

Enhancing College English Teachers' Instructional Adaptability through Positive Psychological Resources

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Abstract

In today's college English classroom, many teachers face a familiar set of problems. Students may look at the screen but lose attention quickly. Some students avoid speaking because they are afraid of making mistakes. Others depend too much on translation apps or wait for the teacher to give the answer. These situations make teaching adjustment a real part of daily work, not just a theoretical issue. Based on positive psychology, psychological capital theory, teacher adaptability studies, and research on language teacher emotion regulation, this paper discusses how positive psychological resources may support college English teachers' instructional adaptability. The paper focuses on hope, optimism, resilience, self-efficacy, professional meaning, and supportive relationships. It argues that these resources help teachers keep teaching goals in mind, read classroom problems more calmly, control negative emotions, and choose more suitable teaching strategies. The paper also suggests practical ways to improve classroom interaction, language scaffolding, feedback, teacher learning communities, and school-based support.

Keywords

Positive psychological resources, college English, instructional adaptability, emotion regulation; teacher development.

1. Introduction

College English teaching in China has changed a lot in recent years. Curriculum goals have become broader. Digital platforms and online resources have entered ordinary classrooms. Students also bring different learning habits into class. The College English Teaching Guidelines describe College English as more than a language course. It should help undergraduates improve English application ability, intercultural awareness, and autonomous learning competence [1]. This goal is valuable, but it also places more demands on teachers [2].

Digital tools have given teachers more materials and more choices. At the same time, these tools have not solved all classroom problems. In many classes for non-English majors, students differ greatly in vocabulary, confidence, and motivation. Some students can follow a listening task but do not want to speak. Some students understand the topic in Chinese but cannot express it in English. A discussion activity may look good in a lesson plan, yet it may become quiet after the first question. A speaking task may need to be changed into pair work or guided practice. A teacher may also have to slow down the lesson when students' responses show that the task is too difficult.

These examples show one simple point. Teaching reform cannot depend only on curriculum documents, digital resources, or teaching models. These things matter, but they work through teachers' classroom decisions. A good design becomes useful only when the teacher can notice students' reactions, adjust the task, give enough support, and keep the class willing to try. For this reason, college English teachers need instructional adaptability.

In this paper, instructional adaptability means teachers' ability to adjust their thinking, teaching behavior, emotions, and later reflection when classroom situations change. For college English teachers, this ability includes several small but important actions. Teachers may rejudge a silent classroom, change a question, reduce task difficulty, add sentence frames, change feedback, calm themselves down, or revise the next lesson after reflection. It is not one teaching technique. It is a practical professional ability that appears in ordinary classroom moments.

Positive psychology offers a useful angle for this issue. It does not deny pressure, burnout, or classroom difficulty. It asks another question: what helps teachers continue to teach well when the classroom is difficult? Positive psychology pays attention to strengths, positive emotions, meaning, engagement, resilience, and relationships [3]. From this view, teachers are not only people who receive pressure from students, schools, or reform policies. Teachers also have inner and social resources that help them understand problems and respond to them.

This paper is a discussion paper. It connects positive psychological resources with college English teachers' instructional adaptability. It also puts forward several school-based and classroom-based suggestions. The purpose is not to claim that positive psychology can solve every teaching problem. Rather, the paper argues that teachers need both teaching strategies and psychological support if they are expected to adapt to complex classrooms.

2. Conceptual Foundations

2.1. Positive Psychological Resources

Positive psychology is often introduced as the study of human strengths and positive functioning. In the context of teaching, this idea can be used in a concrete way. It asks what resources help teachers stay engaged, recover from frustration, and keep improving.

In college English teaching, positive psychological resources refer to the inner and relational resources that support teachers when they meet classroom difficulty. This paper focuses on hope, optimism, resilience, self-efficacy, professional meaning, and supportive relationships. These resources are not separate from teaching. They shape the way teachers explain classroom events and decide what to do next.

