

# Building Transformative Learning English Curriculum to Enhance Chinese College Students' English Listening, Speaking Proficiency and Critical Thinking Dispositions

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## Abstract

In the context of globalization, English, as a global language, plays an increasingly important role, with many countries making it a compulsory subject in their educational systems. However, the English proficiency of students in China, particularly in listening and speaking, is generally low. This study, based on Mezirow's transformative learning theory, aims to improve Chinese college students' English listening and speaking skills as well as their critical thinking abilities through a transformative learning curriculum. A panel of five scholars reviewed the course syllabus. The findings suggest that the comfortable and safe learning environment created within the transformative learning curriculum, combined with a student-centered approach, critical learning tasks, and authentic learning scenarios, significantly enhances student engagement and learning effectiveness.

**Keywords:** transformative learning curriculum, Chinese college students, English listening skills, English speaking skills, critical thinking dispositions

## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary global landscape, the ubiquity of English as a lingua franca is undisputed, with Na (2023) affirming its status as the most prevalent language worldwide. This prominence is further emphasized by Ibrohimova and Ziyaboyeva (2022), who argue that English is instrumental in shaping global employment opportunities, facilitating international mobility, and granting access to a vast repository of information. Piller, Zhang, and Li (2020), along with Taskiran and Goksel (2022), extend this viewpoint, noting English's critical role in international communication and as a cornerstone of both traditional and digital education systems globally. However, English proficiency, particularly in China, remains a concern. Wang et al. (2020) highlight the essential role of English proficiency in educational settings, from elementary through higher education, despite the alarming revelation by IELTS (2021) that Chinese students' performance in English, especially in speaking and listening, falls below the global average.

The persistence of traditional English language teaching methods, as critiqued by Huang (2022) and Zhang (2017), has led to a passive learning culture where students lack autonomy and fail to develop critical thinking skills. This pedagogical approach, characterized by an unquestioning acceptance of teacher authority, undermines the potential for innovative learning strategies and outcomes (Fan, 2019). The need for a paradigm shift is echoed in the advocacy for Transformative Learning (TL) as a means to foster a more engaged and reflective learning process, as proposed by scholars like King. (2002), Freire (1970), and Mezirow (1991). TL aims to catalyze cognitive and behavioral shifts in learners by encouraging a critical stance towards self and environment, which is particularly relevant in overcoming the challenges associated with learning English in Asia (Williams & Andrade, 2008; Foster, 1997).

This study aims to address the gap in applying Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) to English language teaching, particularly for enhancing listening and speaking skills among ESL college students in China. Despite the recognized challenges and the potential benefits of TLT in this context (King, 2000; Guiora, 1983), the scarcity of research on its

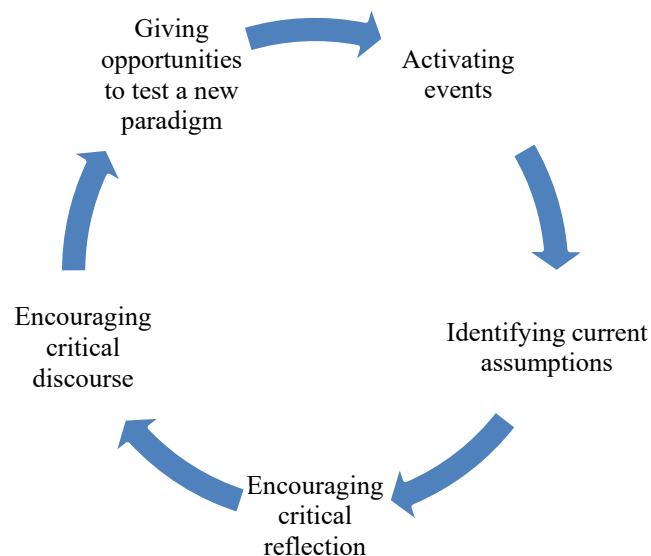
application underscores the significance of this study. By integrating TLT into ESL education, this study seeks to elevate students' proficiency in speaking and listening, as well as their critical thinking abilities, countering the limitations of traditional teaching methods and fostering a more dynamic, student-centered learning environment.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In this study, we explore the application of Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1991, 1994, 2008) to the teaching and learning of English, emphasizing the need for educators to create supportive, inclusive environments that promote critical reflection and dialogue. Taylor (2000) highlights the importance of a safe and supportive environment in facilitating transformative learning, especially through experiential activities. A significant challenge identified is the reluctance of Chinese students to participate in classroom discussions, affecting their English proficiency (Zhu & Sullivan, 2022). This issue is common in Chinese ESL classrooms and is attributed to cultural factors, including Confucian traditions and power dynamics, which influence students' willingness to speak up (Wang, 2019; Shachter, 2022).

