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# Best Evidence in Chinese Education

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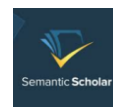
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# The Impact of Family Background on Subject Selection in Senior Secondary School Students in the Context of the Reform of College Entrance Examination: An Empirical Study Based on Survey Data from Zhejiang Province

Jianzhen Zhang, Xiaoyu Liang

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**Abstract:** Subject selection is one of the key components in the new college entrance examination system. This study analyzed the data from a sample survey of college entrance examination participants in Zhejiang Province between 2017 and 2020 using descriptive statistics, factor analysis, cross analysis, and binary logistic regression in an effort to research into the impact of family background on subject selection and academic achievements in senior secondary school students. Research findings showed that: (i) Students from families of higher social and economic status were more likely to be academically high-achieving; (ii) Student family background had a significant impact on their subject selection, specifically represented by a positive effect of home economic capital on student choice of subjects requiring higher learning costs, a positive effect of family perception of the importance of mathematics, physics, and chemistry on student choice of science subjects, and a positive effect of family cultural environment on student choice of liberal arts subjects; (iii) Personal factors such as gender and academic results are crucial for students' decisions on subject selection, with male and high-performing students showing preferences for science subjects.

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**Keywords:** Reform of College Entrance Examination, Subject Selection, Academic Achievement, Family Background

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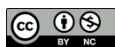
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## **Introduction**

In November 2014, *Implementation Measures for Subject Selection in Zhejiang Province's General College Entrance Examinations* was issued in Zhejiang Province, one of the pilot regions for the reform of college entrance examination (CEE) in China. According to this policy, the "X" in the previous "3+X" model of the CEE was replaced by "selecting three subjects from a range of seven ones." Years of experiences of Zhejiang Province yielded evidence for empirical research on the efficacy of the reform of CEE, and at the same time, issues with subject selection were observed, such as the overly utilitarian mentality, confusion, and anxiety among students during the selection process (Du & Jin, 2016). Do family background disparities lead to differences in decisions on subject selection among students? This article investigated the impact of family origins on student academic performance and subject selection behavior concerning the high-stake examination, based on data from a sample survey.

## **Research Design and Methods**

### ***Sample Selection and Data Sources***

This study conducted a questionnaire survey on "How Family Background Affects Students' Selection of Subjects under the New College Entrance Examination System" in Zhejiang Province from June throughout September 2020. Convenience sampling was adopted to obtain data of the CEE participants between 2017 and 2020 from various cities in Zhejiang Province. Among the returned questionnaires, 1119 were valid. The survey questionnaire had four components: basic personal information of the student; the family social, economic and cultural capital questionnaire; the student's choice of subjects for the CEE; the family-related factors scale.

### ***Variable Description***

- i. The predicted variable in this study is the individual elective subject being chosen or not, intended to examine the impact of family background on academic performance and subject selection in senior secondary school students.
- ii. Student family background is the explanatory variable, indicated by items related to family social, economic, and cultural status and factors listed in the family-related factors scale. There were five dimensions in this variable: family economic capital; family cultural capital; family education involvement; family social connections; family perception of the importance of mathematics, physics, and chemistry and investments in them.

### ***Model Design***

The focus of this study was to examine the relation between student choice of subjects and their family background under the new CEE system. For the predicted variable "the individual elective subject being chosen or not," there were only two options, "Yes"

and “No.” Therefore, it was regarded as a binary variable, and a binary logistic regression model was used to analyze the impact of family background on student subject selection.

## **Research Findings**

### ***Cross Analysis of Student Family Background, Subject Selection, and Academic Performance***

#### **Family Background-Induced Differences in Subject Selection**

There were significant differences in the choice of physics, geography, and politics, only marginally significant differences in the choice of chemistry, but insignificant differences in the choice of biology, history, and technology among students of differential family origins. Students from families of higher SES were more likely to choose physics.

#### **Family Background-Induced Differences in Student Academic Performance**

There were appreciable differences in academic performance at the senior secondary level among students of distinct family origins. Among low-achieving students, 28.8% and 23.1% of them were from underprivileged families and lower-middle-SES families, respectively, and only 13.5% were from advantaged families. At the same time, among the top 10% and 20%-30% of students, the percentages of students from high SES families were 32.8% and 28%, respectively, indicating a positive correlation between family background and student academic results at the senior secondary level.

## **Preliminary Conclusions**

Under the new CEE system, the election of physics, geography, and politics are substantially influenced by family circumstances. Students from higher SES families are more prone to choose physics and geography, but not politics. The higher level of their family SES, the greater the likelihood of the student attaining top-level academic achievements.

### ***Analysis Results of the Binary Logistic Regression Model***

- Family economic capital, cultural capital, perception of the importance of mathematics, physics, and chemistry and investments in them significantly impacted student subject selection in the new CEE system.

