

# An Empirical Study on the Influence of Second Language Learners' Self-Efficacy and Motivation on Class Engagement

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## Abstract

Student class engagement is an important indicator to measure the quality of classroom teaching, especially for second language learners. However, most of the current studies focus on the non-language students in top universities, and lack of research on second language learners and local colleges. Therefore, this study selected two parallel classes of English major from Y University in S City to conduct action research: four workshops including Appreciative Inquiry and SOAR, Coaching and Mentoring, Goal Setting, and Team Building were designed to intervene based on the latest theories of organizational development and educational psychology. The results show that these interventions can effectively improve students' class engagement. At the same time, students' sense of self-efficacy and learning motivation have also been significantly enhanced. In future research, teachers can be included in the main body of research and further intervention can be carried out.

## Keywords

Second language learners, self-efficacy, motivation, class engagement, organizational development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

After experiencing expansion of "quantity", the "quality" of China's higher education has gradually become the core issue that needs to be answered urgently. In order to improve the quality of higher education, China promulgated the "*National Medium and Long-term Education Development and Reform Plan*" [1]. The plan puts forward to improve "quality" as the core task of the reform and higher education development, and it clearly points out that "to fully mobilize the enthusiasm and initiative of students, encourage them to study hard and enhance their engagement" [2].

In addition, the Ministry of Education of China has introduced a "*Several Opinions on Improving the Quality of Higher Education in an All-Round Way*" [3], which emphasizes that "the development of higher education should take improving the quality of learning as its core". Quality is always at the core of higher education. However, student participation and efforts are essential in the teaching/ learning quality, which related to the success or not of their learning. Whatever the teaching contents, forms, and methods the teacher has, they need students' engagement in such learning activities. Therefore, it is of great significance to improve student class engagement.

Consequently, student engagement is a focused area of research with the development of curriculum theory and practice in China. In education, student engagement refers to "the degree

of self-efficacy, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education" [4]. It is often an important component of university course whereby a part of the total grade calculation includes its evaluation. It serves to encourage the development of a variety of skills and the acquisition of knowledge through a more active form of student-centered learning. Class participation and interaction can provide instructors with some confidence that learning is taking place during a course and that students are coming to class prepared, having read and completed assignments. Thus, it is a measure of student class engagement. In general, learning is an active process and that students can learn best and retain more by actively doing.

An investigation by the National Institute of Education Sciences selected over 1800 students from Peking University, Beijing Normal University, Jilin University, Northeast Normal University, Shaanxi Normal University and Northwest Normal University as the research objects [5]. The survey found that 26.8% of respondents believed that engage in the classroom activities had a "very important" influence on the learning effect, and 50.6% hold the opinion that it had an "important" impact. In addition, 13.1% students said they were "not clear about the importance" of engagement, and only 9.6% students thought it was "not important". College students generally believe that class engagement has an important impact on learning outcomes, and it is clearly conducive to the accumulation of knowledge and the improvement of learning quality.

Thus, the Institution of Education Tsinghua University in 2007 introduced the "NSSE" from US and carried out the "China College Student Survey" on this basis, which explores a new perspective for the study of student engagement. Over 300,000 students from 108 institutions have participated in this survey by the end of 2013 [6].

These survey data can be used by universities and colleges to understand the learning experience of undergraduate students inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, related people (such as future college students, their parents, college counselors, and institutional researchers) can also use this information to learn more about how different college students spend their time and what they learned from it.

All in all, the learning engagement of college students can reflect the teaching process, and the performance is the direct expression of teaching quality. Therefore, it is necessary to study the level of learning engagement of college students in China.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Organizational Development and Organizational Development Intervention**

According to Anderson [7], organizational development is the process of improving organizational effectiveness based on the knowledge of behavioral science. It is also a systematic process of data collection, diagnosis, behavior planning, intervention, and evaluation. OD is committed to enhancing organizational structure, consistency between process, strategy, people and culture.

In addition, organization development is the continuous process of organizational self-renewal. The important foundation and characteristic of OD is to emphasize the interrelationship and interdependence of the various parts. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the influence of various parts during the change process, coordinate the activities of them, and adjust its relationship with the outside world from the entire system.

