



FROM TEST BENCH TO CLASSROOM: INVESTIGATING CET SCORES AS PREDICTORS OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH AT JIANGXI UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study scrutinized the validity of the College English Test (CET-4 and CET-6) as predictors of academic performance in English-related coursework across ten universities in Jiangxi, China, where high-stakes testing strongly influenced teaching and learning. Guided by Messick's Unified Theory of Test Validity and Gardner's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition, the research investigated whether CET scores accurately reflected classroom achievement, students' motivational orientations, and teachers' perceptions of learning. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, the quantitative phase surveyed 100 third-year non-English majors on attitudes toward English mastery, learning processes, and motivational drivers. Results showed high intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes toward English, but only moderate engagement in communicative tasks. Regression analysis revealed that external motivation—stemming from institutional expectations, parental pressure, teacher demands, and career benefits—was the sole significant predictor of CET orientation ($b = 0.698$, $p < 0.001$), accounting for 39.5% of the variance. Intrinsic motivation and mastery attitudes were not significant predictors. The qualitative phase, based on interviews with ten English instructors, reinforced these findings. Teachers emphasized the CET's role as a powerful external motivator shaping discipline and study habits, while also critiquing its limitations. They noted that CET performance reflected basic skills (reading, listening, writing, translation) but failed to capture communicative competence, especially speaking. The institutional emphasis on CET preparation narrowed pedagogy, prioritizing drills over interactive, student-centered learning. Triangulated findings revealed a systemic mismatch: students maintained positive attitudes toward English, yet institutional pressures drove exam-oriented behaviors. The study concluded that CET scores captured limited aspects of proficiency and were not valid predictors of academic achievement or communicative competence. Further, it called for instructional reforms that integrated communication skills into CET preparation and balanced curricular goals with holistic outcomes. It provided professional development to help teachers reconcile exam demands with meaningful language learning.

Keywords: College English Test (CET), predictive validity, English proficiency, Explanatory Sequential Mixed-method, P.R. China

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INTRODUCTION

As one of the most influential large-scale language assessments in China, the College English Test (CET-4 and CET-6) has shaped the landscape of English education, policy, and student outcomes for more than four decades. Since the 1980s, the College English Test (CET-4 and CET-6) has been a central component of large-scale English testing in China's higher education system, serving as the primary high-stakes assessment of English proficiency for college graduates (Jiang, 2020; Lewin & Lu, 2012). Although originally designed to evaluate the language skills of non-English majors, the CET's importance has steadily increased. Today, CET results influence job placement, graduation requirements, institutional evaluations, and scholarship eligibility, thereby establishing a strong presence in both the academic and social spheres of Chinese higher education (Jin, 2022; Hou & Huang, 2024).

Despite its prominence, many scholars have questioned the CET's ability to accurately measure undergraduate students' English proficiency. While the test is widely regarded as an effective measure of receptive skills (reading and listening), its capacity to assess productive skills (speaking and interaction) remains limited (Han, 2021; Li, 2009). Moreover, critics argue that high CET scores often reflect students' familiarity with examination strategies rather than genuine communicative competence (Li, 2021; Shijun, 2022). These concerns have fueled ongoing debates surrounding the construct validity, predictive validity, and washback effects of high-stakes language assessments (Kane & Bridgeman, 2021; Lim, 2024; Kelleghan et al., 2012).

Challenges are particularly pronounced in non-elite provincial institutions, where variability in teaching and learning conditions is exacerbated by limited resources. In Jiangxi Province, for example, universities face large class sizes, shortages of qualified English instructors, restricted access to immersion opportunities, and heavy reliance on test-driven pedagogy (Cheng & Wei, 2021; Liu, 2024; Lu et al., 2022). While prior research on CET predictive validity has largely focused on elite institutions, little is known about how CET scores relate to academic achievement in provincial universities, where resource constraints and exam-oriented practices dominate (Azkiyah et al., 2023; Feng, 2023).

