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A Feasibility Study on Teacher Autonomy Support Intervention in Enhancing College Students' Autonomous Learning Ability

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Abstract: In the context of globalization and digital technologies driving the shift in educational goals towards "competency development," Chinese university students face the issues of insufficient extracurricular autonomous learning time and over-reliance on teacher-led knowledge transmission. Teacher autonomy support is considered a key strategy to enhance students' autonomous learning abilities. This study systematically examines the feasibility of teachers stimulating students' intrinsic motivation by providing choices, supporting decision-making, and creating a supportive environment, through five dimensions: policy support, theoretical foundation, practical effects, resource support, and group adaptability. It also highlights the need for future research to focus on subject and student background differences, explore intervention pathways in digital environments, and improve localized implementation guidelines.

Keywords: Teacher Autonomy Support; University Students; Autonomous Learning Ability

1.Research Necessity

Against the backdrop of globalization and the rapid development of digital technologies, the educational focus is shifting from "knowledge transmission" to "competency development" (OECD, 2018). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2015, 2017) emphasizes the importance of cultivating students' "learning to learn" abilities to adapt to changing social demands. In 2016, China incorporated "self-development" into its core competencies framework (Core Competency Research Group, 2016), while the European Union and OECD also highlighted the importance of autonomous learning (European Commission, 2018、OECD, 2019). The United States has promoted the development of autonomous learning skills through its "deeper learning" reforms (William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2020).

"Autonomous learning ability" includes setting learning goals, selecting learning methods, and evaluating learning outcomes (Cai , 2023), and has been a core educational competency since the 1980s (Woolfolk, 2007). This ability not only affects academic performance but is also crucial for career adaptability (Cai, 2023). It is especially important in the era of information overload.

University students possess strong cognitive and self-management skills (Pang , 2001), and autonomous learning ability is vital for both academic success and career development (Li & Wang , 2019). Students with strong autonomous learning abilities are able to set goals and plan their learning strategies effectively, thereby enhancing their professional competitiveness (Cai , 2023; OECD, 2019) and standing out in a rapidly changing society (World Bank, The Changing Nature of Work, 2019).

2. Current Research Status

Currently, there is concern about the autonomous learning ability of Chinese university students, particularly the severe lack of extracurricular autonomous learning time. Studies show that approximately 80% of students rely on teachers to transmit knowledge and lack the habit of active learning (Shi & Guo , 2012). A study by the Xiamen University research team (2023) found that Chinese university students spend only 8.3 hours per week on extracurricular autonomous learning, significantly lower than the 15.8 hours spent by students at highly selective universities in the United States, reflecting a "classroom-heavy, autonomy-light" tendency in China's higher education system (Bao, 2023).

In this context, teacher autonomy support is considered a key factor in enhancing students' autonomous learning abilities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Research indicates that teachers can significantly improve students' autonomous learning abilities by offering choices, supporting autonomous decision-making, and creating a supportive learning environment. Teachers' support not only stimulates students' intrinsic

motivation but also enhances their initiative and persistence, further boosting their autonomous learning abilities (Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992; Simons et al., 2004). Additionally, teachers can help students set goals and plan tasks, which contributes to improving their learning management abilities and promotes autonomous learning (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

However, existing research still has certain limitations. Many studies have focused too much on psychological factors such as learning motivation, self-regulation, and future time perspective, while lacking in-depth exploration of the impact of external factors (such as teacher autonomy support, family, and peer support) on autonomous learning abilities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This study aims to intervene through external factors and explore ways to enhance students' autonomous learning abilities.

3. Mechanisms of Influence

Several teacher-related factors affect autonomous learning ability, including the teacher-student relationship, teacher morale and enthusiasm, and teaching methods.

3.1Teacher-Student Relationship

Studies examining the significance of the teacher-student relationship on self-directed learning ability have found that the better the relationship with the teacher, the higher the positive cognitive level, which has a significant static effect on self-directed learning ability (An & Jin , 2014).