To address these challenges, Mak (2011) suggests that educators should focus on reducing anxiety, as emotional factors play a crucial role in second language acquisition. Dewaele and Li (2022) argue for addressing both linguistic and emotional needs of students, while Touahar (2023) emphasizes the importance of creating a learning environment that encourages risk-taking and overcomes the fear of speaking.

Mezirow's theory encourages educators to introduce students to disorienting dilemmas to foster deep learning through critical reflection and dialogue, challenging the traditional, hierarchical model of education prevalent in Chinese culture (Hu, 2013). This traditional approach, focusing on rote learning and grammar translation, has been found ineffective for improving English speaking proficiency (Du, Zhao, Ruan, Wang, & Duan, 2017; Kessler, Solheim, & Zhao, 2021; Liu & Ren, 2021). Transformative learning theory suggests that designing tasks and real-life situations that promote dialogue and discussion in ESL classrooms can enhance motivation, participation, and critical thinking, thereby improving English proficiency.



**Figure 1.** Five-phase Learner's Transformative Construct

*Note.* Five-phase Learner's Transformative Construct. Adapted from "Teaching for Transformation: From learning theory to Teaching Strategies," by K. McGonigal, 2005, *Transformational Learning*, 14(2), pp. 2-3 ([https://www.oregonschoolofmassage.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SpeakingofTeaching\\_ResourceBkpdf.pdf](https://www.oregonschoolofmassage.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SpeakingofTeaching_ResourceBkpdf.pdf)). Copyright 2005 by Stanford University.

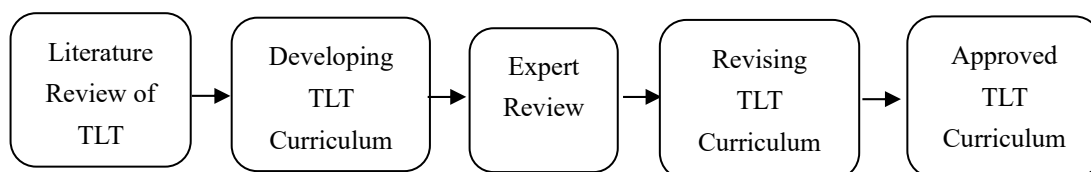
Mcgonigal (2005) simplified Mezirow's original ten phases of transformative learning theory into five key stages. Mezirow (1994) suggests that the main goal of transformative learning is to achieve a significant change in viewpoint or a paradigm shift. According to Megonigal (2005), this shift results from a series of steps: (a)

encountering an event that highlights the limitations of one's current knowledge or methods; (b) identifying and articulating the basic beliefs underlying one's current understanding; (c) deeply reflecting on the origins and impact of these beliefs; (d) engaging in critical discussions with peers and instructors about different ideas and approaches; (e) trying out and adopting new perspectives. These stages can be applied across various disciplines. The study incorporates Megonigal's (2005) five stages into its curriculum design, with specific teaching strategies derived from transformative learning theory illustrated in Figure 1.

This study outlines a curriculum incorporating a five-step transformative learning approach. The first phase, the Activating Event, engages students by challenging their beliefs, encouraging them to become active learners (Al-Hadi, 2018; Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015). The process progresses from Identifying Current Assumptions, where students articulate and examine their preconceptions (McGonigal, 2005), to Encouraging Critical Reflection, fostering personal reassessment of beliefs (Cox, 2021; Grabau, 2007). In the second step, Identifying Current Assumptions, students articulate and critically assess their existing beliefs, enhancing their analytical skills (McGonigal, 2005). The third step, Encouraging Critical Reflection, involves students in personal reflection on their beliefs, promoting critical thinking and self-confidence (Cox, 2021; Grabau, 2007). The fourth step, Encouraging Critical Discourse, facilitates social learning through dialogue and debate (Cranton, 2002; 2016; Taylor, 2013). The final phase, Giving Opportunities to Test a New Paradigm, allows students to apply new insights in practical contexts (Slavich, 2012; Mezirow, 2018). This design shifts the learning environment from teacher-centered to student-centered, emphasizing critical thinking, self-confidence, and open-mindedness through activities such as case studies, discussions, and role-play.