To address this gap, the study "*From Test Bench to Classroom: Investigating CET Scores as Predictors of Academic Achievement in English at Jiangxi Universities*" investigated whether CET-4 and CET-6 scores can serve as predictors of academic performance in English courses across ten Jiangxi universities. Grounded in Messick's Unified Theory of Test Validity (Kane & Bridgeman, 2021; Lim, 2024) and Gardner's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition (Gardner, 2006), the study employed an Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Subedi, 2016). Quantitative analyses examined the relationship between CET scores and course performance, while student surveys provided insights into attitudes, motivations, and CET orientation. Qualitative interviews with English instructors contextualized these findings by highlighting their lived experiences of exam-driven teaching, external pressures, and the washback effects of CET preparation on classroom practices (Han, 2021). Together, these complementary strands provide an



evidence-based understanding of the CET's predictive validity and its broader instructional, curricular, and institutional implications (Chen, 2022).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the extent to which the College English Test (CET-4 and CET-6) serves as a valid predictor of student success in English courses across ten universities in Jiangxi Province, China. Specifically, the study investigates the relationship between CET performance and students' achievement in core English subjects, examining whether standardized proficiency scores correspond with the competencies required in classroom learning. In addition, the research explores students' attitudes, motivations, and learning orientations toward the CET, recognizing that psychological and contextual factors may influence the correlation between test scores and academic performance. The study also examines English language teachers' perceptions of CET-oriented learning, including their observations of classroom behaviors, communicative engagement, and pedagogical practices shaped by test preparation. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study aims to provide an evidence-based assessment of the predictive validity of the CET and to identify instructional, curricular, and institutional strategies that can enhance the alignment between standardized testing outcomes and the broader goals of English language education in Jiangxi universities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. The research design employed in this study was an Explanatory

Sequential Mixed-Methods Design, which combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the predictive validity of the College English Test (CET-4 and CET-6) in relation to academic performance in English-related courses among university students in Jiangxi Province, China. The structure followed the classical two-phase model outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2017). In the first phase, quantitative data were collected and analyzed to identify statistical relationships between motivational variables and CET orientation. In the second phase, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with English language instructors to elaborate on and contextualize the quantitative findings. This sequential design allowed the qualitative results to build upon the quantitative outcomes, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the CET's predictive validity and its implications for teaching and learning.

Phase 1 - Quantitative:

Survey data were collected to examine students' attitudes toward mastering English, their learning orientations, internal and external motivation, and their orientation toward the CET. At this stage, correlational and regression analyses were employed to establish the predictive relationships between motivation-related variables and CET orientation.

Phase 2 - Qualitative:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with English language instructors to elaborate on and contextualize the quantitative survey findings. This phase examined teachers' perspectives on CET washback, classroom behavior, pedagogical practices, and the extent to which CET performance reflects communicative competence.



By combining statistical evidence with contextual insights, the mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive assessment of the predictive validity of the CET and its classroom implications. The synthesis of results occurred at the interpretive stage through methodological triangulation, ensuring that quantitative and qualitative strands were integrated into a coherent and holistic analysis.

Research Locale. The research was carried out within ten (10) universities of the Jiangxi Province, and these were all of the different types of institutions, i.e., comprehensive public universities, teacher-training institutions, and technology-oriented universities. These universities represent the regional difference in the quality of teaching English, resources, and students.

Participating Universities

1. Pingxiang University - Pingxiang
2. Yichun University - Yichun
3. Jingdezhen University - Jingdezhen
4. Xinyu University - Xinyu
5. Nanchang Normal University - Nanchang
6. Yuzhang Normal University- Nanchang
7. East China University of Technology - Nanchang
8. Nanchang Hangkong University - Nanchang
9. Shangrao Normal University - Shangrao
10. Jingdezhen Ceramic University – Jingdezhen

The reason behind the choice of these institutions is that they are examples of the typical provincial universities where CET preparation is highly institutionalized, whereas the teaching of communicative English is diverse.

Research Population

Quantitative Respondents – Students

The quantitative study was conducted among 100 third-year non-English-major students from ten universities in Jiangxi Province, with ten respondents purposively selected from each institution to ensure equal representation. Third-year students were chosen because they had substantial exposure to English coursework and had generally completed both the CET-4 and CET-6, making them an appropriate group for analyzing the correlation between CET performance and academic achievement in English. Eligibility criteria required participants to be non-English majors who had successfully passed the CET-4 and CET-6 and were either enrolled in or had completed an English-related course at the time of data collection. This sampling strategy enabled valid comparisons between academic course grades and standardized test results.