- Family education involvement and social connections had no significant effects on student subject selection in the new CEE system.
- Gender and academic results in the senior secondary period had considerable effects on student subject selection, whereas the year of CEE participation had a slight impact on student subject selection.

## Conclusions

- i. Student academic performance is correlated with their family background. There are prominent disparities in academic achievements among student of differential family origins.
- ii. Student subject selection is affected by family economic capital. Students from economically advantaged families are more prone to choose physics and geography, while those from disadvantaged ones are more likely to pick history, politics, and technology.
- iii. Student choices between science and liberal arts subjects are remarkably affected by family cultural environment and perception of the importance of mathematics, physics, and chemistry.
- iv. Student choices between science and liberal arts subjects are also related to personal factors.

## Reference

Du & Jin. (2016). Issues with subject selection among senior secondary school students in the context of the reform of college entrance examination and countermeasures: An analysis based on a survey of five high schools in Zhejiang Province. *Theory and Practice of Education*, 36(8):15-18.

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张建珍 & 梁晓雨.(2023). 新高考制度下家庭背景对高中生科目选择的影响分析—基于浙江省2017-2020 届高考毕业生调查数据的实证研究. *华东师范大学学报(教育科学版)* 2023; 6:47-58

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# Effects of Online Learning on Student Moral Development: A Meta-analysis Based on 42 Experimental and Quasi-experimental Studies

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**Abstract:** *The widespread practices of online learning have sparked increasing interest in its educational efficacy. The effects of online learning on learners' moral development remain contentious in existing research. The purpose of this meta-analysis was to ascertain how online learning impact students' moral development. It included 42 experimental and quasi-experimental studies with an aggregate sample of 5303 learners after the processes of literature screening, data extraction, and risk of bias assessment. Analytical results revealed that online learning had positive effects on student moral understanding and reasoning, but no significant impact on student moral emotions and behavior. Subgroup analyses by student type, course type, online learning pattern, and involvement of interactive activity showed that there were disparities in the effect size between all subgroups and that only the moderating effect of student type on student moral reasoning was statistically significant.*

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**Keywords:** *Online Learning, Moral Education, Moral Development, Meta-analysis*

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## **Introduction**

Online learning is a paradigm of learning that is partially or completely internet-based and electronic communication device-dependent. Despite the significance of online learning for moral education being widely acknowledged, there is a lack of agreement on how online learning affects moral development among researchers. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a meta-analysis that includes a wide range of relevant studies in order to obtain accurate and timely research findings.

## **Data and Methods**

This meta-analysis adopted the methods proposed in Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions for data treatment (Higgins et al., 2022) and defined the reporting items according to *The PRISMA 2020 Statement* (Page et al., 2020).

### ***Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria***

The present study established literature inclusion and exclusion criteria according to the framework of PICOS:

- Subjects: students exercising online learning.
- Interventions: solely online learning and blended learning.
- Outcome indicator: scores by student moral understanding, reasoning, emotion, and behavior development scales.
- Research design: experimental or quasi-experimental study
- Exclusion criteria: using patients suffering from specific diseases as subjects; electronic games as interventions; information or data on outcomes missing; systematic reviews; republished literature; articles with complete text unavailable.

### ***Literature Search Method***

The present study collected empirical studies on the impact of online learning on student moral development by searching databases including CNKI, Wanfang Data, PubMed, Web of Science, EBSCO, ERIC, Taylor & Francis, ProQuest, and Wiley Online Library. Targeted studies were those published before September 2022.

### ***Literature Screening and Data Extraction***

This study engaged two researchers in screening literature and extracting data independently as well as performing cross-checking. Discrepancies in screening and extraction results were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third party.

### ***Risk of Bias Assessment***

Studies included in this analysis comprised randomized controlled trials and non-randomized studies.

## **Research Results**

### ***Literature Screening Procedure and Results***

With the prescribed literature search method, the present study obtained 6230 pieces of literature, of which 6,222 were attained through database retrieval and 8 through manual tracing. Eventually, 42 studies were included in the meta-analysis according to inclusion and exclusion criteria.

### ***Basic Features of the Studies Included***

There were 7 randomized controlled trials and 35 non-randomized trials, with a sample of 5303 learners included in the analysis. Among them, 20 studies were published after 2020, accounting for 47.62% of the total included literature and contributing the latest research findings on this topic. The 42 studies encompassed participants (subjects) from 15 countries around the world with three of them focusing on students from China. College students constituted the samples of 33 of the studies, in-service personnel such as teachers, nurses, and managers were the participants of eight of them, and primary school students made up the sample of one of them. Online learning courses entailed in these studies included both specialized moral education courses and non-moral education courses. Solely online learning and blended learning were the two main forms of online learning adopted. In terms of the effects of online learning on student moral development, 16 studies reported outcomes of student moral understanding, 9 studies reported outcomes of student moral reasoning, 15 studies reported outcomes of student moral emotions, and 11 studies reported those of student moral behavior.

