

Obedience to Authority: Different Obedience Rate Between Chinese Students and the US students

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ABSTRACT

When people discuss about obedience, it reminds us of Milgram experiment. Indeed, the author wants to learn more about relationship between students and teachers when people regard obedience in this situation. This paper discusses about different obedience rate between Chinese students and the US students in order to test the obedience to authority. By designing an in-class activity and post-experimental surveys. Indeed, it will show the obedience rate of different groups of students. The result indicates that students in different education systems will show out the significant difference of obedience rate. However, students who change from one education system to another one will not have significant difference in obedience rate. This may because of two factors. First, the different cultures play an important role. Second, the two distinctive education systems will form different students. By doing research about this field, we can learn more about the influence of different education systems to students. It will show out why some people prefer to study in the US. It may relate to the obedience rate in American education systems. According to the experiment in this work, students who study in the American have lower obedience rate, which may be better to students' future life.

Keywords: *Obedience, US education, Chinese education, Authority*

1. INTRODUCTION

Individuals learn obedience when they stay in a group because they are forced to give unquestioned obedience to authority. For example, when we talk about obedience to authority, we think of Stanley Milgram. The experiment he conducted observes the pattern of obedience people display when confronted with morally questionable choices provided by authoritative figures. Many of the subjects felt that out ought not to do something morally dubious but failed to translate this conviction into action. The definition of "obedience to authority" means "an authority system...as consists of a minimum of two persons sharing the expectation that one of them has the right to prescribe behavior for the other" **【1】**

The relationship between teachers and students resembles such a power relation, whereby students obey teachers as a legitimate authority within a given social structure. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the role of obedience to authority in education is much debated. For instance, we might be able to think of examples where coaches use tyrannical methods to control a team. When we see the coach applying the means available to him to lead his team well, we applaud

the authority and obedience on display. With these ideas in mind, we may also see authority as something good and right without succumbing to the negative assumptions about the nature of our authority or about the obedience children owe to those roles. However, the presence of obedience or conformity in school can prohibit students from developing a critical spirit or being educated for freedom. For example, obedience to the authority (maybe teachers) can lead to not ask questions because of fear. They may also be afraid to think by themselves and propose opposite ideas. Indeed, the author will test the obedience rate in different education systems.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Stanley Milgram's article is an experiment to consider obedience to authority. Obedience's definition is *a form of social influence that involves performing an action under the orders of an authority figure. It differs from compliance (which involves changing your behavior at the request of another person) and conformity (which involves altering your behavior in order to go along with the rest of the group).* **【2】**

Milgram sets up the precedent of an experiment regarding the topic obedience, which aims to construe the nature of obedience to authority, and uplifts the topic onto an ethical level. It mainly testifies the obedience of participants toward observers. Even though it involves some ethical issues, it is remarkable towards people’s understanding of obedience. "Other researchers have since replicated Milgram's findings. High school students were found to be even more willing to obey orders. Cross-cultural research in other Western cultures has also yielded high rates of obedience using Milgram's procedure. " **【3】** Indeed, the author is curious about students’ obedience to the teachers which can also be considered as authority. Therefore, the author decided to involve two countries to do a comparison. When people think about education in both China and the US, they will definitely agree that they are different somehow. But what does it cause them? The author believes that cultural differences influence the education systems in the US and China. Educational styles and cultural variations in education which one has experienced would likely result in a discrepancy regarding the extent to which students conform to authority. Specifically, we propose that students who receive a traditional Chinese education and undergo no cultural variation in their education experience, with a goal of attaining a remarkable and satisfying score on “Gaokao”, will exhibit the highest degree of obedience to authority among the four experimental groups. Students who have more or less experienced a change in the education styles will exhibit the second highest degree of obedience when confronting an authority. Students who have never received an “exam-orientated” education will exhibit the least degree of obedience.

