

The Exploration and Prediction of the Students’ Degree of Obedience to Authority in the Classroom Context under Different Education Systems Inside the Hive Mind: The Psychology of Group Life

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ABSTRACT

Examining the dynamic relationship between teachers and students is a key topic associating with the relation between authority and obedience. So far, scholars have set up a variety of cross-cultural studies about the authoritative relationship based on a school context, yet there is a lack of studies from a Chinese version. In the contemporary period, the introduction of western-style classes causes Chinese students to have diverse choices in educational approaches. They are not merely limited to learn in traditional Chinese schools until universities. The designed study is aimed at providing a mixed-method approach to investigate how the variation of educational backgrounds affects students’ behaviors in class within Chinese society. By considering a quantitative in-class changing seat activity and a qualitative self-report questionnaire, it induces the discussion about the influence of educational models on the degree of (dis)obedience. The results predict to exhibit a relation to educational backgrounds and age. Chinese students accepting a western-style learning pattern and receiving it in an earlier age tend to have a higher disobedient rate due to diverse aspects, such as learning styles, uncertainty avoidance and individual developing patterns.

Keywords: *(dis)obedience to authority, education systems, students, Chinese society, mixed-method approach*

1. INTRODUCTION

Authority relationship and behavioral expressions of obedience and disobedience are essential components in human life. People constantly interact with authorities in different social structures, such as family, school, and workplace [1]. School is considered as one of the earliest places where people experience authoritative relationships [1,2]. The relationship between teacher and students resembles the power relation between the authority and those who obey, which is a meaningful topic to discuss.

1.1. Literature Review

Studies relating to authority and (dis)obedient behaviors have been discussed for the long term. Stanley Milgram’s experiment (1965) was the first study

exploring the relationship between individuals and authority, which attempted to interpret why people (dis)obey immoral requests of authorities. In Milgram’s study, he briefly defines obedience and disobedience, “if Y follows the command of X we shall say that he has obeyed X; if he fails to carry out the command of X, we shall say that he has disobeyed X” [3]. Later, studies of obedience were replicated in numerous countries [4], and cross-cultural studies also connect to the field of education to explore the relationship between teacher and students’ roles [1,5,6]. But few of these studies focus on the variation of learning styles in a Chinese community. As a country that constantly learns and accepts diverse cultures, different types of educational models are accepted by students in Chinese society, whose influences are further reflected in students’ discrepant (dis)obedient behaviors during the learning process.

So, based on these premises, the paper tries to include two research questions. The first one is how education styles correlate with Chinese students' behaviors. Second, how the transformation of education styles affects the degree of (dis)obedience at different ages? The paper aims to investigate the relationship between the degree of compliance in a school-based context and an individual's educational background using a mixed-method research approach. In particular, I assume that there is a strong relationship between the level of obedience and educational background. Students who receive Chinese-style education have a higher obedience level than those who receive a western-style one.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Participants

A sample of 200 students aged between 19 and 25 years (i.e., the university students) will participate on a voluntary basis, and all individuals need to sign a consent form. The participants are equally divided into four groups in this study: a) students who always receive traditional Chinese educational systems, b) students who attend an international school and always receive western-style education style, c) students who transform educational mode from Chinese style to western style in high school, and d) students who transform educational mode from Chinese style to western style in university.

Two dimensions are considered in the classification. One is different education systems accepted by the participants, divided into Chinese educational system and the Western educational system. The other one is based on the consideration of a dynamic transformation of the education system at different time points, which is accepting a new type of educational system during either an adolescent period or an adult period.

2.2. Research design

The analysis follows a mixed-method approach. It includes a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches since using mixed methods will provide a more comprehensive understanding of multiple reasons causing the results of the research [1]. The first part is a quantitative section called in-class changing seat activity rearranged based on Bridgman's study, focusing on discussing overt disobedient behaviors. The classroom for the experiential exercise needs to have more seats than the number of participants to get more seats available for students to move as the activity proceeds. Participants are asked to take part in a guest lecture instructed by the researcher. They will be semi-blinded during the procedure. Namely, students will be misguided to focus on an illusive task. They are asked to

evaluate the quality of the lecture and give comments to the instructor instead of concentrating on their consciousness towards the true activity focused by the researchers.

A seat-change exercise is integrated naturally into the course content, and the whole procedure will be recorded by a hidden camera. The instructor will give a series of instructions and require students to change seats constantly. (e.g. "students with surnames starting A-M sit on the left-side, and students with surnames N-Z sit on the right-side." "Please move to the southwest corner of the classroom and fill up the seats." "Please fill up the seats from the back." "Fill up the seats from the front.") [7]. All actions do not need additional sources, such as communicating with other participants, and the instructor can repeat their instructions when people persist resistance. Once students are seated in new arrangements, a new ordering instruction will follow without giving any reasonable rationale for the instruction.

After the lecture-based experiment, a second qualitative part is offered to explore students' implicit disobedient rate, named self-report questionnaire. An exercise of free associations is administered to disclose different orientations of (dis)obedience in a class-based context [2]. Ten rules belonging to the themes of obedience and disobedience (five for "obedience" and five for "disobedience") are displayed in random order. Respondents' task is to choose three rules they think are the most important elements for a better learning experience in class. Rules are determined based on Milgram's definition of (dis)obedience and Sadik and Yalcin's research [8], who analyze teachers and students' collective perception of discipline in class. By using the instrument, researchers can examine the comparison of (dis)obedience perceptions of students from different educational backgrounds and which type of in-class behaviors is more adopted.

