

APPLYING PERMA TO DEVELOP COLLEGE STUDENTS' ENGLISH LISTENING AND SPEAKING PROFICIENCY IN CHINA



 Mofang Cheng¹
 Pengfei Chen^{2*}

¹Chinese International College, Dhurakij Pundit University, Thailand/
School of Foreign languages, Weinan Normal University, China.
Email: mofang_006@126.com Tel: +8615829835350
²Chinese International College, Dhurakij Pundit University, Thailand.
Email: peng-fei.che@dpu.ach.th Tel: +66 972106366



(+ Corresponding author)

Article History

Received: 20 September 2021
Revised: 23 October 2021
Accepted: 26 November 2021
Published: 15 December 2021

Keywords

English listening
PERMA intervention
PERMA model
Positive education
Positive psychology
Speaking proficiency
Teaching experiment.

ABSTRACT

Positive Psychology is applied to broaden the learning of a second language, whose application in schools is referred to as Positive Education. The PERMA model (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) proposed by Seligman provides a way for positive education to flourish and open up a new perspective for Chinese scholars in different fields. Hence, the main focus of this study was to explore the effect of PERMA on students' English listening and speaking competency in the Chinese context. This study used a quasi-experimental and a mixed method research design, which included developing a curriculum of PERMA in English speaking and listening, teaching intervention, and a speaking and listening competence test. A total of 240 students studying the same course from six classes, specializing in arts and science, participated in the teaching experiment with the same study level. A total of 110 students in the control group (CG) were taught using traditional teaching methods and the remaining 130 in the experimental group (EG) were subjected to a PERMA intervention for 14 weeks. The results of a one-way ANCOVA indicated a significant improvement in English listening and speaking proficiency of those in the experimental group due to the intervention of PERMA. The outcome of qualitative study conducted by semi-structured interview revealed that students had made progress in English pronunciation, oral expression in their speaking competency. They could also keep up with the speed of audio script and they understood key sentences and details in the listening process. The study pedagogically implicated that whole school approach, including the changes of curriculum, teaching skills, teacher education, and community involvement, should be explored for a new framework of Positive Language Education.

Contribution/ Originality: The study is one of very few studies which have investigated the significance of PERMA intervention in developing the college students' English listening and speaking proficiency in China, which also empirically provides the references for a new validated framework of Positive Language Education to be implemented in China.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays English has become a *lingua franca*, which indicates that it is an internationally dominant language (Kachru & Smith, 2008). As a foreign language, English education has been carried out in China for more than one century (Liu, Xue, & Hu, 2019). Although many ESL (English as second language) learners often confess that as a global language, English is featured as a language of communication by its nature (Saha, 2021), the English listening and speaking performance of Chinese students in China has not gotten any satisfactory results (Hou & Ma,

2020). Despite the addition of oral English courses to most universities' English curriculum, the IELTS English speaking scores of Chinese students are still lower than the global average. Statistics from British Council indicate that Chinese mainland students' oral English performance was unsatisfactory in 2019, lower than the average global scores: female average score was 0.7 behind global female average, and male average was also 0.8 lower than global average (Jan, 2019). According to TOFEL (2019), the average score of Chinese mainland students was 81, which is 2.0 lower than the global average. Additionally, Chinese examinees have also been found to be relatively weak in listening, speaking and writing compared to the global average.

Burgoon (1976) succinctly observes that "an individual who has communication reticence presents a tendency of unwillingness to communicate" (p. 62). Haidara (2016) points out that, since most EFL students have learned English for many years, they have a good command of vocabulary and grammar, but what they lack is a matter of psychology, which is the key to success for the English speaking performance of most EFL learners; therefore, psychological factors should not be neglected. Liu (2018) summarizes that many Chinese language learners are not brave enough to speak English in class because they are influenced by the culture of losing face and disturbed by anxiety when communicating in English. Foreign language anxiety has been studied extensively and it is harnessed to explain the complexity of the language teaching and learning (Boun, 2017). It is negatively correlated to students' language leaning and their attitudes (Glomo-Narzoles & Glomo-Palermo, 2021).

Since psychological factors play a major role in Chinese learners' English listening and speaking, teachers should explore methods and strategies to try to reduce or remove the psychological barriers that prevent students from improving their English communicative competency. Therefore, the implementation of Positive Psychology (PosPsy) could be important in understanding how bilinguals cope with stress (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014; Richards & Rodgers, 2001) and overcome adversity.

The application of psychology to second language learning is not new, but has been at the heart of teaching, learning and communication of second language acquisition (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2019). Due to its fruitful results in many fields, the application of Positive Psychology in schools is referred to as Positive Education (PE) that aims to combine academic goals with the promotion of learners' well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2019). The aim of Positive Education is to improve students' academic performance, as well as their well-being and strength of character, which corresponds to the purpose of language education. Mercer, MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Talbot (2018) proposed to use the term Positive Language Education (PLE), combining Positive Education and learning, and called for an empirically-validated framework of PLE that could be used in different cultural and linguistic contexts.

Since Positive Psychology is still in its infancy in China, its development is slow compared to that of other countries, and there is a lack of substantial empirical studies to enrich it (Li, 2021). Although there has been a great deal of empirical research in other countries on how Positive Education can improve students' well-being, academic achievement and personal characters (Adler, 2016), this field still has great exploration space in foreign language teaching in China (Li, 2021). Han and Xu (2020) explored the emotional experience and emotion regulation strategies of second language writing from the perspective of Positive Psychology and found that they improved learners' well-being and learning effect in the writing of a second language, but the ability to listen and speak is yet to be explored from the perspective of Positive Psychology.

