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# A Study on Perception Survey of Preservice Elementary Teachers on Teaching Methods in Astronomy — A Secondary Publication

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**Abstract:** This study was conducted on 115 students from four classes of 2nd-year intensive courses at B University of Education. Preservice elementary teachers were surveyed on what teaching methods they were aware of regarding the subject of elementary science astronomy. Recognition data of 80 people from whom the questionnaire was collected were analyzed. For this study, a 5-day survey was conducted. Preservice elementary teachers complained of difficulties in teaching methods in the astronomy area of the science department. The purpose of this study was to find out what difficulties preservice elementary teachers have in teaching elementary science astronomy topics and to explore more efficient teaching methods for teaching astronomy topics. The topic of the survey was set by discussing with the preservice elementary teachers about what kind of survey to use in teaching the subject of elementary science astronomy. There are many topics for elementary science astronomy, but two questionnaires were prepared focusing on the unit on the Earth and the moon: “What does the Earth look like?” in Unit 4 (1/10) of the 3rd year, 1st semester; in Unit 2 (1/11) of the 1st semester of the 6th grade, it was set as “What does the moon look like?” The surveys candidly described how to teach the subject of astronomy to elementary school students by mobilizing all the background knowledge of preservice elementary teachers. The results of these surveys were visualized and displayed using NetMiner as a language analysis method, and the contents of the responses to the actual surveys by preservice elementary teachers were described and interpreted. Based on these results, preservice elementary teachers tried to suggest a more efficient teaching method for the subject of elementary science astronomy. In addition, basic procedures and methods for lecturing on the subject of elementary science astronomy were presented. A more efficient teaching method for teaching elementary science astronomy subjects to preservice elementary teachers was suggested.

**Keywords:** Preservice elementary teachers; Subject of astronomy; Study of cognition research; Elementary science teaching methods

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## 1. Introduction

Every year, the College of Education holds a course on teaching methods and materials research in elementary

science for preservice teachers to analyze science textbooks and design teaching and learning plans. The lecture content of this study is centered on the Earth and Space area of elementary science, and it consists of research on teaching materials and teaching methods for the topic of astronomy in elementary science. Although preservice elementary teachers are aware of the existence of astronomy in the Earth and Space domain of elementary science, they have a low level of understanding of the concept of astronomy and complain of difficulties in teaching it. It is believed that the reason for the difficulty in teaching astronomy topics is the lack of a systematic, sequential, and specialized teaching method that is appropriate to the developmental stage of elementary school students. In other words, preservice teachers lack expertise in teaching methods for elementary school students. Due to COVID-19, the education scene is currently undergoing many changes, and various teaching methods for virtual and face-to-face classes are being studied experimentally. Although many educational platforms are being developed that can provide efficient teaching methods for non-face-to-face classes, the results of learning have not been properly tested. Theoretically, the teaching method for elementary science and astronomy is efficient if it utilizes the five senses according to the developmental stage of elementary school students. However, due to the developmental stage of elementary school students, the astronomy teaching method has many limitations in understanding essential spatial perception concepts. This study aimed to discover implications for teaching methods through previous studies at home and abroad on the topic of astronomy in elementary school science. The studies on astronomy for elementary school students<sup>[1-3]</sup> were conducted on the units of “Seasonal Changes” and “Earth and Moon” in elementary school science and showed that various teaching and learning methods were effective in helping elementary school students understand the topic of astronomy. In addition, Kim and Lee<sup>[4]</sup> revealed that the use of storytelling techniques in the “Solar System and Stars” unit for elementary school students helped them acquire scientific concepts. Several studies<sup>[2,5-11]</sup> on astronomy-related topics for elementary school preservice teachers also explain that various teaching methods are applied to achieve learning effects. In particular, Lee<sup>[9]</sup> describes the use of storytelling as an effective way to learn astronomy topics. In a case study to explore the topic-specific pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) development process of elementary school teachers on the Earth’s rotation, Lee and Lee<sup>[12]</sup> explain that, rather than using a specific teaching method, students should use a variety of teaching methods such as videos, role-playing, and astronomical software in classes dealing with the Earth’s rotation. In addition, astronomy-related studies<sup>[13-19]</sup> describe data-based educational activities in astronomy classrooms and the use of teaching observation of lunar phase changes, and they introduce various teaching methods and show that they have been effective in learning. The results of these studies suggest that teaching astronomy-related topics to elementary school students can improve learning outcomes by understanding the characteristics of elementary school students’ thinking. It is meaningful for preservice teachers who will be teaching elementary school students to analyze the topic of astronomy in elementary science and to systematically study and explore teaching and learning methods based on instructional design principles. As a result, it is expected that when preservice teachers become elementary school teachers, they will be able to use effective teaching and learning methods to teach astronomy topics in elementary science.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the preservice teachers’ perceptions of teaching methods for astronomy topics and to find out the extent of differentiated perceptions of astronomy topics among preservice teachers after learning about teaching methods related to the thinking patterns of elementary school students according to their developmental stages. The following research questions were set up to derive the results of this study.

- (1) What are the perceptions of preservice teachers on how to teach the topic of the “Appearance of the Earth?”

- (2) What are the perceptions of preservice teachers on how to teach the topic of “Appearance of the Moon?”
- (3) How do preservice teachers perceive the teaching of the topic “What is the Moon?”

## 2. Research methods

### 2.1. Research procedures

The elementary science curriculum is divided into four areas: motion and energy, matter, life, and the Earth and universe. Preservice elementary teachers complain of difficulties in teaching astronomy topics in elementary science, so we surveyed 115 students in four classes of the second-year enrichment course at B University of Education about their teaching methods for astronomy topics (**Table 1**). The results were interpreted by visualizing the survey results with NetMiner (NetMiner - Social Network Analysis Software) for 80 people who responded to the survey. In addition, the statements that responded peculiarly to the survey were presented and interpreted as examples. Based on the interpretation of the survey results, efficient teaching methods for elementary science astronomy were proposed.

**Table 1.** Number of people per advanced course

Advanced course	Ethics	Math	Society	Music	Total
Number of people (persons)	29	29	29	28	115
Number of people collecting surveys	20	18	21	21	80

### 2.2. Study period

This course started on March 2, 2023, and for the research experiment, the survey was collected from the university’s LMS during the 5-day period from March 6, 2023 to March 10, 2023, when there was a lecture on “Elementary Science Materials Research.”

### 2.3. Inspection tools

This study was a qualitative survey of preservice teachers to find out what areas of elementary science they find difficult to teach. The questionnaire was completed after discussing the topics that preservice teachers find difficult to teach. The questionnaire was presented to the preservice teachers in the following areas: “What does the Earth look like?” in Unit 4 (1/10) of the first semester of grade 3; “What does the moon look like?” in Unit 2 (1/11) of the first semester of grade 6. Using the background of a preservice elementary teacher, they wrote an honest description of how they would teach elementary students about the topic of astronomy.

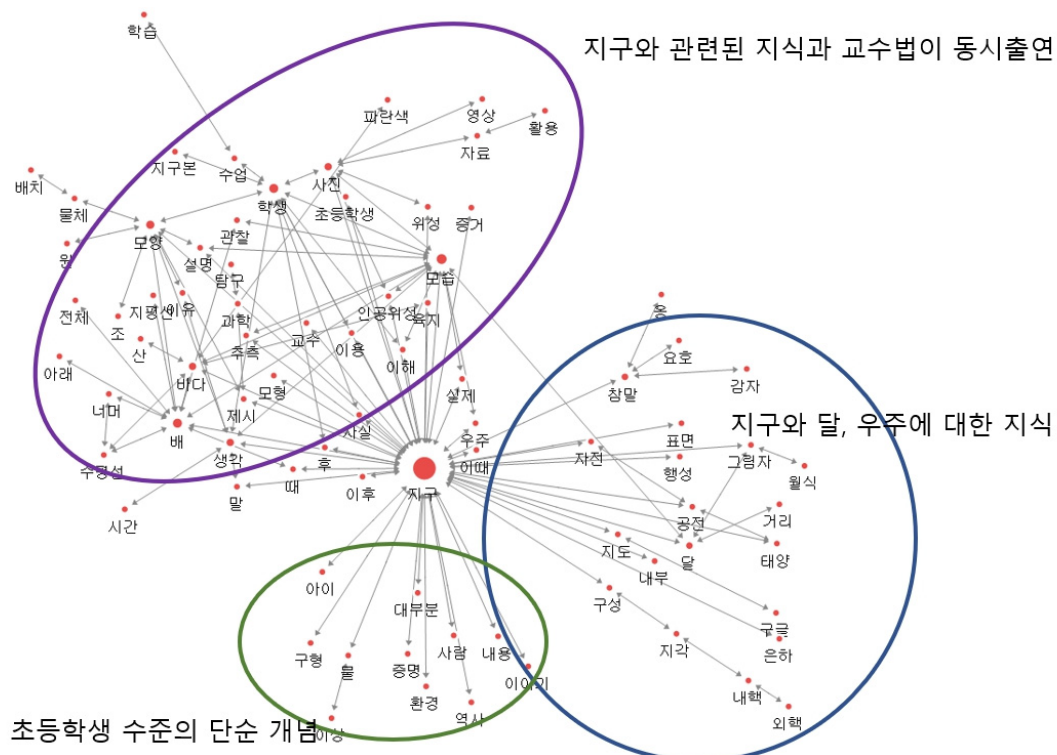
### 2.4. Processing results

The results of the questionnaire responses of preservice elementary teachers were analyzed using the language network of NetMiner 4. Nodes and links were extracted through the method of One Mode Network analysis, Min Windows size was set to 3.0, Min Link Frequency Threshold was set to 2.0 to adjust the number of extracted nodes, and Self-Loop was removed. The minimum unit of co-occurring relationships was set to a sentence, and Degree Centrality analysis was performed using the constructed matrix. Based on the nodes appearing in the semantic clusters, the meaning of the semantic clusters was confirmed by finding the texts in which the co-occurrence of nodes occurs.

### 3. Findings and discussion

#### 3.1. An analysis of preservice elementary teachers' teaching-related language about the "Appearance of the Earth" in the astronomy domain

We visualized the sentences of preservice elementary school teachers responding to the question "What is your teaching method for 'What does the Earth look like?'" and analyzed the results by focusing on the meaning of the clustering of nodes that can be identified by dimensional classification. NetMiner was used to analyze the tendency of language concentration. We wanted to understand various ideas about teaching methods by presenting a somewhat comprehensive questionnaire about how to make elementary school students understand the Earth. **Figure 1** visualizes the network of language connections using a centerline analysis.



**Figure 1.** Language tendencies in the shape of the Earth

Describing the results of the analysis on how to teach about the Earth, the centrality analysis visualization of the linguistic connections to describe the Earth was divided into three main factors. The first factor can be divided into the "co-occurrence of knowledge and teaching methods related to the Earth" node, the "simple concepts at the elementary school level" node, and the nodes centered on knowledge about the Earth, the moon, and the universe.

The first factor is the simultaneous emergence of knowledge and teaching methods related to the Earth, which includes circle, model, student, photo, shape, sea, ship, etc. In the student's terminology, various connections such as shape and appearance are presented, and it is believed that elementary school students will understand the Earth quickly if they show the Earth's appearance through photographs. In the shape network, satellites, ships, and thoughts are presented in various language networks. In addition, we tried to explain that the image of a ship, which is presented in elementary school textbooks as an ocean and a ship, does not show a ship going from close to the ocean to a distant place. This node is considered to be a node that can help students



understand the shape of the Earth by analogizing the shape similar to the Earth or by describing the land in detail.

The original text of the professor's explanation for the "simultaneous emergence of knowledge and pedagogy related to the Earth" is as follows: Case 43. From our perspective, the Earth may appear to be a flat space, but evidence suggests that it is spherical. Evidence includes the existence of a horizon and the presence of solar and lunar eclipses. Elementary students are asked to develop their own ideas about the shape of the Earth, then find and prove evidence on their own, and finally draw conclusions using audio and visuals. It is explained that more than half of the Earth's surface is covered by water, and that the space that is not covered by water is made up of various landforms such as forests and mountain ranges.

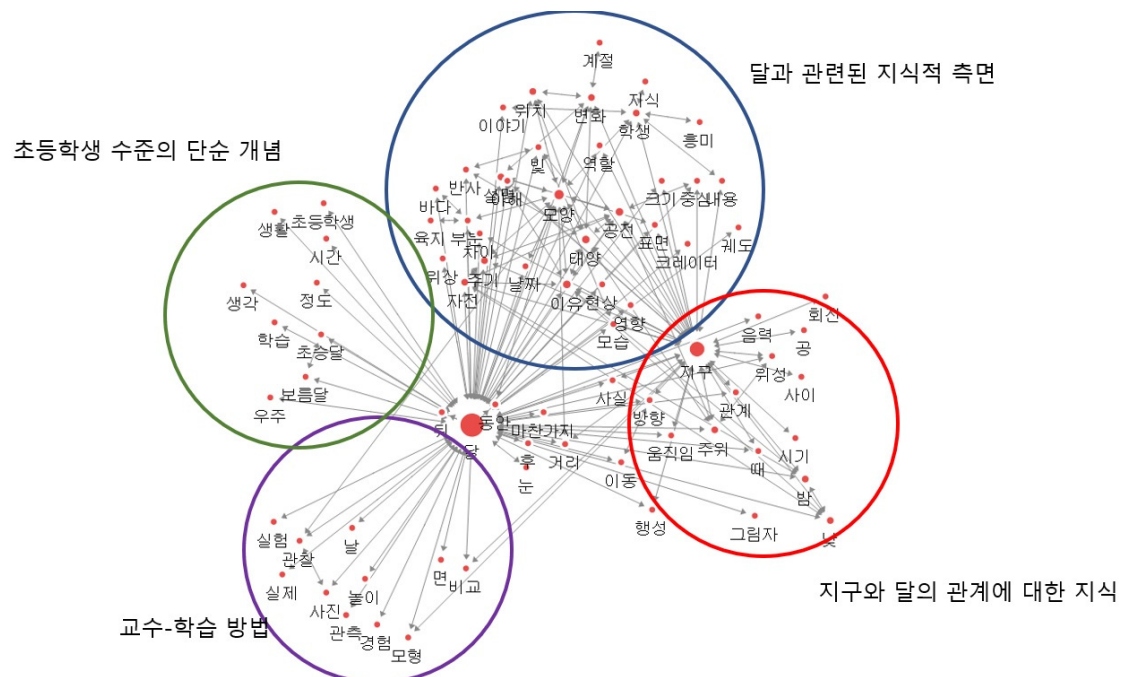
The second factor is that the "simple concepts at the elementary school level" show children, people, and history, and the model shows how to explain the appearance of the Earth by analogy with spherical shape, water, and environment. In addition, the nodes that are imprinted that the Earth is a spherical body and tend to explain the appearance of the Earth in terms of environment, water, etc. are presented. Although the appearance of the Earth can be described in a variety of ways, it is interpreted that the Earth tends to be described in terms of environment, water, etc. The original text about the professor presenting a related explanation of "simple concepts at the elementary school level" looks like this: Case 22. It is bluish and round, but not a perfect sphere, with a neighborhood larger than the moon and much smaller than the sun.