### 3. Methodology

This research is dedicated to enhancing the listening and speaking skills of Chinese university students by implementing a TLT-based English curriculum. The study is conducted in two stages. In the initial stage, an examination of TLT's theoretical framework and related literature on its application, alongside effective classroom tactics and methodologies, identifies approaches that can significantly improve the listening and speaking competencies of college students. Based on these insights, a curriculum and lesson plans are formulated. Subsequently, five seasoned language education professionals are asked to evaluate the proposed curriculum and lesson structures. Following their recommendations, adjustments are made to refine both the course curriculum and the lesson plans.



**Figure 2.** Research Framework  
TLT Curriculum Development

#### 3.1 Building a Transformative Learning Course Design Based on TLT

This study develops a transformative English Listening and Speaking course for first-year university English majors, grounded in an extensive literature review and the principles of Mezirow's transformative learning theory. The course structure integrates Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) strategies to enhance student engagement and initiative, aiming to boost confidence, critical thinking, and practical English skills. The curriculum, detailed in Appendix I and outlined over six thematic units, employs TLT's five teaching strategies across two sessions per unit, totaling three hours each. These strategies—activating events, challenging assumptions, promoting critical reflection and discourse, and testing new paradigms—are operationalized through case studies, group discussions, debates, role plays, and reflective presentations. Assessment combines formative methods, including participation and reflective journals, with summative approaches like oral presentations and listening quizzes. The pedagogical design follows TLT's deep learning cycle to elevate students from superficial to profound knowledge mastery, thereby enhancing critical thinking and language proficiency through active and participatory learning methods.

### 3.2 Experts' Validity of the Course Design

Expert validity refers to how well a curriculum, course, or questionnaire matches the needs of the field, as judged by a group of specialists chosen for their knowledge in the subject. In this study, five specialists, labeled A, B, C, D, and E, were asked to review a document assessing a new syllabus and curriculum framework inspired by TLT. They were tasked with evaluating the relevance and accuracy of the content, providing feedback on whether they agreed with it, suggested changes, or disagreed altogether. These experts, whose backgrounds and experiences in English teaching or education are detailed in Table 1, carefully examined the document. Their combined insights and assessments are summarized in Table 2. The Content Validity Index (CVI), which measures how well the items on the evaluation sheet meet expected standards, ranged from 0.8 to 1, as shown in Table 2. This range meets the criteria outlined by Polit, D. F., Beck, C. T., & Owen, S. V. (2007), where a CVI of 0.78 or higher, agreed upon by at least three experts, indicates strong content validity. Therefore, since the CVI for evaluating the syllabus and course structure meets the recommended threshold, it can be concluded that the material has been thoroughly evaluated for its suitability and relevance to the field. This process ensures that the educational materials being developed are not only grounded in solid theoretical foundations but also meet the practical requirements and standards of quality education. Thus, the syllabus and course design in question are confirmed to have robust content validity, demonstrating their suitability for the intended educational goals.

**Table 1.** Background of Experts Validated the Curriculum and Course Design

Expert	Gender	Education	Profession	Profession Title	Teaching age	Work unit
A	male	Ph.D.	Curriculum and teaching theory,	Professor	33	Normal University
B	male	Ed.D.	English education	Professor	35	Normal University
C	female	Ph.D.	Education management	Associate professor	15	Normal University
D	male	Master	English Literature	Professor	32	Normal University
E	male	Ph.D.	English linguistics	Lecture	16	Comprehensive Institution

