

Implications of Teacher Support and Learning Engagement for English Reading Teaching in Senior High School

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Abstract: In recent years, research on teacher support and learning engagement has attracted scholars' attention in the field of education. Such research has great implications for English reading teaching practice in senior high school. By reviewing relevant studies, this paper proposes the implications of teacher support and learning engagement for English reading teaching in senior high school. Learning engagement has a decisive impact on students' English achievement^[1]. Moreover, teacher support significantly correlates with students' learning engagement and positive emotions play a promoting role as a mediator. Therefore, English teachers should consciously strengthen teacher support in English reading class and relieve students' negative emotions. Designing effective teaching activities and flexibly regulating their implementation can ensure the achievement of teaching goals. At the same time, effective teaching stimulates students' subjectivity in the classroom, enabling them to actively construct knowledge with the support of their teachers.

Keywords: teacher support, learning engagement, English reading teaching

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization, English, as an international language, has become increasingly prominent. Students' English proficiency is not only related to their academic development but also affects their career prospects and social adaptability in the future. Therefore, improving students' English proficiency and cultivating their English core literacy have become the focus of teachers and researchers. Students are exposed to extensive English materials especially reading texts when they are in senior high school. Thus, English reading teaching in senior high school is crucial and takes a vital role.

Education should fully stimulate students' subjectivity and make them the masters of learning. It is easy to observe that teachers are one of the most important factors among the factors affecting students' English achievement in senior high school. However, this does not mean that all English teachers' ideas and behaviors will affect students' English achievements. Teacher support refers to the care and help of the teacher in learning, as well as affirmation and encouragement in the spiritual aspect^[2]. Senior high school students face great academic pressure and are in a sensitive period of psychological development. Their thinking develops rapidly, and their self-awareness is strong. Providing positive care and encouragement to senior high school students and giving them support is conducive to their all-round development. Teacher support is the main social support that students receive at school^[3]. With the proposal of English core literacy, the goal of English education is no longer limited to helping students acquire language knowledge and skills but should also focus on promoting students' individual well-being^[3]. Teachers should help students establish positive emotions and a stable mindset to deal with challenges they faced.

In recent years, educational psychology research has shown that the perception of teacher support is an important

psychological factor affecting students' learning attitudes and behaviors. Teacher support can not only enhance students' learning motivation but also promote their active participation in classroom activities, thereby improving learning effectiveness^[4].

In addition, learning engagement can be understood as an individual's psychological state in learning activities^[5]. It is proven that English learning engagement is positively correlated with English achievement^[1,6,7,8]. Some scholars have studied the impact of factors such as teacher support and psychological resilience on learning engagement, finding that teacher support is positively correlated with English learning engagement, and English learning engagement can predict English learning achievement^[9,10]. Therefore, research on teacher support and learning engagement has great implications for senior high school English reading teaching practice. By reviewing previous studies on teacher support and learning engagement, this paper analyzes their implications for senior high school English reading classes, aiming to help middle school teachers optimize English reading teaching strategies and improve students' English learning effects.

2. Literature Review

Trickett and Moo first proposed the concept of teacher support, which is derived from social support. They believed that teacher support is students' perception of the care and help provided by teachers^[11]. Goodenow argued that students' perceived teacher support is from the students' perspective, where students perceive supportive attitudes or encouraging behaviors from their teachers, and such perception will affect their learning participation, learning motivation, and academic performance^[12]. When students perceive teacher support, they will show a higher level of learning interest and more pleasure in school life^[1]. Some scholars believed that it mainly includes emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and evaluative support, while Chai Xiaoyun and Gong Shaoying divided teacher support into emotional support, autonomy support, and cognitive support. Chai and Gong's division of teacher support has been employed considerably, so it is adopted in this study^[10,13].

