

Exploring EFL Students' Academic Buoyancy in Chinese Context

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Abstract: *Academic buoyancy is a hot topic in the field of positive psychology, but there are few studies related to second language acquisition. This paper adopts Jahedizadeh et al. (2019) second language academic buoyancy questionnaire to study academic buoyancy among college students, and whether there is a relationship between academic buoyancy and English proficiency. This study comprises 204 EFL students from diverse universities. The descriptive statistical results showed that the college students' English academic buoyancy and its four dimensions were generally higher than the average level. Through correlation analysis, it is concluded that there is a relatively low but positive correlation between academic buoyancy and English proficiency.*

Keywords: *Academic Buoyancy, EFL Students, English Proficiency*

1. Introduction

In China, college students face a competitive employment environment and heavy pressure, and English as an examination subject has attracted widespread attention. Language learning is a tedious process, and students will inevitably encounter setbacks and difficulties in the process of learning English, such as low test scores, the learning plateau phenomenon and negative feedback. Confronted with these problems, some students may actively adjust and achieve good development, while others struggle with these, which may result in negative motivation or anxiety. These problems will eventually lead to a further decline in students' academic performance [1]. Academic buoyancy, as a significant variable of individual differences, may have a certain impact on English learning.

In recent years, positive psychology has been widely researched in second language acquisition. Academic buoyancy, is a hot topic in the study of individual differences in SLA in the context of positive psychology, but relevant studies are still in the infant stage. The study of academic buoyancy can promote the study of individual differences in second language acquisition, enhance learners' self-regulation ability, and provide suggestions for improving teaching quality [2]. This paper adopted Jahedizadeh et al.(2019) second language academic buoyancy questionnaire to investigate the academic buoyancy of college students and explore the relationship between academic buoyancy and English proficiency, hoping to provide inspiration for improving students' academic performance.

2. Literature Review

Academic buoyancy was proposed by Martin and Marsh, which refers to students' ability to successfully deal with setbacks and challenges that are typical of the ordinary course of school life (e.g., poor grades, competing deadlines, exam pressure, difficult tasks)[3]. Then Yun et al. introduced this concept into SLA and defined it as learners' capacity to overcome everyday setbacks, challenges, and pressures in L2 learning [4]. In contrast to academic resilience, which has typically been characterized in terms of 'acute' and 'chronic' adversities that are seen as 'major assaults' on the developmental processes. Therefore, the operation of resilience refers to a relatively small number of individuals who experience quite extreme adversity. It is aimed at more acute and long-term setbacks (e.g., poor family, divorced parents, poor living environment). So everyday resilience or buoyancy is relevant to the many who must negotiate the ups and downs of everyday life[5]. The present research adopts the definition provided by Yun et al.

The research on academic buoyancy is mainly quantitative methods. The Academic Buoyancy Scale (ABS), the earliest and the most widely used scale, was developed by Martin and Marsh, which

measures academic buoyancy by only four questions. To better conform to the research background of SLA, Yun et al. adapted the ABS scale and divided academic buoyancy into seven dimensions: buoyancy, self-efficacy, persistence, strategic self-regulation, ideal L2 self, anxiety, and teacher-student relationship. Jahedizadeh et al. further designed an academic buoyancy scale specifically to measure second language learners. Taking into account social background, learning environment and individual differences of students, the academic buoyancy scale consists of four dimensions: sustainability, regularity adaptation, positive personal eligibility, and positive acceptance of academic life [6]. In this paper, the questionnaire is adapted to make it more suitable for the learning situation of Chinese college students, and demographic information is added for analysis.

