cancel programmed exams might spark more enthusiasm than discussing the use of nuclear weapons in military operations due to its relevance and accessibility" (Q #19). To sustain motivation, educators can start with familiar topics, gradually introducing more complex subjects throughout the semester, allowing students to build confidence and skills incrementally.

The desire to win emerged as a strong motivator for active participation in debates. The competitive nature of debating encouraged students to refine their skills and formulate persuasive arguments, even when advocating positions contrary to their beliefs. One student expressed, "There's winning and losing in debate, and we all want to win" (translated I #6). This competitive drive fostered both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic engagement, underscoring the importance of effective preparation and constructive feedback.

The offline components of the flipped classroom, particularly the emphasis on active participation during debates, created a sense of urgency among students. Terms such as "force," "urge," and "pressure" frequently appeared in student responses, with many reporting positive experiences. As one student shared, "You never really know if you're into debating until you give it a shot... the teacher pushed me to step up on that debate stage" (translated I #8). They acknowledged that the "pressure to try" was vital for enhancing their debating skills.

The flipped classroom model actively promoted learning through participation. Students reported that engaging in debate exercises not only improved their oral communication skills but also cultivated critical thinking by necessitating the analysis of diverse perspectives. One student remarked, "Participating in the debate exercises... assisted me in refining my oral communication skills" (translated I #6). The environment fostered by the flipped classroom encouraged students to take control of their learning, motivating them to explore topics

enthusiastically. As one student stated, “As a college student, the most empowering part of the flipped classroom is when I feel in control” (Q #12).

Ultimately, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors play crucial roles in promoting active learning, essential for achieving effective educational outcomes. A supportive classroom environment that emphasizes engagement, encouragement, and active participation significantly enhances students' overall learning experiences within the flipped classroom model.

### *Teacher Role*

The flipped classroom model emphasizes the importance of empowering students to take a more active role in their learning. It places students at the forefront, highlighting self-study and practice, while shifting the teacher's role toward guidance and supervision in line with modern educational practices. However, feedback from interviews and questionnaires indicated widespread dissatisfaction with the limited involvement of teachers throughout the teaching process.

In the context of flipped learning, the teacher's primary role is to act as a prompter, initiating and encouraging student participation through subtle guidance and suggestions. Students benefit when teachers intervene only when essential, providing discreet support for those who may be hesitant or unsure. This supportive approach ensures that students feel guided without being overwhelmed or unsupported in their learning journey. As one student remarked, “Most of us didn't really pay attention to the online course... I think the teacher should give effective reminders about crucial knowledge and skills” (translated I #8). Such proactive engagement is crucial to fostering a productive learning environment.

Furthermore, in flipped learning, the teacher should function as a valuable resource. Acting as a walking resource center, the teacher must remain accessible to offer assistance or provide language support during communicative activities. It is vital for teachers to encourage students to seek guidance independently, thus avoiding dependency. As noted by one student, “During debate exercises, we have only 15 minutes to prepare for the debate motion... The teacher has not guided us on how to prepare the debate material” (Q #22). This underscores the necessity for teachers to equip students with the skills to utilize available resources effectively, such as the internet, while maintaining a balance that promotes learner autonomy.

In guiding learning, teachers assume the role of assessors, evaluating student performance, organizing feedback, and providing constructive corrections. While various grading methods can facilitate tailored feedback, it's vital to communicate these corrections sensitively to maintain students' self-esteem. One student expressed, “We really want to receive feedback from the teacher... besides pointing out issues, the teacher should also offer positive encouragement and genuinely constructive suggestions for improvement” (translated I #3). This highlights the necessity of formative assessment for effective student development.

Moreover, teachers must embrace the role of organizers to ensure successful classroom activities. Clear communication of next steps and structured tasks are fundamental. A student emphasized, “To improve the flipped classroom, the teacher should plan well at the start of the semester... It's good to share ideas, but don't change the main plan unless there's a better

way" (Q #2). This demonstrates the need for consistency while being open to adjustments that enhance engagement.