The third factor is that the Earth and Moon are connected in our knowledge of the universe by spatial concepts such as rotation and revolution. It is also connected to descriptive language about the Earth's internal matter, such as composition, crust, inner core, and outer core. The original text for the professor presenting the related explanation of "Knowledge of the Earth, Moon, and Universe" is as follows: Case 65. The Earth is composed of a crust, inner and outer core, and mantle, and its internal structure is described in detail through a model of the Earth. The important elements and materials that make up the Earth's crust are explained with examples from everyday life.

To summarize the above language connections, preservice teachers are trying to approach the topics of elementary science and astronomy in various ways, especially from the perspective of spatial thinking, and the results of Kim <sup>[20]</sup> argue for the need for education on teaching and learning methods that consider spatial thinking from the teacher training stage. Hanson *et al.* <sup>[21]</sup> claim that they are confident in introducing engineering thinking habits to elementary school students, and the appearance of the Earth also seems to require the introduction of spatial and temporal thinking. Subramaniam *et al.* <sup>[22]</sup> found that preservice teachers' acquisition of science concepts is related to their teaching of students. This prior research suggests that the terms in the linguistic connections network for the shape of the Earth in this study are related to the acquisition of multiple concepts and spatial skills.

### **3.2. Analyzing the teaching-related language of preservice elementary teachers about the "Appearance of the Moon" in the astronomy domain**

To describe the results of the analysis, the visualization of the centrality analysis was divided into four main factors. The factors clustered into "simple concepts at the elementary school level," "knowledge aspects related to the moon," "teaching and learning methods," and "knowledge about the relationship between the Earth and the moon." **Figure 2** shows the language tendencies in the shape of the Moon.



**Figure 2.** Language tendencies in the shape of the Moon

The first factor, “simple concepts at elementary school level” is composed of crescent moon, full moon, learning, life, etc. It is simply the degree to which the language is presented with empirical content about the moon. Here are some examples of texts that represent these factors: Case 13. The Earth is round. When we look out to sea, we can observe ships sailing toward the horizon. If the Earth were not round, the overall shape of the ship would have to be smaller, but if we observe the ship as it goes over the horizon, we can observe that it disappears from the bottom of the ship.

The second factor is that in the “knowledge aspects related to the moon,” the language about the shape of the moon is most centralized, presenting concepts such as sea, position, change, orbit, rotation, etc. It is mainly composed of nodes about the shape of the moon. The following is a sample text that might be representative of these factors: Case 44. We naturally think that the Earth is round, but since the children have never thought about the shape of the Earth, we want to teach them to think about it and reach their own conclusions, rather than telling them the conclusion. We want to guide their thinking by asking them why the Earth is round rather than flat, why the Earth is actually round but looks flat to the eye, what kind of shape would make it possible to travel around the world, etc.

The third factor is the “teaching and learning methods” link, which is dominated by terms that can be used in teaching methods such as experiment, observation, experience, play, and modeling. Since it is a question about teaching methods, it is connected with terms that are used in cognitive teaching and learning. The following texts are representative of these factors: Case 19. You can also teach through experiments, such as using a globe to demonstrate the phenomenon of not being able to see from the bottom as a ship travels away from the ocean. Finally, satellite images are used to summarize that the Earth is round.

The fourth factor is “knowledge of the relationship between the Earth and the Moon,” which is centered around the Earth. The connections between the lunar calendar, ball, satellite, direction, relationship, shadow, etc. tend to be centered on the word Earth. Terms related to the relationship between the Earth and the Moon are presented as connections, and knowledge of the Moon’s relationship with the Earth is presented heavily because it is thought to help understand the appearance of the Moon. The following texts are representative



of these factors: Case 55. Instead of showing students a picture of Earth or teaching them about Earth, the teacher stimulates their thinking by first asking them to say or draw what they think Earth looks like, and then asks them to explain why they think that way. Then the teacher shows them actual satellite images of Earth so they can see what it really looks like. This allows students to revise their previous knowledge by comparing what they think the Earth looks like with what it actually looks like and how it is similar and different. This comparison will make it much easier for them to understand the topic.

To summarize the above linguistic connections, the linguistic connections of words about the appearance of the moon are in line with the findings of Han *et al.* <sup>[19]</sup>, which suggest a teaching method that can support students' spatial competence in the motion of the Earth and the moon. As preservice elementary teachers, the question of how to help elementary students recognize the appearance of the moon is similar to the direction of this study. In Chae's <sup>[18]</sup> study, she analyzed the activities presented in the "Earth and Moon Movement" unit and selected the Earth-Moon Movement Model as an experimental tool to effectively learn the concept, which shows how preservice teachers focus on teaching activities for elementary school students.

### **3.3. Teaching more effectively**

Based on the question, "Please suggest areas and topics that you think are difficult to teach in elementary science," the lectures were given to elementary school preservice teachers in the unit of "Earth and Moon" in the astronomy section of elementary science, with topics such as "What does the Earth look like?" and "Let's learn about the moon." Elementary school students' understanding of the shape of the Earth is based on various experiences and learning, and they conventionally have the idea that the Earth is round. The shape of the Earth is already presented in various science materials, so they only remember it unconsciously, but they do not directly recognize that the Earth is a sphere. In order to present an efficient teaching method for the astronomy of elementary science, it would be good to utilize the developmental stages of elementary school students, the use of IT devices, inductive thinking, and a sequential approach. The lecture content of the astronomy of elementary science is organized based on the fact that preservice elementary teachers have five senses and inductive thinking processes that are emphasized by the Piagetian cognitive developmental stage specific manipulatives. In particular, considering the development of IT technology, elementary school students are using cell phones, game consoles, and smart devices very closely, the basic teaching design is presented as follows.

#### **3.3.1. Topic: 3-1. 4(1/10). What does the Earth look like?**

- (1) Using Google Earth: For a sequential approach to inductive thinking, which is an elementary school student's thinking process, students use a program called Google Earth to explore the terrain around their lives and search from close to distant areas. From the main stadium of the World Cup to Gwangju Bridge (Diamond Bridge) to Namsan Tower in Seoul to Tokyo, Japan to the Great Wall of China to the Eiffel Tower in France to the Statue of Liberty in the United States to the other side of the country (the west coast of Montevideo, Uruguay), these searches are related to Burner's spiral curriculum. In the horizontal and vertical curriculum organization, the curriculum is organized from near to far depending on the grade level (in the social studies curriculum, it is organized from our town, our region, our country, our neighboring countries, and other countries in the world). Describing the phenomenon that when you see a ship approaching from a distance from the beach, you can see the top of the ship and then gradually see the whole ship.
- (2) Finding the circumference of the Earth: Students use Eratosthenes' formula for measuring the size of

the Earth to find the circumference of the Earth.

Assumption: Earth is a perfect sphere, sunlight shines parallel everywhere.

Step 1: Measure the angle between the rod and the end of the shadow. The sun shines vertically on a well in Siena and at an angle of  $7.2^\circ$  in Alexandria.

Step 2: Measure the distance between Siena and Alexandria, Siena to Alexandria  $\rightarrow$  approximately 925 km

Step 3: Find the central angle  $\rightarrow$  The principle of declination. The angle of the Earth's center between Alexandria and Siena is equal to the angle of  $7.2^\circ$  found in step 1.

Step 4: Build a proportional formula to calculate the circumference of the Earth.

$$2\pi R: 360^\circ = 925km : 7.2^\circ ,$$
$$2\pi R = \frac{360^\circ \times 925km}{7.2^\circ} \approx 46,250km$$

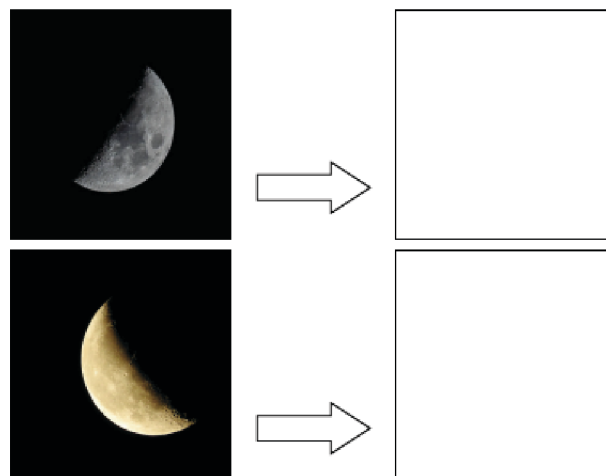
[Source of error from the actual circumference of the Earth]

- The Earth is an ellipsoid, not a perfect sphere.
  - The distance between the two cities was not measured accurately.
  - The two cities are not on the same longitude.
- (3) Having students use a globe to explore different parts of the globe.
- (4) Traveling around the world: A DVD about traveling around the world on foot is watched.

### 3.3.2. Topic: 6-1. 2(1/11). Learn about the Moon

(1) Drawing the first and second waxing moons

When students draw the first and second waxing moons, it is made sure that the middle of the crescent moon is curved instead of straight, so that students can see the plane of the moon and not perceive it as a one-dimensional flat object. The students are then asked to draw the center of the moon as if there are mountains and valleys, and to think about why the center of the moon is not drawn as a straight line when drawing the new and old moon. The key to understanding the spherical shape of the moon is to draw a curved line through the center of the upper and lower moon, rather than a straight line, to create a sense of space in the spherical shape of the moon (**Figure 3**). As students draw the moon, they recognize the spherical shape of the moon.



**Figure 3.** Drawing the upper and lower waxing moon

(2) Measuring the distance to the moon

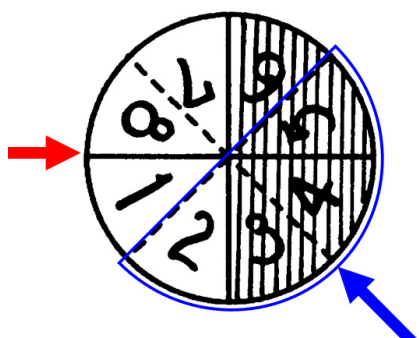
If a laser beam was shot from Earth to the Moon, it would bounce off a reflector on the Moon's surface and reach Earth in 2.5 seconds. The distance from Earth to the Moon is calculated, giving the assumptions underlying the calculation.

Assumption: Light travels 300,000 kilometers in one second.

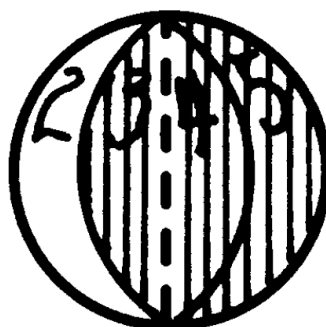
Calculate: Since the one-way time of a laser beam is 1.25 seconds,  $1.25 \times 300,000 \text{ km} = 375,000 \text{ km}$ . If the laser beam showed the time it reached the closest point to the Earth, calculate the distance to the edge of the moon, assuming it took 2.52 seconds to reach the edge of the moon.

(3) Lunar phases

The red arrow in **Figure 4** shows the moon being widely illuminated by the sun, and the basketball is compared to the moon to illustrate how the shape of the moon changes depending on where the observer (Earth) is in the Earth-Moon-Sun dynamic (**Figure 5**). This method of illustrating the moon's phases makes it very easy to understand how the moon's shape changes. Elementary school students' thinking style is based on inductive approach and sequential thinking process, and explaining the lunar phase change in one, two, three dimensions (**Figure 6**) will be easier for students to understand.



**Figure 4.** One-dimensional plane



**Figure 5.** Two-dimensional plane



**Figure 6.** Moon in 3D space

(4) Finding the most light in the relationship between the Earth, Sun, and Moon

In **Figure 7**, if look closely, one can see that the edge of the Moon is very clear in the direction the Sun is shining. In bright areas, the lunar rim is clearly visible, but on the opposite side, where the sun is shining, it is slightly darker and the surface of the lunar rim is not as smooth. These observations may help recognize the Moon's spherical shape.



**Figure 7.** The appearance of the moon in outer space

## 4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of teaching methods in elementary science and astronomy as a starting point for teaching methods to preservice teachers, and to suggest effective teaching methods based on the results.

Firstly, the results of the teaching-related language analysis of preservice elementary teachers analyzed for the appearance of the Earth showed the nodes of “simultaneous appearance of knowledge and teaching methods related to the Earth” and “simple concepts at the elementary school level,” and knowledge of the Earth, moon, and space as the central nodes. Secondly, the results of the teaching-related language analysis of preservice elementary teachers for the appearance of the moon showed the factors clustered into “simple concepts at the elementary school level,” “knowledge aspects related to the moon,” “teaching and learning methods,” and “knowledge of the relationship between the Earth and the moon.” Thirdly, in order to propose an efficient teaching method for the astronomical domain of elementary science, “Earth” and “Moon,” the developmental stage of elementary school students, utilization of IT devices, inductive thinking, and sequential approach were taken as the basis.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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# A Study on College Students' Learning Attitude During Synchronous and Asynchronous Video-Based Group Activities for English Presentation — A Secondary Publication

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the study is to explore college students' perceptions/attitudes during synchronous and asynchronous group activities. The survey comprised a 10-item, 5-point Likert-type questionnaire and open-ended questions. In the study, two groups, a synchronous group and an asynchronous group, participated in four activities during one semester. For the data collection, the researcher surveyed 116 students who are in their 1st year of college and collected their final tests, an oral presentation. The findings are as follows. Firstly, between the two groups, the synchronous group showed higher mean scores for online group participation. Secondly, the synchronous group also indicated higher mean scores for English learning, speaking confidence, and interest in learning English. Lastly, both groups mentioned communication with team members, improvement in English speaking and pronunciation, increased self-confidence, and other elements as advantages of group work. In contrast, disadvantages included technology problems, decreased self-confidence, inconveniences when meeting with team members online, and others. The implications for the study are: firstly, online group activity can reduce isolation and increase interaction; secondly, the online video-based platform, Flipgrid, can help students improve English speaking skills by observing their own or peers' videos; lastly, instructors can selectively use the synchronous and asynchronous group activities to suit their educational needs.

**Keywords:** Synchronous group activity; Asynchronous group activity; Flipgrid; Video-based discussion; Online class

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## 1. Introduction

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has ushered in a new era of digital models in education, with full or partial online classes starting in accordance with ministry policies. This has created many challenges and opportunities for institutions to strengthen their technical knowledge and systems for online learning. Instructors are utilizing various applications such as YouTube, Zoom, Google Meet, Facebook, Naver Café, or the school's learning management system to communicate with students, including giving online lectures or assignments to students.