Organizational development intervention is one of the most important techniques currently used to achieve planned change in an organization. Argyris and Schon [8] indicated that organizational development intervention is a series of planned and step-by-step actions or events taken by the organization to achieve effective operation and growth of its members.

Organizations apply interventions for many purposes. The following key points have been recognized [9]:

- Promoting the realization of organizational change plans and goals
- Inspiring employees' work motivation and improve work efficiency
- Coordinating the activities of various parts of the organization and adjust their relationship with the outside world
- Encouraging employees to solve problems creatively, and
- Achieving sustainable development of the organization

Generally, organizational development intervention is involved in a dynamic relational system that helps organizations solve problems by communicating back and forth and some related measures. The objects of intervention can be individuals, groups or selected targets.

## 2.2. Types of OD Interventions

Classifications of OD Intervention based on the type of process that it targets, and there are four types of OD Interventions, including "Human Process, Techno-structural, Human Resource and Strategic Intervention" [10]. The four types of interventions have been described as follows.

### ➤ Human Process Intervention

This is the most typical application in organizational development which pays great attention to the most common and basic aspects of the organization, interpersonal relationships and communication. Human Process interventions focus on the communication process with internal and external experts and OD practitioner, such as counseling, team building, team internal conflict analysis and management, employee opinion survey, data analysis and results feedback, and interpersonal communication training programs [9].

### ➤ Techno-structural Intervention

This deals with changing/re-designing the organizational structure with emphasis on improving efficiency and productivity. It includes the following manners: creating efficient work or project teams, matrix management, redesigning of work-flows to enhance incentives, quality and responsiveness, and other aspects. For example: total quality management, balanced scorecard, and six sigma [11].

### ➤ Human Resource Intervention

This involves innovation or improvement in human resource management skills. It focuses on changing the factors that affect individuals, including the skills and experience in the selection process, participating in the goal management, redesigning tasks and incentives, career planning, training programs, and performance evaluation methods and projects. For example: goal setting and performance appraisal [9].

### ➤ Strategic Intervention

This intervention involves strategic issues that are closely related to change and reviews at the top of the organization, including a comprehensive change management plan, organizational learning programs, inter-organizational networks, and changes in corporate culture. For example: integrated strategic change, merger and acquisition integration [9].

## 2.3. Self-efficacy

The Social Cognitive Theory is developed by Bandura [12] and explained that self-efficacy is individual's expectations of whether he or she has the ability to accomplish a certain behavior in a particular situation. It consists of two components, namely, the expected outcome and the expected performance. The expected result refers to the outcome an individual may produce due to his or her own behavior, and performance expectations are subjective judgments of an individual's ability to perform an action on his own. According to Bandura's theory [13], people

with high self-efficacy are more likely to focus on the overall task and develop high-level plans, while those with low self-efficacy are easy to get discouraged and give up.

In terms of learning, students with high self-efficacy think that if they can learn new knowledge with serious lectures or reading, they can find ways to solve complex problems and know how to seek resource support. Students with low self-efficacy usually feel that they do not have the ability to solve problems.

Self-efficacy theory believes that individual mastery of expectation is the main determinant of behavior change [14]. According to this theory, many scales were developed by scholars to assess self-efficacy in various contexts, in order to find out the relationship between self-efficacy and behavior.

**Table 1.** Definitions of self-efficacy sub-constructs

<b>Self-Efficacy Sub-Constructs</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
Social Skills	It refers the belief that a person possesses the skills necessary to succeed in an anxiety state [13].
Cognitive Operation	It refers the belief in one's capability to gain academic achievement [15].
Affective Coping	It refers the belief that one can cope with distressing emotions [16].

Self-efficacy is particularly important for individuals with social anxiety [17]. The social anxiety is a strong fear of negative evaluation and accompanying behavioral avoidance in social communication process [18]. Thus, the social skills have great effect on student who do or do not have confidence in social communication.