### ***Meta-analytical Results***

Online learning could moderately and positively impact student moral understanding and positively but slightly affect student moral reasoning, whereas it had no significant effects on student moral emotions or moral behavior.

### ***Moderating Effect Analysis***

School students could make greater progress in moral understanding through online learning, while in-service learners could benefit more from online learning in moral reasoning, moral emotions, and moral behavior. Specialized moral education courses had greater effects on students' moral understanding improvement, while non-moral education courses had more significant effects on students' moral emotion development. Solely online learning was more favorable to students' moral reasoning and emotion development, whereas blended learning was more beneficial for students' moral understanding advancement. Online courses with teacher guidance and peer interplays contributed to students' moral understanding and emotion elevation, while online self-study courses without interactions had positive effects on students' moral reasoning development.

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Higgins, J. P. T., Thomas, J., Chandler, J., Cumpston, M., Li, T., Page, M. J., & Welch, V. A. (editors). *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions* version 6.3 (updated February 2022). Cochrane, 2022. Available at:

[www.training.cochrane.org/handbook](http://www.training.cochrane.org/handbook)

Page, M. J., McKenzie, J., Bossuyt, P., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T., Mulrow, C., Moher, D. (2020, September 14). The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31222/osf.io/v7gm2>

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王浩, 唐爱民. (2023). 在线学习如何影响学生的道德发展-基于 42 项实验与准实验研究的 Meta 分析. *教育研究与实验*, 2023; 2023(3):61-70.

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NEWSLETTER

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## **The Impact of Parent-Child Separation on Students' Social and Emotional Skills: The Mediating Effect of Parent-child Interaction and the Moderating Effect of Home-school Collaboration**

By *Qian, J. & Cao, Y.*

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**S**Ocial and emotional skills are essential to individuals' goal achievement, collaboration with others, and emotion regulation. Developing social and emotional ability in students is a meaningful practice to improve the quality of education and promote student holistic development as well as an active reaction to social changes.

The parental "absence" induced by parent-child separation can significantly influence child growth, particularly child social and emotional development. This study utilized the data from the OECD's Survey of Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) in China to analyze the mediating effect of parent-child interaction and moderating effect of home-school collaboration on the impact of parent-child separation on students' social and emotional skills. Research findings included:

- i. Parent-child separation significantly and adversely affected child social and emotional development by reducing parent-child interaction, which verified the mediating path of "parent-child separation - parent-child interaction - children's social and emotional skills."
- ii. High-quality home-school collaboration could positively moderate the above mediating effect, thus mitigating the negative impact of parent-child separation on student social and emotional development to certain extent.

The article proposed suggestions as follows:

- Parent-child separation does not necessarily mean the absence of parental instruction. Parents should increase parent-child interaction and home-school collaboration to alleviate its negative effect.
- Teachers should offer students more emotional support and provide parents with more guidance on home education to offset the negative impact of emotional deficiency caused by parent-child separation.
- Schools should improve the environment of home-school partnership to support student social and emotional development.

*Source: Education & Economy, 2023; 39(3):45-52+85.*

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NEWSLETTER

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## **Technology-Supported Teaching Interventions and Student Computational Thinking: A Meta-Analysis Based on 37 Empirical Studies**

*By Zhou, Q. & Deng, Y.*

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COMPUTATIONAL thinking, which integrates a wide variety of thinking activities such as problem-solving, system design, and comprehending human behavior, has become a critical thinking ability in the context of accelerated digital transformation. Numerous studies from various countries posited that technology-supported teaching interventions (TSTI) had the potential to foster the development of computational thinking skills in students, whereas some suggested that the potential was insignificant. This article employed the meta-analytical technique to research into 37 domestic and foreign empirical studies published between January 2006 and October 2022, with a focus on examining the impact of TSTIs on student computational thinking. Research findings are as follows.

- i. TSTIs had positive effects on the development of students' computational thinking skills.
- ii. The effectiveness of computational thinking training differed in various disciplines; there were prominent inter-group differences in the efficacy of teaching interventions. The outcomes of computational thinking training were insignificant in English and information science courses, but significant in Spanish and dance classes.
- iii. The intervention effects of graphical/ modular programming languages and game-based programming contexts were significant, indicating that these two types of tools were substantially beneficial for cultivating students' computational thinking skills. That means the ideal match between the tool and the learning agent can result in desirable teaching outcomes.
- iv. Among evaluation tools of student computational thinking, formative assessment based on the programming environment were timelier and more authentic, though posing higher requirements for technical development compared to other forms of assessment. Furthermore, there was no one single evaluation tool that suited all teaching settings.
- v. Teaching interventions for small-size class, junior secondary school students, and lasting 6-11 weeks had better effects, and there were no

significant gender differences in their impact on computational thinking development of students.