In the context of British Parliamentary debates, teachers act as tutors, coaching students during project work or self-directed study. One student stated, "We hope that both before and after the debate, the teacher can act as a coach, encouraging us and providing guidance" (Q #33). By offering support, teachers help students clarify ideas and organize tasks, fostering a conducive learning environment.

Interestingly, several students expressed a desire for teachers to occasionally participate in debate activities, suggesting that this could enhance classroom atmosphere and interest. However, this raises concerns about teachers dominating discussions. One student suggested, "I think the teacher can occasionally join us... This way, we would be more interested and could see better hands-on demonstrations" (Q #28). If teachers can balance their participation to engage without overshadowing students, it could effectively enhance the learning experience while fostering a collaborative environment.

### *Collaboration and Interaction*

Collaboration involves individuals working together towards a shared goal, sharing ideas and resources while making collective decisions, and is closely related to teamwork. Interaction refers to the exchange of information or ideas between individuals or groups. Analysis of interviews and questionnaires revealed that most students viewed the flipped classroom model as effective in enhancing both collaboration and interaction. They emphasized the importance of collaborative learning, noting that debates foster teamwork and improve interpersonal and communication skills. However, there was consensus that collaboration and interaction among students, as well as between students and the teacher, were insufficient in the flipped debate class.

Students expressed a desire for more active teacher engagement during group discussions. One student remarked, "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. When the teacher is part of the judging process, student judges can give better feedback, helping maintain focus and preventing chaos among debaters and student judges" (translated I #2). Although some participants noted the teacher's intent to empower students and foster interaction, the lack of effective guidance and stimulating course design fell short of expectations for meaningful interaction.

Within student groups, collaboration varied, often leading to individualistic approaches to preparation. Many students reported that group members worked independently, seeking help only from peers with strong debating skills. One student stated, "Our debate group members mostly work on their own, preparing debates individually... Students with weaker abilities may focus more on writing their own script and may not have the energy to care about other group members" (translated I #3). Another added, "When my group members and I watch MOOC videos, we do it separately. We also prepare debate materials on our own, and there's little communication" (translated I #5). This lack of interaction underscored the need for more collaborative opportunities to foster meaningful exchanges.

In addition to enhancing collaboration, students emphasized the importance of feedback from both teachers and peers. Given the challenges of British Parliamentary debate for EFL students, timely and constructive feedback is crucial for growth. One student noted, “The feedback from the student judges relies on their understanding of the debate topic... If the student judges prepare more before class, their feedback might be more effective” (translated I #6). Many students felt that the current feedback strategy, which involved weekly evaluations by student judge groups, often lacked depth, with inexperienced judges failing to identify areas for improvement. One participant articulated, “In such cases, the points where we didn’t perform well might not be discovered, and we might make the same mistakes” (translated I #4).

During feedback sessions, students sought precise identification of their shortcomings. Although they felt confident in their preparation, they often struggled to pinpoint weaknesses in their arguments. Their primary expectation was for both teachers and student judges to provide insights on the substance of their arguments, including points, evidence, logic, and presentation style. One student highlighted this need: “I think after each debate, in addition to student judges, the teacher can also provide rankings and explain the reasons” (translated I #7).

Integrating timely and thorough feedback from both student judges and teachers is essential for fostering a rounded approach to learning. This comprehensive feedback mechanism ultimately contributes to improved performance in future debates, enabling students to enhance their skills and build confidence in their debating abilities.

#### *BP (British Parliamentary) Debate Exercise*

The flipped debate course focuses on practicing debates in the British parliamentary format, a key area of this research. Participants widely recognized the significance of debate exercises and the advantages of the flipped classroom in providing ample practice time. Initially, many students felt unprepared for the rigorous nature of debate techniques, leading to limited interest and knowledge. However, through consistent practice, they evolved from novices into proficient debaters. One student noted, “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” (Q #2).

