

***The Effect of Group Poster Competition on Student Motivation in a Rural Primary School
in Southwest China***

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Abstract

Motivation has always played an essential role in determining students' academic performance. The intent on boosting student motivation has led to different pedagogies. This study focuses on how group poster competition designed for 27 sixth grade students in a rural elementary school in China may affect students' levels of motivation in English classes. The group poster competition took place for six consecutive weeks from May to June 2023. The students were divided into 9 groups. Each group drew a poster weekly and presented their posters to the class to review the learning points in it. All students rated the presentations based on a rubric. The winning group received creative certificates of merit at the end of the semester. Although their final exam scores in Spring 2023 term did not show great improvements from the last one, a majority of them reported increased interest in learning English and improved classroom learning behavior during its implementation. My observation during the intervention period corroborated their reflections, as they completed homework more often, concentrated in English class more often and got higher scores in mock exams. I would recommend other teachers to incorporate group poster competition as a means of teaching into classes with students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and of different age groups to explore whether it fits in such contexts. Overall, implementing group poster competition may help students show more positive learning behaviors and perform better in tests, but it only shows a correlation and not a causal relationship.

Keywords: Motivation, Primary School Education, Classroom Learning Activity

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Introduction

Motivation always plays a crucial role in determining students' academic achievement. Before facilitating further discussion, I will first clarify the definition of motivation. According to Schunk et al. (2014), "motivation is the process whereby goal-directed activities are instigated and sustained" (p. 5). In my sixth grade English class, I observed that 55% of all students in the class, or roughly 15 students, who did poor in English tests did not lack the intelligence or ability to learn English well. What they did lack was the motivation to learn English, as demonstrated in their inadequate homework completion, lack of concentration in class and low test scores. The reason may be that for most students in my school, English is a foreign language which they may never use after leaving school.

Their lack of motivation led me to think of a way to engage them through interesting, interactive teaching. I also wanted to increase their peer collaboration through group work, as individual participation could spark their interest in active learning and make them work harder. Also, as Harada & Yoshina (2004, p. 22) noted, cooperative learning among students could increase students' creativity and add to the richness of in-class activities. Group poster competition was my solution to change them from passive knowledge receivers to active language learners.

Group poster competition worked in this way: The 27 students were divided into 9 groups. Each group drew a poster weekly and presented their hand-painted posters to the class to review the learning points in it. All students rated the presentations based on their content and clarity. The winning group received creative, hand-written certificates of merit and reward at the end of the semester. I was curious to learn how group poster competition as a means of teaching may affect students' level of motivation.

Teaching Context

The targeted population of this study consisted of 27 students in sixth grade in a rural primary school in Guangxi, China. Among them, 11 were females and 16 were males, mostly from low socioeconomic background. 22 students were left-behind children whose parents left their hometown and became migrant workers in nearby cities. Among the parents of the 27 students, 10% cared about their child's English grades in school, and 2 of them gave support to their child's English learning activities through homework assistance or finding paid after-school tutoring.

There were four English classes for grade 6 every week. Each English class lasted 40 minutes. The textbook used was PEP Primary School English published by People's Education Press. The components of each English class included presentation through lecturing, practice through teacher-student interaction and summary and homework. The goal of sixth grade English class was to let students master the form, pronunciation and meaning of certain key words and sentence patterns. Daily teaching activities aimed at helping them become fluent English speakers and efficient language users. The classroom learning activities were generally goal-oriented and test-oriented, as sixth-grade students took the Middle-School Entrance Examination in early July. There were two county-wide standardized exams each semester, which served as the main measurements of students' academic achievements.

Research Question

Whether group poster competition in sixth grade English class has an effect on improving student learning and motivation and how?

Research Method

Overview

Before implementing the project, I presented the average scores and passing rate in the students' last final exam in Fall 2022 term in a table. At the end, all students took the final exam in Spring 2023 term, the result of which was compared with that of Fall 2022 term. Due to the limitations of the test statistics gathered in the Spring 2023 final exam, I could only give a quantitative description of students' test score statistics. The result was supposed to demonstrate how group poster competition affected student motivation to learn English in a rural primary school. The conclusion was based on the students' test scores and qualitative data gathered from random student interviews throughout the intervention and a final motivation survey.

Duration of the Intervention Program

The group poster competition took place for six consecutive weeks from May to June 2023.

Method for Assessing the Levels of Student Motivation

In this study, the assessment of students' level of motivation included both a quantitative component and a qualitative one.

The quantitative assessment of students' level of motivation included comparing the average score and passing rate in the students' most recent standardized final exam for Spring 2023 term, with respect to their final exam results in Fall 2022 term.

