Exploring the Impact of Teachers' Support Strategies on College Students' Academic Emotion in Online English Learning

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Abstract: With the rapid development of digital technology, online education has transcended the limitations of time and space, offering rich and high-quality educational resources that facilitate the implementation of fair, just, and personalized education that meets the needs of the people. In the context of China's education digitalization strategy, online learning has emerged as a significant method for college students to learn English. However, learners encounter numerous difficulties and challenges during this process, which can impact their learning emotions and effectiveness. As teachers play a pivotal role in online English learning activities, their supportive behaviors have a profound impact on learners' academic emotions. This study conducted a questionnaire survey involving 100 undergraduate students enrolled in an online College English course at a university. The objective was to investigate the influence of teacher support strategies on college students' online English learning emotions, to enhance the quality of online English teaching. The study categorized teacher support strategies into emotional, professional, social, and instrumental support, and classified online English learning emotions into pleasant and boring emotions. The results indicated that teachers demonstrated strong performance in all aspects of support, although there is still room for improvement. Students exhibited a high level of enjoyment in online English learning, yet their satisfaction with interaction within the learning group and their recognition of boredom required enhancement. Consequently, teachers should adopt strategies such as personalized support, fostering increased interaction and communication, and providing timely and specific feedback to elevate students' learning enjoyment and mitigate boredom, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of online learning.

1. Introduction

The digital revolution has ushered in an era where online education has become an indispensable

component of the modern educational system. With the rapid advancement of digital technologies, the integration of online learning into traditional pedagogical frameworks has been both inevitable and transformative. China, recognizing the potential of digital education, has vigorously pursued strategic initiatives aimed at educational digitalization. This proactive approach has culminated in the establishment of the world's largest repository of educational teaching resources, thereby providing robust support for the effective implementation of online education [1].

The flexibility afforded by online learning, in terms of both time and space, has opened new avenues for learners to pursue personalized educational paths. This has significantly enriched the diversity of learning methods and the depth of educational content, enabling a more tailored approach to learning. Within this dynamic online learning environment, the role of teachers as facilitators of learning is of paramount importance. They are not merely transmitters of knowledge but also serve as essential supports in helping students overcome learning challenges and maintain a positive learning attitude [2]. Despite the extensive body of research that has explored the impact of teacher support on student learning outcomes, there remains a notable gap in understanding how specific teacher support strategies influence the emotional dimensions of online English language learning. The existing literature has not adequately addressed the nuances of how these strategies affect students' emotional engagement and motivational levels within the context of online English learning environments.

This study aims to bridge this gap by employing rigorous investigation and research methodologies to explore the intricate relationships between teacher support strategies and students' emotional experiences in online English language learning. The research seeks to uncover the underlying patterns and characteristics that define this interaction. It is anticipated that the insights gained from this study will provide valuable references for enhancing the quality of online English teaching in higher education. This endeavor aims to contribute to the innovative development and practical application of online education, ultimately enriching the construction of a more comprehensive and efficient modern educational system.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teachers' Support Strategies

When compared to traditional face-to-face teaching methodologies, teachers' support becomes particularly vital in online learning environments, serving as a catalyst for enhancing and optimizing learners' educational processes. The appropriate guidance and support offered by teachers to learners play a pivotal role in facilitating effective learning outcomes. Researchers such as Fraser contend that teacher support encompasses students' perception of teachers' care, friendly demeanor, emotional attention, and assistance during challenging situations [3]. Ouyang Dan further elaborates that the supportive behaviors perceived by students from teachers in both their academic and daily lives constitute students' perceived teacher support, which can be systematically categorized into learning support, emotional support, and ability support [4].

In alignment with the theme and content of this study, teacher support is defined as a comprehensive array of supportive behaviors and measures implemented by teachers within digital environments, aimed at promoting students' online learning and overall development. This multifaceted concept is further classified into four primary categories: emotional support, professional support, social support, and instrumental support. Emotional support entails the provision of emotional care and encouragement by teachers, fostering a positive and conducive learning environment. Professional support entails guidance and assistance in academic content and learning strategies, ultimately enhancing students' cognitive development. Social support involves facilitating interactions and collaboration among students, thereby promoting a sense of community

and belonging. Lastly, instrumental support encompasses the provision of technical assistance and resources, ensuring seamless navigation and effective utilization of online learning platforms.

2.2 Online English Learning Emotions

Academic emotions, defined as the direct emotional experiences of students during the learning process, classroom instruction, and in relation to their learning achievements, play a pivotal role in determining the quality of education, academic success, pedagogical efficacy, and the dynamics of teacher-student interactions[5]. The study of emotions in foreign language learning is primarily anchored in two seminal theories: the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2003) and the Control-Value Theory (Pekrun, 2006)[6]. These frameworks have been instrumental in distinguishing between positive and negative emotions in the context of foreign language acquisition[7][8].