The PERMA framework proposed by Seligman (2011) has become a basic model for delegating work in the field of language teaching (Helgesen, 2016) As a framework of well-being, it includes five dimensions: positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning and accomplishment (Mercer, 2017). The PERMA model, standing for Positives emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment, can be applied to developing and designing lesson plans (Quinlan & Hone, 2020).

Therefore, the current study aims to fill this gap in the research by using the experimental method intervened by PERMA to promote the English listening and speaking competence of Chinese college students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Positive Psychology in Foreign Language Learning

As an applied science that aims to explore how people thrive and flourish, Positive Psychology is a study of the human strength and virtues that make life good (Lopez & Snyder, 2002; Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) have advocated the positive orientation of psychology to study humans' positive psychological quality and pay attention to their health, happiness and harmonious development.

Humanism has immensely influenced both educational psychology and language teaching; hence, it is not surprising to find that humanistic approaches have had a great impact on English language teaching (ELT) methodology (Williams & Burden, 1997). There is a connection between the positive strength of character and the learning and teaching of a foreign/second language in all good language studies (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014). Positive institutions, which are the third pillar of positive psychology, are always defined as educational institutions where foreign/second language learning takes place in a foreign language classroom that stimulates learners' positive emotions, making them happy and satisfied with what they do to develop their unique abilities (Piasecka, 2016).

Though Positive Psychology is applicable to linguistic researchers to explore their studies (Egbert, 2003; Egbert, 2004), a study by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) introduced Positive Psychology to applied linguistics with strong interests in foreign language learning (FL). More PP- intervened studies, however, are required about foreign language classrooms based on a wide range of approaches to find ways to improve learners' linguistic skills and increase their well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

2.2. Positive Education

MacIntyre et al. (2019) define Positive Education as the application of PP in schools with the aim of explicitly combining learners' academic goals and the promotion of their well-being. It can be seen as "the bringing of the science of PP with best practice teaching, to encourage and support schools and individuals to flourish" (Norrish, 2015). Positive education (PE) is thus the education combined by both traditional skills and happiness (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009).

Rooted in humanistic educational approaches, PE puts well-being at the center of education alongside academic subjects without one being compromised by the other (Mercer et al., 2018). Positive well-being is connected to the domains of psychological, social and academic performance (Gilman & Huebner, 2006; Quinn & Duckworth, 2007; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Seligman et al. (2009) propose that well-being should be taught in schools as a way to increase life satisfaction, fuel better learning and advance creative thinking. In the Geelong Grammar School Community (GGSC) project, the whole school places the well-being of learners, as well as teachers, at its heart (Norrish, 2015). The implicit teaching of PE concerns the integration of the science of well-being into the wider curriculum of the Geelong Grammar School (Norrish, 2015). Accordingly, well-being is the outcome and contributor to the learning process (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

2.3. PERMA Framework

The PERMA framework proposed by Seligman (2011) makes a major contribution to PosPsy. It covers five independent dimensions, as shown in Figure 1 (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning in life, and Accomplishment). Helgesen (2016) conducts an ELT classroom intervention based on PERMA intervention activities as a way to achieve the goal of grammar learning.

Positive emotions include hedonic happiness while engagement refers to a psychological connection to activities or organizations (Kern, Waters, Adler, & White, 2015). Fredrickson (2009) proposes that ten positive emotions are especially significant for humans to flourish, namely, joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride amusement, inspiration awe and love.

Engagement is defined as living a life with a high level of interest, curiosity and absorption, and the pursuit of goals with determination and vitality. Positive engagement aims to promote complete immersion in activities by understanding the nature of engagement, the pathways to it, and the effect it has on health and well-being (Norrish, 2015). In addition to appreciating well-being, engagement is beneficial for accomplishment and achievement (Froh et al., 2010).

Relationships include feeling socially integrated, cared for and supported by others, and satisfied with social connections (Kern et al., 2015). The quality of students' relationship with their families, teachers and peers is integrally linked to their engagement and academic achievement at school (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

As the fourth component of the PERMA well-being model, meaning refers to the direction of life, being connected to something higher than oneself, feeling that one's life is valuable and important and believing that there is an aim in one's life actions (Steger, 2012). It is the desire of individuals to believe that they are living or working for a greater purpose (Butler & Kern, 2016).

Accomplishment in the PERMA well-being model is a driving force for achieving personal goals (Seligman 2011). The effort is expended to complete the task and reach the goal by means of capability, competence and efficiency. In fact, competence is a basic human need according to the self-determination theory of Ryan and Deci (2000) and it has been shown that the struggle to achieve success is connected to subjective well-being (Seligman 2011).

McCallum and Price (2015) observe that the essence of the PERMA model constitutes the positive factors that affect individuals' well-being. The PERMA model has practical implications in showing a greater specificity of the PERMA domains offering more information to enable teachers to better address the well-being needs of students or the classroom environment (Kern et al., 2015).