Muilenburg and Berge <sup>[1]</sup> identify four important barriers for students to overcome in online learning: social interaction, administrative/instructor issues, learner motivation, and study time and support. Among these, the issue of interaction in online learning has long been recognized <sup>[2]</sup>. It has been said that the success of online learning begins and ends with online interaction <sup>[3]</sup>. Currently, various studies are underway to enhance interaction between learners and between teachers and learners in online classrooms. In a synchronous online education environment with immediate feedback, graduate students had positive perceptions of having the opportunity to interact with their teachers and peers <sup>[4]</sup>. Furthermore, even if high social presence is not reflected in the frequency of learning participation, interactions among learners in online environments serve to create a sense of community <sup>[5]</sup>. Presence refers to the feeling of being somewhere <sup>[6]</sup>.

Recently, there has been a growing body of research on the use of traditional text-based discussion platforms <sup>[7,8]</sup> or video-based discussion platforms <sup>[9,10]</sup> as a means of online communication. Asynchronous text-based discussions are one of the important methods for interaction between students and between teachers and students in online classes <sup>[11,12]</sup>. Video-based discussions can not only reduce the isolation that learners often feel online but can also decrease the distance between learners and make them feel more connected <sup>[13]</sup>. Students' satisfaction with the use of Flipgrid, a video-based platform, has been shown to have a positive impact on their language learning and their social and cognitive engagement in class <sup>[10]</sup>.

The use of video technology in the English language classroom can improve students' presentation skills and maximize students' speaking skills as they are encouraged to express their opinions and have more opportunities to speak <sup>[14]</sup>. For those who need to invest a lot of effort and time in speaking or presenting English, video technology-based activities can give them the opportunity to observe and correct themselves. In addition, video-based activities for foreign language teaching in online education can help to increase student-teacher interaction and improve student communication. To date, there are not many studies comparing synchronous and asynchronous video-based activities, and particularly video-based activities for English language learning are scarce, and Korean studies are not yet active. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the attitudes and perceptions of students participating in synchronous or asynchronous video-based group activities in terms of group task performance. The purpose of this study is to investigate the learning attitudes and behaviors of students participating in synchronous or asynchronous video-based group activities for English language learning in online classes and to discuss the implications.

## **2. Theoretical background**

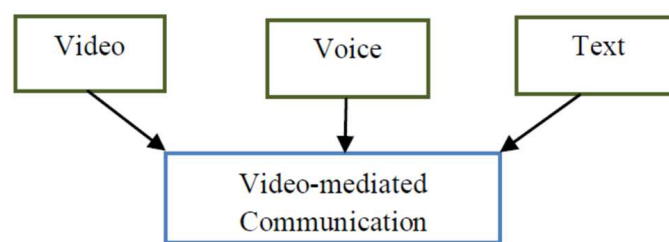
### **2.1. Video-based interactions**

Teachers, educators, and learners in the field have reported a number of challenges with online learning. The disadvantages of online learning include lack of interaction between individuals, low learning effectiveness, poor communication skills development, difficulty in controlling cheating, and difficulty in controlling and supervising the effective utilization of e-learning <sup>[15]</sup>. In particular, interaction in online courses has been shown to influence student satisfaction <sup>[16]</sup>. Moore <sup>[2]</sup> noted that in distance learning, interactions between learners and content, teachers and learners, and learners and learners are important factors that help learners learn. Among these, interactions between learners, which will be the focus of this study, are defined by Moore <sup>[2]</sup> as interactions between one learner and other learners, either alone or in a group, with or without the real-time presence of a teacher.

In language education, learning communicative competence for interaction has been taught in a variety of ways. Traditionally, text-based online bulletin boards as a method of asynchronous communication have been frequently used as a learning tool to improve reading and writing skills <sup>[7]</sup>. Lowenthal and Moore <sup>[13]</sup>

noted that although the development of learning management systems, various instructional technologies, and approaches to online course design have evolved and matured in many ways, today's typical online course is still centered around text-based instruction, such as discussion boards, which have been in use for the past 30 years. Asynchronous text-based activities can be very versatile and effective for teaching and learning in an online learning environment. Goda and Yamada <sup>[17]</sup> noted that the social presence of online asynchronous bulletin board activities can produce more language in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes. However, Lowenthal <sup>[18]</sup> pointed out that asynchronous text-based communication has been criticized as impersonal and antisocial and can only show filtered good task-oriented results. Furthermore, there has been a demand for communication that is less text-based and more based on speaking and listening. To compensate for these shortcomings, the use of video-based online discussion boards can fill in the gaps left by traditional text-based activities. Compared to text-based online discussion boards, video-based online discussion boards are notable in that they can increase the perception of real interaction by enhancing student bonding and providing important social cues such as emotions through facial expressions and voice <sup>[19]</sup>. Video-based discussions also develop group cohesion and a sense of belonging, making students feel like they are part of the group, which increases engagement and participation in activities <sup>[20]</sup>.

As shown in **Figure 1**, Manstead *et al.* <sup>[21]</sup> noted that video-mediated communication is a tool that provides learners with a platform to communicate through a combination of video, voice, and text, which can provide nonverbal signals to be transmitted to others.



**Figure 1.** Video-mediated communication

## 2.2. Asynchronous video-based tools: Flipgrid

Various online tools such as VoiceThread, Flipgrid, EdConnect, and MarcoPolo have been introduced as software for asynchronous video-based discussion boards. Among these, Flipgrid has recently been widely used and studied in language education <sup>[9,13,22]</sup>.

Flipgrid is a video-based discussion platform that is particularly suitable for language learning and can be used in a variety of educational levels and settings. Flipgrid can be accessed through a website or an application, and can be easily incorporated into language classes to improve students' communication skills, both individually and in groups. Flipgrid is designed to allow students to practice speaking in an online context, record and upload their speech without the anxiety of speaking a foreign language in a real classroom situation. Students can repeat the video recording as many times as they want before uploading the final file, reducing the pressure of answering questions under pressure that can come with presenting in an offline classroom. In an educational setting, students, teachers, and schools alike can utilize Flipgrid and its various grids (Flipgrid's community, i.e. a group of learners) to foster collaboration among groups and share videos with other groups. It is free for anyone to use with no restrictions and requires a Google or Microsoft account <sup>[23]</sup>. Users can record and upload an unlimited number of videos from 15 seconds up to 10 minutes. The great thing about Flipgrid is that it can be used as a very useful tool to help students interact with their peers in online classes <sup>[9]</sup>.

**Figure 2** explains how instructors can utilize Flipgrid. Firstly, each grid represents a class or course.



Secondly, they create topics and post assignments to assign work to students in a particular class. The third is a collection of videos that students have uploaded to the topics created. Lastly, instructors provide a link or QR code to share the grid with the students.

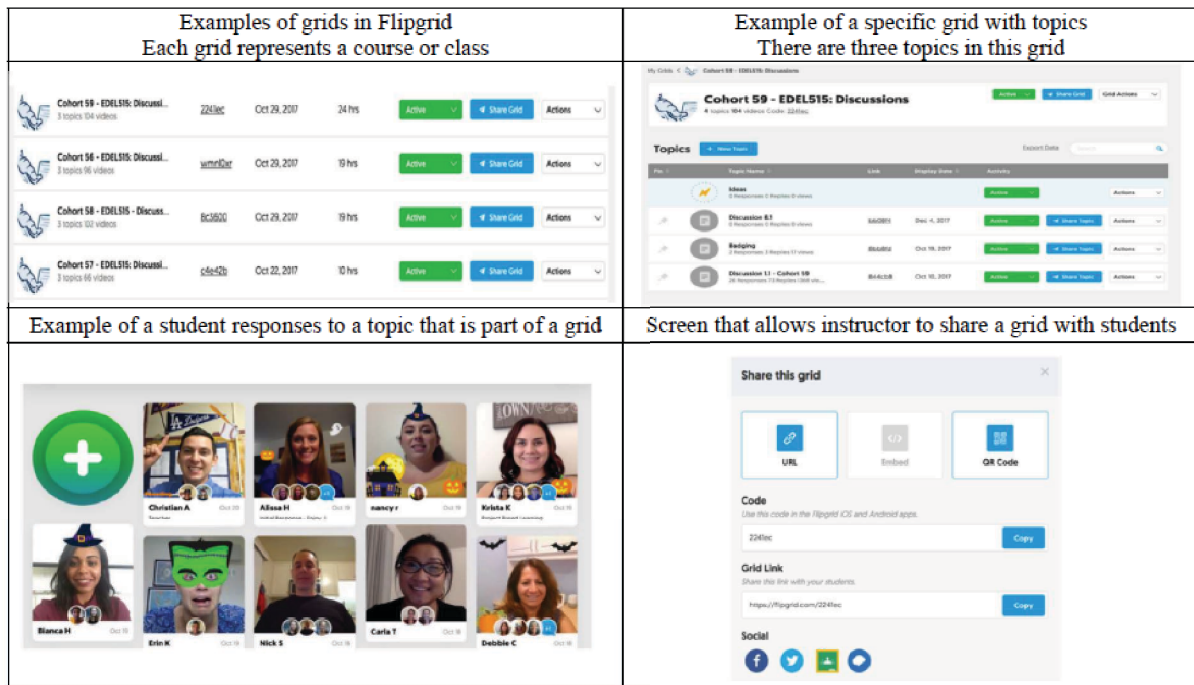


Figure 2. How to Use Flipgrid <sup>[24]</sup>

### 2.3. Prior research

The previous studies utilizing Flipgrid, a video-based platform, are as follows. Clark *et al.* <sup>[19]</sup> compared non-live text-based and video-based discussions in an online teacher education course and found that video-based discussions were more effective than text-based discussions in creating a classroom environment that connected instructor and learner relationships. Students noted that video conferencing made it easier and more productive to collaborate because they could see each other's strengths and weaknesses. They believed that the nature of video allowed them to see members' verbal and non-verbal social cues, which created a sense of trust within the group. Flipgrid can support this limited text-based activity. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 79 students regarding their perspectives on the use of Flipgrid as a non-live video-based discussion tool in a fully online class. Participants were highly satisfied with the use of Flipgrid and found it to be easy to use and could help enhance social presence <sup>[13]</sup>.

Studying the benefits of Flipgrid, Keiper *et al.* <sup>[22]</sup> surveyed a total of 163 students in a hybrid flexible learning environment and found that the majority of students found Flipgrid to be a useful and beneficial tool. Petersen *et al.* <sup>[25]</sup> conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of Flipgrid, a social media application that allows recording on personal computers and mobile devices, in an English communication class. The study was conducted on first-year students at a Japanese national university and the results suggested that Flipgrid could be an innovative way to improve participation in English communication. The results also showed that Flipgrid can be used by teachers to design learning activities that aim to engage students in communicating with each other both inside and outside the classroom.

Edwards and Lane <sup>[9]</sup> introduced Flipgrid as an online video-based discussion platform to 189 first-year students at a Japanese university and conducted a study on students' perceptions of Flipgrid and its role in

facilitating interaction in English communicative classes. The results showed that although some students were hesitant to use Flipgrid, it has the potential to provide an effective platform for interaction and communication in online classes. Mango <sup>[10]</sup> conducted a study on the perceptions of learning effectiveness and the advantages and disadvantages of Flipgrid through the learning experiences of Arab students in language learning. A total of 30 students participated in the survey. The results showed that students were initially skeptical about using Flipgrid, but by the end of the semester, their attitudes had changed to a positive one. They mentioned that Flipgrid helps them gain more confidence in their listening and speaking skills, and while tracking their progress, it provides them with a safe and low-stress platform for language practice. On the downside, 27% of participants noted a lack of immediate feedback on their videos on Flipgrid.

In recent years, there has been a lot of research on video-based activities using Flipgrid in online classes in language education. They show that video-based activities can increase communication and interaction between learners and between instructors and learners.

### **3. Research methods**

#### **3.1. Analysis target**

This study was conducted on 116 first-year students taking a liberal arts core English course at A University in Chungnam, South Korea. The participants in this study were students who scored between 450 and 600 on the diagnostic test taken before entering the university and the online mock TOEIC test, and were enrolled in the intermediate-level college English 1 class. Students with intermediate scores were randomly assigned to intermediate classes at each college. The purpose of this course is to develop oral presentation skills so that students can improve their speaking skills through learning to read English. The participating students belonged to the College of Foreign Languages, the College of Public Health, and the College of Science and Technology, and the total number of students who participated in the class was 116 out of 149.

#### **3.2. Class structure**

In this study, the students were given a group activity as an after-class assignment. The class was fully online and the first hour was a live orientation. In the first hour, students were assigned groups of four or five for group activities and given time to introduce themselves to each other and to exchange phone numbers or contact each other through the LMS or Microsoft Teams, which they were required to sign up for before the class started. Microsoft Teams was used to post group or individual assignments and for group activities. In the synchronous groups, we mainly used Zoom software, but sometimes we used Microsoft Teams when it was not working, and in the asynchronous groups, we used Flipgrid connected to Microsoft Teams.

In this study, the group activities were divided into two groups, Group A and Group B. Group A was a synchronous group activity and Group B was an asynchronous group activity. As shown in **Table 1**, learners in the synchronous group, Group A, met with members in real time using various platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to conduct group activities when given a group task. Based on the given topic, the presenter gave a presentation and the members took turns to ask questions or give feedback to the presenter, and all activities were recorded from start to finish and uploaded to the LMS assignment room. In addition, members of Group B, the asynchronous group, were asked to record their own presentations based on the topic and the allotted presentation time, upload them to Flipgrid by a given date, and then view the presentations uploaded by other members by the assignment due date and leave video or text feedback. For all group assignments, the presentation time was set at about one to two minutes, and for asynchronous groups, the type of feedback could be either text or video, and this group assignment was worth 20% of the overall assessment. In this study, the

group activity was conducted four times during the semester. As shown in **Table 2**, the topics for the group activities were selected from the content of *Keynote 2* <sup>[26]</sup>, the textbook for this university English 1 course, and the questions were assigned to each group. The assignment was explained in detail at the end of the online course content, and the students were given about two weeks to complete the assignment. In particular, Group B was given one week to upload their videos and the remaining one week to give feedback to group members. The topics of the group activities included introducing yourself in the first round, describing your favorite book in the second round, describing someone who inspired you in the third round, and introducing the most livable city in the world in the fourth round.