Recommendations were made based on the foregoing findings. (i) Place high premiums on computational thinking development of students and design teaching intervention strategies corresponding to differential categories of computational thinking skills. (ii) Contextualize teaching inventions in real-world situations and give students opportunities to showcase their computational thinking skills, which can potentially increase students' ability to transfer and apply computational thinking skills in a variety of disciplines. (iii) Employ intervention tools that can train multidimensional computational thinking skills in students as well as meeting their problem-solving and advanced learning needs. (iv) Introduce foreign evaluation tools for computational thinking that pertain in China's education settings and strengthen developing localized ones. (v) Adopt small-size class teaching with special focus on junior secondary school students; place emphasis on the development of computational thinking skills in both male and female students to forego the stereotype of computer science-related disciplines being dominated by male students.

*Source: Journal of Southwest University (Natural Science Edition), 2023; 45(6):44-56.*

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NEWSLETTER

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## **The Relation between Teacher Gender and Student Academic Achievements: From the Perspective of Teacher-student Gender Matches**

*By Liu, Z., Guo, R., & Tian, M.*

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ACCORDING to existing research findings, there is a significant gender difference in student academic performance at the basic education level, with girls outperforming boys on average. Student educational attainments are affected by multiple factors. Among all school-related factors, teachers have been viewed as the most impactful in student academic progress. In China, female teachers predominate in the basic education teacher staff. Therefore, the investigation of how teacher-student gender matches impact student academic performance is of theoretical and practical significance.

This study sourced data from China Education Panel Survey (CEPS) to research into the impact of teacher-student gender matches on student academic achievements and the underlying mechanism, based on the random assignment of teachers within the school. Research subjects were 8th graders in the CEPS, and their grade-seven academic results in the baseline survey were used as the control condition. Research findings showed that:

- Teacher-student gender matches had no impact on male students' school results but posed positive influences on those of female students, represented by the favorable impact of female teachers on girl students' academic progress. Moreover, as opposed to previous research, this study found that the influence of teacher-student gender matches was restricted to the subject of English.
- The positive impact of teacher-student gender matches on girl students' performance was more remarkable among the disadvantaged group (with lower cognitive competence, rural Hukou, and non-key urban schools), likely due to their higher degrees of sensitivity to teacher characteristics such as gender because of less education input from their families.
- Causal analysis showed that female teachers tended to offer more academic and emotional support to girls than to boys, making themselves a beneficial factor in girls' academic advancement.

The implications of this study include that the rising proportion of female teachers in basic education has no potential adverse impact on boy students' education attainments; that more attention should be paid to under-

privileged students in the distribution of educational resources; and that teacher in-service training should place an emphasis on the development of supportive teacher-student relationships in order to improve class interaction and student evaluation.

*Source: Education & Economy, 2023; 9(3):64-74.*

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NEWSLETTER

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## **Can Holistic Module Teaching Improve English Performance of Junior Secondary School Students? An Experimental Exploration Based on the Reform of English Instruction in X City in Eastern China**

By He, P., Wei, H., & Huang, B.

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**T**HE Compulsory Education Course Standards for English 2022 emphasize that teachers must construct module teaching around specific objectives to support the development of academic competence in students. Holistic module teaching is an instructional approach which uses a major concept in a subject to organize relevant course materials to deliver structured instruction. In recent years, there has been a widespread application of module teaching design in English classes in China. Nevertheless, little research has been carried out on the relations between holistic module teaching and student English competence. This study used the empirical data generated by the teaching reform and the method of difference-in-differences estimation to conduct a systematic evaluation of the efficacy of holistic module teaching in English instruction with the purpose of providing evidence for the further improvement of this teaching design. Research findings are as follows.

- i. Holistic module teaching could significantly improve students' English test results. The average results of comprehensive English of the student were upgraded by a standard score of 0.264 at the school level.
- ii. The module teaching design could enhance students' English performance in all aspects, including comprehensive proficiency, writing, listening, and reading, with the most prominent effect being on their comprehensive proficiency of English.
- iii. Due to inter-region differences and the occurrence of omitted variables, the estimated intervention effect of the new approach was presumably smaller than its actual efficacy.

The study suggested that in implementing holistic module teaching in junior secondary English classes, strategies such as real-world situation-based learning and knowledge transfer should be incorporated into the education of English listening, speaking, reading, and writing to assist teachers in identifying teaching objectives and to help students successfully improve their English proficiency.

*Source: Journal of China Examinations, 2023; 374(6):49-57.*

## **Note to Contributors**

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