Qualitative Participants - English Language Instructors.

Ten English language teachers from ten participating universities in Jiangxi Province were invited to take part in the qualitative phase according to the following criteria: they possessed expertise in the CET system and had between 20 and 35 years of professional experience. These teachers taught a range of English courses, including College English, Listening and Speaking, Writing, Linguistics, and culture-related subjects, which enabled them to provide a well-informed perspective on student performance across multiple skill areas. The inclusion criteria required instructors to be familiar with CET structures, preparation practices, and institutional testing policies, and to be able to explain how the CET influences teaching practices, curriculum design,



and student motivation. Their extensive experience with exam-oriented instruction allowed them to articulate the washback effects of the CET and to contextualize the quantitative findings by identifying systemic issues associated with exam pressure, skill imbalance, and pedagogical constraints in higher education.

Instruments

Respondents Survey Questionnaire - Students

The quantitative measure had five major constructs:

- Attitude Towards English Mastery
- Learners' Attitude to the English Learning Process
- Internal Motivation
- External Motivation
- CET Orientation

The survey questionnaire employed a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 4 = *Strongly Agree*). The reliability of the instrument was assessed through internal consistency measures. For statistical analysis, each construct was represented by the mean scores of its respective sections.

Participants Interview Questionnaire - English Language teachers

The key components of the interview guide for the qualitative phase include:

1. Teaching Context and Institutional Familiarity: This section asks about teachers' experience, courses taught, and familiarity with the CET, providing institutional and professional background.
2. CET Impact on Student Learning and Motivation: It explores how CET preparation

affects student behavior, motivation, and whether CET scores align with academic performance.

3. Classroom Behavior and Pedagogical Practices: This part examines how CET orientation influences teaching methods, classroom participation, and the challenges of balancing exam prep with communicative teaching.

4. Assessment and Alignment: It investigates whether the CET accurately measures proficiency, how well it aligns with course objectives, and what skills are overlooked.

Together, these components capture teachers' perspectives on CET's influence, highlighting its effects on students, pedagogy, and assessment alignment.

Data Gathering Procedures

Phase 1 – Quantitative

1. University administrators and department heads were formally approached, and their consent and permission were obtained.
2. Students participated voluntarily and provided written informed consent.
3. The questionnaires were administered exclusively online, with access provided through institution-specific QR codes.
4. The surveys were completed, encoded, and subsequently analyzed using SPSS.
5. Data analysis included:
 - Means, standard deviations (descriptive statistics)
 - Pearson correlations
 - Multiple linear regression
 - Multicollinearity (VIF) diagnostics
 - The information on surveys allowed for the analysis of the predictive nature of the relationship between



motivational constructs and CET orientation.

Phase 2 – Qualitative

After the quantitative analysis:

1. Participants who were available to be interviewed were approached.
2. Audio-taped interviews were transcribed.

Themes of CET as a motivating power, limited communicative congruence, and instructional tension were identified.

Data Analysis Procedure

Phase 1 – Quantitative

The quantitative analysis of the data has used SPSS as the mainstream software to provide descriptive statistics for the attitudes, motivation, and CET orientation of students. The Pearson Correlation Analysis was used to provide a measure of the strength and direction of the relationships between variables. A Multiple Linear Regression Analysis has been performed using the outputs of the previous analysis to identify which motivational factors were significant predictors of CET orientation. Multicollinearity analysis has also been used to diagnose the reliability of the regression model.

Phase 2 – Qualitative

Thematic analysis was performed based on the paradigm and the procedure developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to conduct a search, analysis, and presentation of patterns (themes) in the qualitative data gathered through the semi-structured interviews with the English language

instructors. The analysis was done in six steps, depicted below:

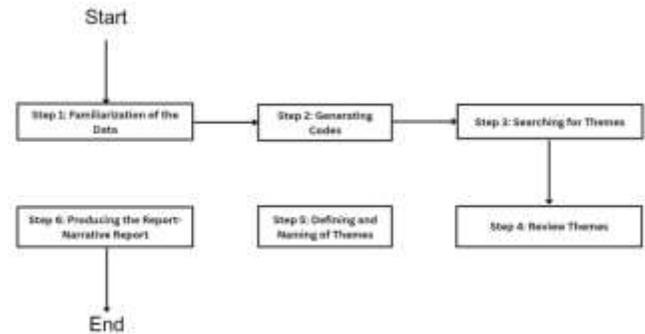


Fig. 01 Thematic Data Analysis: Braun and Clarke (2006) Model

Data Familiarization. The researchers immersed themselves in the data through repeated reading of transcripts and careful listening to the recorded interviews. At this stage, preliminary findings were documented concerning teachers’ perceptions of CET washback, student motivation, communicative competence, and classroom practices. This iterative engagement with the data enabled the researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants’ experiences and perspectives.

Generating Initial Codes. Relevant features were identified across the entire dataset. The initial codes were generated from meaningful units within teachers’ responses, specifically those related to CET stress, teaching practices, student behavior, institutional expectations, and test-related constraints. These codes represented recurring concepts that were directly derived from the participants’ narratives.

Searching for Themes. The original codes were subsequently analyzed and organized into broader categories that highlighted significant patterns within the data. Related codes were clustered into



preliminary themes, which reflected key concerns such as external motivation, examination-based learning, deficiencies in communicative competence, and institutional influence.

Reviewing Themes. The themes were examined in depth and refined to ensure both internal consistency and distinctiveness. The tentative themes were then reviewed against the coded data and the complete dataset to confirm that they accurately reflected teachers' perspectives and that sufficient supporting evidence was available to substantiate each theme.

Defining and Naming Themes. The finalized themes were clearly defined, and each was assigned a concise and descriptive label that captured its central meaning. The analysis produced five overarching themes that reflected the core concerns emerging from the data: (1) CET as a Dominant External Motivator, (2) CET-Driven Learning Hinders Communicative Competence, (3) Instructional Narrowing and Washback on Teaching Practices, (4) Institutional Pressure as a Structuring Force, and (5) Recognition of CET Strengths and Limitations. Together, these themes provided a coherent framework for understanding how the CET influences teaching practices, student learning, and institutional dynamics within higher education.

Producing the Report. The final step involved integrating the analyzed themes into a coherent narrative. Representative excerpts from the interviews were selected to illustrate each theme and to enrich the discussion of the results. These themes were subsequently interpreted in relation to the quantitative findings and the theoretical frameworks guiding the study, thereby ensuring theoretical triangulation.

Ethical Considerations. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards established by institutional protocols. Data collection commenced only after obtaining

consent from the participating universities. All participants were informed of the purpose, scope, and voluntary nature of the study, and were assured that participation or withdrawal at any stage would not affect their academic standing or employment. Written informed consent was obtained from both student and teacher participants, and no names or other identifying information were collected during either Phase 1 or Phase 2 surveys and interviews. All data were treated as confidential, stored electronically in password-protected files, and used solely for academic research purposes. Transcriptions were assigned anonymous identifiers, and all audio recordings were deleted following the completion of coding. Throughout the research process, the researchers upheld transparency, respect, and integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this mixed-methods study are presented as a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative results. The discussion addresses the research questions guiding the quantitative analysis and offers thematic interpretations of the qualitative findings. In the final section, triangulation is employed to identify points of convergence and divergence between the two sources of data, thereby providing a deeper understanding of students' attitudes, motivations, and CET orientation within Jiangxi universities.

1. Relationship between students' attitudes and motivations toward English learning and their CET orientation

The results indicate that students hold a highly positive attitude toward mastering the English language, reflecting their belief in its importance for academic, professional, and personal development.