The qualitative part of the assessment consisted of a formative assessment in the form of student interview questions (Appendix A) asked and answered during the intervention period and a summative assessment in the form of a motivation survey (Appendix B) given and collected at the end of the sixth week after implementing the program.

During the intervention period, I interviewed 6 students on their motivation level in learning English. At the end of the sixth competition, I carried out a survey asking all 27 students to assess their current level of motivation. I asked them to read each statement, tick the choice that best represented their current state and write down their feedback on their current level of motivation in relation to the group poster competition at the end of the survey.

Findings

Analysis of Test Statistics

Below were aforementioned score statistics of the 27 students from the final exam in Fall 2022 term.

Variables	Average Score	Median Score	Highest Score	Lowest Score	Passing Rate
Statistics	51	44.5	94	25	33.3%

Table 1. Students' test statistics in the final exam of Fall 2022

The average score of the class was 51 and the median score was 44.5. The highest score was 94 and the lowest score was 25. The passing rate (percentage of students scoring 60 or higher) was 33.3%.

Below were the score statistics of the 27 students from the most recent final exam in Spring 2023 term.

Variables	Average Score	Median Score	Highest Score	Lowest Score	Passing Rate
Statistics	53	45	87	27	37.0%

Table 2. Students' test statistics in the final exam of Spring 2023

The average score of the class was 53 and the median score was 45. The highest score was 87 and the lowest score was 27. The passing rate was 37.0%. For this study, we focused on the average score and the passing rate of the class.

The average score increased from 51 to 53, and the passing rate increased from 33.3% to 37.0%. However, we couldn't say whether the increase was statistically significant or not because we couldn't say between the two tests whether there were other factors affecting students' scores. So we could only give a qualitative description of students' test performance.

Student Interview Questions and Answers

I interviewed 6 students during the proceeding of group poster competition. As for Question 1, 5 of them said they enjoyed the activity, and 1 said it was OK. The reasons given for enjoying it were the interactive form of the competition and their autonomy in designing the posters. The reason given for the OK answer was that the competition helped in reviewing the knowledge, and the interviewee didn't have a particular interest in the competition. For Question 3, all 6 interviewees expressed increased enthusiasm in learning English during the competition.

Results of the Motivation Survey

All 27 students completed the survey. For the statement "I enjoy group poster competition." 19 selected "Strongly agree", 6 selected "Agree" and 2 selected "Disagree".

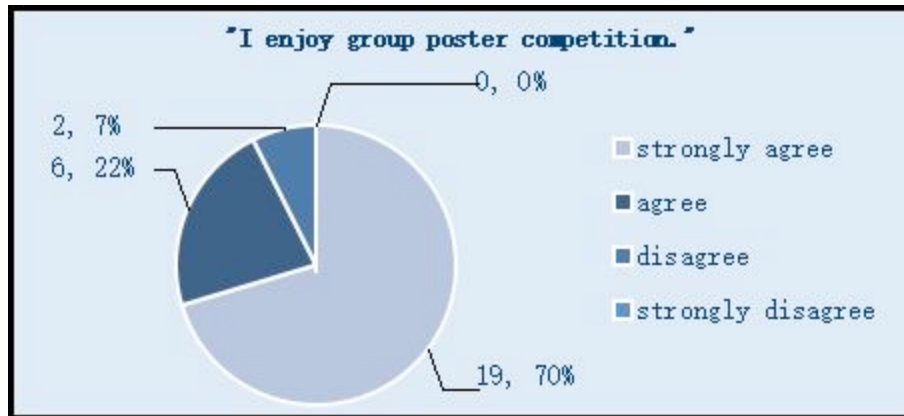


Figure 1: I enjoy group poster competition. (n=27)

For the statement "Group poster competition increases my interest in English language learning.", 18 chose "Strongly agree", 4 chose "Agree" and 5 chose "Disagree".

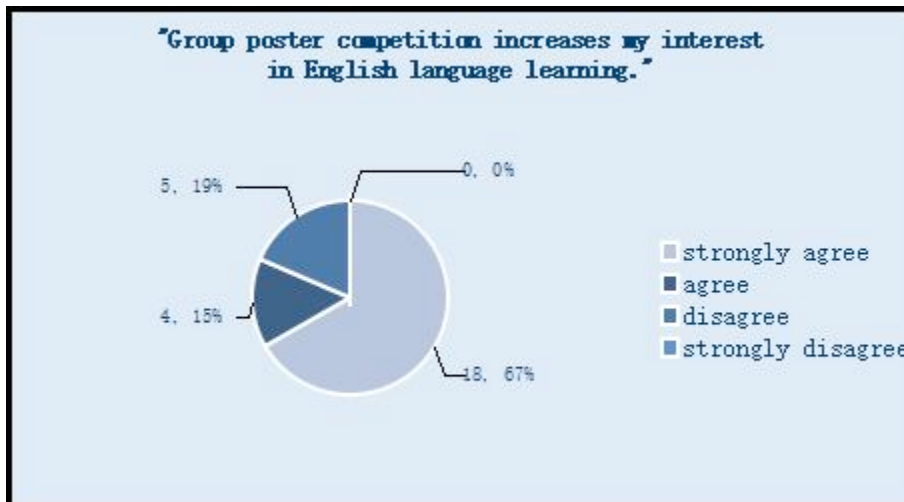


Figure 2: Group poster competition increases my interest in English language learning. (n=27)

For the statement "Group poster competition helps me learn English.", 16 selected "Strongly agree", 7 selected "Agree" and 4 selected "Disagree".