Psychological capital theory gives a clear frame for understanding part of these resources. Luthans and Youssef-Morgan [4] explain psychological capital through hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Their point is useful for teacher development because these qualities are not fixed once and for all. They can be developed through experience, reflection, training, and support.

For college English teachers, hope helps teachers hold on to a teaching goal and look for another way when the first plan does not work. Optimism helps teachers see a quiet class as a problem that may be improved, rather than as proof that students cannot learn. Resilience helps teachers recover after an activity fails. Self-efficacy gives teachers the confidence to try a different method during class. Professional meaning reminds teachers that College English is connected with communication, confidence, and future learning, not only with tests. Supportive relationships give teachers a place to talk, ask, and learn from others.

2.2. Instructional Adaptability

Adaptability means the ability to respond to change. In teacher research, Collie and Martin [5] describe teacher adaptability as teachers' ability to adjust thoughts, behaviors, and emotions in changing and uncertain teaching situations. This description fits college English teaching well. A lesson plan can never fully predict students' vocabulary level, attention, confidence, or willingness to speak on a given day.

Instructional adaptability can be understood through four related aspects. One aspect is cognitive adaptability. It means that teachers can judge the classroom situation and explain

problems in a reasonable way. For example, when students keep silent, a teacher should not immediately say that they are lazy. The teacher may ask several questions first. Is the topic too abstract? Are the instructions clear? Do students have enough words? Is the classroom atmosphere safe enough for oral English practice?

Another aspect is behavioral adaptability. It refers to the visible changes teachers make in class. Teachers may simplify a task, give an example, change individual work into pair work, slow down the pace, or use a different feedback method. These adjustments are small, but they often decide whether students can enter the activity.

A third aspect is emotional adaptability. College English teachers often meet silence, low participation, and uneven responses. These moments can make teachers anxious or disappointed. Teacher emotions influence classroom behavior and teaching quality, and recent research also links teacher emotions with teaching quality [6]. So emotional adaptability is not only a personal trait. It is part of professional teaching ability.

The last aspect is reflective adaptability. A teacher may not always make the best choice during class. After class, the teacher can still look back and ask what happened. The teacher can think about which step was too difficult, which question was unclear, and what support should be added next time. In this way, instructional adaptability is both an immediate classroom response and a long-term learning process.

2.3. Language Teacher Emotion Regulation

Language teaching carries a strong emotional load. Teachers teach language knowledge, but they also handle learner anxiety, silence, uneven participation, classroom atmosphere, institutional expectations, and their own pressure. Gross [7] explains emotion regulation as the process in which people influence what emotions they have, when they have them, and how they express them. This idea is useful for understanding teacher behavior in difficult classroom moments.

Language teacher research has paid more attention to this topic. Greenier, Derakhshan, and Fathi [8] found that emotion regulation and psychological well-being are related to language teachers' work engagement. This finding is meaningful for College English teachers. A classroom problem often needs more than a technical solution. It also needs the teacher to manage frustration, embarrassment, or worry.

A speaking activity gives a simple example. If no student answers, the teacher may feel that the class is refusing to cooperate. This interpretation can increase negative emotion. The teacher may then ask fewer questions or turn the activity into explanation. But the same silence can also be read differently. Students may lack useful phrases. They may not understand the task. They may fear losing face. If the teacher can make this second judgment, the next action will probably be different. The teacher may give sentence starters, allow pair discussion, or accept short answers first. Here, emotion regulation and teaching adjustment work together.

2.4. Professional Learning Communities and School-Based Support

Teachers cannot develop instructional adaptability by personal effort alone. Stoll et al. [9] point out that professional learning communities can build teachers' individual and collective capacity for improvement. In such communities, teachers share problems, discuss practice, and support each other.

For college English teachers, this kind of support is very practical. Problems such as weak interaction, low willingness to speak, large classes, uneven proficiency, and digital distraction are not one teacher's private failure. They are common teaching problems. Wen [10] also suggests that professional learning for college foreign language teachers should move beyond individual experience and rely more on collaborative and reflective mechanisms.

