A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING MOTIVATION AND ACADEMIC HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN YUNNAN PROVINCE

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Abstract

This study, conducted among 363 undergraduate students at D University in Kunming, investigated the current status and relationship between learning motivation and academic help-seeking behavior. Results revealed significant differences between students of different majors and academic achievement levels, with students majoring in stomatology, traditional Chinese medicine, and high-achieving students showing the strongest performance. Learning motivation was positively correlated with academic help-seeking behavior, while intrinsic motivation was more strongly associated with instrumental help-seeking, and all motivational dimensions were negatively correlated with avoidant help-seeking. External motivation had a slightly greater predictive effect on executive and instrumental help-seeking than internal motivation, both of which inhibited avoidance behavior. Rural and first-generation college students exhibited a lower level of help-seeking awareness. The conclusion suggests that learning motivation is a key factor influencing academic help-seeking behavior, while differences in majors and social structural factors influence help-seeking intentions. It is recommended that universities integrate motivational theory to implement differentiated support and environmental optimization.

Keywords: college students, learning motivation, academic help-seeking behavior

Introduction

In the 21st century, "learning to learn" has become a core competency, with UNESCO, the European Union, and others listing it as a key competency for lifelong learning and personal development. As higher education expands and the student population becomes more diverse, academic pressure and knowledge obsolescence become prominent. While academic help-seeking behavior has attracted attention as a key strategy for coping with academic challenges, some students lack the awareness to proactively seek help, hindering their development. Actively seeking academic help can help solve academic problems and promote interpersonal communication and social adaptation (Liu Huqing, 2015; Wu Yanan, 2021). Research shows that academic help-seeking behavior is influenced by factors such as gender, major, and external environment, with learning motivation, a key psychological variable, playing a significant role (Dou Yuanyuan, et al., 2015). Learning motivation is the internal driving force

that drives students to actively learn and plays a decisive role in learning outcomes and help-seeking behavior. Based on self-determination theory, both internal and external motivations influence learning performance (Wu Youhong, 2024), with internal motivation being more strongly associated with instrumental help-seeking (Algharaibeh, 2020). Furthermore, factors such as teacher support, individual differences, and the online learning environment also play a role (Raboca & Carbunarean, 2024; Cabras, et al., 2023; Sungjun, et al., 2021). Students in different regions of China exhibit varying learning motivation and help-seeking behaviors due to cultural and economic factors. Therefore, a systematic analysis of the relationship between these two factors among students in Yunnan universities is of great significance for enriching theory and improving higher education practice.

Research Objectives

This study focuses on undergraduate students at University D in Yunnan Province, utilizing questionnaire surveys and related methods with the following objectives:

1. To study the current status of learning motivation and academic help-seeking behavior among college students;

2. To study the relationship between college students' learning motivation and their academic help-seeking behavior.

Conceptual Framework

The independent variables of this study are learning motivation, which is divided into two dimensions: internal learning motivation and external learning motivation. The dependent variables are academic help-seeking behavior, which is divided into three dimensions: executive help-seeking, avoidance help-seeking and instrumental help-seeking. The relationship model between the constructed variables is shown in Figure 1.