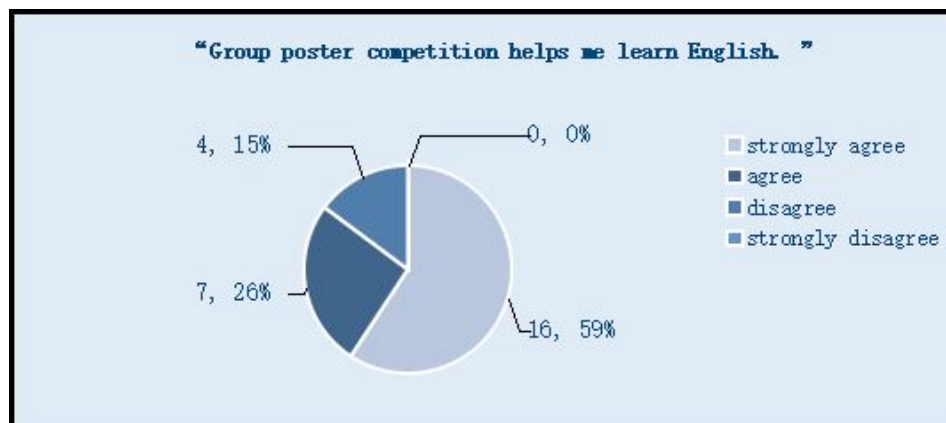


Figure 3: Group poster competition helps me learn English. (n=27)

For the statement “During the group poster competition, I complete my homework more often”, 14 chose “Strongly agree”, 7 chose “Agree” and 6 chose “Disagree”.

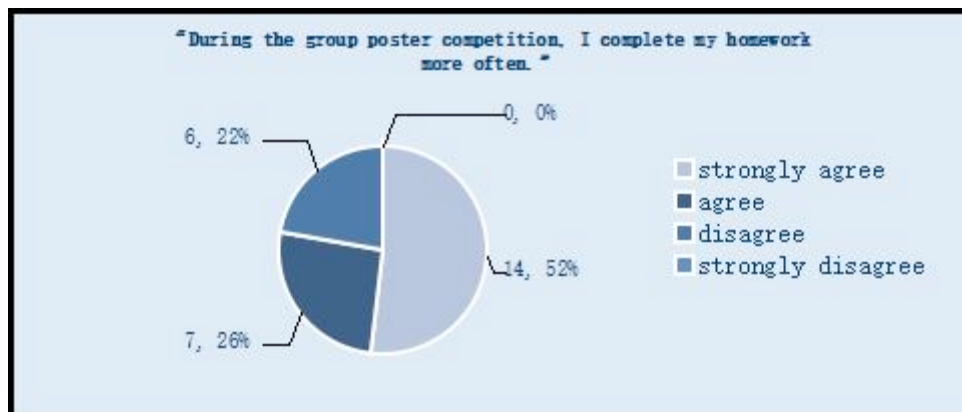


Figure 4: During the group poster competition, I complete my homework more often. (n=27)

For the statement “During the group poster competition, I concentrate in English class more often.”, 15 selected “Strongly agree”, 4 selected “Agree” and 8 selected “Disagree”.

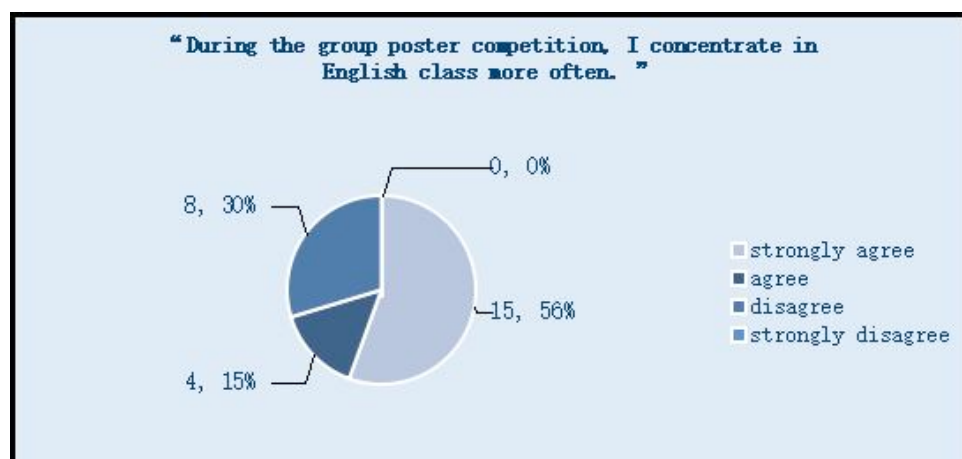


Figure 5: During the group poster competition, I concentrate in English class more often. (n=27)