**Table 2.** Background of Experts Validated the Curriculum and Course Design

Contents	Experts' Opinions			CVI
	Agree	Need Revision	Disagree	
Learning objectives	5			1
Teaching Contents	4	1		.80
Teaching Methods	5			1
Activities Assessment	5			1
Period	5			1
Lesson 1	5			1
Lesson 2	5			1
Lesson 3	5			1
Lesson 4	5			1
Lesson 5	5			1
Lesson 6	5			1
Lesson 7	5			1
Lesson 8	5			1
Lesson 9	5			1
Lesson 10	5			1

The expert panel reviewed the design of the TLT curriculum and the teaching design and teaching plan of five teaching units. In terms of the teaching content in the syllabus, the expert B suggests that the thematic issues of teaching content can be more critical and speculative. At the same time, he also suggested “Omit expressions like ‘Students try to...’ in teaching units; emphasize what students will learn, not just teaching objectives. And “when describing the teaching contents, we’d better use statements, not questions.” Although Expert D agrees with all the content, he suggests providing more detailed descriptions for each lesson. The other three experts agree with all the content of the course syllabus and lesson plans. The teaching units and content were adjusted and enhanced according to the revised feedback from experts, which was in line with previous teaching methods. Up to this point, all the experts unanimously agree that the design of teaching objectives is reasonable, the setting of situational tasks aligns closely with the teaching objectives, and the integration of critical challenging tasks into the TLT teaching curriculum can enhance the English listening and speaking abilities, as well as their critical thinking dispositions of college students. This achieves knowledge acquisition, fosters critical thinking, and simultaneously guides students towards the right values, thus achieving students' moral cultivation.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 The Objectives of the Transformative Curriculum Based on TLT

This paper focuses on evaluating students through learning objectives, which are essential for guiding students as they engage with educational material (Mitchell & Manzo, 2018). A key development in 2018 linked the IELTS with China’s Standards of English Language Ability (CSE), equating Senior Middle High School English to Level 4 of the CSE, aligning with IELTS 4.5 (Chen & Hu, 2020) and CEFR B1. This study classifies learning objectives into language and ability goals, detailed in Table 3. For language goals, we aim for students to reach CEFR B2 in listening, meaning they should understand complex speech on various topics, including specialized discussions (Council of Europe, 2001). Speaking goals also target CEFR B2, requiring students to provide clear, detailed presentations on subjects of interest, emphasizing key points with supporting details (Council of Europe, 2001).

The paper also emphasizes the importance of enhancing students’ cognitive skills, academic achievements, retention, and overall learning experience (Kalelioğlu & Gülbahar, 2014). It introduces targeted teaching strategies in English listening and speaking courses to develop students' critical thinking through seven dimensions: Analyticity, Open-mindedness, Truth-seeking, Systematicity, Self-confidence, Inquisitiveness, and Maturity, as the competency objectives. Details on these critical thinking dimensions are available in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Learning Objectives of the TLT Curriculum

Main capacities	Sub-capacities
A. Listening	A1: Grasp basic facts and specifics on common topics when spoken clearly in a familiar accent. A2: Understand key ideas of complex speech, including technical content, in a standard dialect.
B. Speaking	B1: Maintain a coherent description of a topic within the area of interest, presenting ideas in a logical sequence with reasonable fluency. B2: Offer clear, organized insights on relevant topics, highlighting main points with supporting details.
C. Critical thinking dispositions	C1: Truth-seeking: Seek knowledge with integrity and neutrality, ready to embrace findings that challenge personal views or interests without hesitation. C2: Open-mindedness: Adopt a tolerant attitude towards differing opinions and guard against the possibility of personal bias. C3: Analyticity: Possess the ability to identify issues, understand core problems and anticipate consequences through reasoning and evidence. C4: Systematicity: Effortfully address issues with organization and clear objectives. C5: CT self-confidence: Confident in one's ability to analyze rationally. C6: Inquisitiveness: Eagerly curious and passionate about learning, even when the practical benefits are not immediately clear. C7: Maturity: Judge cautiously, stay open to different solutions, and recognize the need for temporary decisions without full knowledge.

## 4.2 Applying TLT into Course Unit

The curriculum applied the dynamics of transformative learning within the ESL classroom context, segmented into five distinct units, each capability indicator is reasonably integrated into the course design. Through the study of five units, the program specifically aims to cultivate students' English listening and speaking abilities, as well as their capacity for critical thinking. For detailed information, please refer to Table 4.