**Table 1.** Synchronous group activity and asynchronous group activity procedures

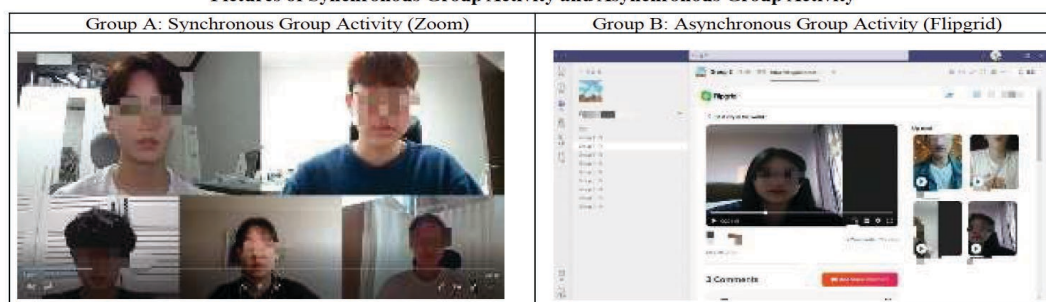
	Group A: Synchronous group	Group B: Asynchronous group
Platform used	Zoom, Teams, Gom player	Flipgrid
Procedure	1) Practice their own presentation	1) Practice their own presentations
	2) Set the date and time for group meetings	2) Record their own speeches on Flipgrid by a certain date
	3) Present their own presentation and give feedback to each other in online meeting	3) Watch team members' video and give (text/video) feedback

**Table 2.** Topic and contents for group activities

	Topic	Description
1st	Introduce yourself!	Introduce yourself in a group.
2nd	What is your favorite book?	Explain your favorite book using these four elements: characters, setting, theme, plot.
3rd	Who is your inspirational person?	Introduce the person who have been inspired you in your life.
4th	What is the best city in the world to live in?	Think and describe the best city that you want to live in.

**Figure 3** shows a sample of the students' synchronous and asynchronous group activities. Group A is a synchronous group activity, with five people working on the task simultaneously via Zoom and rotating presentations in a team-determined order. After the presenter finishes, the other four members ask questions or make comments, and the presenter answers them before moving on to the next presenter. Group B is an asynchronous group activity where members upload their own recorded videos via Flipgrid connected to Microsoft Teams using their mobile or personal computer, and when all members have uploaded their individual presentations by a certain time, they watch each other's videos and leave text or video feedback.

**FIGURE 3**  
Pictures of Synchronous Group Activity and Asynchronous Group Activity



**Figure 3.** Pictures of synchronous group activity and asynchronous group activity

### 3.3. Data collection and analysis

In order to examine the attitudes and perceptions of learners who participated in synchronous and asynchronous group activities, a survey was conducted for each group activity at the end of the semester after all activities were completed, and the results of the participants' final exams were analyzed. The questionnaire of this study was adapted from Yu's <sup>[27]</sup> questionnaire with modifications and supplements. A total of 116 copies of the questionnaire were collected and analyzed, and the open-ended questions were answered using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions, with multiple-choice questions about learners' participation in group activities, the impact of group activities on learners' English learning, and their preferences for presentation time and feedback, and open-ended questions to describe the advantages and disadvantages of each group activity. Participants' performance on the final exam was also analyzed. The final exam was worth 30 points out of the total grade and was assessed by submitting a video and script of an English presentation. The topic of the final exam was chosen from one of the four group projects. The final examination was evaluated on accuracy, which was divided into presentation format (10 points), English grammar and expression (5 points), and fluency, which was evaluated on delivery (10 points), pronunciation, and naturalness of intonation (10 points). The survey data of this study was analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative methods. The open-ended questions were analyzed by coding the keywords in the participants' answers, and the results were divided into communication with group members, English proficiency, and definitional aspects in synchronous and asynchronous group activities.

## 4. Research findings

### 4.1. Participation in group activities

To examine the participation of students in synchronous and asynchronous group activities in this study, we examined their responses to the survey question, "I have been actively involved in group activities this semester." **Table 3** shows that the mean for the synchronous group was 4.7 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.6 and the mean for the asynchronous group was 4.6 with a standard deviation of 0.7. We can see that the average engagement rate for synchronous group activities is slightly higher than the average engagement rate for asynchronous group activities.

**Table 3.** Result of participating in online group activities

I actively participated in online group activities this semester.	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Synchronous group	63	2.0	5.0	4.7	0.6
Asynchronous group	53	2.0	5.0	4.6	0.7

During the group activity, members were asked to provide comments or feedback to the presenter after the presenter had finished speaking, and the presenter was asked to respond. The results of this part of the question, "I actively tried to give feedback to the presenter in the group activity." are shown in **Table 4**. The synchronous group had a mean of 4.6 with a standard deviation of 0.7, while the asynchronous group had a mean of 4.3 with a standard deviation of 1.0. We can see that the synchronous group participants had a slightly higher mean.



**Table 4.** Result of giving feedback to the presenter's speech

<b>I tried to actively give feedback to the presenter's speech.</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Synchronous group	63	2.0	5.0	4.6	0.7
Asynchronous group	53	1.0	5.0	4.3	1.0

We looked at the results of the “I tried to respond back to feedback from other members in the group activity” survey question, which asked whether the presenter responded or tried to respond to feedback from members. **Table 5** shows that the synchronous group had a mean of 4.7 with a standard deviation of 0.6, while the asynchronous group had a mean of 3.4 with a standard deviation of 1.2. We can see that there is a rather large difference in the mean between the two groups. This is due to the fact that the synchronous and asynchronous group activities were similar in terms of giving feedback, but while the synchronous group could ask and answer questions on the spot, the presenters in the asynchronous group activity had to take time out of their day to read the comments or videos and replay them.

**Table 5.** Result of answering the feedback from other team members

<b>I tried to respond to the feedback (questions) from other team members' questions or comments.</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Synchronous group	63	2.0	5.0	4.7	0.6
Asynchronous group	53	1.0	5.0	3.4	1.2

## 4.2. English learning progress

A survey was conducted to find out whether synchronous and asynchronous group activities improved English learning. The participants were asked to answer the question, “The group activities helped me learn English.” The mean of the synchronous group was 4.2 with a standard deviation of 0.9, while the mean of the asynchronous group was 3.8 with a standard deviation of 1.0. It can be seen that the mean of the synchronous group is slightly higher than the mean of the asynchronous group (**Table 6**).

**Table 6.** Result of English learning

<b>Online group activities helped my English learning.</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Synchronous group	63	2.0	5.0	4.2	0.9
Asynchronous group	53	1.0	5.0	3.8	1.0

We also examined the impact of synchronous and asynchronous group activities on speaking by asking “Group activities helped me improve my confidence in speaking English.” The results in **Table 7** show that the mean of the synchronous group was 4.2 with a standard deviation of 0.9, and the mean of the asynchronous group was 4.0 with a standard deviation of 1.1. The mean for synchronous group activity is slightly higher.

**Table 7.** Result of English speaking confidence

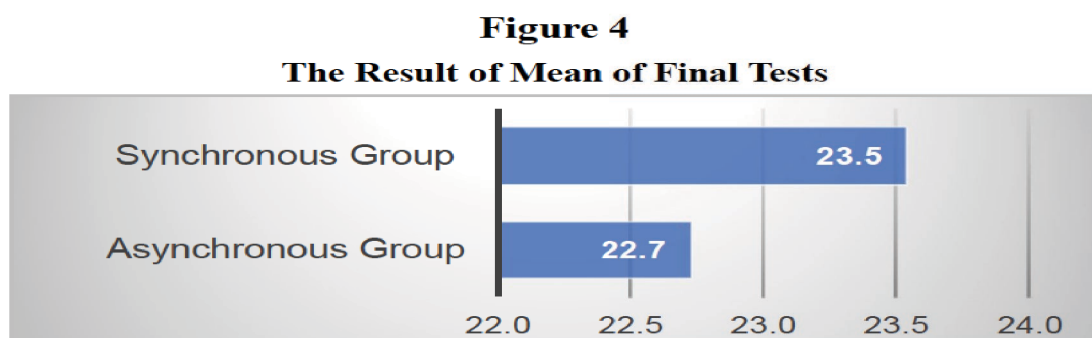
<b>Online group activities helped to improve English speaking confidence.</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Synchronous group	63	2.0	5.0	4.2	0.9
Asynchronous group	53	1.0	5.0	4.0	1.1

**Table 8** shows the effect of group activities on interest in English: “Group activities helped me get interested in learning English.” The mean of the synchronous group was 4.0 with a standard deviation of 1.0, and the mean of the asynchronous group was 3.8 with a standard deviation of 1.1. The mean was 0.2 higher for the synchronous group participants.

**Table 8.** Result of interest in learning English

Online group activities helped me to be interested in learning English.	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Synchronous group	63	2.0	5.0	4.0	1.0
Asynchronous group	53	1.0	5.0	3.8	1.1

**Figure 4** compares the mean final exam grades of the two groups. Learners who participated in synchronous group activities had a mean final exam grade of 23.5, while students who participated in asynchronous group activities had a mean final exam grade of 22.7. The difference in mean final exam grades between the synchronous and asynchronous groups is about 0.8 points. Students in the asynchronous group have a slightly lower final exam average than students in the synchronous group.



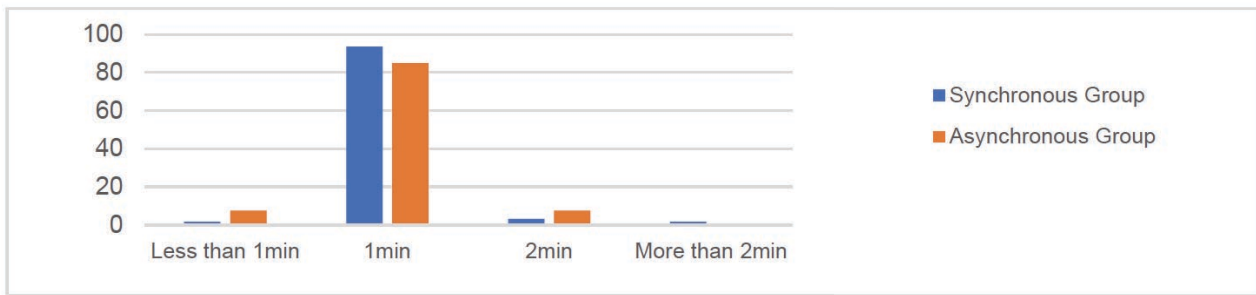
**Figure 4.** The result of mean of final tests

### 4.3. Preferences

In addition, we asked the participants what they thought was the most appropriate amount of time for an individual presentation in an online group activity, and both groups agreed that one minute was appropriate. As shown in **Figure 5**, 94% of the synchronous group and 85% of the asynchronous group felt that a one-minute presentation was the most appropriate, with 2% of the synchronous group under one minute, 3% under two minutes, and 2% over two minutes, and 8% of the asynchronous group under one minute and 8% over two minutes. As shown in **Figure 6**, the synchronous groups had simultaneous access to each other for verbal feedback, while the asynchronous groups had both text and video feedback. When participants in the asynchronous group were asked to choose their two favorite types of feedback, 23% chose video feedback and 77% chose text feedback, indicating that they preferred to simply leave written comments or feedback.

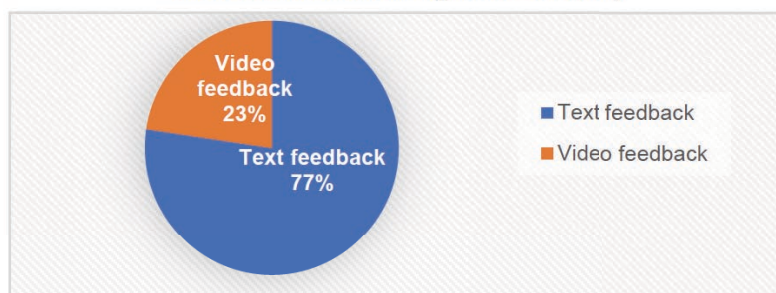
**FIGURE 5**

**Time for Individual Presentation**



**FIGURE 6**

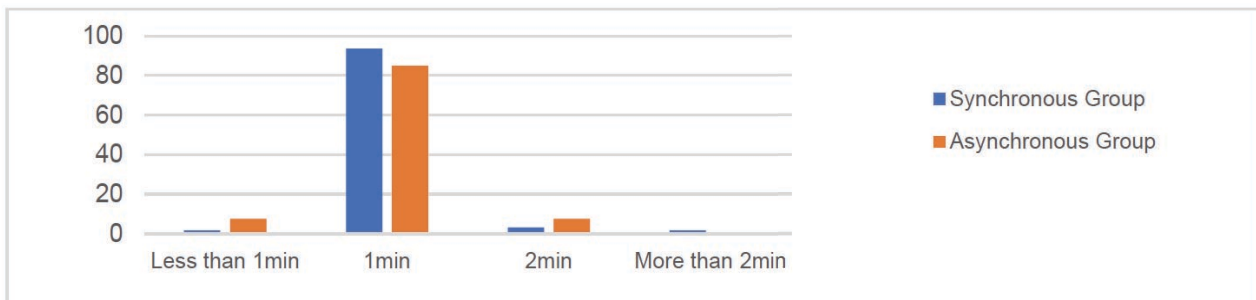
**Feedback Preference of Asynchronous Group**



**Figure 5.** Time for individual presentation

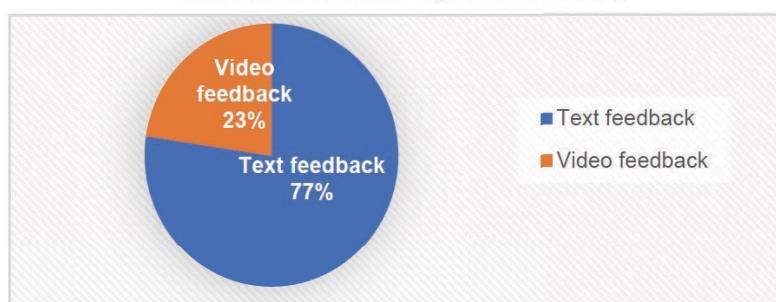
**FIGURE 5**

**Time for Individual Presentation**



**FIGURE 6**

**Feedback Preference of Asynchronous Group**



**Figure 6.** Feedback preference of asynchronous group

#### 4.4. Pros and cons of online group activities

Learners who participated in synchronous or asynchronous group activities were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of the activities. As shown in **Table 9**, learners mentioned the advantages of synchronous group activities as interacting with members, improving their pronunciation and speaking English, increasing their confidence, expanding their opportunities to communicate in English, and increasing their interest in learning English. The disadvantages of synchronous group activities include technical difficulties with online connectivity, cameras and microphones, difficulty in coordinating with members, discomfort with face-to-face communication, and a decrease in confidence.

**Table 9.** Advantages and disadvantages of synchronous group activity

Advantages	N	Disadvantages	N
Communicating with team members	19	Technology problems (camera, microphone, etc.)	23
Improving English pronunciation and speaking	10	Inconvenience when meeting with team members online	9
Increasing self-confidence	8	Inconvenience when communicating with team members online	5
Expanding communication opportunities in English	6	Decreasing self-confidence	4
Improving of interest in learning English	3		

As shown in **Table 10**, the benefits of asynchronous groups included communication with members, improving English pronunciation and speaking, the opportunity to observe and learn from others' videos, increased confidence, and increased interest in learning English. Other comments included improving English listening skills by listening to group members and improving focus through the presentation preparation process. The disadvantages of asynchronous groups included decreased confidence in pronouncing or speaking English, difficulties in utilizing technology such as online connectivity, uploading, and video recording, time difficulties in giving and receiving feedback within the assignment deadline, and difficulties in understanding the pronunciation or speech of group members. Other comments included that the asynchronous activities were awkward and difficult because they did not build friendships among members, and that it was difficult to communicate only through uploaded videos.