For students’ written feedback on the program, most students wrote that the competition did spark their interest in learning English. They self-reported that during the intervention period, they felt more involved in classroom through peer collaboration and they loved to participate more in English class to get a sense of achievement after reviewing materials in their posters before the entire class. All these interactions empowered them and increased their self-efficacy in learning English. After all, as Black (2004, p.40) found, making students feel engaged in classroom learning sparked their intellectual curiosity and promoted effective ingestion of knowledge.

Conclusion

From my observation in the intervention period, students showed improved classroom learning behavior and better performance in tests. Specifically, they completed their homework more often, concentrated in English class more often and got higher test scores in mock exams. Besides, my students really enjoyed the interactive learning environment and

increased participation in class, as they raised hands more frequently in classroom interactions with me and shared their opinions more actively in group discussions. Their most remarkable improvement was their change from showing visible stage fright in the first competition to becoming comfortable and confident about public speaking in the end.

As we can see in the data and figures, most students show a positive attitude towards group poster competition. A majority of them report increased interest and improved learning behavior during its implementation. There is a tendency in the motivation survey that as the statements on students' English learning behavior become more specific, the number of students disagreeing with the statements steadily increases. Perhaps as students get more reflective of their actual performance in English class, they come up with more details that contrast with the statements. Overall, I would recommend other teachers to incorporate group poster competition as a means of teaching into classes with students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and of different age groups to explore whether it fits in such contexts.

Discussion

This research only focuses on small-size, rural primary school class, so its applicability in larger classrooms and different school settings is still unclear and opens for further research. Meanwhile, developing different dimensions of assessing changes in student motivation levels is another possible area of exploration.

Furthermore, some researchers have proposed ways of motivating students that may be used in combination with group poster competition to see their effects in the future. For example, Kobus et al. (2008) demonstrate through their study that "creative engagement, student self-assessment and positive reinforcement" contribute to students' better academic performance, improved learning behavior and increased self-efficacy. For another instance, Biehler and Snowman (2015, pp. 398-402) suggest that means of motivating students specifically through positive reinforcement include offering effective praise, establishing a series of short-term learning goals for students to reach step by step, encouraging collaboration in classroom discussions through active contribution of opinions, etc. All these are valuable motivating strategies to be further studied in combination with group poster competition.

Appendix A

Student Interview Questions

学生面试问题

1. What do you think of the group poster competition so far?
1. 到目前为止，你觉得小组海报竞赛怎么样？
A. I enjoy it! B. It is OK. C. I don't like it.
A 我觉得不错！ B 一般般啦。 C 我不喜欢。
2. Why do you give such answer in question 1?
2. 为什么会给出问题 1 里的答案呢？
3. Do you think group poster competition increases your enthusiasm in learning English?
3. 你认为小组海报竞赛是否提升了你学习英语的兴趣？
A. Yes! B. Not really.
A. 是的！ B. 没有。

Appendix B

Motivation Survey

学习动力调查

Read the following statements. Please tick under the choice that applies.

阅读下列陈述。请在你认同的选项下面打√。

No. 序号	Statement 陈述	Strongly Agree 非常同意	Agree 同意	Disagree 不同意	Strongly Disagree 非常不同意
1.	I enjoy group poster competition. 我享受小组海报竞赛这个活动形式。				
2.	Group poster competition increases my interest in English language learning. 小组海报竞赛让英语学习更有趣了。				
3.	Group poster competition helps me learn English. 小组海报竞赛让我学到了英语知识。				

4.	During the group poster competition, I complete my homework more often. 小组海报竞赛开始后，我完成英语作业更主动了。				
5.	During the group poster competition, I concentrate in English class more often. 小组海报竞赛开始后，我上课听讲更专注了。				

6. Please provide a detailed description of your current level of motivation in learning English after the group poster competition, as compared to your level of motivation before it. Please also write down any feedback you would like to let me know for group poster competition.

请详细描述一下在小组海报竞赛开展之后，你现在英语学习的动力与小组海报竞赛开展之前相比，有什么变化？也请写下你对于小组海报竞赛的任何想写的反馈。

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