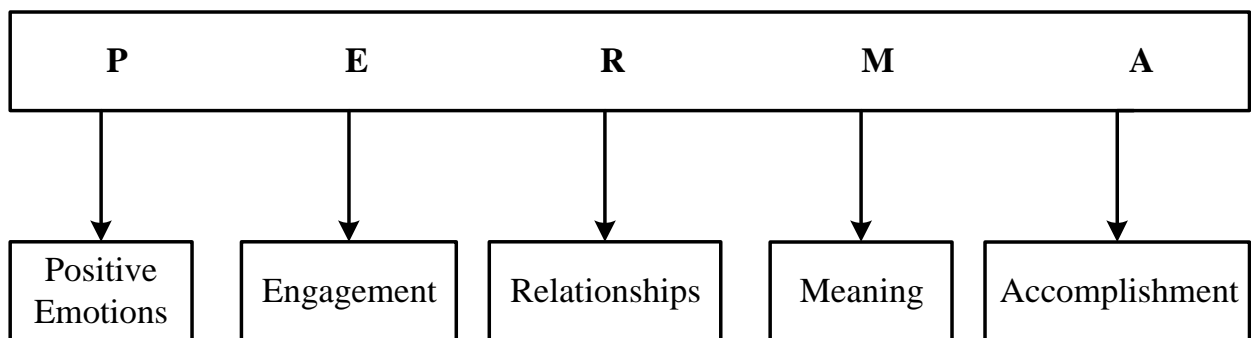


Figure 1. PERMA Model.

Note: The figure describes the PERMA model with 5 dimensions including Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment.

2.4. English Listening and Speaking Competency

Listening comprehension plays a very important role in terms of human communication. As a challenging skill, listening is crucial to the oral communication and closely related to the processing of speaking (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Rost, 2011).

Nation and Newton (2008) describe the process of English listening comprehension as extremely complex, as it involves students' brain processing multi-faceted spoken information. Hence, listening comprehension is often regarded as the most difficult skill to master in the development of English proficiency and because listening comprehension is characterized by internalization and personalization.

Language that is generated by learners (in either speech or writing) is considered to be productive, and language directed at learners (in either reading or listening) is regarded as being receptive language (Savignon, 1991). Hence, speaking is a "productive, oral skill" (Bailey, 2005) However, speaking is a combination that contains the physical, mental, psychological, social and cultural factors working together (Bailey, 2005), which makes speaking a second or foreign language difficult for language learners.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study focused on the application of the PERMA model as an intervention to improve the English listening and speaking proficiency of college students in China; therefore, the study was preceded by designing a teaching curriculum of PERMA model in English listening and speaking training with the help of the ADDIE model, and conducted the quasi-experiment to investigate that whether or not the PERMA model could work effectively to improve Chinese students' listening and speaking through enhancing well-being.

3.1. Context

The necessity of using experimental methods to study the second language teaching is that the experiment is a natural, controlled observation. Experimenters set up such a research environment in order to define the structure of the research task, observe the behavior of participants and propose the questions specifically (Paivio & Begg, 1981). The university involved in the experiment is located in ShaanXi Province in the west region of China. Compared with the developed areas in China, the concept of foreign language talents' cultivation in Shaanxi is relatively backward compared with the eastern region of China, since foreign language learners in Shaan Xi are greatly influenced by the traditional exam-oriented education, which is also theory-centered (Zhu, 2020). It is critically important to change the training mode of foreign language talents to improve the quality education in colleges and universities in Shaan Xi Province.

3.2. Research Procedure

An EFL teacher needs to be qualified in designing a syllabus to improve learners' speaking proficiency (Bailey, 2005). The experimental studies consisted of two phases, the first of which involved building a curriculum with the intervention of PERMA. The second entailed conducting a course experiment based on the curriculum, while the course was evaluated in the third phase. The flow chart of the research procedure was shown in Figure 2.

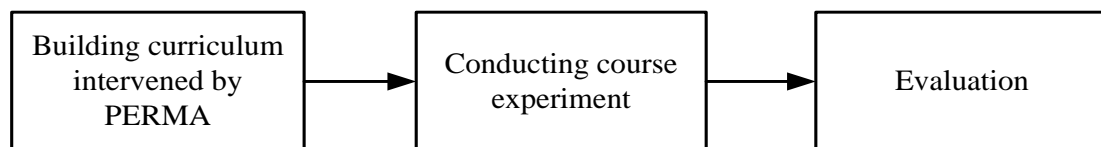


Figure-2. Research procedure.

Note: The figure describes the research procedure including course building, experiment conducting and course evaluation.

3.3. Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 240 freshmen, who were majoring in 6 non-English subjects at a public university in the west of China. There were 130 of them assigned to the experimental group (EG) and 110 were allocated to the control group (CG). The freshmen were conscious of the differences between the high school English teaching and college English education intervened by new teaching model. Hence, it enhanced their happiness and interests in English listening and speaking from a new angle.

3.4. Research Intervention

The PERMA model intervention was used to teach the experimental group but the control group was taught through the regular English course as usual. The control group adopted mainly the Grammar-translation method and Lexical approach. Once called the Classical Method in the teaching of classical languages, the Grammar-translation method is applied by many language teachers with the aims of fueling students to read and appreciate foreign language literature (Gamage, 2020).

The experimental group intervened by PERMA adopted mainly Cooperative Language Learning, and a Content-based instruction in learning the English language. Cooperative language learning is a part of the

interdisciplinary teaching approach that advocates maximizing the use of group or pair cooperation activities (Olsen & Kagan, 1992). It is beneficial for teachers to set up friendly ties with their students, and accessible for students to develop their psychological and cognitive condition (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994). Many researchers have found that social relationships are critical for physical health (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996), well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002), and meaning of life (Hicks & King, 2009).