When teachers bring real classroom cases to a teaching group, they can compare different ways of handling the same problem. One teacher may use a keyword card before speaking. Another may use peer rehearsal. A third may use written preparation before oral sharing. These experiences can become shared knowledge. In this way, adaptability becomes less lonely and more sustainable.

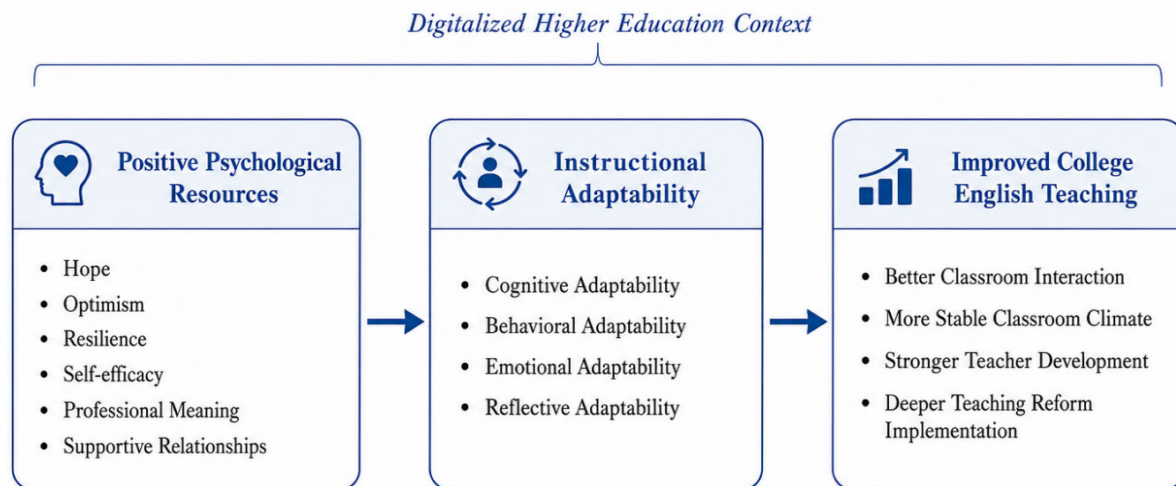


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Positive Psychological Resources and Instructional Adaptability

Figure 1 shows the basic logic of this paper. Positive psychological resources support teachers' cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and reflective adjustment. These adjustments may improve classroom interaction, classroom climate, teacher development, and the classroom implementation of College English reform.

3. How Positive Psychological Resources Enhance Instructional Adaptability

3.1. Hope Maintains Instructional Goals and Opens Alternative Pathways

Hope is closely connected with goal-directed thinking. In college English teaching, a teacher often has a clear goal at the beginning of a lesson. The goal may be to help students understand a listening passage, discuss a cultural topic, or finish a short oral task. The difficulty is that the planned route may not work. Students may not know enough words. They may not understand the question. They may also be unwilling to speak in front of classmates.

A hopeful teacher does not give up the goal at once. The teacher asks, "Can I reach the same goal in another way?" If an open discussion fails, the teacher may give key words or a short model answer. If individual speaking is too stressful, the teacher may allow pair discussion first. If the task is too large, the teacher may divide it into two or three steps. Hope, in this sense, does not mean blind confidence. It means the teacher still believes that adjustment is possible.

3.2. Optimism Encourages Positive Reinterpretation of Classroom Difficulties

Optimism affects the way teachers explain classroom events. In College English classes, silence and low participation are easy to read in a negative way. A teacher may think that students do not care about English. Sometimes this may be partly true, but it is not the only possible explanation. Silence may also show that students have not prepared enough, do not understand the question, lack language support, or feel afraid of making mistakes.

This more positive reading matters because interpretation leads to action. If a teacher treats silence as resistance, the teacher may become impatient and reduce interaction. If the teacher treats silence as a sign of difficulty, the teacher is more likely to adjust the task. The teacher may change an open question into a guided question, give two choices, or let students write one sentence before speaking. Optimism therefore supports cognitive adaptability and leads to more useful classroom behavior.