Martin and Marsh investigated the relationship between students' academic buoyancy and a series of predictors, and the results showed that both self-efficacy and academic engagement could significantly predict academic buoyancy, while anxiety and academic buoyancy were negatively correlated. Some scholars also compare academic buoyancy among different disciplines [5]. Malmberg et al. measured the difference in academic buoyancy among students in English, mathematics, science and physical education. They found that students hold relatively consistent views about their academic buoyancy compared to relatively less consistent views they held regarding the difficulty of the four school subjects as well as corresponding personal competence and effort [7]. Martin et al. investigated the relationship between academic buoyancy and adaptability among students of different nationalities (Chinese, North American and British), and found that Chinese students had the highest academic buoyancy and adaptability, while British students had the lowest [8]. In the field of second language acquisition, Yun et al. conducted a survey on Korean college students and found that buoyancy could significantly predict L2 achievement and GPA, among which self-efficacy, strategic self-regulation, and ideal L2 self were the most significant predictors [4]. In terms of English learning skills, Saalh and Kadhim compiled a questionnaire to measure the difference in academic buoyancy in English reading and listening skills, and found that students' reading buoyancy was higher than listening buoyancy. However, since the subjects were all female college students, the conclusion was inevitably over generalization [9].

To sum up, academic buoyancy will be a hot topic in SLA. The study on academic buoyancy began in foreign countries for the first time, and the research scope is more extensive, covering different disciplines and nationalities, and involving the study of the relationship with various variables. In China, the study on academic buoyancy in SLA begins in 2018. However, relevant domestic researches are still mainly focused on psychology, there is a paucity of buoyancy in college English learning.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

- (1) What are the levels of academic buoyancy among college students?
- (2) What is the relationship between college students' academic buoyancy and English proficiency?

3.2 Participants

Table 1: Basic information of participants.

Gender	Male	26	13.73%
	Female	176	86.27%
Home location	County seat or above	102	50%
	Town seat	78	38.24%
	Village	24	11.76%
Ethnicity	Han	180	88.24%
	Ethnic minority group	24	11.76%
Self-rated English proficiency	Poor	20	9.8%
	Intermediate	97	47.55%
	Good	73	35.78%
	Excellent	14	6.86%
Year level	Under graduate year 1	9	4.41%
	Under graduate year 2	16	7.84%
	Under graduate year 3	21	10.29%

	Under graduate year 4	100	49.02%
	Graduate year 1	13	6.37%
	Graduate year 2	37	18.14%
	Graduate year 3	8	3.92%
Major	Liberal arts	75	36.76%
	Science	30	14.71%
	Engineering	13	6.37%
	Management	28	13.73%
	Arts	0	0%
	PE	0	0%
	Foreign language	53	25.98%
	Others	5	2.45%
The pass rate of CET-4 and CET-6	Haven't passed CET-4	27	13.24%
	Have passed CET-4, haven't passed CET-6 yet	29	24.02%
	Have passed CET-4 and CET-6	128	62.75%
	Total	204	100%

In this study, 213 questionnaires were received through the online survey conducted by Wenjuanxing in February 2023. After excluding invalid questionnaires, 204 valid questionnaires were retained, with an effective recovery of 95.8%. All the students' foreign language is English. The subjects' general information is shown in Table 1.

3.3 Instrument

This study used Jahedizadeh et al. (2019) questionnaire as research tool to collect data on academic buoyancy. Taking into account the specific English learning environment, some questions have been modified. All the options were ranked on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire includes positive questions and reverse questions, total 34 questions, among which 23, 25 and 33 are reverse questions, which are divided into four dimensions. Sustainability refers to the ability of students to overcome difficulties in language learning (such as low scores, negative feedback from teachers, academic pressure and failure); Regularity adaptation refers to setting goals in language learning, such as planning, self-discipline and other qualities; Positive personal eligibility is concerned with positive perception regarding personal abilities, such as independence, pride in language learning, trustworthiness, persistence in language learning, and ability to handle multiple tasks at the same time. Positive acceptance of academic life means that students are committed to language learning. For example, they enjoy learning the language, deal with problems flexibly, and believe in that language learning meaningfulness in life. The scale introduces academic buoyancy into SLA, making the measurement more targeted. The dimensions of the questionnaire are shown in Table 2, and the reliability of the questionnaire is shown in Table 3.