Content-based teaching is a method of organizing second language teaching around the teaching content rather than the linguistic items (Krahnke, 1987) The principles and concepts of it can be applied to students at different levels. A more popular model advocated by content-based teaching is thematic language teaching, which organizes teaching around a specific topic, when a topic-or theme-based course acts as a foundation for an integrated skills approach and highlights the use of English in the whole context (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The course chosen for this study was College English. All the participants studied the same course and utilized the same text book that prescribed contained 5 units; hence, each dimension of the PERMA model served as a topic for each unit, and the teaching activities were designed around different themes (See Table 1).

The course was preceded with the application of positive emotions (hope) from week 1 to week 2, relationships from week 3 to week 4, engagement from week 5 to week 6, meaning from week 7 to week 8, and accomplishment from week 9 to week 11. According to Harmer (2000), students find many speaking activities (role-playing, discussion, problem-solving etc.) intrinsically enjoyable; therefore, the activities designed in the curriculum are consistent with those suggested. The pre-test and the post-test were applied to both control group and experimental group.

Table-1. Theme Design of Each Unit Intervened by PERMA for Experimental Group.

Sections	Descriptions				
	Unit One	Unit Two	Unit Three	Unit Four	Unit Five
Class	Experimental group	Experimental group	Experimental group	Experimental group	Experimental group
Period	2 periods (3 classes with 1.5 hours each class)	3 periods (3 classes of 1.5 hours each)	3 periods (3 classes of 1.5 hours each)	2 periods (3 classes of 1.5 hours each)	2 periods (3 classes of 1.5 hours each)
Theme	Fresh start	Loving children, loving your parents	Digital campus	Duty comes first	Hoping for better
Intervention	Hope-based intervention	Relationship-based	Engagement-based	Accomplishment-based	Meaning-based

3.5. Measurement

The qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted to measure the outcome of the research intervention. Cambridge assessment English was used to examine the students' English listening and speaking competencies in both the EG and CG after the intervention. A semi-structured interview was conducted to investigate the students' learning experience in the EG during their engagement in PERMA English course after the post-test.

3.5.1. Pre-test and Post-test: Cambridge Assessment English

The language test of the pre-test and the post-test utilized in this study was the Cambridge Assessment English, one of the world's most recognized examinations and tests, used by world's leading colleges and universities for admissions. Linguaskill, a quick and convenient online test, is distributed through a CAE network of authorized agents who run and administer the test. It has two parts: Linguaskill General and Linguaskill Business. The former is used to test the suitability of English for university admission and recruitment for roles in a non-specific business environment, while the latter is a quick and convenient online test powered by Artificial Intelligence technology to enable organizations to check the English level of individuals and groups of candidates

based on modules to test all four language skills of speaking, writing, reading and listening (Cambridge Assessment English, 2019).

The Reading and Listening Module contains two sections: questions for reading tasks and questions for listening tasks. Each section has different items to test the English reading and listening proficiency of candidates. The Speaking Module involves five parts, including Interview, Reading aloud, Long turn1, Long Turn2 and Communication activities, to test the English speaking competency of candidates (See Appendix-A and B for test formats and tasks). Test takers can easily administer the test at any time or place, even at home, and accurate results are provided within 48 hours. Test results are aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which is recognized globally as a language proficiency measurement for language learners in the way of offering lingual skill tests (Kim, 2021). The international standard of language ability based on a six-point scale: level A for basic users (A1 and A2); level B for independent users (B1 and B2); and level C for proficient users (C1 and C2). This makes it convenient for anyone participating in language teaching and testing, whether they are teachers or students, to test their level of different qualifications. The type of questions in the listening and speaking module are listed in the appendix.

The students' listening proficiency was tested by questions at B2 and A1 difficulty levels from 6 levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2) of the listening test system. The test scores were calculated on a 100-point scale. The students' oral English proficiency test was based on man-machine conversations and, at the end of the test; each student was given an accurate speaking grade based on the internationally-recognized CEFR scale. Each level was assigned a score of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively. (A1=1, A2=2, B1=3, B2=4, C1=5, and C2=6). The results are presented in Table 2.

Table-2. Descriptive analysis of listening & speaking proficiency test.

Variables	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Listening	240	10	86	41.29	13.78
Speaking	240	1	4	2.45	0.57

According to the statistical analysis, the average score for listening was 41.29. There were 35 points in the primary A part of the listening test, which accounted for 35% of the total score. Therefore, the average listening score was above the A2 Level, but not at the B1 Level. The speaking performance was 2.45, which was equal to the A2 Level of the CEFR, waiting for further advancement through college English study.

It is evident from the above discussion that students' listening and speaking proficiency needs to be urgently improved; therefore, this was the most important teaching objective in this study.

3.5.2. Semi-Structured Interview

The qualitative tool for data collection was a semi-structured interview. The authors cooperated to design the interview guide that comprised questions developed in a way that participants could openly convey their English learning experience and study insights during research intervention. The interview was conducted after the post-test. There were 10 students from the EG who volunteered to participate in the interview. The questions raised in the interview were open-ended in accordance with PERMA English course aiming at interviewees to answer each question truthfully and comprehensively according to their own English learning situation. The questions had 3 issues after the PERMA intervention including learning problems, evaluating self-improvement, and positive expectations about English proficiency.