**Table 10.** Advantages and disadvantages of asynchronous group activity

Advantages	N	Disadvantages	N
Communicating with team members	12	Decreasing self-confidence when speaking	10
Improving English pronunciation and speaking	12	Technology problems (camera, microphone, etc.)	9
Learning by watching other team members	7	Inconvenience when meeting with team members online	7
Increasing self-confidence	6	Difficulty understanding team members' speech and pronunciation	5
Improving of interest in learning English	6		

#### 5. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine the learning attitudes of learners when participating in synchronous or asynchronous group activities in online classes and to suggest educational implications. A total of 116 participants participated in this study, 63 in the synchronous group and 53 in the asynchronous group. Participants



were surveyed and their final examination grades were collected. The data was collected and analyzed at the end of the semester when all group activities were completed. The results of the study showed that synchronous groups had a slightly higher average in terms of group activity engagement, and when it came to feedback, synchronous groups had a slightly higher average than asynchronous groups when it came to actively providing feedback to the presenter. Synchronous groups also had a slightly higher average when it came to responding back to members' questions or feedback. Overall, engagement in online group activities was slightly higher in synchronous groups. The reason for the lower participation in asynchronous group activities is that unlike synchronous group activities, learners do not enter the platform and perform group tasks at the same time, but rather watch individually uploaded videos of members and leave feedback, which may have caused them to miss or skip some activities. There was no immediate feedback or comments from members at the same time like in synchronous activities, so participation may have somewhat decreased.

In terms of English learning improvement, the synchronous group scored slightly higher on the questions of whether the group activity helped them learn English, enhanced their confidence in speaking English, and increased their interest in learning English. Plus, when looking at the final exam performance of each group, the synchronous group scored slightly higher on the final exam. In terms of English learning effectiveness, it can be said that the students' synchronous group activities were slightly higher than the asynchronous group activities. In addition, when it comes to the length of the video recording of the personal presentation, the learners preferred about one minute for both groups as an appropriate length. It is speculated that the participants, who are still in their first year, were not used to giving oral presentations in English and lacked a good rapport with each other, so it was difficult for them to give presentations longer than one minute. In the asynchronous group, participants preferred video or text feedback. Unlike text feedback, participants may have found it cumbersome to watch the video of the presenter and then post comments or questions on the video again.

As for the advantages of both synchronous and asynchronous group activities, both groups mentioned interacting with members, improving their English pronunciation and speaking, increasing their English confidence, and increasing their interest in learning English, while the asynchronous group mentioned that they were able to learn by watching other members' videos. Common disadvantages for both groups included technical issues with cameras and microphones, difficulty keeping time with members, and a decrease in confidence. The synchronous group mentioned difficulty communicating with members, while the asynchronous group mentioned difficulty understanding members' speech and pronunciation.

Based on the findings of this study, there are several educational implications. Firstly, online group activities can reduce the feeling of isolation online. In online learning, peer-to-peer group activities can be one way to incorporate the meaningful interactive processes of classroom field trips into online classes <sup>[28]</sup>. In addition, synchronous online group activities have been shown to increase student engagement, confidence, motivation, and social interaction through real-time communication <sup>[29,30]</sup>. Recent studies have also reported that these asynchronous group activities can help foster trust, teamwork skills, group cohesion, and cognitive processes among learners <sup>[31,32]</sup>.

Secondly, the participants in the asynchronous class had positive attitudes towards the use of Flipgrid. Although they were less active in giving peer feedback in group activities, the non-live Flipgrid platform can provide learners with an opportunity to identify and reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their own English speech by recording and uploading their own videos. They can also learn from the strengths of their peers by watching their peers' videos repeatedly. In particular, practicing English presentations using video can encourage students to share their ideas on a non-threatening platform <sup>[33]</sup>. The use of Flipgrid can be used as an online tool for instructors to provide students with opportunities to practice their communication skills and

interact with their peers.

Lastly, instructors should understand the advantages and disadvantages of synchronous and asynchronous video-based group activities when designing lessons with the aim of increasing learners' communication and interaction in online classes, and mix the two appropriately to create a curriculum that meets the learning objectives and students' needs. To reduce learner confusion when utilizing online tools, instructors should provide clear guidelines and allow sufficient time for orientation periods to help students adjust to the use of online tools. This will reduce any technical difficulties or inexperience that students may have in the beginning and encourage all students to be active and self-directed in their work. Engineering students who have experience using Flipgrid, especially in presentation classes, have shown a positive understanding of the tool <sup>[33]</sup>.

Limitations of this study include the following. First of all, although we sent texts and emails to students to encourage them to participate in the survey, the number of students who participated was somewhat low. Moreover, we tried to find volunteers to add data by conducting in-depth interviews, but it was difficult to find them, and some students could not be contacted through online classes. Furthermore, the majors and grades of the students who participated in the survey were somewhat limited as the participants in this study were limited to intermediate-level students, so it is difficult to generalize the results of this study to the perceptions of EFL learners as a whole.

## Disclosure statement

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# Practice and Exploration of High-Quality Development of Teacher Ethics Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in the Context of the New Era

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**Abstract:** It was emphasized that “only with high-quality teachers will there be high-quality education.” In the new stage of development, China’s basic education shoulders the heavy responsibility of the times, and there is an urgent need to comprehensively promote the construction of high-quality teachers at the new historical starting point. Teacher ethics is directly related to the quality of students’ character and comprehensive development and is also an inevitable requirement for promoting the construction of high-quality teachers. The current school-based construction of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools is characterized by incomplete planning, single content, insufficient assessment and feedback, inadequate integration of resources, and deficient incentives and ongoing support <sup>[1]</sup>. In this regard, it is necessary to establish standards of teacher ethics, implement teacher ethics education, and keep the bottom line of teacher ethics in order to realize the high-quality development of teacher ethics education.

**Keywords:** Primary and secondary schools; Teacher ethics education; High-quality development; Practical difficulties

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## 1. Basic situation of the research

This thematic research was carried out in Shantou, Chaozhou, Jieyang, and Meizhou in the form of listening to reports, reviewing information, group interviews, questionnaires, etc. The questionnaires and interview notes were collated and analyzed to find out the basic situation of the construction of teacher ethics education in the eastern part of Guangdong Province, to discover the problems of teacher ethics education in various places, and to analyze the factors that restrict the effectiveness of moral education in schools. The content of the research centers on the significance of the construction of teacher ethics education, the current situation, problems and causes of the construction of teacher ethics education, the study of the long-term mechanism of the construction of teacher ethics education, etc. It also focuses on the mechanisms that should be established



for the construction of teacher ethics education, including the cultivation and training mechanism, the integrity commitment mechanism, the incentive and motivation mechanism, the role model demonstration mechanism, the supervision and monitoring mechanism, the assessment and evaluation mechanism, and the competition mechanism, etc. The aim is to collect and sort out the problems found in the thematic research in a timely manner, to form a research report, and to promote the transformation of the research results into practical measures to improve the construction of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools.

## **2. Importance of strengthening teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools**

Teacher ethics education is the basic need to implement moral governance in schools. The primary task of education is to cultivate moral character, adhere to the people-oriented principle, and regard cultivating character and shaping personality as the core of the entire educational undertaking. The teaching force is the core force for realizing moral education and school governance, as well as the key to promoting the realization of quality education, and the guide to lead the development of students. Therefore, strengthening teachers' professional ethics and teaching style is the key to the implementation of moral education in schools. By improving teachers' own professional quality and ethics, they can effectively drive students to adhere to the basic moral norms and improve their moral level. Therefore, strengthening teachers' professional ethics and teaching style is an important mission of the school, but also the main responsibility of teachers.

Other than that, teacher ethics education is a key factor in realizing the goal of running schools. In order to realize the modernization of the country, we need to rely on hundreds of millions of high-quality innovative talents, which requires corresponding efforts. One of the important points is to establish good teacher ethics and build a team of teachers with excellent performance and firm ideology. Teachers' morality is not illusory, it is closely related to teachers' ideological and moral concepts, work attitude, and so on, and is directly displayed in the teaching process. To cultivate high-quality innovative talents, the requirements of teacher ethics must be more stringent, always keep pace with the times, and grasp regularity.

On top of that, teacher ethics education is the core means to strengthen the school spirit of school discipline. For a long time, although many schools integrated teacher ethics construction into the school's development plan, they only put the energy and focus on teaching, research, academic construction, and other "hard" indicators. Intentionally or unintentionally, teacher ethics education as a dispensable "soft indicator" is ignored. Such an assessment system of "talent over morals" will inevitably lead to young teachers emphasizing the scientific research and professional level, ignoring professional moral cultivation. School incentive policy is mainly for teaching and research, and the incentive policy for teacher ethics education is still very lacking. Although some schools have formulated teacher moral education incentive policies, the effects of rewards and punishments are greatly reduced due to tendencies such as focusing on spiritual rewards over material rewards, and on praise over criticism.

## **3. Current situation of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools in the eastern Guangdong region**

In the previous period, we carried out research through visits, talks, literature reviews, and online questionnaires to understand and grasp the current situation of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools in the eastern part of Guangdong Province. A total of 3085 valid questionnaires were collected and the results of the survey showed that although the overall situation was good, it also revealed some problems in the

construction of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools. 100% of the interviewees said that teacher ethics education has an effect on the enhancement of the level of teacher ethics; 80% of the interviewees said that the effectiveness of teacher ethics education is not yet satisfactory, and there is a gap between the requirements of the policy and system. It can be seen that primary and secondary schools generally attach great importance to teacher ethics education, and gradually improve it in key aspects such as party building leadership, implementation path, system construction, and personnel team. However, there is still a need to strengthen coordination and guidance for the construction of “key groups” and other aspects of the team, to increase support for the construction of teacher ethics education, and to further improve the relevant systems and policies, in order to promote greater achievement in the construction of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools <sup>[2]</sup>.

### **3.1. Characteristic highlights of the high-quality development of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools at the present stage**

#### **3.1.1. Party building leadership**

The grassroots party organizations of primary and secondary schools, as the organizational carrier that undertakes the important task of building teacher ethics education in schools, give full play to the political, organizational, and institutional advantages of party building leadership, stimulate the teachers’ subjective consciousness, guide the majority of teachers to build their parties, schools, and souls on morality, and continue to promote the construction of teacher ethics education to make new progress in the comprehensive implementation of the party’s education policy and the fundamental task of establishing morality in the education of people. The main paths to realize the party’s leadership in teacher ethics education are as follows:

- (1) Clarifying the responsibility of the party organization: Schools clarify the leadership position of the party organization in teacher ethics education, and closely integrate party building work with the construction of teacher ethics. A special party committee or party branch is set up to take charge of the organization and guidance of teacher ethics education, formulate corresponding work plans and policy measures, and ensure that party building plays a leading role in teacher ethics education.
- (2) Strengthening the construction of party member teachers: Strengthening the ideological and political education of party member teachers improves the cultivation of teacher ethics and teaching levels. Party member teachers are encouraged to participate in activities such as teacher ethics selection, teacher ethics training, and teacher ethics assessment to motivate them to play a pioneering and exemplary role and drive other teachers to improve together.
- (3) Developing specific implementation paths: The objectives and contents of teacher ethics education are defined and relevant educational programs and training plans are formulated. Teacher ethics education activities are carried out within the school, such as organizing teacher ethics lectures, seminars, teaching observation, etc., and strengthening the care and assistance for teachers’ parties guidance and personal growth.
- (4) Improving the system of teacher ethics education: The evaluation and incentive mechanisms for teachers’ ethics are established and improved, and teachers’ ethical performance is incorporated into the important indexes of performance appraisal and promotion assessment. Further actions include strengthening the supervision and management of teachers, establishing a feedback mechanism, correcting teachers’ bad behavior in time, and guaranteeing the smooth progress of the construction of teacher ethics.
- (5) Strengthening the construction of resources for teacher ethics education: A resource bank for teacher ethics education is established, relevant teaching materials, cases, and teaching resources are collected

and organized, and teachers are provided with learning and reference materials. Teachers are also encouraged to participate in the research of teacher ethics and innovation in educational practice, so as to form a favorable environment for teacher growth.

### **3.1.2. Construction of “key groups”**

The joint efforts of “key groups”<sup>[3]</sup> such as school principals, members of the leadership team, excellent teachers, party members, classroom teachers, and teachers of ideology and political science can promote the achievement of greater results in teacher ethics education, cultivate more teachers with good morals and excellent teaching, and contribute to the cultivation of socialist builders and successors with all-round development in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, and aesthetics. It is mainly reflected in the following aspects.

First of all, school principals, as the leaders of teacher moral and ethical development in schools, assume the important role of “moral leadership.” Principals should establish correct moral values, set an example, and become role models for teachers. They should pay active attention to the moral construction of teachers, emphasize teachers’ professional ethics and educational responsibility, and promote the establishment of sound evaluation and incentive mechanisms of teachers’ morality in schools, so as to provide teachers with a better environment and support for their development. Secondly, the members of the leadership team should play an important role in promoting and coordinating the construction of teachers’ morality in schools. They should work together to formulate development plans and goals for teacher ethics construction, clarify the division of responsibilities, strengthen the management and cultivation of the teaching force, and provide the necessary training and guidance in order to improve the moral cultivation and educational level of teachers. Plus, outstanding teachers, as the backbone of the school’s teacher ethics construction, play the role of modeling and leading. They should inspire and influence other teachers with their high teacher ethics and professionalism, and convey good educational values and teaching concepts. Schools should strengthen the cultivation and commendation of excellent teachers, provide them with more opportunities to demonstrate and maximize their talents, and encourage them to become role models for other teachers to learn from. At the same time, party member teachers, as an important force in the construction of school teachers’ morality and ethical behavior, should play the leading role in the party organization. Party member teachers should take the Party Constitution and Party discipline as the guideline, take the lead in abiding by the professional ethics of teachers, and motivate other teachers to better fulfill their duties. Schools should strengthen the party education and party building work of party members, improve their ideological awareness and political quality, and promote the ideological and moral cultivation and teaching level of party members. In addition, classroom teachers and teachers of ideology and political science also constitute the “key groups” of the school’s teacher ethics and morality construction. Class teachers are responsible for the ideological education and management of students in their daily work, and they should play a leading and modeling role in guiding students to establish correct values and behavioral norms. Ideology and political science teachers are responsible for cultivating students’ ideological and moral qualities in the classroom, and they should emphasize the introduction of teaching content and practical guidance to help students understand and apply moral norms.

### **3.2. Practical dilemmas of the high-quality development of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools at the present stage**

At this stage, the high-quality development of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools is facing many difficulties, the most typical of which is the problems encountered in the school-based construction, which are specifically reflected in the following aspects.