When people face a new task, they will estimate the value of the task at first. Only when people determine that it is a valuable task will they take the further action. However, once people find that they are lack of ability to complete the task, they may not take action or choose an easier goal [14]. On the contrary, if it is very likely for them to succeed in something, they tend to have an optimistic and positive attitude, full of emotion and initiative. These are the process of cognitive operation and affective coping, which can also be used to assess student self-efficacy.

## **2.4. Motivation**

Motivation can be defined as “a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, a state that leads to a conscious decision to take action and produces sustained intellectual and/or physical effort” [19].

According to Gardner and Lambert [20], there are two types of motivation: integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to individuals have a strong interest in language learning and hope to integrate into the culture of the language they are learning. People who have integrative motivation can enjoy the fun of learning a foreign language, and easily master it. Instrumental motivation emphasizes that the purpose of learning is to gain economic benefits or other profits, such as working in a foreign company, studying in English countries, and so on. Learners with instrumental motivation focus on the actual value and benefits of learning a new language. The first kind of students enjoy language learning and prefer active learning, and the latter require language for a practical purpose, and is more like passive learners.

Moreover, compared with instrumental motivation, integrative motivation is the most important motivation for learning a target language, and it also has the greatest impact on the degree of learning engagement [21, 22].

## 2.5. Student Engagement

Kuh [23] argued that student class engagement is the time and effort that students put into classroom-related activities, including both in-class and out-of-class activities, and the school's practice of using a range of policies to guide students in engaging in these activities.

In addition, Günüç and Kuzu [24] examined the two main components of student engagement: campus engagement and class engagement. They discussed the two components with six dimensions: "Valuing, Sense of Belonging, Cognitive Engagement, Peer Relationships (Emotional Engagement-I), Relationships with Faculty Member (Emotional Engagement-II) and Behavioral Engagement" (see figure 1).

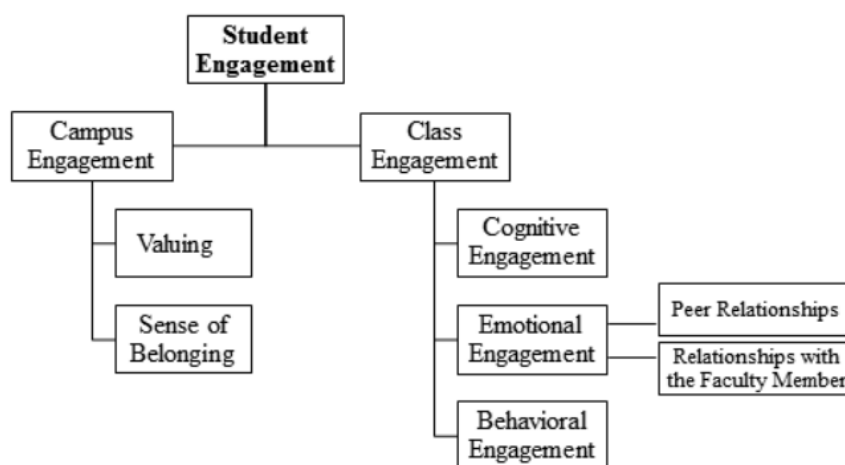


Figure 1. Student engagement structure

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. OD Intervention Design

As this research mainly focuses on improving student class engagement for enhancing student self-efficacy and student motivation, the action research employing the quantitative and qualitative is used before and after ODI. The action research framework includes three stages: pre-ODI stage, ODI stage, and post-ODI stage.

#### ➤ Pre-ODI stage

The purpose of pre-ODI stage is to identify and confirm the problem of the focal organization. When the problem is confirmed, survey questionnaires, interviews and observation will be implemented in this stage with the permission of the selected University and School of English Language who provide full support to all the research processes. The kick-off meeting will be held firstly to introduce the purpose of research and OD intervention to related students and teachers. Meanwhile, these teachers and students will have a clear understanding about the key terms in this research: student self-efficacy, student motivation and student class engagement.

#### ➤ ODI Stage

This is the transformational phase. The researcher will conduct various intervention tools both in individual and team levels to solve the current problems of the organization in this stage.