### 4.2.1 Unit Content

Unit 1 highlights the transition challenges freshmen face when adapting to university life. Through integrating Teaching, Learning, and Technology (TLT), the unit emphasizes critical reflection, allowing students to reassess their perspectives on “new beginnings” (Joubert & Slabbert, 2017). This reflective process aids students in understanding and navigating the differences between high school and college, ultimately leading to a more profound comprehension of how to engage meaningfully with their college experience.

Unit 2 delves into the significance of hobbies and good habits within the educational framework. It underscores the role of a comfortable learning environment in fostering student engagement and the importance of reflective learning in understanding and developing positive habits. Taylor (1998) posits that the transition from knowledge to practice in transformative learning necessitates opportunities for students to apply their insights, which is facilitated through collaborative planning for habit cultivation.

Unit 3 addresses the challenges of public speaking and presentation in ESL contexts, emphasizing the need for an environment that promotes transformation over rigid methodologies (Islam, Ahmad, & Islam, 2022; Wang & Cranton, 2011). By engaging in discussions on personal topics such as friendship and love, students enhance their comprehension and communication skills through reflective learning and reasoned dialogue.

Unit 4 focuses on experiential learning through the analysis of English short films related to tourism, without the aid of subtitles (Pitchford, Owen, & Stevens, 2020). This real-world engagement empowers students, fostering a deeper understanding and motivation towards learning. Collaborative efforts in creating travel plans serve as a practical application of their acquired knowledge.

Unit 5 explores the application of transformative learning tools such as reflective questioning and role-playing to facilitate deep learning on controversial topics like fashion (Baumgartner, 2019). These methodologies encourage critical thinking and enhance teamwork and understanding among students, embodying the essence of transformative learning in ESL education.

The curriculum presents a comprehensive examination of transformative learning through a multi-unit ESL course, highlighting critical reflection, practical application, and the development of soft skills as pivotal elements in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes.

### 4.2.2 Pedagogy

Teaching involves guiding students from their initial level of understanding to achieving the goals of a course, which requires changing their skills and mindset (McGonigal, 2005). Different teaching methods may be preferred depending on the subject, but the transformative learning theory, as suggested by McGonigal (2005) and incorporating Mezirow's approach, can be universally applied. This theory advocates for creating a learning environment that promotes critical thinking, dialogue, and openness to new ideas. Our study applied this theory in English listening and speaking courses through five strategies: using real-life cases to connect theory with practice, fostering inquiry-based learning to encourage active participation and curiosity, solving problems to develop critical thinking, engaging in group discussions to enhance collaboration, and simulating real-world scenarios for practical application. These methods help students challenge their existing beliefs and assumptions, leading to a deeper understanding of the subject and a more profound learning experience.

### 4.2.3 Teaching Activities

Despite the emphasis on integrating classroom activities in English speaking classes, the views of teachers and students on these activities have often been overlooked (Huang & Hu, 2016). Immersive experiential activities are crucial for transformative learning, which aims to change students' perspectives and understandings (Taylor, 2000). This study explores various transformative teaching strategies including case studies, group discussions, debates, role plays, reflective journals, and oral presentations, offering a comprehensive approach to learning.

Case Studies: Employ challenging cases relevant to the course theme to stimulate reflective thinking, association, and questioning among students, acting as a catalyst for transformative learning (Rush, 2008). Facilitating discussions around the course theme helps students develop and share diverse understandings, promoting rational

communication and active listening (Arends, 2014).

**Debates:** Organize debates to challenge students' pre-existing beliefs, using evidence from different perspectives to enhance critical thinking.

**Role Play:** Utilize authentic materials for role-playing activities to simulate real-life scenarios, improving the authenticity and practical relevance of English learning.

**Reflective Journals:** Encourage reflection on class activities and personal beliefs, prompting students to consider new perspectives and revise their existing cognitions.

**Oral Presentations:** Present case studies for discussion, allowing students to express their viewpoints in a supportive environment, thus boosting their confidence and oral English skills.

This multifaceted approach not only involves students in active learning but also aims to transform their understanding and communication skills through critical thinking, reflection, and practical application.