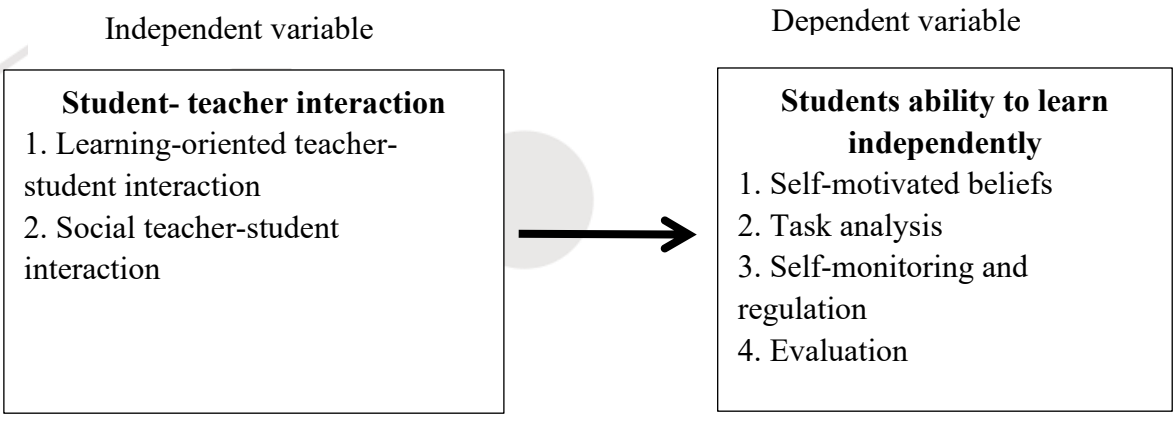

Figure 1: Model of variable relationship in the study

Hypotheses

This study in this study, learning motivation is treated as the independent variable, comprising two dimensions: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Academic help-seeking behavior is taken as the dependent variable, including three dimensions: executive help-seeking, avoidant help-seeking, and instrumental help-seeking. Based on the relationships

among these variables, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_1: There are differences in college students' learning motivation and academic help-seeking behavior among different demographic variables.

H_2: There is a significant correlation between college students' learning motivation and academic help-seeking behavior.

$H_{2.1}$: Internal learning motivation has a positive effect on executive help-seeking behavior.

$H_{2.2}$: Internal learning motivation has a negative effect on avoidance of help seeking behavior.

$H_{2.3}$: The effect of internal learning motivation on executive help-seeking behavior was not significant.

$H_{2.4}$: External learning motivation has a positive effect on executive help-seeking behavior.

$H_{2.5}$: External learning motivation has a negative effect on avoidance seeking behavior.

$H_{2.6}$: External learning motivation has a positive effect on instrumental help-seeking behavior.

Literature Review

Research on Learning Motivation

Wu Xinchun (2021) defines it as the internal psychological drive that stimulates, directs, and sustains learning activities, primarily encompassing two dimensions: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation stems from an individual's interest in knowledge, curiosity, and need for self-actualization, while extrinsic motivation often manifests itself in the pursuit of external rewards, evaluation, and social recognition (Mo Yuwan & Liu Baocun, 2022). Numerous studies have shown that positive learning motivation not only enhances learning initiative and self-efficacy but also strengthens goal setting, focus, and resilience, thereby improving academic achievement and mental health (Kang Yating, 2018). The factors influencing learning motivation are complex, encompassing both individual traits and external factors such as teaching methods, teacher-student relationships, family background, and digital literacy. In recent years, the application of digital teaching and artificial intelligence in the classroom has provided new avenues for enhancing learning motivation (Hou Hongmei & Qiang Liman, 2024). Furthermore, teacher support, positive psychological capital, and parent-school collaboration have been shown to help stimulate and maintain student learning motivation and alleviate learning burnout (Li Hongling & Zhang Zhiguo, 2021). In terms of measurement tools, domestic and foreign scholars have developed a variety of questionnaires and scales with high reliability and validity, such as the "Learning Motivation Scale" developed by Tian Lan et al., the "Learning Process Questionnaire" by Biggs, and the "Work Motivation Scale" by the Amabile team, which provide guarantees for quantitative research on learning motivation.

Research on Academic Help-Seeking Behavior

Since its introduction by Nelson-Le Gall (1981), academic help-seeking has gradually become a hot topic in educational psychology research. Academic help-seeking is generally categorized into three types: instrumental, executive, and avoidant. Instrumental help-seeking helps enhance students' self-efficacy and independent problem-solving abilities, executive help-seeking tends to rely on others to complete tasks, and avoidant help-seeking involves not actively seeking help (Li Xiaodong, 1999). Academic help-seeking not only directly impacts academic achievement but also promotes social interaction and personality development (Wu Yanan, 2021).