Because of the negative student self-efficacy and student motivation towards student class engagement, a strengths-based assessment (including Appreciative Inquiry and SOAR) will

conduct firstly to help students discover their strengths and weaknesses, and then they may see things in a new light way. AI is a practical and effective method for stimulating collective intelligence and provides a way for organizations to convert potential energy into active energy [25, 26]. SOAR adopts the concept of AI to provide guidance for strategic thinking of students. It enables everyone to participate in learning activities and form a kind of creative cooperative learning [27].

The following coaching and mentoring workshop will make learners to focus on their learning experience, problems that they need to address, and find the solutions to these problems by appropriate advice and guidance of mentors [28]. Furthermore, goal setting theory is used to emphasize the importance of clear objectives for individual and team goals. Students become involved in action planning to identify ways to define success and failure and achieve goals. This is intended to strengthen motivation and foster a sense of ownership. Students can measure their learning process by identifying specific outcomes and tests of incremental success.

Moreover, the team development activities will be applied to improve students learning motivation and self-confidence, so as to devote themselves to learning. The five stages (forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning) of team building will provide a roadmap for students to enhance and improve their experience in communication, cooperative learning and experiential learning, and get them to learn how to work together. Students are organized in six groups of five or six students each, in order to fulfill a learning task cooperatively. Teams are formed based on the exam results of last semester, class engagement, and language level.

#### ➤ Post-ODI Stage

The post-ODI stage includes the measurement of the impact of ODIs. The same questionnaires used in the pre-ODI phase will be employed at this stage. The post-ODI phase will compare the results between pre-ODI and post-ODI on student self-efficacy, motivation and engagement. Moreover, monthly meeting will be continued to apply to reinforce learning goals and receive individual and group feedback.

### **3.2. OD Intervention Design**

Based on the scores of required courses in the fourth semester, this study uses the method of “purposive sampling” to select two parallel classes of junior English majors in Z University as the target group of this study. Then, the target population was randomly divided into experimental group and control group for a semester of action research. There were 33 people in the experimental group and 33 people in the control group. The age of each group was between 20 and 21 years old.

### **3.3. Action Research Process**

#### (1) Appreciative Inquiry & SOAR Workshop

##### ➤ Purpose

The previous class meeting always began with the problem of student class engagement, and to find solutions by analyzing the causes of the problem, rather than exploring the peak moments where students can be passionate and actively participate in learning tasks. The main purpose of AI is to allow students to change their mindsets, and cultivate a positive way of thinking. AI emphasizes the importance of setting positive themes to help members recognize their strengths, build self-confidence, and how to apply these positive cores to play better in future learning.

In addition, SOAR is “a strategic formulation and planning framework” that allows the students to plan their ideal future [27]. It adopts the concept of Appreciative Inquiry and provides direction for strategic thinking. SOAR can bring students to a place of building on what

is “right” instead of focusing on what is “wrong”, and it can engage everyone in the process and lead to a creative and cooperative learning. Once the process is started, students can be impressed with SOAR’s ability to get them at all levels involved and enthusiastic about bringing their “voice” into the learning process.

#### ➤ Process

The project kick-off meeting first aided students to understand the process of the workshop and some related issues, and brought in new thinking concepts (such as AI and SOAR), so as to stimulate students to regain their passion and power, and make everyone familiar with each other and integrate the relationship between team members. Through a series of activities, students shared their insights and feelings of engage in 4D cycle process to understand their own strengths and opportunities, and put forward their future aspirations of learning and the ultimate result they want to achieve (see figure 2).