Another student highlighted that “approximately 80% of students reported challenges in applying knowledge gained from MOOCs, as these resources often provide brief examples of specific techniques without sufficient context” (translated I #5). Practice sessions allowed students to identify shortcomings and seek guidance from experienced peers and teachers, effectively addressing their confusion. This hands-on experience clarified roles and responsibilities in different debate positions and significantly enhanced their readiness for real competitions, ultimately improving their practice and preparation.

Students emphasized the importance of involving the class in the democratic process of selecting debate topics, advocating for collective voting or student judges to choose subjects that resonate with everyone. This participatory approach fosters ownership and responsibility while ensuring diverse and meaningful topics. Additionally, students expressed a strong preference for collaborative preparation of debate materials, suggesting that all members



contribute to researching, brainstorming arguments, and compiling evidence. This collaboration enriches idea exchange, enhances critical thinking, and cultivates teamwork skills essential for academic and professional success. One student remarked, "A group of students could receive the debate topic one week in advance to better serve as judges. The practice debate topic would be announced one day in advance, with the classroom session dedicated to sharing prepared materials and practicing" (Q #22).

Debate preparation times and formats should be flexible to facilitate gradual skill development. Initially, individual debate durations can be reduced to 4 minutes at the semester's start, with extensions to the standard 7 minutes as students gain proficiency.

Students also highlighted the importance of non-debaters' participation during debates, stressing teachers' roles in fostering engagement. In simulations with eight students, non-debating participants often contributed minimally due to a lack of prior topic analysis and awareness of their group's proficiency, leading to disengagement. To mitigate this, teachers should implement effective instructional designs and supervision to ensure non-participating students maximize their face-to-face class time for skill improvement.

*Research question 3: How does the integration of digital technology within the flipped classroom model impact the learning experiences of Chinese EFL students in an undergraduate English debate course?*

Chinese EFL students identified two key factors shaping their learning experiences: teaching aids and instructional materials, as well as technological issues. Each factor includes several sub-themes that offer further insight.

#### *Teaching Aids and Instructional Materials*

The flipped course model integrated Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), with MOOC videos serving a crucial role in explaining debate concepts. Students valued the flexibility to revisit these materials post-class, enhancing their understanding and confidence. As one student noted, "The pre-class materials on the MOOC platform, including readings, videos, and research tasks, helped me gain a deeper understanding of the topics and boosted my confidence for debate sessions" (Q #2).

While students found the structure of MOOCs acceptable, they felt that video quality needed improvement to maintain engagement. Uninteresting content led some to perceive the course as nonessential, especially affecting students with average performance or low self-discipline, who reported limited meaningful learning opportunities. Many suggested customizing materials to address diverse expertise levels. Surveys on teaching methods and formative assessments were viewed as valuable for enhancing MOOC content. Students actively provided feedback during interviews, with one stating, "The teacher could organize an observational match with senior students or debate team opponents, recording their preparation and debate for a more immersive learning experience" (Q #19).

Some students expressed that while they didn't particularly enjoy the MOOC videos, they found the post-lesson materials engaging, particularly concise social news articles related to debate topics like firearms, crime, drug abuse, abortion, and the feminist movement. These materials, usually seven to eight pages long, were practical and helped students use the

arguments effectively in debates, fostering a collective enthusiasm for further exploration of these subjects.

Given the wealth of contemporary online resources, students advocated for incorporating popular platform videos, like those from Bilibili, or using QR codes to enrich learning. Many agreed that educators should regularly update instructional materials. Current testing formats, which consist of five questions after each MOOC video, were widely criticized as inadequate. One student commented, "We hope for more targeted assignments, such as having students gather information and prepare debate topics after learning search techniques" (translated I #8).

In surveys, students emphasized the importance of testing and offered various suggestions. One proposed, "Students could record their practice, note their strengths and weaknesses, and conduct self-reflections as regular homework" (Q #17). Another suggested, "Teachers could conduct a quick quiz in the first five minutes of offline classes to check everyone's grasp of pre-class materials" (Q #28). Such assignments would enable teachers to continuously monitor student progress and adjust their teaching methods accordingly.