3.3. Resilience Supports Recovery from Classroom Setbacks

Resilience means that teachers can recover after setbacks and continue their work. College English teachers may meet repeated frustration. A carefully prepared speaking activity may receive only a few short answers. A group discussion may become quiet after two minutes. Some students may look at their phones when the teacher expects interaction. If these experiences happen often, teachers may stop trying communicative activities and return to teacher explanation.

Resilient teachers are more likely to treat an unsuccessful activity as information. A failed discussion may show that the topic is too far from students' life. A cold response may show that students need more examples. A disrupted pace may show that the task order should be changed. This attitude helps teachers turn frustration into later improvement. It also protects teachers from giving up too early on teaching reform.

3.4. Self-efficacy Activates Adaptive Strategy Use

Self-efficacy refers to teachers' belief that they can organize and carry out teaching actions. Bandura [11] argues that self-efficacy influences how people think, feel, and act. In College English classrooms, this belief is very important. Teachers who believe they can manage a changing classroom are more willing to adjust the lesson during class.

For instance, when students struggle with a speaking task, a teacher with stronger self-efficacy may quickly offer sentence starters, change the task into role-play, or ask students to rehearse in pairs. A teacher with weak self-efficacy may stay with the original procedure even when it is not working, because changing the task feels risky. Self-efficacy therefore works like a trigger. It helps teachers believe that a small adjustment is worth trying.

3.5. Professional Meaning Sustains Teachers' Motivation for Adaptation

Instructional adaptability takes time and energy. Teachers need to observe students, change materials, control emotions, and reflect after class. This effort is hard to maintain if teachers see College English only as a compulsory course or a test-related subject.

Professional meaning gives teachers a stronger reason to adapt. When teachers believe that College English can support students' communication, intercultural awareness, academic development, and confidence, they are more willing to improve classroom interaction. A teacher may still prepare sentence frames for a weak class, not because the task is easy, but because the teacher believes that even a short successful answer can help students build confidence. Professional meaning connects daily teaching changes with a larger educational value.

3.6. Supportive Relationships Transform Individual Coping into Shared Professional Knowledge

Supportive relationships are both emotional resources and professional resources. Teachers often develop useful strategies from their own classes, but these strategies may stay in one person's notebook if there is no chance to share them. Collegial dialogue, student trust, and institutional recognition can make adaptive practice easier to continue.

This is especially important for novice teachers. A young teacher may think that student silence means personal failure. After talking with experienced colleagues, the teacher may learn that

many classes need warm-up questions, sentence frames, or peer practice before public speaking. Experienced teachers also benefit from this exchange. Their tacit knowledge can become clearer when they explain why a method works. In this way, supportive relationships turn private coping into shared professional knowledge.