3.2 Teacher Morale and Enthusiasm

Teacher morale and enthusiasm have a positive impact on autonomous learning ability. Kim Jishan and Kim Yiying (2015) found that teacher morale and enthusiasm directly affect high school students' autonomous learning ability, and indirectly affect middle school students through future orientation. Li Zhenying and Zheng Jiying (2019) also reported that teacher morale and enthusiasm have a static effect on autonomous learning ability. Zheng Yuzhen (2011) and Li Zai De (2018) pointed out that teacher education support or professionalism also has a static effect on autonomous learning ability.

3.3 Teaching Methods

Research shows that teaching methods positively influence autonomous learning ability (Li , 2019). Student-centered teaching methods, especially flipped learning and student-question-driven teaching, can significantly enhance students' autonomous learning ability (Song , 2020、Li & Liu, 2020、 Cheng, 2020).

4. Feasibility Analysis

From the perspective of policy support, teacher autonomy support has been widely recognized as a key strategy to enhance college students' autonomous learning abilities, both domestically and internationally. UNESCO (2015) and the Chinese Ministry of Education (2021) have emphasized that teachers should strengthen students' autonomous learning abilities by supporting their decision-making, reducing controlling language, and providing personalized feedback, thus offering institutional support for policy implementation.

From the theoretical support perspective, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides the core framework for the feasibility of teacher autonomy support. Ryan and Deci (2000) pointed out that when teachers offer choices and encourage goal setting, students' intrinsic motivation and self-regulation abilities can be significantly enhanced, thereby promoting autonomous learning behavior.

From the practical effect perspective, empirical research shows that teacher autonomy support significantly increases students' academic engagement. Jang and Deci (2010) found that reducing controlling instructions and providing explanatory feedback can increase students' extracurricular autonomous learning time. Furthermore, cross-cultural studies show that structured teacher autonomy support effectively enhances students' strategic flexibility, task persistence, and cognitive regulation (Jang, Reeve & Deci, 2010).

From the resource support perspective, the university teacher training system provides a foundation for the implementation of autonomy support strategies. The OECD (2019) report indicates that 75% of universities have incorporated "autonomy-supportive teaching methods" into teacher professional development courses. Additionally, China's "Standards for University Teachers' Teaching Ability" (2020)

requires teachers to master the core skills of stimulating students' autonomous learning motivation.

From the perspective of group adaptability, the cognitive development level and educational environment of university students provide a natural advantage for teacher autonomy support. Research shows that university students possess strong metacognitive abilities and can transform teachers' supportive behaviors into self-regulation strategies (Pang, 2003). Additionally, a study by the Xiamen University research team (2023) found that in courses where teachers provided personalized learning suggestions, students' extracurricular autonomous learning time increased by 42% compared to the control group.

In conclusion, policy support, theoretical validation, empirical effects, resource support, and group adaptability together form the feasibility basis for teacher autonomy support interventions. Future research should further develop localized implementation guidelines and optimize intervention designs through mixed research methods.

5. Conclusion and Outlook

This study explored the impact of teacher autonomy support on college students' autonomous learning abilities, finding that teachers can significantly enhance students' autonomous learning by providing choices, supporting autonomous decision-making, and creating a supportive learning environment. This provides theoretical support for educational reform and practical guidance. However, this study is limited in that it does not fully consider the impact of subject differences and student backgrounds on the effectiveness of teacher support. Future research should further explore the implementation methods in different educational contexts. As the educational environment continues to evolve, teacher autonomy support will become increasingly important in fostering students' autonomous learning abilities, especially in the context of digitalization and intelligence. How to integrate technological tools to enhance autonomy support will be a key direction for future research. Additionally, policy support and teacher training systems are crucial for enhancing autonomous learning abilities. Future studies should delve into how to implement teacher autonomy support in various educational settings to promote the development of students' autonomous learning abilities and help address the challenges of future society.

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