#### 4.2.4 Assessment

Classroom Assessment is a strategy designed to help teachers understand how well students are learning and mastering course content (Angelo et al., 2012). This approach involves using techniques that match the goals and outcomes of the course. Studies on formative and summative assessments provide guidance on achieving these goals, especially in innovative learning environments, to improve student achievement (DiCarlo & Cooper, 2014).

This study distinguishes between formative and summative assessments for course evaluation. Formative assessment allows teachers to monitor and evaluate students' participation in class and group discussions, assessing both their speaking and listening skills. It also includes evaluating students' reflection logs after class to gain insights into their critical thinking and their ability to integrate new information with their existing knowledge.

Summative assessment incorporates two main evaluation tools: oral presentations and listening comprehension quizzes. Oral presentations assess students' ability to articulate their thoughts on specific topics and evaluate their speaking skills. Listening comprehension quizzes are used to measure students' listening skills, including their ability to grasp main ideas, understand the content, and make inferences.

Together, these assessment methods provide a comprehensive view of student learning, focusing on both the process and the product of education to enhance student success.

**Table 4.** Building Transformative Learning English Curriculum Based on the TLT

Units	Learning objectives	Class time (hours)	Teaching methods	Assessments
U1 New beginnings	A1 B1; C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6 and C7	3	Lesson 1: Activating events; Identifying current assumptions; Encouraging critical reflection; Lesson 2: Encouraging critical discourse; Giving opportunities to test a new paradigm;	Oral quiz; Group work Presentation; Paper examination
U2 Hobbies	A1 B1; C1, C2, C3,	3	Lesson 3: Activating events; Identifying current assumptions	Oral quiz; Group work Presentation;

**Table 4.** Building Transformative Learning English Curriculum Based on the TLT (Continued)

Units	Learning objectives	Class time (hours)	Teaching methods	Assessments
	C4, C5, C6 and C7		Encouraging critical Lesson 4: Encouraging critical discourse; Giving opportunities to test a new paradigm;	Paper examination
U3 Friendship and love	A1 B1; C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6 and C7	3	Lesson 5: Activating events; Identifying current assumptions; Encouraging critical reflection; Lesson 6: Encouraging critical discourse; Giving opportunities to test a new paradigm;	Oral quiz; Group work Presentation; Paper examination
U4 Tourism	A1 B1; C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6 and C7	3	Lesson 7: Activating events; Identifying current assumptions; Encouraging critical reflection; Lesson 8: Encouraging critical discourse; Giving opportunities to test a new paradigm;	Oral quiz; Group work Presentation; Paper examination
U5 Fashion	A1 B1; C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6 and C7	3	Lesson 9: Activating events; Identifying current assumptions; Encouraging critical reflection; Lesson10: Encouraging critical discourse; Giving opportunities to test a new paradigm;	Oral quiz; Group work Presentation; Paper examination

## 5. Discussion

This study adopts Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory as the theoretical perspective and, based on the Transformative Learning Model by McGonigal (2005), constructs a Transformative Learning course aimed at enhancing the English listening and speaking skills and critical thinking abilities of Chinese university students. The curriculum designed in this study aligns with the concepts and methods advocated by the theory. This research resonates with the study by Enkhtur & Yamamoto (2017) regarding the application of Transformative Learning in higher education contexts. Their study specifically highlights the broad prospects of Transformative Learning Theory in the teaching of a second language in higher education. This research advances the theory into practice. This study also confirms Wang's (2022) observation that Transformative Learning Theory has great potential in ESL English teaching at Chinese universities and can effectively enhance the English proficiency of Chinese university students.