Factors influencing academic help-seeking behavior include students' motivational type, achievement goals, self-efficacy, family upbringing, and school atmosphere. Research has found that positive achievement goals and high self-efficacy tend to promote instrumental help-seeking, while high-stress environments or negative attributions can lead to avoidant help-seeking (Won Sungjun, et al., 2021; Zhou Xiaolan, 2022). In China, the Academic Help-Seeking Behavior Scale developed by Li Xiaodong and Zhang Bingsong is widely used to measure help-seeking behavior among college students, demonstrating good reliability and validity. Recent studies have also focused on help-seeking behavior in online learning contexts, arguing that a sense of belonging and digital skills have an important impact on the willingness to seek academic help.

The Relationship between Learning Motivation and Academic Help-Seeking Behavior

Elliot and Dweck (2015) argue that students with strong intrinsic motivation are more willing to proactively seek help, tend to engage in instrumental help-seeking behaviors, and effectively inhibit avoidance behaviors. External motivation, on the other hand, promotes executive and instrumental help-seeking to a certain extent. Raboca and Carbonarean (2024) note that teacher support can significantly enhance students' learning motivation and, through motivation, influence their willingness and approach to help-seeking. Related theories, such as attribution theory and social learning theory, provide powerful explanations for understanding the relationship between the two

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

The subjects of this study were undergraduate students enrolled at University D, a private medical university located in Kunming, Yunnan Province, China. The university has approximately 10,000 students. Using a stratified random sampling method, questionnaires were distributed to 376 students selected from different grades and majors, with 363 valid responses ultimately collected. The sample size exceeds 100 and is more than ten times the total number of questionnaire items (32), meeting accepted standards for sample adequacy (Gorsuch, 1983). The survey was designed and distributed using the Wenjuanxing (Questionnaire Star) online platform and was also disseminated via WeChat.

Research Instruments

This study utilized a self-compiled questionnaire, adapted from established instruments in previous research, and consisted of three main sections.

1. Basic Information

This section collected six demographic variables: gender, grade level, major, academic performance, place of origin, and whether the respondent was a first-generation college student. These data were used for subsequent demographic variable analyses.

2. Learning Motivation Scale

This scale was developed with reference to the works of Tian Lan (2006) and Kang Yating (2018), and included two dimensions: intrinsic motivation (e.g., interest, pursuit of competence, items D1–D6) and extrinsic motivation (e.g., career pursuit, reputation orientation, items D7–D12), totaling 12 items. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree), with no reverse-scored items.

3. Academic Help-Seeking Behavior Scale

Adapted from the scale developed by Li Xiaodong and Zhang Bingsong (1999), this scale included three dimensions: executive help-seeking (Q1–Q5), avoidant help-seeking (Q6–Q10), and instrumental help-seeking (Q11–Q14), for a total of 14 items. Items Q6–Q10 measured avoidant help-seeking and were reverse-scored during analysis.

All scales used a 5-point Likert rating (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree), with higher scores indicating higher levels of the corresponding dimension. The questionnaire items were reviewed by five education experts (professors or associate professors in educational management, educational economics, Chinese education, and physical education) using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method; all items achieved an IOC index ≥ 0.8, indicating good content validity. Reliability analysis showed Cronbach's α coefficients of 0.88 for the learning motivation scale and 0.87 for the academic help-seeking behavior scale, indicating high overall reliability of the instruments.

Data Collection

A stratified random sampling method was adopted for sampling, with samples drawn relatively evenly across different professional categories. Based on the total research sample size of 20,000 people from University D, the sample size for the formal survey was determined to be 376, with approximately 94 people selected from each of the first, second, third, and fourth grades. The questionnaires were distributed through the Wenjuanxing platform and WeChat platform.

Data Analysis

This study uses SPSS 25.0 for statistical analysis of data, with the main methods including: descriptive statistical analysis, factor analysis, analysis of variance, correlation analysis, and regression analysis.