Table 1
Summary of Quantitative Findings

Variable / Model	Indicators / Items	Mean Range / Key Statistics	Interpretation
Attitude Toward English Mastery	Items 1–5	3.36 – 3.48 (Overall = 3.43)	Very high positive attitude toward English for academics, career, and personal growth
Attitude Toward Learning Process	Items 6–15	2.61 – 3.28 (Overall = 2.98)	Moderate engagement, lower confidence in active skills (speaking, writing)
Internal Motivation	Items 16–25	2.75 – 3.48 (Overall = 3.15)	High intrinsic motivation (grids, satisfaction, enjoyment)
External Motivation	Items 26–35	2.40 – 3.26 (Overall = 2.98)	Moderate to strong influence of external, teacher, grade, and career pressures
CET Orientation	Items 36–38	2.70 – 2.85 (Overall = 2.80)	Moderate influence of CET on study behavior and confidence
Key Correlations	External ↔ CET	$r = .583, p < .01$	Strongest bivariate relationship with CET Orientation
	Process ↔ CET	$r = .221, p < .05$	Weak but significant
	Mastery ↔ CET	$r = .097, ns$	Not significant
	Internal ↔ CET	$r = .179, ns$	Not significant
Regression Model (CET Orientation)	$R = .629, R^2 = .395, F(4,95) = 15.51, p < .001$		Model explains 39.5% of the variance
Significant Predictor	External Motivation	$B = .842, \beta = .696, p < .001$	Only significant predictor of CET Orientation
Non-Significant Predictors	Mastery, Process, Internal	$p > .05$	Effects weakened by multicollinearity
Multicollinearity	VIF Range	30.63 – 113.58	Severe multicollinearity present

However, the CET (College English Test) orientation and learning process do not provide strong evidence that such positive attitudes translate into sustained engagement in CET-focused learning behaviors. Correlation and regression analyses revealed that external motivation—specifically institutional and social factors—was the only significant predictor of CET orientation, accounting for 39.5% of the variance. This finding suggests that students’ engagement with the CET is driven primarily by external pressures rather than internal learning goals. The non-significant relationships between mastery attitudes, intrinsic motivation, and CET orientation further imply that, although students desire to learn English, these internal motivators are suppressed within the high-stakes CET environment. Additionally, the presence of substantial multicollinearity among motivational constructs indicates that, in exam-dominated contexts, multiple motivational factors overlap and interact, complicating the distinction between individual influences.

3. Teachers perceive the influence of the College English Test (CET) on students’ learning and classroom practices

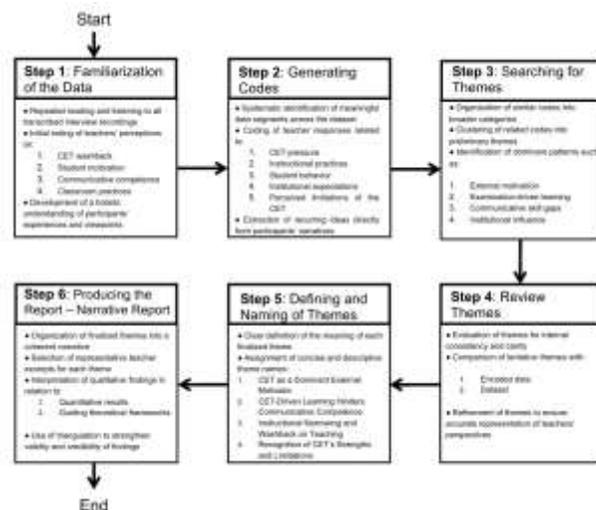


Figure 2. Thematic Data Analysis using Braun and Clarke (2006) Model

Theme 1: CET as a Dominant External Motivator

External Pressure as the Primary Driver of Student Engagement.

The College English Test (CET) emerged as the most influential external factor shaping students’ learning behavior. Attendance, concentration, and discipline were consistently observed to increase markedly as the CET approached. However, this heightened activity was driven not by an intrinsic desire to learn English, but rather by compulsion and the perceived threat of academic failure or diminished employment prospects. Functioning as a gatekeeping mechanism for graduation and job opportunities, successful performance on the CET represents an external demand, rather than evidence of inherent motivation to acquire the language.



Teacher 1: "Students become very serious only when CET is near. Attendance improves, but the purpose is mainly to pass the exam, not to really communicate in English."

Teacher 2: "They often tell me directly, 'Teacher, I must pass CET to graduate.'

This pressure is stronger than their personal interest in English."

Teacher 3: "Most students study English mainly for CET, not because they enjoy learning the language."

Theme 2: CET-Driven Learning Hinders Communicative Competence

Limited Development of Speaking and Spontaneous Communication.