This research endeavors to contextualize the emotions experienced by learners in online English learning environments. It encompasses the emotional responses elicited by the learning content, the pedagogical process, the nature of interactive communication, and the outcomes of learning endeavors. Drawing from the dichotomy of positive and negative emotions, this study categorizes these emotional experiences into two distinct types: pleasurable emotions and emotions of boredom. This delineation aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the affective dimensions of online English learning, thereby offering insights into the complex interplay between emotions and educational engagement in digital learning spaces.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

This study focused on 100 undergraduate students from a university who were enrolled in the online course "College English" and were not majoring in English. The course was delivered exclusively in an online format, providing resources, interactive discussions, online study groups, and teacher support and clarification services. The sample comprised 11 males and 89 females, reflecting the gender distribution within the selected course.

3.2 Instruments

The research instruments utilized in this study consisted of two scales: one assessing teacher support in online courses and the other measuring foreign language learning emotions in an online context.

3.2.1 Teacher Support Scale for Online Courses

The Teacher Support Scale for Online Courses was adapted from a previously validated instrument designed by Li et al. [9], with modifications tailored to the unique characteristics of online English learning environments. The scale encompasses four dimensions: emotional support, professional support, social support, and instrumental support. These adjustments aimed to ensure the scale's relevance and accuracy in measuring the perceived level of teacher support among university students engaged in online English learning.

3.2.2 Foreign Language Learning Emotions Scale

The Foreign Language Learning Emotions Scale was divided into two subscales: one for enjoyment and another for boredom. The Enjoyment Scale drew upon the Chinese version of the

Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (CFLES) adapted by Li et al. (2018) from the original Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) [10][11]. This scale captures positive emotions associated with language learning. Conversely, the Boredom Scale was based on the Foreign Language Learning Boredom Scale (FLLBS) developed by Li et al. (2021) [12], assessing negative emotions related to feeling bored during language learning activities.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Both scales employed a Likert-type, five-point response format, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), allowing participants to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. Prior to data collection, the reliability and validity of the instruments were evaluated. The results indicated good internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.945, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7) and satisfactory construct validity (KMO = 0.859, $p < 0.05$), confirming the scales' appropriateness for use in this study.

Data were collected through an online survey distributed to the selected participants. Descriptive statistics, including means and percentages, were used to summarize the participants' perceptions of teacher support and learning emotions.

4. Results

The study examined various aspects of online English language learning, focusing on teacher support and the emotional experiences of learners. The findings are presented as follows:

4.1 Teacher Emotional Support

The study assessed the emotional support provided by teachers in the context of online English language learning, with an average score of 4.05 out of 5. This score indicates a high level of emotional support from teachers, as perceived by the students. The majority of students reported that teachers were responsive to their issues and offered learning advice, which helped to bolster their confidence in the learning process. Additionally, teachers were noted for respecting student feedback and encouraging the expression of opinions during the course. However, a minority of students felt that teachers did not provide timely praise and were critical when tasks were not completed on time. Despite the small proportion of such responses, these concerns highlight areas for potential improvement in the provision of emotional support.

4.2 Teacher Professional Support

Participants rated the professional support from teachers highly, with an average score of 4.21 out of 5. This suggests that teachers were generally seen as performing well in their professional roles. In terms of learning resource satisfaction, 94.29% of participants indicated that the resources provided by teachers met or exceeded their learning needs, indicating that the materials and information provided were adequate for most students. Regarding pre-class testing, 71.43% of participants agreed that teachers assessed their prior knowledge, while 28.57% either disagreed or were uncertain, suggesting variability in teaching practices or student awareness. The majority of participants (71.43%) also agreed that teachers posed open-ended and heuristic questions during instruction, with 85.71% finding this approach consistent, indicating a preference for guided thinking over mere knowledge transmission. Furthermore, 94.29% of participants were satisfied with the organization of course content, suggesting that teachers effectively structured their lessons to ensure comprehensive and appropriate learning experiences.

4.3 Teacher Social Support

Most students held a positive view of the social support provided by teachers, with four out of five items scoring above 4. Notably, the item "Teachers notice and respond to my postings in forums or other communication tools" received the highest average score of 4.43, indicating that students generally appreciated this aspect of teacher support. However, the item "I enjoy communicating with teachers and classmates using social tools" scored slightly lower at 4.14, suggesting room for improvement in the use of social tools for communication. A few students selected "Not at all" and "Somewhat disagree" for two items, but the overall high average scores indicate that these were isolated opinions and did not significantly impact the general perception of social support. In summary, most students were satisfied with the social support provided by teachers, particularly in terms of attention and responsiveness, but there is potential for enhancing the use of social tools for communication.