Table 2: A brief description of factors and items of academic buoyancy.

Factors	Items
Sustainability	8.9.13.16.17.18.12
Regularity adaptation	10.22.24.25
Positive personal eligibility	11.12.19.20.26.28.29.31
Positive acceptance of academic life	14.15.21.27.30.32.33.34
Total	27

Table 3: Reliability statistics of academic buoyancy questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Items
.91	27

3.4 Procedure

Before the participants began to answer the questionnaire, they were informed of the purpose and value of the study and promised that the questionnaire would be completely anonymous and confidential. The reliability of this scale is 0.91, higher than 0.90, which is high according to Qin[10]. Then the valid data was input into the computer and analyzed by SPSS 22.0. Through the frequency analysis of demographic information, the distribution of students' gender, ethnicity, grade and English scores was obtained. Descriptive statistics are used to analyze students' buoyancy level in English

learning. Due to the different majors in different schools, the evaluation of English is different. This paper takes the passing of CET-4 and CET-6 and the self-rated English proficiency as the standard to determine English proficiency. Spearman correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between English buoyancy and English proficiency.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Academic Buoyancy

Table 4 illustrates the result of descriptive statistics of academic buoyancy.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of academic buoyancy.

	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Sustainability	204	1.71	5.00	3.52	.63
Regularity adaptation	204	1.50	5.00	3.53	.67
Positive personal eligibility	204	1.13	5.00	3.71	.68
Positive acceptance of academic life	204	1.50	4.75	3.52	.51
Academic buoyancy	204	1.69	4.81	3.57	.53

The five-point Likert scale is used to measure the buoyancy of English studies. The higher the score, the higher the buoyancy level of English learning. As shown in Table 4, the buoyancy of college students' English study is higher than 3.5, which is at a relatively high level ($M=3.57$; $SD=0.53$). Among the five dimensions of buoyancy, positive personal eligibility has the highest mean value ($M=3.71$; $SD=0.68$). Regularity adaptation followed ($M=3.53$; $SD=0.67$), sustainability ($M=3.52$; $SD=0.63$) and positive acceptance of academic life have the lowest mean value, but the average value of the four dimensions is all above 3.5, indicating that the academic buoyancy of English study in college is generally good. The results show that college students can deal with the difficulties encountered in English learning to some extent and accept academic life actively. In addition, students are able to set goals in English learning, which means that essentially college students take the initiative in English learning.

4.2 Correlation Analyses of Students' Academic Buoyancy and English Proficiency

The English proficiency in this study is based on the passing of CET-4 and CET-6 and the students' self-rated English proficiency. Spearman correlation analysis is used to explore the relationship between academic buoyancy and the passing of CET-4 and CET-6. The analysis results are shown in Table 5. The results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between students' passing situation and sustainability ($\rho=.325, p=.000$), regularity adaptation ($\rho=.219, p=.002$) and positive acceptance of academic life ($\rho=.214, p=.002$), although the correlation was low. Among them, the passing situation of CET-4 and CET-6 and positive personal personality ($\rho=.430, p=.000$) showed a significant positive correlation, and the correlation is medium.

Table 5: Correlations between the passing of CET-4 and CET-6 and academic buoyancy on four independent variables.

		The passing of CET-4 and CET-6	Sustainability	Regularity adaptation	Positive personal eligibility	Positive acceptance of academic life
The passing of CET-4 and CET-6	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.325**	.219**	.430**	.214**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.002	.000	.002
	Total	204	204	204	204	204

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Spearman correlation analysis is also used to study the relationship between academic buoyancy and self-rated English proficiency, and the analysis results are shown in Table 6. The results showed that the students' self-evaluated English proficiency and sustainability ($\rho=.516, p=.000$), positive personal eligibility ($\rho=.567, p=.000$) and positive acceptance of academic life ($\rho=.417, p=.000$) were significantly positively correlated, and the correlation was in the middle degree. In addition, there was a significant positive correlation between self-evaluated English proficiency and regularity adaptation ($\rho=.320, p=.000$), but the degree of correlation was low.