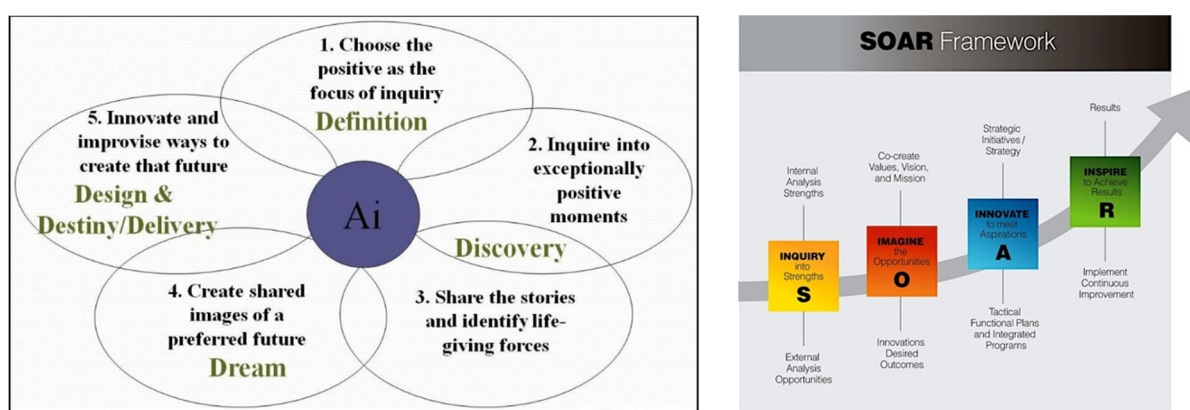


Figure 2. AI & SOAR workshop

## (2) Coaching and Mentoring

#### ➤ Purpose

Coaching and mentoring as a cooperative process is aiming to promote the development of students’ personal and professional skills, so as to achieve sustainable and highly influential learning outcomes [29]. This program is a purposeful and structured sermon product, and it implements the goal from four stages, including “observation and preparation, discussion, active coaching and mentoring, follow up” [30].

#### ➤ Process

The concepts of coaching and mentoring was introduced to students at the beginning of this training project. Students who participated in this training can be coached and mentored in four questions (see figure 3) and five stages (see figure 4).

The four questions were: 1) What is the situation now?; 2) What could you do?; 3) What will you do?; and 4) What do you want to achieve? [31]. The purpose of these questions was to make students aware of the current learning situation, and define it. Once they understood the reality, they could find solutions to achieve their learning goal.



Figure 3. 'GROW' model of coaching and mentoring

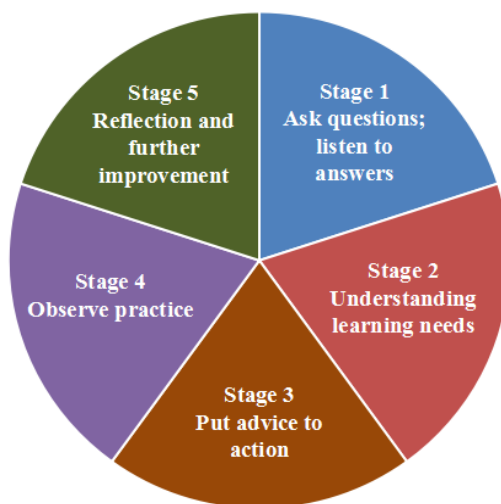


Figure 4. Stages of coaching and mentoring

(3) Goal Setting

➤ Purpose

A famous follow-up study on the impact of goals on life by Harvard University shows that there are 13% of people had clear long-term or short-term goals that became the upper middle class of society after 25 years [32]. Most of them also became successful people in a field. And 27% of them without clear goals lived at the lowest level in society. They often unemployed and lived on social assistance. Clearly, the goal has a great guiding role in the development of people. Thus, the purpose of goal setting is to help students to follow the SMART principle and develop a “specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound” goal. A positive attitude of students may lay a solid foundation for success, but the attitude is only the first step to success. In order to achieve success, a clear goal must be set, and as students achieve these goals, they can have a sense of achievement, and their way of thinking or learning psychology can become more active toward the direction of change [33]. Furthermore, a person’s energy is limited. Only when students have made clear goals can they concentrate their efforts on achieving better and faster development in certain occupational fields or in some aspects, and in order to lay the foundation for future development.