4. Practical Pathways for Enhancing College English Teachers' Instructional Adaptability

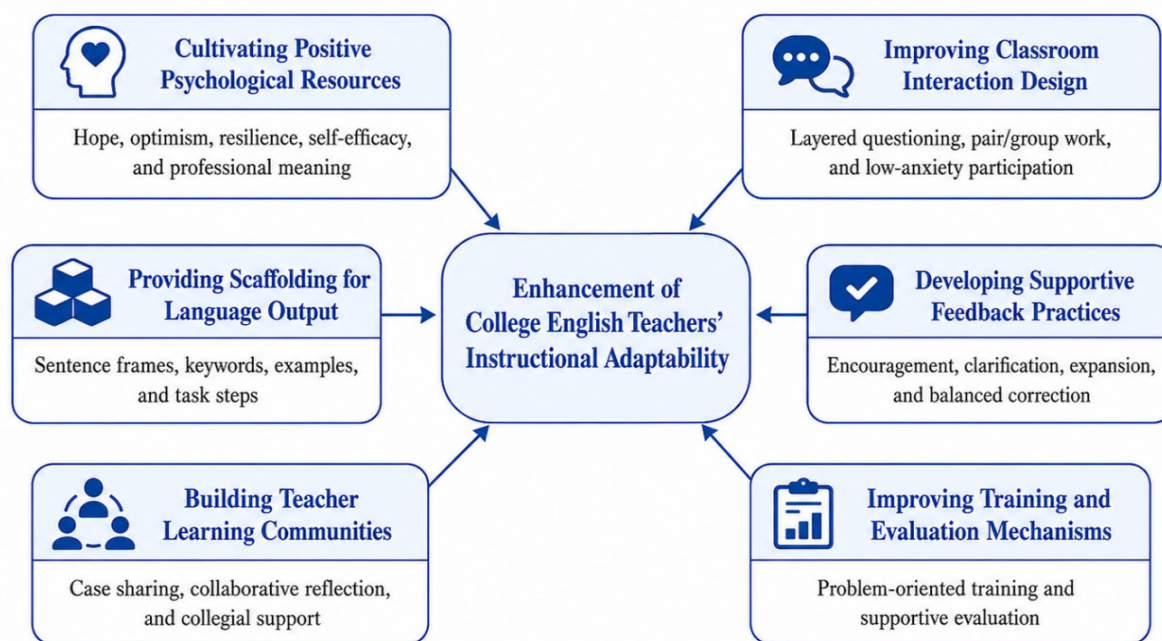


Figure 2. Practical Pathways for Enhancing college English Teachers' Instructional Adaptability

Figure 2 presents six practical pathways for enhancing college English teachers' instructional adaptability. These pathways are not isolated measures. They involve coordinated support at the individual, classroom, and institutional levels.

4.1. Cultivating Teachers' Positive Psychological Resources

Teacher development programs often focus on methods, digital tools, curriculum standards, and assessment tasks. These topics are necessary. Yet training sometimes pays less attention to teachers' hope, optimism, resilience, self-efficacy, and professional meaning. These resources affect how teachers react when a class does not follow the plan.

School-based training can include simple but useful activities. Teachers can review one successful classroom moment and explain why it worked. They can also analyze one failed activity and identify what could be changed next time. This kind of reflection helps teachers see that they already have some adaptive resources. Mentoring can also help novice teachers. When they observe experienced teachers and discuss real classroom difficulties, they gain both strategies and confidence.

4.2. Improving Classroom Interaction Design

Weak interaction is one of the most common problems in College English classrooms. Teachers can reduce this problem by designing interaction in layers. Instead of asking a question and waiting for a whole-class answer, teachers can give students time to think, let them talk in pairs, ask groups to prepare, and then invite short public sharing. This process lowers anxiety and gives students more language preparation.

Teachers can also adjust the level of questions. Easy questions can help students recall information. More difficult questions can guide analysis or personal response. When students keep silent, the teacher may move from an abstract question to a concrete prompt. The teacher may also change an open question into two choices or ask students to write one sentence first. These small changes make interaction more realistic for mixed-level classes.

4.3. Providing Scaffolding for Language Output

Many students do not speak because they have nothing ready to say in English. Teachers' adaptability should therefore include language scaffolding. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes mediation and support in learning [12]. In College English teaching, scaffolding can include vocabulary lists, sentence frames, discourse markers, model answers, visual prompts, task steps, and peer support.

Before a speaking task, the teacher can give phrases such as "In my opinion," "One reason is," or "This reminds me of." Before a discussion, the teacher can give role cards, key words, or guiding questions. Before writing, the teacher can give a paragraph outline. These supports do not make communication less valuable. They make communication possible. When students become more confident, the teacher can remove part of the support and make the task more challenging.

4.4. Developing Supportive Feedback Practices

Feedback is another place where teachers show adaptability. In College English classrooms, feedback should not only correct grammar or pronunciation. If a teacher corrects every error immediately, students may become more nervous and less willing to speak. Supportive feedback needs a balance between encouragement, clarification, expansion, and correction.