The interview was conducted by one of three approaches, i.e. Wechat video, face to face, or online conferencing. The data of semi-structured interview was changed into transcripts and analyzed by means of thematic coding method of pawing (Banard, 2012). The participants' responses were thematically coded based on their institution

and were anonymous. The transcripts of interview were read more than twice (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) to get a better understanding of the interviews. Such phrases were highlighted in different colors if they were cooperatively harmonized. The coded texts were read again and nuances of each theme with sub-themes were formed (Huntley Henderson, Wersun, Wilson, Yeung, & Zhang, 2019).

4. RESULTS OF THE PRE-TEST AND THE POST-TEST

A paired sample t-test was used to determine if there was a mean difference between the pre-test and post-test results of the students in both the experimental and control groups respectively. A one-way ANCOVA was employed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the competencies of the experimental group and the control group in the post-test controlling the pre-test. According to the data analysis, 91.7% of the participants scored more than 90 points in the College Entrance Examination. (See Table 3).

Table-3. Descriptive Statistical Analysis of the Sample.

Items	Distinction of items	Number	Percentage %
Gender	Male	46	19.2
	Female	194	80.8
English Score of NCEE	≥ 120	11	4.6
	110-119	43	17.9
	100-109	103	42.9
	90-100	63	26.3
	80-89	11	4.6
	<80	9	3.8
Majors	Science	129	53.8
	Arts	111	46.2

Note: The NCEE is the National College Entrance examination. This is an important examination in China, since the results determine if the student will be accepted by a college. The total score of English in the College Entrance Examination is 150, and the dividing line between pass and fail is 90.

4.1. Results of Listening and Speaking Competencies

The results of the descriptive analysis of the listening and speaking proficiency of the EG and CG students in the pre-test and post-test are shown in Table 4. This suggests that there was no significant difference in the pre-test scores of the experimental group ($M=43.36, M=2.51$) and the control group ($M=40.23, M=2.38$). However, there was a significant difference in the post-test, with the results of the experimental group ($M=50.89, M=2.90$) being better than those of the control group ($M=42.60, M=2.52$).

Table-4. Descriptive analysis of the results of listening and speaking in pre- and post-tests.

Variables	Group	Number	Mean (Pre-test)	SD	Mean (Post-test)	SD
Listening	EG	130	43.36	13.73	50.89	14.40
	CG	110	40.23	13.75	42.60	13.24
Speaking	EG	130	2.51	0.57	2.90	0.76
	CG	110	2.38	0.57	2.52	0.65

4.2 Independent Sample T-Test Of EG and CG Students as Pre-Test

An independent sample T-test was conducted before the experimental intervention as a pre-test to examine the average level of proficiency of the students in both the control group and the experimental group. If the pre-test scores of the different groups had no statistically significant difference after the pre-test, the pre-test scores could be used as the base line before introducing the independent variables to the teaching intervention (Shi, 2017). The results of the T-test indicated that there was no significant difference ($p>0.05$) between the experimental group

($M=43.36$, $M=2.51$) and control group ($M=40.23$, $M=2.38$) of listening and speaking respectively, which was the precondition for conducting the teaching experiment. The specific results are shown in Table 5.

Table-5. Results of Independent Sample T - test of EG and CG Students in the Pre - test.

Variables	Group	Mean	SD	df	F	t	p
Listening	EG	43.36	13.73	238	0.66	-1.76	0.080
	CG	40.23	13.75	238			
Speaking	EG	2.51	0.57	238	0.27	-1.79	0.074
	CG	2.38	0.57	238			

4.3. Paired Sample T-Test for the Pre-Test and the Post-Test

A paired -sample T-test was employed to both the experimental group and the control group after the experimental intervention to determine whether there was a significant difference before and after the intervention for each group. As shown in Table 6, there was no significant difference ($p>0.05$) in the results of the pre-post and post-test of the control group, but there was a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in the pre-test ($M=43.36$, $M=2.51$) and post-test ($M=50.89$, $M=2.90$) results of the experimental group, indicating that the listening and speaking of the students in the experimental group had greatly improved.

Table-6. Results of paired- sample T-test of listening and speaking of the control group and experimental group in the pre and post-tests.

Group	Variables	Mean (Pre-test)	SD	Mean (Post-test)	SD	df	t	p
EG	Listening	43.36	13.73	50.89	14.40	239	6.08	0.000
	Speaking	2.51	0.57	2.90	0.76	239	6.25	0.000
CG	Listening	40.23	13.75	40.60	13.24	111	-1.30	0.194
	Speaking	2.38	0.57	2.52	0.65	111	-0.12	0.898

4.4. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of EG and CG Students in the Post-Test

A one-way ANCOVA was applied in order to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the listening and speaking of the experimental group and the control group in the post-test after controlling the pre-test.

Table-7. Summary of the Results of a One-way ANCOVA of the Listening and speaking of EG and CG.