- (1) Lack of comprehensive teacher ethics education planning: Some schools lack systematic and holistic planning in teacher ethics education, and teacher ethics education activities are often fragmented and temporary, lacking long-term and continuous educational effects. The lack of comprehensive planning of teacher ethics education can easily lead to the one-sidedness and superficiality of teacher ethics education.
- (2) Single content in teacher ethics education: Some schools focus on simple moral indoctrination in teacher ethics education, lacking teachers' moral connotation of in-depth excavation. Teachers' moral education should include content such as professional ethics, educational ethics, teaching responsibility, educational thinking, and other aspects, in order to promote the improvement of the overall quality of teachers.
- (3) Lack of effective evaluation and feedback mechanisms: The effectiveness of teacher ethics education often needs to be monitored and improved through evaluation and feedback. However, some schools lack scientific and effective evaluation and feedback mechanisms in teacher ethics education, which makes it impossible to promptly understand teachers' performance and improvement needs, and difficult to improve the effectiveness of teacher ethics education.
- (4) Lack of integration and sharing of teacher ethics education resources: The lack of integration and sharing of resources in teacher ethics education in some schools has led to a single content and form of activities in teacher ethics education, failing to meet the diversified needs of teachers in schools. The integration and sharing of resources should be strengthened, and external experts, educational institutions, and other resources should be fully utilized to enrich the forms and contents of teacher ethics education.
- (5) Lack of effective incentive mechanism and continuous support: The effects of teacher ethics education often need to be consolidated and developed through incentives and continuous support. Some schools lack an effective incentive mechanism in teacher ethics education to stimulate teachers' enthusiasm and initiative. At the same time, ongoing support and training are also important safeguards for teacher ethics education, but some schools have neglected this issue.

In summary, there are problems in the school-based construction of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools, such as incomplete planning, single content, insufficient assessment and feedback, inadequate integration of resources, and deficient incentive mechanisms and continuous support. To solve these problems, it is necessary for schools to strengthen the attention and research on teacher ethics education, establish an ideal teacher ethics education management system, strengthen the planning, resource integration, and assessment and feedback of teacher ethics education, and at the same time emphasize the incentive mechanism and continuous support, so as to improve the level of school-based construction of teacher ethics education<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **4. Improvement paths of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools**

### **4.1. Establishing the standards of teacher ethics**

Teachers' ethics education system construction in primary and secondary schools should be changed from passive to active development mode, and it is also the key link to put the construction of teachers' ethics education in schools into practice.

On the one hand, schools should take themselves as the core and design a program for building teacher ethics in primary and secondary schools according to the actual situation. It is necessary to stop relying too

much on managerial thinking, and to formulate a relevant system for teacher ethics education in schools based on teacher ethics diagnosis in accordance with the school's philosophy, development plan, and campus culture. In the process of developing and revising the system, schools should cooperate fully with higher education management departments and experts in teacher ethics education to solve problems in the design process. At the same time, front-line teachers should be given the right to participate in the development and revision of the system, and their opinions and suggestions should be heard to the greatest extent possible.

On the other hand, the implementation of teacher ethics education construction in schools not only relies on the school's educational and teaching organization, but is also closely related to the regional teacher professional development organization. Through the establishment of a school teacher ethics community, the construction of teacher ethics education is integrated into daily teaching and school management, and a specific course of action is formed. Firstly, a community of mutual assistance in teacher ethics can be established by relying on the school's grassroots party organization to promote the organic integration of the school's teacher ethics education construction and party building work, and to give full play to the role of the grassroots party branch in organizational leadership and supervision and promotion. Secondly, a teacher ethics management team should be established with the principal as the leader, "key groups" as the main body, and teacher ethics experts and representatives of teachers in the school, which is responsible for the top-level design and process management of the construction of teacher ethics in the school. Lastly, teacher ethics can be integrated into daily teaching, subject teaching, and research and thematic activities by relying on the school's subject teaching and research groups, grade-level groups, and mentor workshops.

## **4.2. Implementing teacher ethics education**

If a country wants to develop, it must have noble teachers and great talents. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee attaches great importance to the work of education, and puts education in the strategic position of priority development. On April 29, 2021, the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress decided to amend the Education Law. Among them, the first paragraph of Article 4 was amended to read, "Education is the foundation of socialist modernization, and is of decisive significance in improving the people's comprehensive quality, promoting the all-round development of human beings, enhancing the vitality of innovation and creativity of the Chinese nation, and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and the state guarantees that priority be given to the development of education."

Teachers serve as role models for students. As teachers, their professional characteristics determine that they must have high moral character. Qualified teachers should first be morally qualified people, and excellent teachers should first educate people with virtue and establish themselves with virtue, becoming role models for students to learn from. In the new era, students and parents have higher expectations of teachers. Teachers must deeply realize that society's demand for teachers' ethics is a powerful motivation for teachers to continuously improve their own development, and they should sincerely become the guides for students' growth and have immense love for their own careers. Teachers' vocation is to teach and establish virtue, not only imparting knowledge and answering questions, but also cultivating students' personalities and shaping their souls with inner strength. Loyalty and love for the cause of education are first reflected in the care for students. Respecting, loving, protecting, and caring for students are teachers' social responsibilities and the professional emotions teachers should have <sup>[5]</sup>. Only by caring for students will teachers spare no effort to improve their professional competence, constantly standardize their words and actions, and work towards the goal of "learning to be a teacher and being a model."

### 4.3. Keeping the bottom line of teacher ethics

Firstly, it is important to emphasize moral education and enhance teachers' moral quality through education and teaching. The guidance of new and young teachers should be strengthened, and the old-for-new mechanism should be used to play the role of teacher training, so that they can familiarize themselves with the laws of education as soon as possible, master the teaching methods, and cultivate noble moral sentiments in the practice of training students. Teacher ethics education should be carried out throughout the entire process of teacher training and teachers' careers. Teacher trainees must take courses on teacher ethics education, and vocational teacher training should ensure that each academic year includes thematic education on teacher ethics.

It is also necessary to emphasize the shaping of exemplary teachers, and continue to carry out activities to select and publicize outstanding teachers. Multi-level selection and publicity activities are carried out for outstanding teachers, creating an atmosphere in which there are role models in schools and models around them, and where everyone can learn from and emulate them. Teachers who are "models of the times," national models of teaching and educating, national mentors, and the most beautiful teachers are invited to give lectures on teacher ethics. Schools around the world are encouraged to take the form of practical reflection, situational teaching, and other forms of inviting front-line outstanding teachers into the classroom, using real people and events to explain the connotation of teacher ethics.

Additionally, it is imperative to emphasize the establishment of virtue in accordance with regulations, and strengthen teachers' education on teacher ethics and discipline. Focusing on the study of the Teachers' Law of the People's Republic of China and the series of documents on the Ten Guidelines for Teachers' Professional Behavior in the New Era, we will improve the rule of law literacy and awareness of rules among all teachers, and enhance their ability to teach according to the law and standardize their teaching. We need to strengthen awareness education, guide the majority of teachers to always self-reflect and self-motivate, and adhere to the bottom line of teacher ethics <sup>[6]</sup>.

In the context of the new era, the high-quality development of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools is an important task in education. Through practice and exploration, we deeply realize that the implementation of teacher ethics education in primary and secondary schools aims not only to cultivate excellent teachers, but is also a key link in cultivating newcomers of the times who will take up the great responsibility of national rejuvenation. In this process, we must adhere to the original intention, inherit and carry forward the excellent traditional Chinese culture, and cultivate students' correct values and healthy mental qualities. At the same time, the high-quality development of teacher education requires the common concern and support of the whole society to form a synergy and cooperate to realize the goal of teacher education in primary and secondary schools. Only in this way can we contribute to the building of a harmonious socialist society and the realization of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, so that every student can become a new socialist man with ideals, morals, culture, and discipline, and create a bright educational future.

### Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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# A Probe into the Integration Concept of Blended Teaching Mode of College English in Application-Oriented Universities

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**Abstract:** Blended teaching is the product of the organic combination of classroom teaching and online learning. The practice of college English teaching in application-oriented colleges shows that the construction of the integration concept of blended teaching mode will play a good role in promoting the quality of college English teaching. The organization and implementation of the blended teaching mode of college English should pay more attention to the integration of all elements of college English core literacy and online teaching resources, and establish a sense of integration in teaching concept, content, mode, and evaluation, so as to further promote the course reform of college English and realize the goal of cultivating English talents with emphasis on application practice.

**Keywords:** Undergraduate colleges; College English; Blended teaching; Concept of integration

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## 1. Introduction

In the 1980s, the curriculum reform of practical teaching was gradually put on the agenda and attracted more and more attention from all walks of life <sup>[1]</sup>. The training goal of practical teaching courses is to improve students' practical operation skills, innovative consciousness, social adaptability, and lifelong employment skills, among which the cultivation of professional skills and employment competitiveness is significant. The reform of the practical teaching curriculum has promoted a number of undergraduate colleges to take the lead in changing the teaching methods, thus giving birth to the embryonic form of application-oriented undergraduate colleges. From the theory of practical teaching, it is not difficult to see that application-oriented undergraduate colleges need to emphasize the application of talent training, and relevant schools should also closely highlight this feature in the setting of school-running concepts, so as to train applied talents for the country. Therefore, these undergraduate colleges can set the goal of talent training from the perspective of modern development, so as to carry out comprehensive reforms in disciplines, courses, teaching systems, teaching links, and teaching methods, and vigorously cultivate high-quality talents in the new era <sup>[2]</sup>.



College English is a basic compulsory course in application-oriented undergraduate colleges, and the teaching purpose is consistent with the teaching objectives of application-oriented undergraduate colleges. Therefore, college English should not only cultivate students' basic English skills and communication skills but also pay attention to cultivating students' professional competitiveness and cultural communication literacy in combination with the teaching characteristics of application-oriented undergraduate colleges. The service subject of college English includes students and even the whole society. While cultivating students' social English communication skills and professional quality, they should also be based on society and cultivate high-quality applied talents. In order to make college English teaching more effective, blended teaching mode has become the main teaching method in college English teaching. The blended teaching mode mainly focuses on offline theoretical and practical teaching and assists online expansion teaching. This offline + online teaching mode not only broadens students' learning horizons but also improves the quality and efficiency of classroom teaching. However, after an in-depth study of the blended teaching model, it is found that the essential characteristics of its emphasis on theoretical teaching have not fundamentally changed. With the popularization and development of computer network technology, mobile internet technology makes online network teaching platforms become the focus of high-quality teaching resources, which significantly enhances the teaching effect of online + offline blended teaching mode, thus bringing brand-new changes to college English teaching. In this case, the topic of fully integrating college English teaching under the blended teaching mode with modern teaching concepts, techniques, resources, and evaluation mode is also important for college English educators to think deeply.

## **2. Blended teaching mode**

With the rapid development of network technology, the blended teaching mode has emerged. Blended teaching mode is a combination of online and offline teaching modes, and it is also the product of the development of information technology. In blended teaching mode, classroom teaching and online distance teaching complement and promote each other, which is more conducive to stimulating students' motivation and enthusiasm for autonomous learning, inquiry learning, and cooperative learning in the learning process.

### **2.1. Blended teaching mode of college English**

The first aspect of blended teaching is online learning. The blended teaching mode of college English is an application of online + offline blended teaching mode. Therefore, online learning has become a more common form of blended teaching. Students can independently study video courses through the learning resources of online teaching platforms, complete the practice of knowledge systems and content closely related to professional courses, supplement classroom teaching in time, and further consolidate the learning results. The second aspect of blended teaching is the classroom teaching method. Classroom teaching is a traditional teaching method, which refers to the process of students' face-to-face study and inquiry with teachers in the classroom. Classroom teaching and online learning complement each other, especially after online learning and preview, classroom teaching and training can help students to further master and understand knowledge. At the same time, in college English classroom teaching, teachers can create an English language application environment closely around the teaching theme, so that students can be placed in the English application situation, and through teamwork and other forms, students' English application skills can be continuously improved. The last aspect of blended teaching is the extracurricular practical experience. In the teaching and training of college English, extracurricular practical experience is also an important link in the blended teaching mode. After studying online and offline, students can experience the real language application environment

through extracurricular practical activities, so that the theoretical knowledge of the English language in classroom learning can be widely combined with practical application, which is an effective teaching supplement to online learning and classroom teaching. By exchanging ideas with foreign friends face to face, participating in volunteer service activities, and making English posters and commemorative books, students can cultivate their English language output and improve their English communication application level <sup>[3]</sup>.

## **2.2. Advantages of the blended teaching model of college English**

The blended teaching mode of college English mainly refers to the organic combination of online teaching mode and traditional classroom teaching mode in the process of college English teaching and training. It can also be said that the blended teaching mode of college English is a new teaching mode that integrates online and offline teaching. The organization and implementation of the blended teaching mode of college English is not only conducive to the complete transformation of the teaching mode to the information direction, but also can effectively promote the rapid and efficient development of college English teaching, avoid the teaching limitations and disadvantages brought by the traditional classroom teaching mode, and break through the limitations of time and space. Compared with the traditional teaching mode, the blended teaching mode of college English can cultivate students' awareness of autonomous learning, inquiry learning, and cooperative learning, so that students' knowledge horizon is not limited to classroom teaching tasks but can be extended to online autonomous inquiry learning, which further enhances students' learning interest and efficiency. In addition, the blended teaching mode of college English, as a new teaching form, strengthens students' enthusiasm for active participation in teaching, makes students become real learning subjects, deepens the interaction between teachers and students, and enables teachers to have a comprehensive and detailed understanding of students' learning situation through various channels. Therefore, the effect of college English teaching guidance should be comprehensively strengthened through the blended teaching mode.

## **3. Summary of the concept of college English teaching integration**

In fact, the integration concept is important in the language discipline, and the starting point of its research is the form, law, and significance of language <sup>[4]</sup>. The integration concept constructs the known model from the aspects of integrating network, common space, interrelation, and innovation, and explains the mechanism and influence of meaning.

### **(1) The concept of integration in college English teaching**

The integration concept is a kind of concept with a fusion nature, and it is also a new product of the second generation of cognitive science. The application of the integration concept in college English teaching can exert an extremely important influence and promote the change in students' learning attitudes and thinking modes. In the practical application of college English learning, the concept of integration can become the focus of the cross-application of English and other disciplines, which can continuously expand students' cognition of English learning, so that they can clearly understand the meaning composition of English learning and the profound interpretation of English images. The integration concept further reveals the significance of learning English and further integrates the form and meaning of language learning.

### **(2) Teaching forms of college English under the concept of integration**

The concept of integration determines the meaning of English learning form and the grammatical relationship in English, which requires teachers to pay attention to language marks in the teaching process and fully understand students' psychological characteristics and learning needs, so as to

effectively play the initiative of learning <sup>[5]</sup>. The first aspect is the teaching form of communicative oral English. The concept of integration has brought many beneficial inspirations to the oral English teaching of college English. Teachers can instill a lot of rich discourse information into students, make them form a discourse space in their minds, and constantly stimulate cognitive thinking in English communication. At the same time, college English teaching under the concept of integration can closely combine limited classroom teaching with unlimited extracurricular practice, form a real situation of uninterrupted English communication, further stimulate the training needs of college oral English communication, promote students to develop the habit and understanding of thinking in English, and thus achieve the transformation of oral communication of language skills.