When a student gives an incomplete answer, the teacher can first recognize the attempt and then guide the student with a prompt. When a student makes an error, the teacher can decide whether to correct it at once or wait until the communication is finished. When only a few students participate, the teacher can praise small attempts so that more students feel safe to join. This kind of feedback protects classroom atmosphere and still supports language learning.

4.5. Building Teacher Learning Communities around Real Classroom Problems

Instructional adaptability grows better when teachers can talk about real problems. College English teaching teams can organize discussions around concrete topics. These topics may include how to handle classroom silence, how to help low-proficiency students speak, how to reduce phone distraction, how to design low-anxiety interaction, and how to balance fluency and accuracy in feedback.

In such discussions, teachers should not only judge whether a lesson was successful. They should ask what happened and why. They can compare different strategies and build shared materials. A short case from one classroom may help several teachers improve their next lesson. This process also reduces the feeling that one teacher is facing the problem alone.

4.6. Improving School-Based Training and Evaluation Mechanisms

Institutional support is needed if adaptability is expected to last. If evaluation only values a smooth lesson, full use of digital tools, or completion of all planned content, teachers may be afraid to adjust the lesson. They may continue a procedure even when students cannot follow it. Evaluation should recognize that good teaching sometimes includes timely changes.

School-based training should be more problem-oriented. General lectures are useful, but they are not enough. Training can focus on specific issues such as student participation, task design, teacher emotion regulation, feedback, and classroom communication. Schools can also provide time for collaborative lesson planning, peer observation, and reflective dialogue. These

arrangements make instructional adaptability a supported professional capacity rather than a personal burden.

5. Discussion

The discussion above shows that positive psychological resources support instructional adaptability in several ways. Hope helps teachers keep the goal and find another route. Optimism helps teachers read problems more constructively. Resilience helps teachers recover from setbacks. Self-efficacy gives teachers the courage to try a different strategy. Professional meaning keeps teachers willing to spend effort on improvement. Supportive relationships give teachers emotional and professional help.

These points also show that instructional adaptability is not only a technical issue. A teacher may know many activities but still avoid using them if the teacher lacks confidence or feels unsupported. On the other hand, a teacher with positive psychological resources is more likely to use available strategies flexibly and learn from classroom experience. Teacher development should therefore combine psychological support, teaching strategies, and organizational support.

This view has implications for College English reform. Reform is often written in terms of curriculum design, digital transformation, teaching models, and assessment innovation. These areas are important. But reform finally enters the classroom through teachers' decisions. If teachers cannot adjust to students' real responses, reform may stay in documents and lesson plans. If teachers receive psychological and professional support, reform ideas are more likely to become classroom practice.

The argument also reminds schools not to place all responsibility on individual teachers. When teachers face repeated classroom difficulty, they need personal reflection, but they also need collegial dialogue, supportive evaluation, and institutional recognition. A sustainable model should help teachers understand classroom complexity, manage emotional pressure, share strategies, and build confidence through practice.

6. Conclusion

College English teaching is becoming more complex. Teachers need to respond to different proficiency levels, unstable attention, weak interaction, language anxiety, and uncertain classroom situations. These problems require more than fixed teaching procedures. They require teachers to adjust thinking, action, emotion, and reflection.

Positive psychological resources provide an important base for this adjustment. Hope, optimism, resilience, self-efficacy, professional meaning, and supportive relationships help teachers keep goals, reinterpret difficulty, recover from setbacks, regulate emotion, use strategies, and continue learning. These resources should not be treated only as individual qualities. Schools can cultivate them through training, mentoring, learning communities, supportive evaluation, and a collaborative teaching culture.

Enhancing college English teachers' instructional adaptability therefore needs work at several levels. Teachers need positive psychological resources and reflective awareness. Classroom teaching needs flexible interaction, scaffolding, and supportive feedback. Institutions need practical training, teacher learning communities, and evaluation mechanisms that respect classroom complexity. When these levels work together, College English reform can become more responsive, more sustainable, and more meaningful for both teachers and students.

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