### *Technological Issues*

The rapid advancement of information technology profoundly impacts education, necessitating that both teachers and students remain informed and adaptable. This influence extends to educational administration, resource acquisition, assessment methods, and feedback processes.

Regarding MOOC management, students proposed a supervision system via learning management software to encourage engagement with MOOC videos. In focus group discussions, one student noted that many video courses now feature interactive pop-up programs for progress evaluation (translated I #1), while another cautioned that strict monitoring through pop-up quizzes could diminish interest (translated I #3). Participants also suggested adding comment sections in videos to foster discussions (translated I #6) and advocated for QR code-based learning, allowing groups to share materials (translated I #5). The integration of ChatGPT was discussed, with students proposing its use for resource gathering and script editing, while emphasizing the importance of producing original work first (translated I #7).

Amid these discussions, students highlighted the necessity for both educators and learners to develop their digital skills in today's educational environment. However, concerns about potential downsides of technology, such as information overload and distraction, were also raised. One student remarked that teachers should enhance their digital literacy to help students filter and assess the vast amount of information available, acknowledging that preferences vary (translated I #4).

Surveys indicated several technological challenges, with some students specifically noting issues that require attention. Limited access to resources can hinder students with unreliable internet connections or insufficient devices, making equitable access to technology and support a critical issue that needs careful consideration.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to conduct a comprehensive examination of EFL students' perceptions on the flipped learning of English debate in the intersection between methodology and technology. The focus was on identifying key factors that students consider significant for their learning journey. Building on this project, the researchers aim to provide a practical example grounded in empirical evidence and propose suggestions for a future instructional design for flipped learning tailored to students' needs. The discussion is organized according to the research questions.

### *(A) EFL college students' perceptions regarding the implementation of flipped learning in an English debate course*

EFL college students' perceptions of the flipped classroom in English debate courses reveal both enthusiasm and concerns about its practical application. While viewed as a modern approach, challenges include maintaining classroom discipline, managing instructional processes, and sustaining student interest. Many students express dissatisfaction with MOOC videos, citing issues such as a lack of depth, logical coherence, and meaningful teacher-student interaction, which hinder effective learning. Consequently, the flipped classroom often results in surface-level knowledge and shallow learning experiences across pre-class, in-class, and post-class activities. To address these issues, the flipped classroom must prioritize deep learning and meaningful educational outcomes.

This study supports existing research on the flipped classroom's ability to enhance student motivation in EFL contexts (Berrett, 2012; Milman, 2012; Strayer, 2012) and aligns with studies highlighting debate's role in fostering critical thinking, argumentation, and linguistic skills (Bellon, 2000; Kennedy, 2007; Roy & Macchiette, 2005). Findings also corroborate research on the positive impact of flipped learning on speaking proficiency and motivation (Chen Hsieh et al., 2017; Hung, 2014; Mehring, 2016), consistent with studies on mastery and performance goals in academic motivation (Ames, 1992; Kaplan et al., 2002; Linnenbrink, 2005).

This study suggests that while the flipped classroom enhances motivation, targeted strategies are needed to boost engagement further. Future research should focus on interventions to enrich the learning experience and develop standardized tools for assessing motivation in EFL debate contexts (Phoeun & Sengsri, 2021). Larger-scale, longitudinal studies are also needed to validate the long-term impact of flipped learning on motivation and engagement. Although valuable, this study would benefit from broader sample sizes and longer research periods to improve generalizability. Ultimately, it provides strong evidence of the flipped classroom's effectiveness in motivating EFL students in debate courses, paving the way for further investigation into its impact on language learning in EFL contexts.

### *(B) Factors influencing students' experiences with flipped learning in the context of an English debate*

Chinese EFL students' perceptions of the flipped classroom highlight key factors influencing their experiences, including engagement, teacher roles, collaboration, and BP debate exercises. These insights enhance understanding of flipped learning dynamics in EFL education.