The second aspect is the teaching form of reading. College English reading teaching is a process to promote students' dynamic cognition of semantic flow in coherent texts. Traditional English classroom reading teaching will focus on teaching vocabulary and sentence structure, while English teaching under the integration concept not only requires students to master the specific meanings of vocabulary and phrases but also pays attention to the cultivation of students' reading analysis skills. English reading discourse is not isolated, and it needs to be integrated with the cultural background and specific context of the article in order to accurately understand the intention expressed by the author. The purpose of English teaching is to cultivate students' awareness of exchanging ideas and their ability to acquire language information. Therefore, English reading teaching under the integration concept is conducive to students' understanding of the metaphorical meaning of the whole English discourse and constantly stimulates students' thinking and imagination.

#### **4. The construction of the integration concept of blended teaching mode of college English in applied undergraduate colleges**

The blended teaching mode of college English in applied undergraduate colleges is a complete teaching system. Therefore, in this system, teachers need to get rid of traditional teaching concepts and ideas, establish innovative ideas of blended teaching, closely combine the teaching objectives of colleges with English teaching objectives, and gradually build an online + offline integrated teaching mode of college English. Only by deeply integrating the mixed teaching mode with all the elements of college English teaching can the best teaching effect be achieved. Therefore, teachers should integrate and optimize teaching-related content according to students' learning characteristics, and maximize teaching benefits through advanced teaching means and technologies.

##### **4.1. Integration of relevant elements of cultivating college English core literacy**

The core literacy of English subject mainly includes four aspects: language skills, cultural thought, thinking quality, and learning skills, which is a comprehensive skill integrating knowledge, skills, and humanistic literacy. Therefore, college English teachers should proceed from the reality of students' learning and organically integrate students' language knowledge, skills, training, and cultural accomplishment. The first element is the integration of teaching objectives to cultivate core literacy. The teaching goal of college English teaching activities is mainly to promote the improvement of English language skills. Therefore, this teaching goal requires the support of teaching goals at all stages. At the same time, teachers also need to cultivate students' language knowledge related to teaching topics in various ways to further promote the realization of the teaching goal of cultivating core literacy. The second element is the integration of teaching content to enhance core literacy. Under the premise of college English teaching reform, the content of English teaching is mainly humanistic education, with the cultivation of students' humanistic accomplishment as the core, and through training students' awareness of learning, thinking, and culture, students' knowledge application in language

learning can be improved. Although English teaching still needs to rely on the text, it is no longer simply the cultivation of language skills, but the cultivation of cultural accomplishment and cognitive level. Therefore, in the blended teaching of college English, it is necessary to integrate the teaching content that cultivates core literacy, so that students' comprehensive language practical skills can be rapidly improved and their language cognitive skills can develop to a higher level.

#### **4.2. Integration of college English online teaching information technology**

The integration of college English teaching and online teaching information technology can enable students to not only learn college English knowledge, but also to fully understand the blended teaching mode, master the application function of online teaching platforms, and further improve the learning efficiency of autonomous learning and inquiry. The first method is to promote information network teaching methods. Under the background of applying blended teaching mode, colleges and universities should pay attention to classroom teaching and encourage students to make full use of their spare time for online learning. Multimedia technology in online teaching allows students to gain real situational experience in learning, and integrating information network technology into teaching mode allows students to grasp the details and laws of knowledge more vividly, and the sense of sensory experience in English learning will be stronger. The second method is to give full play to the evaluation efficiency of the network technology learning process. The integration of information technology and college English teaching will bring about profound changes in teaching methods, especially in the process of assessment and evaluation of students' learning effects. The traditional form of offline examination can no longer meet the needs of modern college students. Understanding students' learning abilities and degrees before and after class is required to evaluate students' learning process scientifically and objectively. Evaluating students' use of information technology teaching platforms will help to assess students' learning process more fairly and objectively, so as to fully mobilize students' enthusiasm for autonomous learning, greatly increase students' participation in learning before, during, and after class, and significantly improve the learning effect.

#### **4.3. Integration of online teaching resources**

There are great differences in the construction degree of blended teaching mode of college English in various applied universities in China. In terms of the construction of online teaching resources, applied universities should integrate online English teaching resources according to the actual needs of college English major teaching, so that a large number of high-quality online college English teaching resources can be fully utilized and developed <sup>[6]</sup>. Firstly, the integration of the establishment of online English teaching resources is necessary. Applied undergraduate colleges collect and sort out the downloadable high-quality college English teaching resources on the network, organically integrate these online resources with the on-campus teaching resources, and establish an online English teaching resource base according to the types. At the same time, colleges and universities should actively encourage teachers and students to study and develop online teaching resources and present all aspects of English teaching theoretical knowledge to teachers and students quickly and conveniently, so as to further enhance students' mastery of college English knowledge, skills, and culture. Secondly, it is imperative to construct an inquiry mode of autonomous learning in online courses. In order to further enhance students' use of online teaching resources and deepen their understanding and cognition of the practice of knowledge transformation ability, applied undergraduate colleges should build a high-quality online learning platform, and use multimedia and network technology to create an online cloud classroom for English listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, so as to enrich and expand students' learning channels. Online



teaching platforms break the limitation of time and space on teaching, which can reduce students' offline learning pressure, cultivate students' autonomous learning and inquiry ability, and enable students to enjoy the real situation of multimedia audio-visual teaching.

## 5. Conclusion

The blended college English teaching mode has injected new vitality into English curriculum reform. In this case, college English teachers should establish a sense of integration in teaching, and organically integrate online and offline teaching concepts, techniques, and resources, so as to facilitate the teaching links of English learning before, during, and after class. Under the training goal of applied talents, English teachers should take students as the main body of education, further optimize teaching design, content, and evaluation system with integration concept, and pay attention to the improvement of students' English language knowledge and skills.

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# Enhancement of International Students' Psychological Well-Being and Social Integration Through Peer-to-Peer Support Networks

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**Abstract:** This study explores the efficacy of “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles” in enhancing the psychological well-being and social integration of international students. Through a combination of literature review, innovative program design, and empirical evaluation, we address the prevalent issues of loneliness, cultural shock, and mental health challenges faced by this population. Our methodology involves matching students based on shared interests and backgrounds and facilitating monthly exchange activities to foster connections. Findings from questionnaire feedback highlight significant improvements in participants’ social interactions and mental health support, with a majority reporting enhanced well-being. This initiative underscores the vital role of peer support networks in educational settings, offering a replicable model for institutions aiming to improve international student experiences. Our results contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting structured peer support programs as a means to alleviate the psychological stresses of studying abroad.

**Keywords:** Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles; International students; Social integration; Mental health support

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## 1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized educational landscape, the influx of international students into universities worldwide has highlighted critical challenges in mental health and social integration. Despite the vast opportunities presented by international education, students often face daunting social, cultural, and emotional hurdles. These challenges, ranging from cultural shock to loneliness, significantly impact their psychological well-being and academic performance. This study introduces “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles,” an innovative intervention designed to mitigate these issues by fostering a supportive community through peer connections. Rooted in the concept of peer support as a potent tool for psychological resilience, this program pairs international students based on shared interests and backgrounds, facilitating structured monthly exchange activities to enhance social integration and emotional support. The initiative responds to the urgent need for

effective mental health interventions by leveraging the natural social networks within the student body. This approach acknowledges the unique challenges faced by international students and offers a scalable model for educational institutions seeking to cultivate a more inclusive and supportive campus environment.

This paper aims to detail the development, implementation, and impact evaluation of the “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles,” providing insights into their potential as a replicable model for enhancing international student well-being across diverse educational contexts.

## 2. Literature review

The integration of international students into global educational systems presents significant psychological and social challenges, necessitating innovative support strategies. Literature emphasizes peer support’s pivotal role in enhancing international students’ well-being, addressing issues like loneliness, cultural shock, and language barriers that detrimentally affect their mental health and academic performance. Studies highlight the efficacy of peer support in fostering a sense of belonging and mitigating loneliness, underlining the value of initiatives like “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles” that facilitate structured social interactions and emotional support <sup>[1]</sup>.

The impact of cultural sensitivity and adaptation is also notable, with social networks playing a crucial role in easing cultural adjustment and reducing stress among international students <sup>[2]</sup>. Moreover, the evolution of digital platforms offers new opportunities for enhancing communication and support networks, suggesting the importance of online communities in providing accessible mental health resources <sup>[3]</sup>.

However, research indicates gaps in implementing and scaling peer support programs effectively, calling for evidence-based approaches to maximize their benefits for international students’ well-being <sup>[4]</sup>. In summary, the literature review underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by international students and advocates for peer support as a crucial intervention, advocating for further research into optimizing these initiatives within educational settings.

## 3. Methodology

To investigate the impact of “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles” on the psychological well-being and social integration of international students, we employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. This methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of the program’s effectiveness from both statistical and personal perspectives.

The quantitative component consisted of a structured questionnaire distributed to participants before and after their involvement in the Wellbeing Circles. This survey assessed various dimensions of psychological well-being, including levels of loneliness, social support, and academic stress, utilizing validated scales such as the Psychological Wellbeing Scale <sup>[5]</sup> and the Social Support Questionnaire <sup>[3]</sup>. The pre- and post-intervention comparisons allowed for the measurement of changes in these areas.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a subset of participants, chosen to reflect diverse backgrounds and experiences within the program. These interviews explored students’ personal experiences with the Wellbeing Circles, including perceived benefits, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. The qualitative analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s <sup>[6]</sup> thematic analysis framework, enabling the identification of common themes across participants’ narratives.

This mixed-methods approach was chosen to capture the nuanced impact of peer support systems on international students’ well-being, reflecting the complexity of their experiences. By combining quantitative data on psychological indicators with qualitative insights into personal experiences, this study aims to offer a

holistic view of the efficacy of “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles.”

## 4. Results

The evaluation of the “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles” revealed significant findings on their impact on the psychological well-being and social integration of international students. Quantitative data from pre- and post-intervention surveys indicated a notable improvement in participants’ reported levels of psychological well-being. Specifically, there was a statistically significant decrease in levels of loneliness and an increase in perceived social support, with the mean score of loneliness dropping from 4.2 (SD [standard deviation] = 1.3) on a 7-point scale to 2.8 (SD = 1.1), and the mean score for perceived social support increasing from 3.5 (SD = 1.2) to 5.4 (SD = 0.9).

Furthermore, qualitative interviews provided depth to these findings, with many participants sharing personal anecdotes of enhanced feelings of belonging and decreased feelings of isolation. One recurring theme was the value of shared experiences and cultural exchange, which not only mitigated feelings of loneliness but also facilitated cultural adjustment and integration into the campus community. Participants highlighted the importance of having a safe space to express themselves and share their challenges, which they attributed to their improved mental health and academic motivation.

An unexpected finding was the positive impact of these circles on participants’ academic experiences. Many reported feeling more engaged and motivated in their studies, attributing this change to the reduced stress and increased emotional support they received from their peers. This aligns with the research of Ziaian *et al.* <sup>[7]</sup>, which suggests that social support can significantly enhance academic engagement and success.

The program also faced challenges, notably in matching students effectively to ensure meaningful connections. Despite the overall positive feedback, some participants felt that their matches were not well-aligned with their interests or backgrounds, suggesting a need for a more nuanced matching process.

Overall, the “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles” demonstrated a positive impact on international students’ well-being and social integration, supporting the notion that peer support can be a valuable resource for addressing the unique challenges faced by this group. The findings contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the implementation of structured peer support programs within educational settings to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for international students.

## 5. Discussion

The findings from the “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles” underscore the pivotal role of peer support in enhancing the psychological well-being and social integration of international students. The significant reduction in loneliness and increase in perceived social support align with existing literature, highlighting the effectiveness of peer-led interventions in mitigating the adverse effects of cultural displacement and academic stress <sup>[7]</sup>. These results affirm the critical need for universities to adopt holistic support mechanisms that address both the social and academic challenges faced by international students.

The qualitative insights reveal the nuanced benefits of such circles, particularly in facilitating cultural exchange and fostering a sense of belonging. This resonates with Daru <sup>[8]</sup>, who emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity in support programs for international students. The positive feedback on the impact of Wellbeing Circles on academic motivation also suggests a broader application of peer support programs, extending beyond social integration to enhance academic engagement and success <sup>[1]</sup>.

However, the challenges identified in matching participants highlight the complexity of implementing peer

support programs. The diversity of international student populations necessitates a more sophisticated approach to matching, considering not only shared interests but also cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds. This finding points to the need for continuous refinement of matching algorithms and the incorporation of student feedback to improve the effectiveness of such programs.

The study contributes to the body of knowledge on the benefits of peer support for international students, providing empirical evidence to support the development of similar initiatives across educational institutions. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of adopting a multi-faceted approach to student well-being, integrating peer support with professional mental health services to comprehensively address the complex needs of international students.

## 6. Implications for practice

The positive outcomes of the “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles” underscore their potential as an integral component of university support services for international students. The findings suggest several implications for practice, aiming to enhance the well-being and academic success of this diverse student population.

Firstly, educational institutions should consider incorporating structured peer support programs as part of their student services portfolio. The significant reduction in loneliness and increase in social support observed in this study highlight the effectiveness of peer-based interventions in creating a supportive and inclusive campus environment <sup>[9]</sup>. Institutions could leverage existing student organizations or develop new programs to facilitate these connections, emphasizing the importance of careful matching to ensure meaningful relationships.

Additionally, the feedback on the importance of cultural exchange within the Wellbeing Circles suggests that universities should prioritize initiatives that promote intercultural understanding and integration. This could involve organizing multicultural events, workshops, and seminars that encourage students from different backgrounds to share their cultures and experiences, fostering a campus culture of diversity and inclusion <sup>[7]</sup>.

The challenges identified in participant matching also point to the need for continuous improvement and adaptation of peer support programs. Universities should employ dynamic matching algorithms that consider a wide range of factors, including cultural, linguistic, and academic preferences, and regularly collect feedback from participants to refine these processes <sup>[8]</sup>.

In short, the “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles” offer valuable insights into the design and implementation of peer support programs for international students. By embracing these practices, universities can enhance the well-being, social integration, and academic success of their international student body, contributing to a more vibrant, inclusive, and supportive campus community.