Research Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 Basic Descriptive Statistics (N=363)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median
Learning Motivation	3.049	0.858	3.083
Extrinsic Motivation	3.019	1.026	3.333
Intrinsic Motivation	3.065	0.985	3.143
Academic Help-Seeking	3.018	0.519	3.000
Executive Help-Seeking	3.067	1.107	3.200
Avoidant Help-Seeking	2.904	1.105	2.800
Instrumental Help-Seeking	3.102	1.111	3.250

A total of 363 valid samples were collected in this study, with 59.5% female respondents, 82.09% from rural backgrounds, and 68.04% being first-generation college students. The overall mean score for learning motivation was 3.05 (SD=0.86), and for academic help-seeking was 3.02 (SD=0.52), both at a moderate level. The mean scores for internal motivation, external motivation, and instrumental help-seeking were slightly higher than other subscales, indicating that students have a certain foundation in proactive learning and academic support, but with notable individual differences.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Table 2 Analysis of Differences in Learning Motivation Across Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Variable		N	Mean ± SD	F	P
Gender	Male	147	3.15±0.81	3.650	0.057
	Female	216	2.98±0.88		
Grade	Freshman	160	3.02±0.87	0.217	0.085
	Sophomore	140	3.09±0.81		
	Junior	63	3.04±0.95		
Major	Clinical Medicine	94	3.11±0.97	2.69	0.046*
	Chinese Medicine	101	3.27±0.83		
	Nursing	102	3.02±0.92		
	Stomatology	66	3.37±0.82		

Demographic Variable		N	Mean ± SD	F	P
Academic Performance Level	Excellent	43	3.48±0.70	5.288	0.002**
	Good	105	3.09±0.89		
	Average	160	2.97±0.84		
	Poor	55	2.87±0.86		
Place of Origin	Urban	65	3.18±0.99	0.02	0.99
	Rural	298	3.18±0.88		
First-generation college student	Yes	247	3.21±0.88	0.89	0.35
	No	116	3.11±0.92		
p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001					

Table 3 Analysis of Differences in Academic Help-Seeking Across Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Variable		N	Mean ± SD	F	P
Gender	Male	147	3.20±0.87	3.814	0.052
	Female	216	3.01±0.90		
Grade	Freshman	160	3.02±0.87	0.217	0.085
	Sophomore	140	3.09±0.81		
	Junior	63	3.04±0.95		
Major	Clinical Medicine	94	3.14±0.89	2.74	0.043*
	Chinese Medicine	101	3.28±0.84		
	Nursing	102	3.04±0.95		
	Stomatology	66	3.41±0.82		
Academic Performance Level	Excellent	43	3.15±0.90	3.740	0.011*
	Good	105	3.09±0.89		
	Average	160	3.02±0.92		
	Poor	55	2.89±0.82		
Place of Origin	Urban	65	3.21±0.96	0.08	0.94
	Rural	298	3.20±0.87		
First-generation college student	Yes	247	3.06±0.92	0.674	0.412
	No	116	3.14±0.83		
p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001					

Significant differences in learning motivation and academic help-seeking were found across academic majors and achievement levels ($F=2.690$-5.228, $p<0.05$ or $p<0.01$). Students in Traditional Chinese Medicine and Stomatology (Dentistry) majors, as well as those with excellent academic performance, demonstrated stronger motivation and help-seeking behaviors. Gender, grade, background (urban/rural), and first-generation college student status did not show significant effects on these variables ($p>0.05$). These findings partially support Hypothesis H_1.

Correlation Analysis

Table 4 Results of Correlation Analysis

Variable	Academic Help-Seeking	Executive Help-Seeking	Avoidance Help-Seeking	Instrumental Help-Seeking
Learning Motivation	0.276	0.485	-0.509	0.480
Intrinsic Motivation	0.218	0.370	-0.385	0.373
Extrinsic Motivation	0.246	0.451	-0.483	0.441
* $p<0.05$, $p<0.01$				

Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between learning motivation and academic help-seeking overall ($r=0.276$, $p<0.01$). At the dimensional level, both internal motivation and external motivation were positively correlated with instrumental help-seeking ($r=0.373$ and $r=0.441$, respectively), while all motivation dimensions were negatively correlated with avoidant help-seeking (r ranging from -0.385 to -0.509). These results support Hypothesis H_2 and its sub-hypotheses.