Student engagement, vital for active learning in pre-class preparation and in-class debate, varied based on MOOC quality, student backgrounds, and debate topic appeal. Consistent with previous studies (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Hamdan et al., 2013), engagement was linked to motivation and outcomes, emphasizing the need for tailored instructional design. Students also highlighted the importance of more teacher guidance, reflecting research on the role of teacher facilitation (Strayer, 2012; McLaughlin et al., 2014). Collaboration and teacher-student interaction were crucial for fostering teamwork and communication skills. The study calls for more structured feedback mechanisms (Sergis et al., 2018; Jang & Kim, 2020) to enhance learning, critical thinking, and argumentation. Through debate practice, students progressed from novices to proficient debaters, supporting studies on the role of structured debate in language proficiency (Ginther, 2012; Wang, 2014). Students also recommended adjusting debate durations for gradual skill development, aligning with research on the importance of scaffolding in language learning (Somjai & Jansem, 2015; Zhang, 2016, 2018).

This study enriches understanding of effective pedagogical practices in EFL by exploring student engagement, teacher roles, collaboration, and instructional design. While the flipped classroom shows promise, further research is needed to refine practices and support diverse learners globally.

#### *(C) Influential factors of modern technology in enhancing the teaching methodology of flipped learning*

The study examined how modern technology enhances flipped learning, highlighting both opportunities and challenges. Key factors such as learning management software, ChatGPT, digital literacy, and distractions impact its effectiveness.

MOOCs and supplementary resources demonstrate the model's adaptability and content accessibility, but issues with content quality and student engagement necessitate ongoing improvements in instructional design (Karabulut-Ilgü et al., 2017; Tourón & Santiago, 2015). Interactive elements and real-life applications can boost learning and sustain interest. Learning management software centralizes content delivery and student engagement but needs user-friendly design to ensure smooth navigation. Technological advancements offer opportunities but also introduce challenges, including digital literacy gaps, access issues, and distractions. Addressing these requires promoting digital literacy, improving learning management systems, and ensuring equitable access (Bishop & Verleger, 2013; Sharp, 2016; Galindo-Dominguez, 2021). ChatGPT offers potential for personalized assistance, dynamic content, and enhanced communication, though challenges such as ethical concerns and integration remain. Digital literacy, essential for successful flipped learning, must be supported by educators. Additionally, managing overload and distractions is crucial, requiring students to develop disciplined online learning habits.

In conclusion, modern technology offers significant potential for advancing flipped learning. However, successful integration depends on optimizing its benefits while addressing associated challenges.

#### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study examines the transformative effects of the flipped classroom model on student learning, teacher instruction, and the broader educational ecosystem in English debate education for EFL students, emphasizing equity, personalization, and evolving educational

paradigms. The integration of modern technology provides greater flexibility, richer resources, and more personalized teaching methods, creating open learning environments that foster student engagement and broaden academic experiences. These elements contribute to a more innovative and efficient educational system.

Collaboration between humans and machines, especially through AI tools, enhances feedback quality and supports dynamic teaching practices. Continued exploration of advanced technologies is essential to optimize human-machine collaboration in flipped learning environments. Leveraging educational big data can further inform instructional design, promoting continuous improvement. This study highlights the importance of a digitized learning environment that incorporates smart features to enhance interactivity, accessibility, and the overall educational experience, especially in EFL debate training.

Despite these advantages, challenges such as resistance to change, privacy concerns, and information security remain. Educators may be reluctant to move away from traditional methods, while students may struggle with adapting to new approaches. These concerns require strict adherence to policies and regulations. Educators must recognize both the potential and limitations of contemporary technology, using it to improve student development and teaching quality. Future research should focus on equitable resource access, AI-driven tools to reduce teacher workload, and hybrid models that combine face-to-face and digital learning. These efforts will enhance engagement, instructional efficiency, and technological integration, shaping the future of flipped learning in EFL education.

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