Table 6: Correlations between self-evaluated English proficiency and academic buoyancy on four independent variables.

		Self-evaluated English proficiency	Sustainability	Regularity adaptation	Positive personal eligibility	Positive acceptance of academic life
Self-evaluated English proficiency	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.516**	.320**	.567**	.417**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	204	204	204	204	204

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore the general situation of college students' academic buoyancy and its relationship with English proficiency. The results show that college students' academic buoyancy is higher, and academic buoyancy is positively correlated with English proficiency, that is to say, the higher the English proficiency of students, the higher the academic buoyancy, and vice versa. Among them, the dimension of positive personal eligibility has the highest correlation with English proficiency. This study provides more understanding of the current situation of college students' academic buoyancy and its relationship with college students' English achievement.

The descriptive data showed that college students' academic buoyancy was higher than the median value of the five-point scale ($M=3.57$, $SD=0.53$). In other words, college students' academic buoyancy is generally good. Therefore, they have the ability to deal with the difficulties in daily life. This result is different from the conclusion of Jia[11], who believes that high school students are at an average level of academic buoyancy. According to the results of this study, positive personal eligibility has the highest mean value among the four dimensions of academic buoyancy. This result is consistent with the study of Jahedizadeh et al. (2019), who found that positive personal personality has the highest mean value among the four dimensions of Iranian college students. Regularity adaptation ($M=3.53$, $SD=.67$) followed. In addition, sustainability ($M=3.52$, $SD=.63$) and positive acceptance of academic life ($M=3.52$, $SD=.51$) had the lowest mean values in academic buoyancy, but both were still higher than the median of the five-point scale.

The correlation analysis of this study shows that academic buoyancy is positively correlated with English proficiency. Specifically, academic buoyancy has a low correlation with passing CET-4 and CET-6, but a moderate correlation with self-evaluated English proficiency. Because English learning is a complex process, the relationship between buoyancy and English proficiency is affected by other individual variables, so the correlation between the two is not high.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between academic buoyancy and English proficiency in college students, enrich relevant studies on academic buoyancy, and better understand the role of academic buoyancy in improving English achievement. The results show that college students' academic buoyancy is higher than the median value of the five-point scale ($M=3.57$, $SD=0.53$). To be specific, the dimension of positive personal eligibility is the most conducive to academic buoyancy, followed by regularity adaptation, and finally sustainability and positive acceptance of academic life. Academic buoyancy is positively correlated with English achievement, and the four dimensions are positively correlated with English proficiency. Specifically, academic buoyancy in English learning has a low positive correlation with the passing of CET-4 and CET-6, while it has a moderate correlation with the self-evaluated English proficiency. The positive personal eligibility correlation was also the highest among the four dimensions.

These findings provide some implications for English teaching and learning. English buoyancy is closely related to English proficiency, that is to say, the higher the buoyancy, the higher the English proficiency, so English teachers should cultivate students' academic buoyancy. First of all, teachers should provide students with a positive learning environment to ensure that students' mental health is in the best state. A healthy and positive state can improve students' buoyancy, so as to overcome difficulties encountered in learning. Teachers should find ways to help students cope with academic

difficulties. This can be done by encouraging students to study independently, setting learning goals, and dealing with the inevitable ups and downs of language learning.

This study puts forward some new understandings of the relationship between buoyancy and English proficiency, but there are still some limitations. First, the subjects were too large across grades and the ratio of men to women was imbalanced. More concrete conclusions can be reached by separating undergraduate and graduate students. Secondly, a questionnaire survey is the only research method, which cannot deeply understand the real reasons of students, so qualitative research such as interviews should be adopted as a supplement. Finally, the passing of CET-4 and CET-6 and self-evaluated English proficiency are not sufficient to summarize English proficiency, so a uniform exam should be used as the standard.

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