Fredricks defined learning engagement as the degree of effort or investment of learners in the learning process, including behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement^[5]. Guo Jidong and Liu Lin believed that learning engagement has an vital impact on both the learning process and learning outcomes^[14]. It is a necessary prerequisite for achieving excellent learning achievements. Improving and optimizing students' learning engagement is a common goal of teachers and schools^[14]. Zhang Na pointed out that students with high learning engagement usually actively seize opportunities, choose and strive to complete tasks that are challenging to their abilities^[1]. They are enthusiastic, optimistic, and curious. However, students with low learning engagement usually do not study hard, easily give up in the face of challenges, always feel bored, depressed, and anxious during learning, and even skip classes, or disrupt normal class and school order. The definition of learning engagement by Guo Jidong and Liu Lin, emphasizing the procedural and result-oriented role of learning engagement, is in line with the theme of this study. Previous studies on teacher support and learning engagement in English teaching are reviewed and analyzed.

2.1 Research on Teacher Support

The teacher-student relationship is an important factor affecting students' development. With the development of educational psychology, scholars have analyzed the impact of teachers on students' learning from the perspective of teacher support and explored the factors that affect students' perception of teacher support. Ren Ping et al. found that students' sense of fairness affects their perceived teacher support, and a fair and just class atmosphere can meet students' intrinsic learning needs, thereby stimulating learning motivation and improving academic performance^[15].

Researchers have explored the relationship between teacher support as a whole, its various dimensions, and students' learning achievement, as well as the relationship learning pleasure. Studies by Chen Jiwen and Guo Yongyu showed that teacher support has a positive predictive effect on English learning achievement. English learning achievement is also affected by teacher support. Moreover, English learning achievement is mediated by learning motivation^[14]. Jensen et al. studied showed that there is a significant relationship between teacher emotional support and readers' self-concept, as well as between readers' self-concept and reading achievement^[16]. Torbergsen et al. concluded that students' perceived teacher autonomy support has direct and indirect relationships with learning achievement and learning efforts^[17]. These studies fully indicate that teacher support is an important factor in students' English learning achievement.

Previous studies have shown that teacher support has a considerable influence on learning pleasure. Ghaith et al.

found that teacher support is a beneficial environmental factor, and is positively correlated with students' learning interest, enthusiasm for classroom participation, and English scores^[18]. Jiang found that teacher support factors are environmental and emotional factors affecting students' learning pleasure^[19]. Liu et al. revealed that teacher support has a direct positive impact on interactive engagement and learning pleasure^[20].

2.2 Research on Learning Engagement

In recent years, research on English learning engagement has focused on both external and internal factors affecting learning.

Professor Xu and Long found that learning engagement plays a decisive role in English learning outcomes. In a multi-interactive environment, learners' feedback engagement presents various types. Although learners have different preferences for various types of feedback, teacher feedback is favored by all learners^[21]. Professor Ren Qingmei studied the regulatory role of motivation on English learning engagement in the class, and found that learning engagement can predict learning satisfaction. She also constructed a theoretical framework for English classroom learning engagement and developed a multi-dimensional evaluation scale covering the generation, performance, and development orientation of learning engagement^[8].

Hui Lianghong et al. assessed the impact of psychological resilience on Chinese English learning engagement, showing that psychological resilience can help students overcome learning difficulties and negative emotions in online learning, and improve cognitive strategies and learning engagement in online English learning^[9]. Based on Complex Dynamic System Theory, Yu Hanjing et al. investigated the diachronic development of learning pleasure and learning engagement. The results showed there is a supportive relationship between learning pleasure and learning engagement^[22].

2.3 Research on Teacher Support and Learning Engagement

According to Self-determination Theory, individuals generally have basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The social environment can promote the development of individuals' motivation and behaviors by supporting and satisfying these basic psychological needs. Specifically, in the classroom environment, as an important component of social support, teacher support can make students experience greater autonomy and sense of belonging, thereby internalizing their motivational behaviors and making them more actively engage in learning activities^[13]. Luan, Dong, and Liu divided teacher support strategies in online English learning into several dimensions: providing challenges, creating contexts, stimulating interest, encouraging autonomy, and feedback evaluation^[23]. The study found that "providing challenges" and "feedback evaluation" can positively predict all variables of learning engagement, and "providing challenges" has the strongest predictive power for learning engagement. When teaching content is challenging to a certain extent, teachers' timely and effective feedback and evaluation will significantly affect all aspects of online English learning engagement, and teacher support strategies have a significant positive impact on online English learning engagement.