3. METHODS SECTION

First of all, there are four groups in the experiment, which are Chinese students in traditional Chinese high school, Chinese students attending an international department of a traditional Chinese high school, Chinese students who have completed the nine-year compulsory education in China and attend a local high school in the United States, Chinese students who were born in countries outside China but are attending an international school. The author decides to use two different ways to test the obedience rate in a different group. Part 1 is to use an in-class activity/change seat activity**【4】**. By doing this activity, students may show how long they take to follow the unreasonable requests from teachers. Part 2 is to design after-class/post-experimental surveys **【5】**. One is the teachers’ survey which is students' behaviors perceived by teachers in order to scale the obedience rate. The other is the students’ survey to show our perception of their behaviors and thinking.

	Question in the survey for students	Measurement
Q1	Do you want to disobey the teachers' order?	1-10(1 means very few disobedience, 10 means extremely disobedience)
Q2	Do you want to question teachers?	1-10(1 means very few, 10 means extremely)
Q3	Are there any time-taken difference between your first changing and your latest changing seats?	1-10(1 means no difference, 10 means lots of difference)
Q4	Are you confused about this activity?	1-10(1 means very few, 10 means extremely)

When it comes to the preparation, the participants(students) will not get information about the experiment. Then, the teachers who will be regarded as the authority get some training before the experiment. Procedure for change-seat activity is based on the teachers’ instructions: students with surnames starting A-M sit on the left side, students with surnames starting N-Z on the right-side order in seats based on birthday, the youngest on the left, oldest on the right, order in seats based on height, move to the southwest corner of the classroom and fill up the seats, move to the front seats, fill up the seats from the back. The above processes will be repeated 10 times. In order to measure the obedience rate, the author will consider the following compliant behavior: changing seat and resistant behavior: pretend not to have understood the instruction, slowness to move, through to outright refusal. Besides, the direct measure is the time taken for each round and the number of repetitive instructions. Then, the experimenters will judge the degree of disobedience based on the frequency of resistant behaviors. (There will be at least 30 experimenters so that its more believable.)

When it comes to the measurement of an after-class survey, the author creates a scale and gives scores. Teachers will perceive students’ behaviors, like students being passivized, being silent about events, obeying instructions, or accepting everything without scrutinizing. Students may also show implicit disobedience, like whether are willing to obey the order, controlling the feelings, or behave consistently. Indeed, the author can know the disobedient rate by observing the frequency of disobedient behaviors. The frequency of disobedient behaviors is measured from obedient to disobedient, which is from 0 to 6. The questions for the teachers’ survey are whether students are silent about the instruction and whether students accept everything without scrutinizing. For students’ surveys, the question can be whether you are willing to obey the order instructed by the teacher and whether you control your feelings. The author realized that the obedience rate can

be inferred from their behaviors [6]. For example, if students are being passive or being passivized, they will be silent about the events, obey the instructions, don't look after their rights, and work with fear. Indeed, it will help the author to understand the scores and obedience rate. Besides, obedience differs from conformity in three key ways: [7]

Obedience involves an order; conformity involves a request. Obedience is obeying someone with a higher status; conformity is going along with people of equal status. Obedience relies on social power; conformity relies on the need to be socially accepted.

4. RESULTS SECTION

There are four study groups in our experiment. Group A is Chinese students in traditional Chinese high school in China. Group B is Chinese students attending an international department of traditional Chinese high school. Group C is Chinese students who were in a traditional Chinese school in China through middle school but now are attending a high school in the US. Group D is Chinese students who study IB/AP diploma in international schools in China.

Based on the experiment data, the author conduct p-value of t-test for group A and D, B and C. The hypothesis is that group A's obedience rate is bigger than group D's obedience rate, and group B's obedience rate is bigger than group C's obedience rate. The p-value of the t-test for group A and D is 0.006, which is smaller than 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant difference between A and D. Indeed, the obedience rate of group A is actually bigger than D. Besides, both group A and group D are the students who only experience one education system. This leads to the significant difference between cultures and indeed obedience rate. However, the p-value of t-test for group B and C is 0.2319, which is bigger than 0.05. This means that if there are enough data, there will be no significant difference between these two groups. It's because group B and C is changing from one education system to the other one. Therefore, the difference is not significant. (Table 1)