➤ Process



The goal setting training started from the basic concept and explained the five steps of the SMART Principles (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-sensitive) to enable students to understand SMART goals systematically. In the teaching process, many cases were taken as references to help students analyze and formulate the principles of SMART goals. In the process of training, real cases (such as excellent graduates of the last school year) could be conducted as examples to help students make their SMART goals based on their strengths and aspirations (see figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Stages of coaching and mentoring

#### (4) Team Building

##### ➤ Purpose

Team building activities are a way to improve students' self-efficacy, learning motivation, communication skills, and to enhance students class engagement with experiential based. It focuses on the development of students' soft skills in the classroom [34].

##### ➤ Process

It started by explaining the concept and importance of team building in the classroom. Tuckman's team development model could be applied to guide the following process.

##### ① Forming

The project started with a short report and introduced agenda and the preset goals. Students were organized in six groups according to their academic performance, class engagement, and language level. There were three groups of five each, and the other three groups of six each. The researcher then encouraged team members to introduce themselves to each other, in order to establish a close and open relationship among them. In this stage, the grouping was only for the better management of follow-up activities without any competitive factors [35].

##### ② Storming

At this stage, researcher encouraged team members to discuss a favorite topic towards language learning and find out a common one to present. During the discussion process, team members elaborated on different ideas and opinions and tried to convince others to reach an agreement, and thus led to the occurrence of some conflicts. Researcher listened to their ideas and gave appropriate advice to help them resolve conflicts and eventually reached a consensus.

##### ③ Norming

When team members reached an agreement, they had a common goal to strive. Researcher encouraged them to continue in-depth discussions on the topic and prepare to present to other

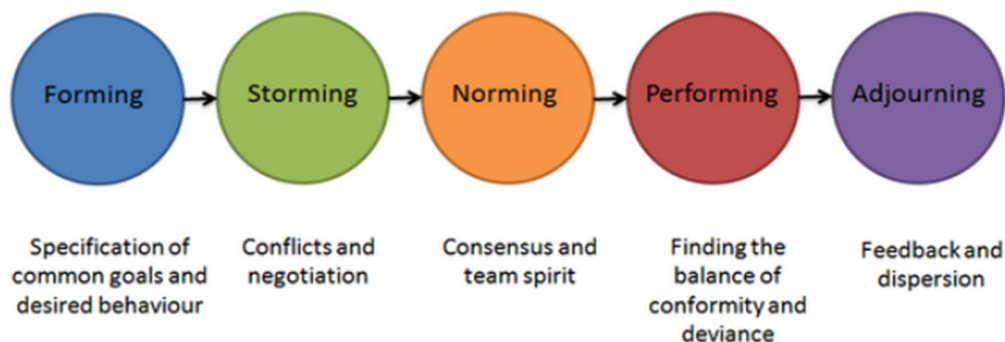
groups. At this stage, team members could adapt their behavior, clarify their responsibilities, and consciously solved problems, and then they were eager to work hard for the team's goals. They respected the views of other members and their levels of confidence and motivation had been strengthened.

#### ④ Performing

After finishing the group discussion, one of the team members should aggregate and summarize the ideas and opinions of all the members, and write it on paper for public display. The host was selected by team members to present their topics to other team members. After presentation, other team members and researcher could propose suggestions for improvement. At this stage, team members had a extremely clear understanding of their responsibilities, and could make decisions by themselves without supervision. They congratulated each other and felt happy for their wonderful performance and collective efforts. The team members showed a positive attitude of "I can do it" and the team goal was achieved.

#### ⑤ Adjourning

In the final stage, the researcher invited all members to talk about what they had learned from this project. All team members were satisfied with their efforts and believed that their self-confidence and motivation had been greatly improved. The relationship between team members had become closer and smooth communication and cooperation had been achieved. In this process, the team goals were achieved through their active engagement. Finally, the researchers thanked all the team members for their participation and cooperation, and hoped that they could continue to apply this change to learning.



**Figure 6.** Tuckman's five stages of team development

## 4. DISCUSSION

By reviewing the proposed research questions raised in the first section of this paper, this section discussed the effectiveness of the OD intervention.

The intervention part of this action research consists of four main workshops, and the monthly meetings are also used to maintain the change of students on student class engagement, self-efficacy and motivation. Interviews at the end of each intervention, and quantitative research at post-ODI stage proved the effectiveness of these interventions.