Teachers emphasized that CET preparation places considerable emphasis on receptive and test-oriented competencies, such as reading, listening, vocabulary, translation, and structured writing. As a result, students' communicative competence—particularly in speaking—remains underdeveloped. Many students who perform well on the CET continue to experience difficulties with oral fluency, confidence, and real-time language processing.

Teacher 4: "The CET mainly tests reading and listening. Speaking is not included, so students do not take speaking seriously."

Teacher 5: "Some students score very high in CET but cannot express their ideas clearly in a simple conversation."

Teacher 6: "They know a lot of vocabulary, but they cannot use it naturally when they talk."

Theme 3: Instructional Narrowing and Washback on Teaching Practices

Shift from Communicative Teaching to Exam-Focused Instruction.

The CET exerts a strong washback effect on classroom pedagogy, compelling educators to align their teaching methods closely with the exam's content and format. As a result, communicative and student-centered practices are frequently compromised in favor of drill-based instruction, test-taking strategies, and repetitive practice with CET-style questions. This instructional narrowing is further reinforced by institutional expectations and the constraints of limited classroom time.

Teacher 7: "I want to do more speaking activities, but there is not enough time because students and the school both focus on CET results."

Teacher 8: "Our teaching plans must align with CET content, so we practice test-taking strategies more than real communication."

Teacher 9: "Speaking activities are often reduced because they are not tested in the CET."

Theme 4: Institutional Pressure as a Structuring Force

CET as a Basis for Institutional Evaluation and Accountability.

Institutional policies were found to be strongly supportive of teaching and learning practices oriented toward the CET. Teacher performance evaluations, departmental rankings, and even the reputation of the university were



closely tied to student pass rates. This alignment exerts systemic pressure on both teachers and students to prioritize exam performance, often at the expense of fostering the holistic development of language competence.

Teacher 10: "The school evaluates us according to CET pass rates, so naturally we must teach for the test."

Teacher 2: "Parents and employers also care more about CET scores than real ability, so students focus on scores first."

Teacher 4: "Passing CET is seen as a basic requirement of being a successful university student."

Theme 5: Recognition of CET's Strengths and Limitations

Academic Benefits with Limited Communicative Value.

Despite their criticisms, teachers acknowledged that the CET makes a positive contribution to students' academic English skills, particularly in areas such as vocabulary development, reading comprehension, translation accuracy, and structured writing. However, they unanimously agreed that these strengths do not equate to full English proficiency, especially with respect to real-life communicative competence.

Teacher 1: "The CET helps students build a solid foundation in vocabulary and reading."

Teacher 6: "It is useful for training students' test discipline and analytical skills."

Teacher 3: "A student who can only pass CET but cannot speak confidently is still not really proficient in English."

4. Combined interpretation of the quantitative findings and qualitative observations as to what the CET scores mean for students' real performance in the actual English learning and academic achievement

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provides strong evidence of convergence between statistical trends and teachers' perceptions. Quantitatively, external motivation emerged as the sole significant predictor of CET orientation. Qualitatively, teachers consistently described the CET as an institutional mechanism shaped by policy, accountability, and systemic pressure. The absence of a significant quantitative relationship between intrinsic motivation and CET orientation aligns directly with teachers' observations that exam success does not necessarily translate into communicative proficiency. Both data sources indicate that achievement on the CET is only weakly correlated with real-world English proficiency. Interview evidence highlighted the washback effects that help explain why students who excel on the CET often struggle with oral fluency. Quantitative data further revealed a moderate level of attitude toward the learning process, reinforcing the nuanced motivational landscape. Taken together, this triangulated evidence lends strong support to Messick's theory of consequential validity, demonstrating that the CET not only omits essential language constructs but also exerts a negative influence on teaching and learning practices. Gardner's motivational framework is partially supported, insofar as students exhibit high levels of intrinsic motivation; however, this motivation exerts limited influence under the pressures of high-stakes assessment environments.