Regression Analysis

1. The influence of each dimension of learning motivation on executive help

Table 5 Regression analysis results of the dimensions of learning motivation on executive help seeking (n=363)

Model	B		StdF	T	P	VIF
	B	SE	Beta			
constant	1.180	0.187	-	6.299	0.000	-
Internal learning	0.219	0.056	0.203	3.891	0.000	1.284
External learning	0.400	0.059	0.356	6.812	0.000	1.284
R^2	0.236					
Adjust R^2	0.231					
F	F (2,360) = 55.521, p=0.000					
D-W	1.675					

Dependent variable = executive help

* p<0.05, p<0.01

A linear regression analysis was conducted with internal learning motivation and external learning motivation as independent variables and executive help-seeking as the dependent variable. As can be seen from the above table, the model formula is: Executive help-seeking = 1.180 + 0.219 * Internal learning motivation + 0.400 * External learning motivation. The R-squared value of the model is 0.236, indicating that internal learning motivation and external learning motivation can explain 23.6% of the variation in executive help-seeking. The regression coefficient of internal learning motivation is 0.219 (t=3.891, p=0.000<0.01), which means that internal learning motivation has a significant positive impact on executive help-seeking. The regression coefficient of external learning motivation is 0.400 (t=6.812, p=0.000<0.01), indicating that external learning motivation also has a significant positive impact on executive help-seeking.

In summary, both internal learning motivation and external learning motivation have significant positive impacts on executive help-seeking, thus hypotheses $H_{2.1}$ and $H_{2.4}$ are supported.

2. The influence of each dimension of learning motivation on avoidance seeking help

Table 6 Regression analysis results of each dimension of learning motivation on avoidance seeking help (n=363)

model	B		StdF	T	P	VIF
	B	SE	Beta			
constant	4.896	0.183	-	26.711	0.000	-
Internal learning motivation	-0.218	0.055	-0.202	-3.952	0.000	1.284
External learning motivation	-0.436	0.057	-0.388	-7.586	0.000	1.284
R^2	0.266					
Adjust R^2	0.261					
F	F (2,360) = 65.072, p=0.000					
D-W	0.466					
Dependent variable = avoidance of help						
* p<0.05, p<0.01						

As shown in the data in Table 6, the regression coefficient of internal learning motivation is -0.218 (t=-3.952, p=0.000<0.01), which means that internal learning motivation has a significant negative impact on avoidant help-seeking. The regression coefficient of external learning motivation is -0.436 (t=-7.586, p=0.000<0.01), indicating that external learning motivation also has a significant negative impact on avoidant help-seeking.

In summary, both internal learning motivation and external learning motivation have significant negative impacts on avoidant help-seeking, thus hypotheses $H_{2.2}$ and $H_{2.5}$ are supported.

3. The influence of each dimension of learning motivation on avoidance of help

Table 7 Regression analysis results of each dimension of learning motivation on instrumental help (n=363)

model	B		StdF	T	P	VIF
	B	SE	Beta			
constant	1.227	0.189	-	6.503	0.000	-
Internal learning motivation	0.230	0.057	0.213	4.061	0.000	1.284
External learning motivation	0.385	0.059	0.341	6.509	0.000	1.284
R 2	0.230					
Adjust R 2	0.226					
F	F (2,360)=53.750,p=0.000					
D-W price	1.729					
Dependent variable = instrumental help						
* p<0.05, p<0.01						

As shown in the data in Table 7, the regression coefficient of internal learning motivation is 0.230 (t=4.061, p=0.000<0.01), which means that internal learning motivation has a significant positive impact on instrumental help-seeking. The regression coefficient of external learning motivation is 0.385 (t=6.509, p=0.000<0.01), indicating that external learning motivation also has a significant positive impact on instrumental help-seeking.