## 7. Conclusion

The “Peer-to-Peer Wellbeing Circles” have proven to be a valuable intervention for improving the psychological well-being and social integration of international students. This study corroborates existing research demonstrating the critical role of peer support in enhancing international students’ academic and social experiences. Through structured social interactions and cultural exchange, students reported significant decreases in loneliness and increases in social support, validating the importance of such initiatives. Future efforts should focus on refining matching processes and expanding program reach, ensuring that peer support becomes a cornerstone of university support services. This research contributes to a growing body of evidence supporting the implementation of peer support systems across educational settings to foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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# A Critical Investigation into Transformational Leadership and Its Relevance to Universities in China

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**Abstract:** At present, transformation and innovation have become an important topic for the development of schools. Transformational leadership is a significant driving force in school reform and development. The management of Chinese universities has to transform to adapt to the rapidly changing social environment. This paper focuses on the intention and effectiveness of transformational leadership, and how it can be applied to improving the school management of Chinese universities. Firstly, the paper discusses the concept and main dimensions of transformational leadership. Secondly, the role of transformational leadership in the school is analyzed from three aspects, which are students, teachers, and school organization. Next, the paper discusses the limitations of transformational leadership. Subsequently, the paper shows the current situation and main problems of the school management of Chinese universities. Lastly, the paper gives suggestions to school management of Chinese universities in the light of transformational leadership based on previous studies.

**Keywords:** Chinese universities; Leader; School; Transformational leadership

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## 1. Introduction

Modern society is in a stage of rapid transition, and there is a lot of uncertainty in the current times. Transformation is an irresistible trend now, which has a great impact on people's lives. Social change poses serious challenges to education, so education also requires transformation. Transformational leadership has been popular in school practices in recent years<sup>[1]</sup>. Nedelcu said that transformational leadership is the key strength for school reform and transformation. It is an essential way of promoting teachers' professional development and the essential basis of enhancing students' academic achievement<sup>[2]</sup>. Leithwood and his colleagues pointed out that the theory of transformational leadership puts emphasis on values and emotions, and it defines the role of leaders, which makes things become meaningful to the followers<sup>[3]</sup>. Thus, the application of transformational leadership to school is significant and deserves studying. Education institutions like Chinese universities have to make transformations to adapt to today's situation. School management problems are particularly serious in

Chinese universities, and they impede the further development of universities in China. Thus, it is necessary for Chinese universities to transform their way of school management. Compared with foreign research in the area of transformational leadership, domestic studies are still relatively lagging in content and method, and the number of research is insufficient. In this paper, the author reviews previous researches which correspond to four research questions related to transformational leadership:

- (1) What is the connotation of transformational leadership?
- (2) What benefits does transformational leadership have on school?
- (3) What is the limitation of transformational leadership?
- (4) How can transformational leadership be used to improve the school management of Chinese universities?

## **2. The connotation and dimensions of transformational leadership**

### **2.1. The connotation of transformational leadership**

Downton initially coined the term “transformational leadership” in 1973. Although he created the foundation for transformational leadership, his influence in this field was very limited. The theory of transformational leadership first appears in the famous book *Leadership* by political sociologist Burns, which links leaders and the staff together and tries to excite the ethics and motivation between leaders and the staff<sup>[4]</sup>. It is a new concept that means leaders attempt to make the staff be clear about the importance of their duties and missions through the appeal and charm of the leadership, as well as intellectual stimulation and personalized care. Then, the potential of the staff will be fully exploited to achieve the best degree of performance. Leithwood and his colleagues brought the theory of transformational leadership to educational settings. They clearly proposed the concept of school transformational leadership. Hallinger explained that transformational leadership in school refers to the principal’s capability of advancing teachers’ recognition of school objectives, improving teachers’ internal need level, stimulating teachers to continue to make progress, and achieving school sustainable development<sup>[1]</sup>.

After reading literature related to this theme, the author finds that the connotation of transformational leadership in school contains three aspects. The first one is that school transformational leadership represents the school leaders’ capabilities and the interaction process between school leaders and teachers. The second meaning is that school transformational leadership directly acts on teachers, so as to affect the teacher’s internal state, especially the respect of motivation and values. The third one is that the school has the burden of promoting students’ development. No matter how the school makes changes and transforms, the ultimate aim is to help students gain better development<sup>[2,5]</sup>.

### **2.2. The main dimensions of transformational leadership**

Western scholars further explored the main dimensions of transformational leadership after its concept was put forward. Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration were proposed by Bass and Avolio in 1994. These four dimensions form transformative leadership together, and they are interdependent. Idealized influence refers to the leader’s firm belief and value in the organization. Inspirational motivation refers to the leader’s vision of the school’s development and encouragement to members about achieving meaningful goals. Intellectual stimulation is that leaders inspire members to come up with new ideas and ways and encourage members to actively express their views on organizational change. Leaders’ attention to and listening to the personal development needs and wishes of organizational members is called individualized consideration<sup>[6]</sup>. Leithwood and his colleagues summed up transformational leadership

in the school situation in 1999 and summarized three dimensions of the practice of transformational leadership in schools. The first one is setting a direction, which refers to the development of vision and order formed by all school members participating in decision-making. The second one is personnel development, which means that leaders look forward to the development and achievements of the faculty and provide material and spiritual guarantees for their development. The third one is to redesign the organization, form a strong campus culture through getting involved in decision-making, and establish the core values of the organization <sup>[7]</sup>.

### **3. The role of transformational leadership in school**

Transform always belongs to the creators, thinkers, and leaders of the times. Transformational leadership has an idealized impact which enables the staff to trust leaders and have a good relationship with leaders. Transformational leadership is inspiring, and this is reflected in the vision and expectation that leaders have in everything they do. Transformational leadership is able to encourage the staff to immerse themselves into thinking by stimulating their intelligence. During the study process of the role of transformational leadership in schools, the author finds that students, teachers, and the school organization are three aspects to be reckoned with.

#### **3.1. The effect of transformational leadership on students**

Transformational leadership is beneficial to students. Anderson found that school leadership is quite an essential factor in student achievement and excellent performance <sup>[5]</sup>. Student learning outcomes are greatly influenced by transformational leadership <sup>[8,9]</sup>. Lv's study mentioned that the principal indirectly influences students' learning results by discussing and cooperating with teachers, participating in the establishment of school teaching goals, and creating a positive campus cultural atmosphere <sup>[10]</sup>. Bolkan and Goodboy's study revealed that transformational leadership is also beneficial to the participation of students in class, and students' cognition of teacher reliability <sup>[8]</sup>. However, the purpose of school education is not only to improve student performance but also to pay attention to the physical and mental health of students and constantly develop the personality of students. Therefore, future research should be based on the well-rounded development of students, and test the influence of the school's transformational leadership on students more scientifically.

#### **3.2. The effect of transformational leadership on teachers**

Transformational leadership is beneficial to teachers. The study of Leithwood *et al.* illustrated that the leaders of transformational leadership primarily have an influence on teachers by developing them. It includes setting an example to teachers, giving teachers individualized care, intelligence inspiration, and building a common vision <sup>[11]</sup>. Some researchers find that transformational leadership has a marked effect on teachers' organization promises, participation in academic activities, and job satisfaction <sup>[12,13]</sup>. Zhao and Xi's research demonstrated that transformational leadership has a remarkable effect on teachers' job satisfaction. Nevertheless, if leaders pay too much attention to teachers' personal goals and satisfy teachers only with wages, they can no longer cause teachers' job satisfaction. In this case, principals need to lead teachers with deeper values, clearer shared visions and goals, and impel teachers to realize their own needs from the perspective of school organizational development and transformation <sup>[14]</sup>.

#### **3.3. The effect of transformational leadership on the school organization**

Transformational leadership can benefit the school organization. In the research on the utility of transformational leadership on the organization of schools, schools' organizational culture, school atmosphere,

and organizational learning are generally considered. Teaching improvement, working environment, common goals, and decision-making of school are all directly linked to transformational leadership. The book of Leithwood *et al.* illustrates that transformational leaders of schools attempt to benefit the school organization by creating a sort of organizational culture that is meaningful and positive. It has been found that several dimensions of transformational leadership are strongly connected to the school atmosphere in the study by McCarley *et al.* <sup>[15]</sup>. The research results by Manshadi *et al.* showed that transformational leadership can positively affect organizational learning, and it is the most essential component of predicting organizational learning <sup>[16]</sup>. The findings of the previous documents suggest that school transformational leadership has a positive effect on school organization. In addition, it can promote the learning of students and the teaching of teachers through its impact on school organization.

All in all, it can be concluded from the previous literature that transformational leadership can affect students' learning outcomes, class participation, and cognition of teacher credibility. It is good for teachers' organizational commitment and job satisfaction and leads the teachers to realize positive development. Transformational leadership ameliorates the school organization in school climate, organizational culture, and organizational learning. Previous researchers have done a lot about the effectiveness of transformational leadership. In spite of this, scholars still need to develop assessment tools that are applicable to different cultures and situations based on a common theoretical basis.

#### **4. The limitations of transformational leadership**

According to the point of view of Bass, transformational leadership works for any situation or culture, and it is always good for the organization and followers <sup>[6]</sup>. Obviously, this statement ignores the contextual applicability of transformational leadership. The study by Yukl pointed out that transformational leadership sometimes can also have an adverse effect on the organization. For example, if members of the organization are affected by the competitive visions of different leaders at the same time, the roles of the members of the organization will be more blurred and role conflicts will be greater. Eventually, organizational effectiveness will decline. As for the context of school, too much school work will be set back if teachers and other staff of the school are led by leaders with different school development plans <sup>[17]</sup>. Therefore, it can be seen that transformational leadership is not applicable in all environments and it has negative effects occasionally. Moreover, most transformational leadership theories acquiesce that the achievements of the organization are attributed to the leader's own abilities and their encouragement of the followers' work <sup>[18]</sup>. Leaders unilaterally guide followers to work hard and make self-sacrifice. Transformational leadership tells leaders to motivate their followers' struggles and help them grow. However, it does not involve the contents about the ways leaders encourage followers to put up with improvement suggestions to their plans and ideas, which might be quite useful for getting more comprehensive solutions <sup>[17]</sup>. In school, if the principals merely make decisions for everything instead of listening to teachers' ideas, it will not be conducive to the development of the school.

### **5. Application of transformational leadership to improve school management of Chinese universities**

#### **5.1. The present situation of the school management of Chinese universities**

In the past 40 years since the Chinese reform and opening-up, China's higher education has been expanding. Students with higher education are no longer a minority, but a majority. With the continuous deepening of the reform, the management behavior of Chinese universities is also changing from a passive, strategic,



administrative, and closed traditional management mode to a modern management mode. The ultimate aim of universities is to cultivate high-quality and comprehensive talents, thus it can meet the development needs of various industries in the society. At present, due to the widespread concern of society, the educational work of Chinese universities will meet new opportunities and challenges <sup>[19]</sup>.

Xuan and Zhong's research analyzed the shortcomings and deficiencies of the school management of Chinese universities. One problem is that the management of the principals of Chinese universities is too rigid. It basically relies on criticism, punishment, or temptation to make teachers work hard and maintain the teaching order of the school. Consequently, teachers are prone to generate negative emotions, and schools may lose some good teachers. One problem is that the short-term behavior of Chinese university principals is relatively obvious. It reflects in that the principal makes every effort to present the school results that superior leaders would like to see in response to the school evaluations conducted by the education department. However, they have forgotten that academic development is the fundamental responsibility of the university, and they have given up in-depth thinking and long-term planning for the development of the university. Another problem is that the administrative power of principals of Chinese universities is too large. The problem of replacing and interfering with academic power is very serious in the university. These problems have severely restricted the development of the school <sup>[20]</sup>. Therefore, it is time for the universities to adjust their way of school management, which is significant for producing more high-quality talents for society.

## **5.2. Advice for improving the school management of Chinese universities based on transformational leadership**

- (1) Building a shared vision in the school: Instead of chasing after the requirements of upper departments, it is wiser for university leaders to put more effort into setting the university's own common development target. Bass and Avolio expounded that transformational leaders give the staff confidence and tell them how to achieve the shared vision. Leaders should also show their resolution to manage it. At the same time, for the common vision that has been built, the principal must lead the school collective to move forward solidly and turn the resistance encountered in the process into motivation <sup>[6]</sup>. Idealized influence, individualized support, and inspirational motivation play an important role in strengthening the shared vision of the organization <sup>[21]</sup>. They make teachers filled with responsibility and a sense of mission. In practice, university principals must understand the goal and significance of Chinese educational reform correctly, and transform them into educational concepts. They should embed educational concepts into the minds of every teacher, and let the teachers turn the concepts into behavior spontaneously. They can make unique but reasonable development plans for the university through self-assessment, group discussions, and field comparisons <sup>[19]</sup>. In this way, the university will become a distinctive school in light of its own development.
- (2) Shaping cohesive school organizational culture: School organizational culture refers to the value system created and accumulated by the school in the long-term education practice, which is recognized by school members. As school autonomy is strengthened and the diversity of students and teachers is increasing, university leaders are facing the challenge of how to establish a harmonious learning and working environment and campus culture <sup>[22]</sup>. Transformational leaders compare the success of an organization with its setbacks, which affect the followers' values and beliefs. All four dimensions of transformational leadership help connect the members' concept to the task of the organization <sup>[23]</sup>. Universities need to build their own campus culture, so that every faculty member will hold a sense of faith in the school. Shaping a cohesive organizational culture is also conducive to letting the faculty



maintain a good understanding of each other, have mutual respect and mutual trust, and create a healthy working atmosphere. If university members understand their school's organizational culture and let it penetrate into their own behavior, then the principals do not have to regulate the discipline by relying on a strict reward and punishment system.

- (3) Enhancing the professionalism of the school management team: The team not only refers to the school leaders but also includes all the teaching administrators. It is necessary for university leaders to have solid professional knowledge and mature leadership. University leaders should also exert strong decision-making ability, form a unique management style, hold a rigorous working attitude, and be highly responsible towards the school. In view of transformational leadership, leaders should respect each member of the organization and give them sufficient support and encouragement, as well as help them plan their direction of future development<sup>[24]</sup>. The study by Jiang mentioned that transformational leadership believes that the exertion of teachers' capabilities is a reflection of organizational development, and is the key to schools' efforts to build themselves into better schools. It is a process of constantly giving challenges to teachers with new ideas and methods, and encouraging teachers' organization work<sup>[19]</sup>. Besides, school leaders should also understand the process of students' physical and mental development, possess the knowledge and practical skills of education and teaching, master scientific and effective methods of evaluating students, have a healthy and positive attitude to dealing with student affairs, and have the willingness to keep learning and the potential of self-development<sup>[20]</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

To sum up, transformational leadership has far-reaching effects in many areas of society. It makes people value the high-level needs and self-actualization of each individual, encourages individuals to seek better development, and believes that individuals own unlimited potential<sup>[24]</sup>. Transformational leadership is recognized as one of the main ways to promote the transformation of schools<sup>[1,25]</sup>. It has a positive impact on students, teachers, and school organizations, though it has some limitations. Future studies should focus on the applicability of transformational leadership to different contexts, and put more emphasis on the positive significance of followers to the organization. In the era of China's education reform, Chinese universities should actively learn from Western transformational leadership theories, in order to advance university reforms, improve education quality, and cultivate more high-quality talents for the society. Based on the theory of transformational leadership, this paper provided suggestions for the methods of ameliorating the school management of Chinese universities.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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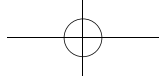
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