4.4 Teacher Instrumental Support

Most students "fully agreed" (57.14%) that teachers were capable of resolving technical platform issues, followed by "somewhat agree" (14.29%). This demonstrates that teachers were effective in addressing technical challenges. In terms of providing course information, 71.43% of students "fully agreed," and 28.57% "somewhat agreed," indicating that teachers were also effective in this regard. When it came to resolving issues with missing or erroneous student learning data, 71.43% of students "fully agreed," and 28.57% "somewhat agreed," showing that teachers were adept at handling such issues. The overall average score for teacher instrumental support was 4.52, reflecting general satisfaction with this aspect of teacher support.

4.5 Enjoyable Emotions in Online English Learning

The majority of participants exhibited positive attitudes towards online English learning, as indicated by their agreement with statements such as "I am not bored with online English learning," "I enjoy the process of online English learning," "I have learned a lot of interesting knowledge in the process of online English learning," "The atmosphere of online English learning is good," and "Learning English online is fun," with average scores exceeding 4. However, responses to "I am proud of my English achievements" and "I have a good English learning atmosphere in the online learning process" were more neutral, with average scores of 4 and 3.86, respectively. The item "We have a close learning group" received a lower average score of 3.29, suggesting that the perceived closeness of learning groups in the online environment may not meet participants' expectations. Overall, participants generally found the online English learning experience enjoyable, with interesting content and a positive learning atmosphere, but there is room for improvement in fostering closer group interactions.

4.6 Boring Emotions in Online English Learning

Most participants held neutral attitudes towards the statement "English class is not very interesting," with a minority fully disagreeing or somewhat disagreeing. For statements such as "I easily get sleepy in English class," "I easily get distracted in English class," "In online English class, I am physically present but mentally elsewhere," "It is difficult for me to concentrate in English class," "Time passes very slowly in English class," "I often feel like I cannot continue listening in English class," and "I always try to pass the time in English class," most participants also held neutral attitudes, with a minority fully disagreeing or somewhat disagreeing. The overall average score for these

statements was 2.13, indicating a moderate level of agreement. In summary, while most participants did not find English classes particularly boring, there was a subset that did, indicating a need for further exploration into the factors contributing to this perception.

5. Discussion

The present study has delved into the impact of teacher support strategies on college students' emotions within the context of online English learning. The findings of this research offer invaluable insights into the pivotal role that teachers play in cultivating positive learning environments within digital platforms. Firstly, it is evident that teacher support strategies, classified into emotional, professional, social, and instrumental support, exert a significant influence on shaping students' emotional experiences during online English learning.

Emotional support, characterized by teachers' timely recognition of student issues, encouraging feedback, and respect for students' perspectives, was highly perceived by students, with an average score of 4.05 out of 5. However, the study also identifies areas for improvement, such as offering more timely praise and balanced criticism, underscoring the importance of maintaining a supportive and non-judgmental learning atmosphere. Professional support, which includes the quality of learning resources, pre-class assessments, and the use of open-ended questions, received high ratings from students, indicating their satisfaction with the professional expertise of teachers. Notably, a vast majority (94.29%) reported that the learning resources met or exceeded their needs, suggesting that teachers effectively adapted their materials to cater to students' individual learning requirements. Social support, marked by teachers' attention to students' online interactions and engagement, was also positively evaluated. Students appreciated the fact that teachers monitored and responded to their forum posts and encouraged the use of social tools for communication. However, there is room for enhancement in utilizing social tools to facilitate more collaborative learning experiences. Instrumental support, particularly in resolving technical issues and providing timely course information, was well-received, with an average score of 4.52. This highlights teachers' proficiency in addressing technical barriers and ensuring a seamless learning process.

Regarding learning emotions, students expressed overall positive sentiments towards online English learning, enjoying the process and finding it intellectually stimulating. However, a notable finding is the moderate agreement on feelings of pride in English achievement and the perceived tightness of learning groups, indicating opportunities for enhancing students' sense of accomplishment and fostering stronger peer connections. Furthermore, while students generally did not experience high levels of boredom during online English classes, some displayed neutral attitudes towards specific indicators of boredom. This neutrality may be attributed to the flexibility and autonomy offered by online learning, which can mitigate feelings of monotony.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study underscores the significant impact of teacher support strategies on college students' emotional experiences during online English learning. Teachers' emotional, professional, social, and instrumental support were found to contribute positively to students' learning emotions, fostering higher levels of enjoyment and mitigating boredom. The findings highlight the importance of personalized support tailored to students' unique needs and backgrounds, as well as frequent and effective communication between teachers and students. The use of open-ended questions, encouraging feedback, and respect for student perspectives are crucial for fostering a supportive learning environment. Additionally, the provision of high-quality learning resources and timely technical assistance are essential for ensuring a seamless learning experience.

Future research should explore strategies to further enhance students' sense of accomplishment

and foster closer learning communities within online English courses. Given the dynamic nature of online learning, it is crucial for educators to continuously adapt their support strategies to evolving student needs and preferences. By optimizing teacher support and addressing potential areas for improvement, the quality and effectiveness of online English education can be significantly enhanced, ultimately leading to more positive learning experiences for students.

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