Variables	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Listening	Group	4097.09	11	4097.09	30.97	0
	Listening	14556.96	1	14556.96	110.05	0
	Group *Pre-test	2.27	1	2.27	0.17	0.897
	Error	31347.93	237	132.27		
	Total	582232	240			
Speaking	Group	8.62	1	8.62	21.18	0
	Speaking	25.86	1	25.86	63.55	0
	Group *Pre-test	0.04	1	0.74	1.82	0.178
	Error	96.44	237	0.4		
	Total	1924	240			

The homogeneity of the regression coefficient in the initial test represented that there was no significant difference between the listening and speaking performance of the experimental group and the control group. The

results of Listening ($F=0.17$, $p=0.897>0.05$) and Speaking ($F=1.826$, $p=0.178>0.05$) in the initial test presented in Table 7 indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups in the post-test after controlling the pre-test. The results of the covariance indicated that the application of the PERMA intervention had a significant effect on the Listening [$F(1, 237) = 30.97$, $p<0.001$] and Speaking [$F(1, 237) = 21.18$, $p<0.001$] of both groups but the performance of the students in the experimental group was significantly better than that of those in the control group as a result of the PERMA intervention.

5. RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEW

The aim of the semi-structured interview was to investigate the students' views of 3 issues after the PERMA intervention: 1) problems involved with English listening and speaking; 2) whether their English listening and speaking competency had improved after the intervention; 3) positive expectations of their English competency. The essential views of the 10 students from the EG during interviews conducted after the post-test were presented below. All of them had studied English for 11 years. The themes and sub-themes were analyzed based on the three interview questions.

RQ1. What do you find difficult about English listening and speaking?

The first question explored the theme of problems involved in students' English listening and speaking. Three sub-themes emerged: lack of English-speaking environment due to limited objective context; failure to keep pace with the speed of the listening material; and poor pronunciation and 'Chinglish'. All three were the obstacles to speaking English as shown in Table 8.

Table-8. Summary of students' view on the problems with their English listening and speaking.

Theme	Sub-themes	Numbers of Occurrences
Problems with English listening and speaking	Sub-theme 1: Lack of English-speaking environment due to limited objective context	10
	Sub-theme 2: Failure to keep pace with the speed of the listening material	5
	Sub-theme 3: Poor pronunciation and 'Chinglish'	5

Most of the students claimed that they had different problems with English listening and speaking, but they all conceded that there was no English-speaking environment due to the limited objective context. Participant 2 claimed that it was a fact that there was no English-speaking environment:

Participant 2: I find that there is no good language environment around me, and I hardly need to communicate and express myself in English after class.

Participant 1 and 9 confessed that they had failed to keep pace with the speed of the English audio scripts, leaving them nervous and frustrated. They stated that they had no idea of what was being said because English was a combination of liaison, contraction and reduction:

Participant 9: Compared with Chinese, English pronunciation and intonation are very different. Its intonation changes frequently in the audio script, which is a big obstacle in my English listening studies. I am often nervous when I do not understand the listening material.

Participant 10, 6 and 3 stated that they found poor pronunciation badly hindered their competency of listening and speaking since their reaction was a bit slow when listening to sentences and this poor foundation made it difficult to build an auditory image. Participant 3 exclaimed that he found poor pronunciation and "Chinglish" was a phenomenon that many students around had in common:

Participant 3: As my English pronunciation is not of good standard, I soon find that the pronunciation of the words in listening materials is different from my own pronunciation. Sometimes we also have an expectation to English speaking, but we often express English in the Chinese way.

RQ2. Has a semester of PERMA courses helped you to improve your English listening and speaking skills?

The second question explored whether students' English listening and speaking competency improved after PERMA intervention. Most students admitted that their English listening and speaking competency was developed in different aspects. Four themes emerged: being able to keep up the speed of audio script; could understand the key sentence and details; the English pronunciation being improved; English oral expression was being more native and Chinglish used less frequently. Table 9 presents the breakdown of themes exploring the second research question.

Table-9. Summary of students' view on the improvement of students' competency of English listening and speaking.

Theme	Sub-themes	Number of Occurrence
A. Improvement of listening	Sub-theme A1: Being able to keep up the speed of audio script	3
	Sub-theme A2: Could understand the key sentence and details	2
B. Improvement of speaking	Sub-theme B1: The pronunciation of English being more standard	2
	Sub-theme B2: English oral expression being more native and "Chinglish" used less frequently	2

Theme A: The improvement of listening

This was the first well-being program conducted in this university to improve students' English proficiency. As each student made different areas of progress, the themes were divided into two categories: improvement of listening and improvement of speaking. Participant 4 explained that she had made progress in listening because she could follow the speed of listening and became familiar with the English phonetic environment when she was immersed in English topic-based course.

Participant 4: Now I can gradually catch up with the speed of listening material, and have a certain degree of adaptation to the English intonation. Teacher often told us to imitate standard American pronunciation through dubbing activities. Even if I don't clearly hear the words and sentences in the exam, I won't feel so frustrated.

Participant 5 and 6 claimed they made advances in listening comprehension, especially in acquiring listening skills. Participant 6 expressed that she could listen for details of the listening material:

Participant 6: I have obviously improved my listening ability. I can not only understand the meaning of the article, but also listen to key sentences and detailed sentences clearly. During listening training, the error rate of detailed questions is significantly reduced.

Theme B: Improvement in speaking

With regard to speaking English, some of the students observed that their sense of the English language had enhanced compared to the speaking performance they had achieved when starting their college.

Participant 10 highlighted that the constant listening input could help him correct his pronunciation, and the students with good English foundation often helped him correct his pronunciation in group cooperation:

Participant 10: In the audio-visual class, I positively take part in group dubbing activities, and corrected my pronunciation by imitating and repeating the American English materials. The students in the team who are good at pronunciation often help me. When checking my reading assignments, my English teacher often corrects my mispronunciation. With the help of the teachers and students around me, my pronunciation has improved a lot.