Transformational learning theory advocates for a student-centered teaching philosophy. It emphasizes creating a comfortable and safe learning environment, using real-life scenarios to encourage active student participation. The student-centered curriculum construction system has been supported by previous research and is also a trend in future curriculum development (Schreiber, 2017). This approach aims to facilitate deep learning. Additionally, by introducing challenging topics, it seeks to develop students' critical thinking skills, thereby achieving cognitive transformation. The curriculum design in this study incorporates a student-centered teaching philosophy and integrates rational dialogue teaching strategies. This aligns with the findings of some scholars (Angeliki Anagnostopoulou, A., Hummel, H. G., & Martens, R, 2023; Gao & Chen, 2024; Kisirkoi & Mse, 2016; Taylor, 1983), which confirmed that a student-centered approach, incorporating communication elements into language classes, can effectively enhance ESL (English as a Second Language) learning outcomes. In addition, in 2018, the Ministry of Education in China released a directive titled 'Opinion on Advancing the Enhancement of Talent Development Capacity through Accelerated Construction of High-quality Undergraduate Education.' This guideline stresses the significance of implementing a student-focused strategy to significantly improve the quality of higher education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018). As a result, there has been a growing trend in higher education institutions to adopt teaching approaches that prioritize the needs and perspectives of students (Sun & Liu, 2021). These all resonate with the curriculum construction in this study. Angeliki et al. (2023) confirmed that authentic language settings, along with the establishment of specific task themes to challenge students to think and



participate, can effectively enhance the learning outcomes of ESL students.

The research objectives of this study align with the focal points of previous research in ESL education, where listening and speaking skills have consistently been identified as weaknesses among Chinese ESL students. According to Wang & Chen (2024), the listening and speaking proficiency of Chinese ESL university students is notably weak, making it an important target for enhancement in ESL instruction. In 2010, the National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) by the Chinese Ministry of Education underscored the need to cultivate critical thinking and creativity.

In the classroom, the teacher undertakes two primary roles: conducting teaching activities and managing the classroom (Setyaningsih & Suchyadi, 2021). In this study, six teaching activities were designed in the curriculum. These teaching activities are consistent with previous ESL instructional arrangements and also corroborate the findings of past TLT research. The case in this study can be a task, project, topic, etc. They are challengeable and easy to make students get stuck into a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1978). Previous studies (Greenier, 2020; Shaalan, 2020) have shown that setting tasks or discussion topics is a highly effective teaching method in ESL instruction and ESL curriculum design. Transformational Learning Theory promotes rational discourse (Mezirow, 1978; Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020). This study incorporates rational dialogue into the ESL curriculum design through the format of group discussions, adhering to the theoretical principles of transformative learning theory while also aligning with previous research in ESL instructional courses. This study incorporates debate as a teaching activity into the curriculum design, which is consistent with previous research that has demonstrated debate to be effective in enhancing ESL outcomes. As what El Majidi, Janssen, & de Graaff, (2021) state is that debate is widely recognized as a powerful educational technique that enhances the argumentation skills of students in their second language (L2). Incorporating debate into the curriculum design is also consistent with the findings of Argyropoulou (2021). In adult transformational learning courses, Argyropoulou introduced debate into classroom instruction and found that debate, as an effective teaching method, can efficiently transform students' perspectives, making them more critical. Finally, this study incorporates role play, reflective journals, and oral presentations into the curriculum design. These results are consistent with the findings of current scholars in both ESL courses and transformative learning research (Alabidi, Owais, Alabidi, & Taani, 2022; Alam, Karim, & Ahmad, 2020; Gonzalez, Walker, Rodriguez, Noah, & Marantz, 2021; Crane & Sosulski, 2020; Hammad, 2020; Saravanamuthu, 2015). These studies effectively validate the rationality and potential practicality of this curriculum design. Finally, education and assessment are closely linked, making it impossible to fully understand one without considering the other (Mohamadi, 2018). Whether it's summative assessment, which focuses on accreditation and validation, or formative assessment, aimed at enhancing learning, assessment plays a central role in education (Gikandi, Morrow, & Davis, 2011). Mohamadi. (2018) found that incorporating both summative and formative assessments into EFL curriculum is both effective and necessary. This study designed both summative and formative assessments within the transformative learning course, meeting the requirements for course design integrity (Gikandi et al., 2011) while also aligning with the findings of previous researchers.

## 6. Conclusion

The results of this study show that transformative learning curriculum can be effectively adapted and applied to ESL teaching environments in Chinese universities. This study is vital as it enhances ESL students' listening, speaking, and critical thinking skills, essential for effective communication and modern workforce demands. It innovatively incorporates transformative learning theory into task-based curriculum design, enriching teaching methods and fostering student engagement. To improve, researchers must refine student-centered teaching strategies, create better learning environments, optimize task and topic relevance, and develop comprehensive language skills, including reading, writing, and intercultural communication.

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