In addition, existing studies have found that teacher support may be related to learning engagement through learners' internal factors, thereby affecting their learning engagement^[4]. Zhang Qian believed that academic emotions are important variables throughout the individual learning process and may be the bridge between teacher support and learning engagement^[10]. Sadoughi and Hejazi studied that teacher support significantly affects Iranian college students' English learning engagement, and positive academic emotions play an intermediary role between teacher support and learning engagement^[24]. Liu, Guo, and Wang investigated the impact of the sense of teacher support on classroom social engagement^[4]. The results showed that the perception of teacher support positively predicts social engagement through the complete mediating role of learners' perceived interaction value and anxiety self-regulation. Teacher emotional support can help students gain respect, a sense of security, and confidence, overcome social anxiety and inferiority complex, and actively seek opportunities for foreign language learning and communication.

3. Teaching Implications

Both teacher support and learning engagement have a positive effect on English learning achievement. Although there are differences in various teaching environment, most studies confirmed that improving teacher support and learning engagement facilitates students' learning interest and active engagement in the class. Based on the above findings, this paper puts forward the following teaching suggestions.

3.1 Strengthen Teacher Support

As a key source of support that students feel in the classroom, teacher support has vital impacts on students' learning achievement. It can directly affect students' learning status and learning engagement.

Different scholars have divided teacher support into different dimensions, all of which include emotional support, which also indicates the uniqueness and importance of emotional support from the side. However, in senior high school English reading classes, teachers should flexibly balance different dimensions of teacher support according to students' situations and teaching links. Strengthening teacher support includes enhancing all dimensions of teacher support.

Teacher emotional support, autonomy support, and cognitive support each play their own roles in promoting students' learning achievement. Teachers can provide emotional support through verbal encouragement, set challenging activities and give feedback and evaluation to improve autonomy support, and provide cognitive support by building conceptual networks. For example, in reading classes, teachers can design "role-playing" activities. For students with performance anxiety, teachers can first provide demonstrations and then gradually reduce guidance. Teachers should respect and care for students, actively give feedback on their classroom performance, make students feel teachers' emotional and cognitive support, gain a sense of happiness in foreign language classes, and improve foreign language learning effects^[19]. While providing autonomy support, teachers also need to strengthen the cultivation of students' English autonomous learning ability, especially the cultivation of foreign language self-learning ability through self-regulated learning strategies^[20].

3.2 The Linking Role of Teaching Activities

Classroom activities are the key to connecting teachers and students. Teachers and students enter the same cognitive system through teaching activities. Teachers can provide students with teacher support during the implementation of classroom activities, and students, perceiving teacher support, actively participate in the classroom, thereby improving their learning willingness and participation. Scholars have pointed out that teacher support can positively affect English learners' learning engagement^[18,23]. That is, teachers provide learning support through encouraging measures as scaffolding to promote learners' learning engagement^[12]. Teachers should innovate curriculum content design and provide rich and challenging teaching activities, such as journalist interviews, poster design, and interactive games, to enhance learners' comprehensive English achievement and English literacy. English teachers should help students understand the value of social interaction, actively participate in social interaction activities, and conduct self-regulation during interaction^[4].

3.3 Learning Motivation and Learning Pleasure

Research on teacher support and learning engagement shows that learning motivation and learning pleasure play an important mediating role in teacher support predicting learning engagement and academic achievement^[4,12,24]. English teachers should pay attention to students' learning engagement and stimulate their subjectivity. Teachers should actively care about students' emotional needs, provide sufficient emotional support, and alleviate their pressure and anxiety in English learning. Secondly, teachers should create contexts, encourage students' autonomy, and affirm and encourage students at both linguistic and non-linguistic levels^[19].

4. Conclusion

Students are the main characters in the class, while teachers are the leaders. Teacher support plays a unique role in the class to activate students and promote their construction and internalization of knowledge. Teacher support can significantly and positively facilitate students' English learning engagement and predict English learning achievement. Therefore, English teachers should deliberately enhance their support in the classroom. On the one hand, teachers should carefully design and flexibly regulate teaching activities to ensure the achievement of teaching objectives. On the other hand, they should continuously arouse students' subjectivity in the classroom, making learning a driving force of their independent construction of knowledge and improvement of English core literacy.

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