Participant 1 and 9 asserted that their English oral expression was more native and they used Chinglish less frequently. Participant 9 emphasized that using 'immersion method' of language teaching and team work was an efficient way to make oral expression more native:

Participant 9: I believe that what the teacher teaches in class is in the way of full English instruction is very important for me to correct my Chinese English. As long as I listen to the teacher, I can correct the mistakes in everyday English

sentences at any time. Besides, teamwork also matters since there is something wrong with English expression, we will work together to look for relevant information, discuss with each other, and make progress together.

RQ3. What positive expectations do you have for your English ability? If so, how do you achieve it?

The third question discussed the positive expectations that student had for their language ability. The students' views of passing the National College English Test in the new semester and developing different language skills tended to overlap. Three themes emerged according to the data analysis: making a commitment to English listening and speaking; strengthening English writing and translating; English teachers needing to work harder on motivating their students in English class. In addition, the other theme was to develop personal growth. Table 10 shows the breakdown of themes exploring the third research question.

Table-10. Summary of students' view on the positive expectations that students hope for their future language skills.

Theme	Sub-themes	Numbers of Occurrences
A. Passing National College English Test	Sub-theme A1: Making a commitment to English listening and speaking	4
	Sub-theme A2: Strengthening English writing and translating	2
	Sub-theme A3: English teachers needing to work harder on motivating their students in English class	3
B. Personal growth	Sub-theme B1: English facilitating student's personal growth	1

Theme A: Passing National College English Test

In the context of China, students are either confident they can pass 'The National College English Test' successfully or cannot determine whether they can succeed. Therefore, many students wanted to pass the exam with a positive attitude, and meanwhile, the preparation for exam fueled their advancement in their English ability. Most of them held the view that listening and speaking were the priority they could consider.

Participant 8 claimed that organizing extracurricular study groups to practice oral English with classmates was the best way to study English and it was also beneficial for preparing to take the English test since it collaboratively reinforced the study of English:

Participant 8: I hope my English accent can be more native, so that I can confidently communicate with others in English, and get benefit from it to pass the examination. I think we should pay attention to cultivate the ability of self-study after class, and it is not enough to rely on the time in class alone. We will form an extracurricular study group to practice oral English together.

Participant 6 also thought that he would progress by committing effort and time to listening and writing to lay a solid language foundation. Participant 10 stressed that listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating was interrelated with each other. Writing and translation were the weaknesses in English learning, which needed more commitment:

Participant 10: My advantage in English studies is listening and speaking, so I could pay more attention to writing and translation next semester. First of all, I could increase my vocabulary, and recite some good examples and sentences; second, I believe that the improvement of writing and translation will promote my oral expression more and more accurately.

Some students proposed that English teachers need to work harder on motivating their students in English class. Participant 4 hoped teachers would design more activities that aroused students' motivation and interest in learning English because interest was the best teacher and participant 1 and 3 agreed:

Participant 4: I think it is necessary to arouse students' enthusiasm of English learning since the interest is the best teacher. I hope teachers can design more interesting classroom activities to stimulate everyone's interest from many aspects. There are a lot of boring classes in college. I hope teachers can make more efforts

in classroom design to increase the motivation of learning and reduce the anxiety of foreign language learning.

Theme B: Personal growth

Besides the positive expectations in language ability development, participant 7 believed that English would play a role in her future studies and personal growth:

Participant 7: I really want to see a broader world through higher education. English leaning changes the way of my thinking, and broadens my horizon, which makes me to be a better of myself. I think that the future of English learning tasks will be more difficult, but the ability to progress in English at the same time, also can exercise my courage and confidence, letting me become a more mature person.

6. DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to explore whether the PERMA model could make an intervention for Chinese students to improve their competency of listening and speaking, which provided an empirical evidence for Positive Language Education in different contextualization. MacIntyre et al. (2019) states that the question about how positive psychology will be applied in the second language acquisition should be given adequate attention. This research carried out a teaching experiment based on a curriculum building involving Positive Education, jointly with teacher and student evaluation, school management and formal curricula (Quinlan & Hone, 2020). As freshmen, most of the participants were positive in the teaching experiment and confident to speak in English. But many students did not have many new ideas and opinions on topics since they were high school graduates who just started their college life. They vigorously got involved in the activities assigned by teacher and were willing to share their ideas with others. Being connected with others is an embodiment of well-being.

Additionally, five aspects arose from the students' interviews. Firstly, the failure to speaking was due to the lack of an English-speaking environment. The next two points were a poor foundation of English pronunciation and unconsciously speaking in Chinglish. The poor foundation of English pronunciation was a phenomenon that most students faced in common, which was one of the reasons they failed to listen or speak confidently in the oral English classes. Hence, it can be inferred that these Chinese students were aware of the importance of speaking English, and they were motivated to practice and could correctly identify the obstacles in their success. As for the Chinglish, the transfer of the language between Chinese and English was a universal phenomenon in second language acquisition. Coder (1981) insists that learner's native language does play a role in affecting second language learning, and the language transfer featured by cross-linguistic influence is regarded as a vital theoretical part in the domain of SLA and language teaching and learning (Odlin, 2001).