In summary, both internal learning motivation and external learning motivation have significant positive impacts on instrumental help-seeking, thus hypotheses $H_{2.3}$ and $H_{2.6}$ are supported.

In conclusion, there is a significant positive correlation between learning motivation and academic help-seeking behaviors. The coordinated development of internal and external motivations can effectively promote positive academic help-seeking and reduce avoidant behaviors, providing empirical evidence for optimizing university support services.

Research Suggestions

Main Conclusions

Learning motivation and academic help-seeking behaviors are at a moderate level overall, with significant group differences.

The survey found that D University students' learning motivation and academic help-seeking behaviors are both at a moderate level, but there are considerable individual differences. The sample had a higher proportion of female students, as well as a predominance

of students from rural backgrounds and first-generation college students, highlighting the diversity and regional characteristics of the current private university student population.

Academic major and achievement have significant effects, while gender and other factors have limited impact. Variance analysis showed that students from different majors and with varying academic achievements display significant differences in both learning motivation and help-seeking behaviors. Students majoring in Traditional Chinese Medicine, Stomatology, and those with excellent academic performance, demonstrated higher levels of motivation and help-seeking behaviors. Variables such as gender, grade, place of origin, and first-generation college student status did not significantly affect learning motivation or help-seeking behaviors, suggesting that educational interventions should focus more on academic major and achievement level.

Learning motivation is significantly positively correlated with academic help-seeking behaviors, with different types of motivation playing distinct roles. Correlation and regression analyses revealed a significant positive correlation between learning motivation and academic help-seeking behaviors. Both internal and external motivation were found to have positive effects on instrumental help-seeking; all motivation dimensions were negatively correlated with avoidant help-seeking. Regression analysis further showed that external motivation had a slightly stronger predictive effect on executive and instrumental help-seeking than internal motivation, and both types effectively suppressed avoidant help-seeking. This suggests that students require both internal interest-driven and external achievement-oriented incentives, and the synergy of both can reduce negative avoidant behaviors.

Help-seeking awareness among disadvantaged groups is relatively weak and requires focused attention.

Rural students and first-generation college students were found to have significantly lower awareness of academic help-seeking, indicating insufficient structural support. Universities should increase attention and targeted assistance for these disadvantaged groups.

Recommendations

Optimize academic support and tiered counseling mechanisms. Develop targeted academic support systems for students with different majors and achievement levels. For groups with weaker academic performance and lower help-seeking awareness, provide case-based group counseling, academic psychological support, and attribution training courses to help foster positive motivation and enhance proactive help-seeking abilities.

Strengthen teacher training and exemplary role models. Teachers should adopt diverse instructional approaches such as problem-based learning and tiered motivation to enhance students' internal motivation. At the same time, positive feedback, honor-based incentives, and timely responses can lower students' psychological barriers to seeking help. It is recommended that universities continuously strengthen teachers' capabilities in academic guidance and psychological support.

Focus on and support disadvantaged student groups. Universities should enhance academic and psychological support for rural and first-generation college students by offering one-on-one mentoring, peer support groups, and other multi-channel support to boost their academic confidence and proactive help-seeking awareness.

Innovate digital academic support methods. By leveraging online platforms, develop integrated digital tools that include modules for academic help-seeking, instant feedback, and self-regulated learning to promote individualized student development. Explore cutting-edge technologies such as AI-powered intelligent assistants to improve the efficiency and precision of academic support services.

Future Prospects

Future research should expand sample size, increase longitudinal tracking, and explore the dynamic evolution of learning motivation and academic help-seeking behaviors. More attention should be given to cross-regional and cross-cultural comparisons and to the new trends in digital and AI-enabled academic support in higher education. By continuously improving both theoretical and empirical foundations, this will provide scientific support for enhancing the quality of talent cultivation in higher education institutions.

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