

# The Impact of Teacher Support, Learning Engagement, and Flow Experience on Junior High School Students' Foreign Language Learning

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[ **Abstract** ] This study explores the relationship between teacher support, learning engagement, flow experience, and junior high school students' English performance. Existing research indicates a significant positive correlation between teacher support and junior high school students' English performance, learning engagement, and flow experience. Additionally, flow experience and learning engagement significantly predict English performance. Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers improve their teaching strategies and provide more support to increase students' engagement in English learning, helping them maintain a continuous flow state and ultimately improving their English performance. Moreover, teachers should guide students to engage comprehensively in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects to enhance their autonomous learning ability and English performance.

[ **Key words** ] teacher support; learning engagement; flow experience; English performance

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## 1 Introduction

Academic performance not only reflects students' learning outcomes (Gao Bingcheng & Liu Rude, 2011) but also serves as an important basis for teacher evaluations (Gong Linquan, 2016). Exploring the factors influencing academic performance can deepen teaching theories and promote teaching practice. Compared to other grades, ninth-grade students face academic pressure from the pivotal high school entrance exam, making students, teachers, and parents eager to adopt appropriate strategies to improve academic performance (Chen Xu et al., 2018). Teachers, as significant others in students' school experiences, can influence students' learning activities and academic performance through support (Liang Kaili, 2021). Learning engagement is essential for second language acquisition; a lack of engagement leads to a decrease in meaningful learning (Reeve, 2012). With the introduction of positive psychology in foreign language teaching, recent studies have increasingly focused on the emotional experiences during teaching and their impact on achievement (Jean-Marc D. & Chengchen L., 2022; Li Chengchen & Han Ye, 2022). Flow, a subjective emotional experience of fully immersing in an activity, can modulate learners' perceptions of task difficulty and emotional experiences (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975, 1990). This study aims to explore the relationships between English teacher support, English learning engagement, English flow experience, and learners' academic achievements, providing beneficial insights for English teachers in their teaching practices.

## 2 Teacher support

Teacher support occurs during students' learning processes and refers to the supportive behaviors teachers provide in students' academic lives. Domestic researcher Ouyang Dan (2005) classified teacher support into three types: emotional support, ability support, and learning support. Existing studies have found that teacher support significantly predicts students' academic performance (Chen Yanlei & Guo Shaoyang, 2016), and students receiving comprehensive teacher support perform relatively better (Qiao Na et al., 2013). In a school environment, social support is a crucial classroom environmental factor, as well as teachers' help and concern for learners' study and spirit, influencing not only learners' academic performance but also their mental health and stress management (Ghaith, 2002). As a component of the social support system, teacher support can promote learners' learning engagement (Jang, 2010), thereby improving their academic performance (Ahmed, 2010). According to the Control-value Theory (Pekrun, 2006), students' control over learning tasks and their value assessments influence their academic emotions. Teacher support, perceived by students as an authoritative resource when facing learning pressure, can provide a sense of security in the classroom (Ahmed, 2010). This sense of security and confidence, facilitated by teacher support, helps learners complete English learning tasks when facing difficulties or pressure, enhancing their positive academic emotional experiences.

## 3 Learning engagement

Learning engagement, a crucial concept in studying students' learning and development, began its research in the 1990s. American scholar Kuh (2009) believed that learning engagement is the involvement of students' thoughts, behaviors, and actions in the learning process, with students' willingness to spend time and effort on educational activities. Kearsley (1998) summarized learning engagement into two main aspects: students should actively engage in cognitive activities and proactively learn in meaningful activities. Learning engagement is indispensable for improving academic performance and teaching quality, significantly correlating with academic performance (Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Xerri et al., 2018). Researchers emphasize the importance of learning engagement in foreign language learning contexts (Mercer, 2019), and studies have confirmed the positive impact of foreign language learning engagement on language acquisition (Oga-Baldwin & Fryer, 2018; Khajavy, 2021). Reeve (2012) defined learning engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing four main dimensions: behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and agentic engagement. Studies show that these dimensions are highly correlated and can jointly predict the engagement level of foreign language learners (Oga-Baldwin, 2019). Foreign language learning engagement is the manifestation of learning engagement in foreign language learning, referring to the degree of effort or investment students make in language knowledge, skills, and related knowledge during the learning process (Guo Jidong & Liu Lin, 2016). Zhang Qian (2023), through a survey of 642 non-English major college students, pointed out that foreign language teacher support can significantly predict foreign language learning engagement, and learners with higher foreign language learning engagement achieve significantly better performance than those with lower engagement.

## 4 Flow experience

Flow is the state of being completely immersed in an activity and enjoying the positive emotions of the activity, which is also known as optimal experience. With the "positive psychology turn" in second language acquisition and foreign language teaching, flow experience, hailed as "the ultimate engagement", has received increasing attention. Csíkszentmihályi (1990) showed that flow enables people to repeatedly engage and explore to achieve optimal learning experiences and work accomplishments. Despite differences among scholars in the stages of flow elements (Finneran & Zhang, 2005; Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), it is widely believed that the fundamental cause of flow is the "balance between skills and challenges" (Fong et al., 2015). The Flow State Model posits that flow occurs when skills and challenges are balanced; high challenges lead to anxiety, while high skills lead to boredom (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975). Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi (2014) revised the early model to the "Four-channel Model", suggesting that challenges and skills must not only be balanced but also both at high levels to produce strong flow experiences. Conversely, even if balanced at low levels, flow experiences do not

occur, potentially leading to indifference. After experiencing flow, learners seek to improve their skills to re-experience this joy, daring to face challenges and ultimately achieving better learning outcomes.

Egbert (2003) was the first to study flow experience in foreign language learning, developing a flow scale for foreign language learning by constructing a model of flow experience in the foreign language learning process of 13 junior high school students. With further research, domestic and international scholars have improved flow scales based on different research contexts (e.g., Eryilmaz & Ergünay, 2018) and proposed different scales for various learning processes of language skills (e.g., Mirlohi et al., 2011; Payant & Zuniga, 2022). Scholars have also explored flow experiences in different task contexts and learning environments (e.g., Cho, 2018; Elmansı, 2022). Chinese scholars have made significant achievements in researching flow experiences in various language skills learning and developing related scales, such as vocabulary learning (Li et al., 2019) and oral dubbing (Liu & Song, 2021). Wang & Huang (2022) incorporated second language emotions and flow experiences into a unified system, examining the relationship between common emotions like anxiety, joy, boredom, and flow experiences. Studies show that flow plays a crucial role in promoting foreign language learning and language development (Li et al., 2018). Chinese scholars Wu Huajun et al. (2020) found that teachers' emotional and cognitive support significantly predicts flow experiences in foreign language learning, while learning support influences flow experiences through the mediation of perceived ease of use. Gao Yulei & Zhang Zhiyi (2023) discovered through research on college students in English competition contexts that flow experiences significantly predict English learning performance.

## 5 Conclusion

This study aims to explore the relationships between teacher support, learning engagement, flow experience, and foreign language performance. Combined with research by scholars at home and abroad, it is shown that teacher support has a significant positive correlation with junior high school students' English performance, learning engagement, and flow experience. Meanwhile, flow experience and learning engagement also significantly predict English performance. Based on these findings, we suggest that teachers improve their teaching strategies and provide more support to enhance students' engagement in English learning, helping them maintain a continuous flow state and ultimately improving their English performance. Furthermore, we plan to conduct further research in Chinese junior high schools to demonstrate the importance of guiding students to engage comprehensively in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects to enhance their autonomous learning ability and English performance, providing references and insights for related research.

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