### (1) Appreciative Inquiry & SOAR Workshop

This workshop focuses on stimulating students' learning motivation and enhancing their self-efficacy by allowing students to identify their areas of strength, exploring opportunities for future development, and designing ways to achieve them.

If the researcher or teacher provides answers or solutions directly at the beginning, students cannot necessarily agree to do so, let alone touch their hearts. The motivation of students is greatly stimulated when it starts from their personal interests and advantages and affirm their achievements. Then the researcher can further inquire about their short-term and long-term

goals, and give some effective suggestions, so that they could have stronger self-efficacy and motivation to participate in the classroom activities, thereby improving student class engagement. This is confirmed by interviews with students and observation by the researcher at the end of the workshop.

### (2) Coaching and Mentoring

The coaching mainly focuses on students' learning goals. Researchers and teachers help students think about what drives their learning, and what possibilities do they have in terms of time, space, roles, etc. Throughout the process, what resources they can mobilize, and what blind spots they can break through, in order to continue to improve their self-efficacy and motivation, so as to improve class engagement. The mentoring provides students with the experience of teachers, including the way of thinking, the experience of development, and the lesson of failure. Therefore, students usually choose the topic of "future development" to communicate with mentor, such as progression, employment, qualifications, as well as current learning confusion, immature ideas.

In a world, where students are goal-oriented, starting from discovering their own potentials, and using teachers' more effective experiences and perspectives to practice, they can demonstrate a stronger interest in learning and enthusiasm for participating in classroom activities.

### (3) Goal Setting

Students with clear SMART goals are more actively involved in classroom learning activities, rather than just passively receiving instructions and explanations from teachers. Through the specific goals set by students for each lesson, students can be encouraged and promoted to maintain a high level of concentration and motivation in learning throughout the learning process, thus it can greatly improve student class engagement.

Through the comparison of the learning situation between the experimental class and the control class, the researcher finds that students' learning mode based on SMART principle embodies its own superiority, and achieves the expected results in resolving the differences in students' self-efficacy, lack of motivation and low engagement.

### (4) Team Building

The purpose of team building is to acquire knowledge, skills and values through communication and interaction between teachers and students, so as to improve student class engagement, self-efficacy and motivation. Students learn to work together in a team to make progress and grow together. During the process of teamwork, students are willing to discuss freely with team members, and can be good at capturing the content expressed by students, and then to give feedback based on what others have discussed. This kind of cooperative learning can not only enhance students' sense of cooperation, but also develop their learning habits and learning abilities.

Students are the most dynamic group, and their thinking is in the most critical period of development and training. Every student has his own unique opinion and insights on specific things. Teamwork gives each member an opportunity to share the views of other team members and express their own different perspectives. Through the exchange and learning of team members, students' thinking patterns are changed, so the motivation of learning can become stronger. At the same time, based on their good performance, the self-efficacy of team members is improved and their self-worth is realized. Ultimately, student class engagement has been effectively improved.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The research proved that the intervention can effectively improve student engagement in the classroom and enable students to deeply engage in curriculum activities. The students' learning attitude has also changed from "passive" to "active", and their self-efficacy and learning motivation have been effectively enhanced.

Additionally, teachers are the main force of change. Teachers' professional development is the main trend of educational development in the world and the orientation of educational reform of various countries. However, in reality, the attitudes of teachers toward change are not so optimistic, they often resist or passive accept it. Leaders in universities should combine changing schools with helping teachers to cope with change well together to achieve win-win situation. Consequently, a systematic ODI training plan should be taken as a part of teachers' professional development, so that teachers can clearly understand the importance of change and actively participate in the process of change, rather than blindly hinder change.

One of the focuses of the new round of curriculum reform is how to promote the change of students' learning style, advocate self-learning, cooperative learning and exploratory learning, and make students change substantially. The implementation of organizational development intervention has proved its role in promoting student class engagement, self-efficacy and motivation. Therefore, a systematic ODI training plan also can be used to improve students at other variables and make students devote more enthusiasm to learning.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper was supported by Zhejiang Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences (Grant number 2022N89).

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