5. Developmental programs or instructional strategies can be suggested based on the synthesized findings to improve the congruence between standardized testing and authentic English language learning in Jiangxi universities

The synthesized findings suggest several developmental programs and instructional strategies:

1. *Curriculum Reform.* Integrate communicative activities (e.g., speaking tasks, group interaction, task-based learning) alongside exam preparation to foster fluency, accuracy, and confidence in authentic contexts.
2. *Diversified Assessment.* Employ performance-based measures such as presentations, debates, collaborative projects, and writing assignments to complement CET scores and provide a fuller picture of student proficiency.
3. *Teacher Development.* Implement professional training programs that equip instructors to balance CET-focused instruction with communicative, student-centered approaches, supported by ongoing pedagogical guidance.
4. *Motivational Enhancement.* Strengthen students' internal motivation through meaningful content, authentic materials, and technology-enhanced activities that connect language learning to personal and professional goals.
5. *Policy Review.* Re-examine institutional policies to reduce excessive external pressure from CET performance, mitigating stress and superficial learning

habits while promoting deeper language development.

6. *Future Research.* Conduct longitudinal studies on CET washback and interventions targeting communicative competence to inform sustainable improvements in assessment and instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study employed a mixed-methods design to examine students' attitudes, motivations, and CET orientation in Jiangxi universities. Quantitative findings revealed that students demonstrated strong mastery and internal motivation, indicating genuine interest in learning English. However, their views on the learning process were relatively moderate, suggesting that exam routines diminish enjoyment and engagement. The moderate level of CET orientation further indicated that, while students regard the exam as significant, they do not perceive it as a comprehensive measure of English proficiency. Regression analysis showed that external motivation was the sole significant predictor of CET orientation, highlighting the influence of institutional requirements, graduation regulations, and employment pressures. Although attitudinal variables exhibited multicollinearity, this overlap did not reduce the predictive strength of external motivation.

Qualitative findings reinforced these results. Educators consistently described the CET as a powerful driver of student behavior, while also noting its narrowing effect on instruction. Test-related skills such as reading, listening, vocabulary, translation, and structured writing were prioritized, whereas communicative competence—particularly speaking—was marginalized, as it is not assessed in the CET.

Taken together, the triangulated evidence reveals a clear discrepancy between students' intrinsic desire to master English and the external pressures imposed by the educational



environment. While students aspire to achieve genuine language proficiency, institutional structures compel them to focus on exam preparation, thereby limiting opportunities for holistic language development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research suggest several interventions to enhance the effectiveness of English language teaching and improve CET preparation. First, it is essential to integrate more communicative activities into the curriculum. Even within exam-focused learning environments, speaking exercises, group-based interactive tasks, and task-oriented learning should be incorporated. Such activities enable students to use English in authentic contexts, thereby promoting fluency, accuracy, and confidence. Moving beyond memorization and drill-based test practice allows learners to acquire well-rounded language skills that support both academic success and real-life communication.

Second, schools are encouraged to adopt diverse measures of proficiency rather than relying exclusively on CET scores. While CET results provide standardized indicators of knowledge, they are limited in capturing students' communicative abilities. Performance-based assessments such as presentations, debates, collaborative projects, and writing assignments can offer a more comprehensive evaluation of learners' competencies. These assessments not only measure practical language use but also encourage students to apply their knowledge in constructive and meaningful ways.

Third, teacher training should prioritize balanced instruction. Professional development programs can equip educators with strategies to combine CET preparation with communicative and student-centered approaches. By integrating test-oriented methods with interactive instruction, teachers can simultaneously achieve strong exam outcomes and foster genuine language use.

Ongoing support and training will further enable teachers to design engaging, context-sensitive lessons that respond to diverse student needs.

Fourth, strengthening students' internal motivation is critical for long-term learning. English instruction can be made more enjoyable and personally relevant through meaningful content, authentic materials, and technology-enhanced activities. Such approaches encourage sustained engagement and help learners connect language study with their personal and professional goals.

Fifth, institutional policies should be carefully examined to avoid unintentionally increasing external pressure on students. Excessive emphasis on CET performance risks generating stress, anxiety, and superficial learning habits, which undermine deeper language development. Schools should critically review these policies and implement measures that balance exam preparation with broader educational objectives, thereby fostering a healthier and more supportive learning environment.

Finally, future research on CET washback is recommended. Longitudinal studies examining the long-term outcomes of CET preparation, particularly interventions aimed at enhancing communicative competence, would provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers. Such research could inform more balanced approaches to assessment and instruction, ensuring that language education supports both exam success and authentic proficiency.

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