Table 1: P-value for four groups

	Average	P-value
A	10.25	P-value for A&D: 0.006094036 P-value for A and B: 0.153860312
B	13.05	P-value for B and D: 0.0405156 P-value for B and C: 0.231965034
C	16.55	P-value for A and C: 0.02228916
D	21.6	P-value for C and D: 0.247078187

When it comes to the result of teachers' surveys, it shows the impression of teachers. The scale is 1-2 slight obedience, 3-4 moderate obedience, and 5-6 strong obedience. Indeed, the predicted range of group A is from 5-6; group B's range is from 4-6; group C's range is from 3-4; and group D's range is from 1-3. Reviewing the result, the author believes there are two reasons why Chinese education leads to higher obedience rate. First, there are different thinking patterns between China and the US, which means Culture differences. For the U.S., their culture is pioneering, innovative, and passionate competition.

However, Chinese culture is totally different, which has two important characters. One is affected, which involves commitment, respect, humility, and shame/guilt. Another one is processed, which focus on learning virtues of resolve, diligence, enduring hardship, perseverance, and concentration [8] Second reason must be a different education system. U.S. education system takes emotion and cognitive as very important factors [9] (According to "School mission statement" written by Steven E.Stemler and Damian J. Bebell) Students are eager to learn and study happily; They enjoy meeting new challenges with confidence in their own worth. On the contrary, because of a large population [10] (According to "Education in China since 1976" Xiufang Wang “), which is the total enrollment of students in regular and adults school at all levels exceeds 320 million, accounting for more than 25% of the nation's population,” Chinese education needs to think for every student. So, students are not allowed to ask questions and propose their own ideas. Then, Chinese education is exam-oriented education. Students have excessive workloads and unrealistic expectations. (According to "Education in China since 1976" Xiufang Wang)

5. CONCLUSION

By designing seat-changing activity and post-experimental surveys, the author gets a final conclusion that the Chinese will lead to a higher obedience rate probably because of different cultures and thinking patterns between Chinese and Americans and different educational systems in the two countries. The contributions of this experiment are quite different. First of all, this experiment is derivative from Milgram's Paradigm. Stanley Milgram's article provides obedience towards authority. For the proposed experiment, the author regards teachers as the authority. Indeed, the author focuses on obedience and authority in the setting of education, school, classroom, students, and teachers. This is a kind of experiment which is derivative of Milgram's original experiments. Secondly, according to Thomas Blass's research on cross-cultural comparison of studies of obedience, the experiment which is about obedience is in many other countries such as Spain,

Austria, Germany, Jordan, South Africa, Scotland, etc. Many of the studies have reported even higher obedience rates than those seen in Milgram's American samples. For example, obedience rates of over 80% have been reported for samples from Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain, and Holland." 【11】

However, the author realizes that there is no such an experiment in China. Indeed, the author conducts an experiment in which the topic is obedience in an Asian-centric perspective. By doing this, the author can understand the different education systems' influence on students. Nevertheless, there are still some limitations in the experiment. For example, the limitation exists in variable control in the course of our experimentation. In order to be easier to do the experiment, assumed that parental guidance, personalities, affluence, and previous personal educational and life experience do not necessarily play a big role in the determination of obedience rate. Also, the author ignores the influence of religions. For example, students who believe Catholicism may have higher obedience rate because of this religions' belief. This may also influence the results. Besides, the participants in the experiment are students, which means that it is impractical to conduct such experiment on a large scale in whether China or in the States. The experiment may only conduct in one or two schools. As a result, it may not be able to support all results. Finally, it is impossible to control students' and teachers' behaviors, so it might influence the results of the experiment. For example, teachers may change their behaviors if they know there are researchers who watch them. Also, doing these strange activities may confuse both teachers and students. Indeed, they may not behave normally. By doing research about this field, we can learn more about the influence of different education systems to students. It will show out why some people prefer to study in the US. It may relate to the obedience rate in American education systems. Therefore, it is really helpful for education systems to improve. They may understand which teaching ways are better.

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