Fourthly, after the PERMA intervention, the students felt less frustrated and their sense of language learning was better cultivated. They could follow the speed of the audio script and could find the main ideas or major details in listening process. With a more standardized English pronunciation, the expression of 'Chinglish' was less used frequently. These specific improvements in both listening and speaking competency indicate that the PERMA course was very conducive in developing students' language ability by actively cooperating, mutual help, and fully engagement.

The findings of the semi-structured interview were in line with the outcome of quantitative analysis. MacIntyre et al. (2019) proposes that the empirical test of Positive Psychology intervention by applying different method available is needed in different language learners across diverse cultures. The results of interview, used as the details of specific advances, continue to support and complement the outcomes of quantitative analysis in this study. The findings echoed the statement indicated by Oxford (2016) that psychological forces contribute learners to gain high well-being and make progress directly, improve their proficiency and enjoy the process of language leaning. The study highlights that PERMA intervention, as a well-being project, proves as a facilitator to develop college

students' competency of English listening and speaking in the context of China, which also provides a new horizon for Positive Education in language teaching.

Finally, the students had a clear objective to pass the English level test; moreover, they hoped to develop some basic skills in a well-rounded way. They proposed more requirements for teachers' classroom design. One student had sensed that English learning was beneficial for her personal growth, which echoed the aims of Positive Education. It can be inferred that students generally have some positive expectations both for the promotion of their academic achievement and personal growth after PERMA intervention. Well-being is the aim, outcome and contributor to the language process because the academics and development of character are of equal importance in Positive Education (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

7. CONCLUSION

In summary, the study aimed to improve the English listening and speaking performance of Chinese college students by the intervention of PERMA model and was conducted by a quasi-experimental research design with 240 participants (130 for EG, 110 for CG) as subjects of this research. After the 14-week teaching experiment based on the building PERMA curriculum in English course, the students' progress was mainly reflected in their academic performance. The English listening and speaking competencies of the students in the experimental group had greatly improved. The results of the qualitative interview continued to supplement the progress made by students in listening and speaking competency with the instruction of PERMA course. Students also claimed that they had positive expectations for future English competency.

The finding of this study is in line with the statement proposed by Mercer (2017) that positive psychology is a facilitator to fuel the language education by means of advancing emotional, social and psychological well-being for language learners. Intervened by PERMA model, the empirical study provides a lens for how to incorporate well-being with language project, and offers applied framework for the empirical study of Positive Language Education in community of China.

8. IMPLICATION

This study showed that the English proficiency of students' listening and speaking of experimental group had greatly improved after the intervention of the PERMA framework. However, the design of teaching activities, the insufficient students' involvement and the limited teaching time for freshmen were barriers to facilitate the Chinese students to learn. The future study should explore more activities centered on well-being in context of whole school communities. The whole school approach, including the changes of curriculum, teaching skills, teacher education, and community involvement should be explored. The longitudinal studies should be available to well-being embedded into ESL/EFL programs, because it is beneficial for researcher to observe and explore new findings by the Time Series Analysis.

Funding: The research was funded by WeiNan Normal University (Educational Science Research Project, Project Number: 2019JYKX014).

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Acknowledgement: The authors appreciate and acknowledge the support of the participants of WeiNan Normal University for their active involvements and in the teaching design and sincere support for the teaching practice.

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Appendix-A. Type of Questions in the Reading and Listening Module

Length	About 60-85 minutes
Number of questions	Variable
Type of questions- Reading tasks	<p>Read and select Candidates read a notice, label, memo or letter containing a short text and choose the sentence or phrase that most closely matches the meaning of the text. There are three possible answers.</p> <p>Gaps in sentences Candidates read a sentence with a missing word (gap) and choose the correct word to fill the gap. There are three or four choices for each gap.</p> <p>Multiple-choice gap-fill Candidates choose the right word or phrase to fill the gaps in a text. There are three or four choices for each gap.</p> <p>Open-gap fill Candidates read a short text in which there are some missing words (gaps) and write the missing word in each gap.</p> <p>Extended reading Candidates read a longer text and answer a series of multiple-choice questions, which are in the same order as the information in the text.</p>
Type of questions – Listening tasks	<p>Listen and select Candidates listen to a short audio recording and answer a multiple-choice question with three options.</p> <p>Extended listening Candidates listen to a longer recording and answer a series of multiple-choice questions based on it. The questions are in the same order as the information they hear in the recording.</p>

Note: The table referring to different question types setting for reading and listening module.

Appendix-B. Test Formats and Types of Tasks in the Speaking Module

Length	15 minutes	
Part I	Interview	Candidates answer eight questions about themselves (the first two are not marked).
	Questions	8
	Marks for part I	20% of the marks
Part II	Reading aloud	Candidates read eight sentences aloud.
	Questions	8
	Marks for part II	20% of the marks
Part III	Long turn 1	Candidates are given a topic to talk about for one minute and allowed 40 seconds for preparation.
	Questions	1
	Marks for part III	20% of the marks
Part IV	Long turn 2	Candidates are given one or more graphics (for example a chart, diagram or information sheet) to talk about for one minute and allowed one minute for preparation.
	Questions	1
	Marks for part III	20% of the marks
Part V	Communication activity	Candidates are required to give their opinions in the form of short responses to five questions related to one topic and are allowed 40 seconds for preparation.
	Questions:	5
	Marks for part V	20% of the marks

Note: The table showing that the speaking format is made up of five sections, each with a different set of questions.

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