2.3. Measurements

The analysis includes two parts based on the in-class activity and after-class questionnaire. As for the change seat activity, the recording enables the researcher to measure the variable, which is the time of seat change each round. Once the instructor finishes giving the instruction, the time starts to be measured, and the timekeeping ends when every student are correctly seated in their new arrangement. The time taken for each round will be analyzed, which further reflects the tendency of disobedient rate. For qualitative survey, the total number of each code will be counted and categorized into either "obedience" or "disobedience". The ratio of quantities of rules belonging to "obedience" and "disobedience" will be compared between groups.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Predicted Results

The following table and figure show the predicted results of the in-class activity. Table 1 shows the

Table 1. The predicted results of t-test and the relationship between times and the time of changing seats

The Predicted Results													
The Relationship Between Number of Times and the Time of Changing Seats												P-value of T-test (the Relationship Between Education Styles and Disobedient Rate)	
group	number of times	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		Average time/second(s)
	time/second(s)												
A		50	70	85	90	95	105	115	130	140	145	102.5	p-value for group A and B 0.006094036
B		60	100	120	150	190	230	265	300	350	395	216	
C		60	90	105	130	145	180	220	260	300	340	183	p-value for group C and D 0.058575515
D		50	75	90	100	110	125	130	150	165	180	117.5	

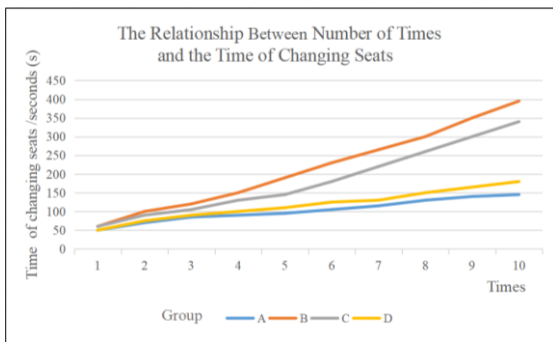


Figure 1. The relationship between times and the time of changing seats

Several pieces of information are conveyed. Firstly, students with different educational backgrounds all involve disobedient behaviors. According to Bridgman, explicit resistant behaviors include pretending not to understand the instruction, refusal, and slowness to move [7]. The predicted lines of four groups suggest a rise in the time of movement with increasing times of instructions, referring to the increasing disobedient rate. Possible reasons cause the happening of the phenomenon. For example, students feel annoyed as they do not allow to sit in a preferred seat without acquiring any explanation of the requirements. Also, the repetitive cycles of change is more accessible for students to become tired, and others' resistance will influence individuals' action and move more slowly over time [7].

Secondly, the hierarchy of four groups in regard to disobedient rate from high to low is: b, c, d, a. Different trends of each line and stratification between each line represent the difference of the degree of disobedience. On the one hand, students who receive western-style show a less obedient rate than those with traditional Chinese style, reflecting in the lines of group a and b and their corresponding tiny p-value of t-test. On the other hand, students who are earlier to change to a westernized learning style (group c) is predicted to have a higher disobedient rate, while students who receive a

variation of the time of changing seat as time goes by and the p-value of the t-test corresponding to the relationship between students' disobedient rate and their discrepant education styles. Figure 1 further delineates the data shown in table 1 concretely.

western-style educational system after university (group d) demonstrates less contrast to purely Chinese-style learning modes, corresponding to the small p-value of two groups gained from t-test.

The statistics of the qualitative questionnaire assumes to have a similar result. Specifically, in the classification of the top three codes, the frequency of selecting rules belonging to "obedience" will be relatively higher in group a and c compared to the other two groups. Namely, people who accept western educational system earlier exhibit higher disobedient rate and tend to believe that disobedient behaviors' existence contribute to learning knowledge in the classroom.

3.2. Related Discussion

Two possible reasons trigger the appearance of the predictions in both qualitative and quantitative results. First of all, cultural difference between west and China causes the difference of students' behaviors in class, which further leads to a higher disobedience rate under a western style learning pattern. One reflection is different learning styles. A few researchers demonstrate empirical evidence about how different learning cultures influence individuals' behaviors and ways of learning. Xiao illustrates that western countries (e.g.America) and east countries (e.g.China) are two societies with different cultures [2]. American culture emphasizes individualism, guiding individuals to have active experimentation and autonomy during the learning experience instead of keeping silent [6,9]. In contrast, Chinese culture is established upon a system of Confucianism, which emphasizes values of Confucian teachings and collectivism, like obedience, respect, unselfishness, hard work, and responsibility [2,10]. Therefore, obedient behavior is a manifestation of respecting to norms and teachers at school for students who study in a Chinese-style class.

Another cultural difference reflects in uncertainty avoidance, referring to “the extent to which the members of an organization or a society strive to avoid uncertainty by relying on established social norms, rituals, and bureaucratic practices” [11]. Researchers acknowledge that people in a society with a less uncertainty avoidance are more willing to break rules and less resistant to change [11]. They prefer an open learning environment in education where allows unconventional thoughts. Still, members of a society with a high level of uncertainty avoidance (e.g., China) are more tolerant of obeying rules, unwilling to take risks, and tend to learn from convenience [6]. These findings support that students who learn in a traditional Chinese educational system will be less encouraged to learn from a dynamic experience. Namely, they are more comfortable complying rather than creating a complicated learning environment by disobeying acquiescent norms.

Secondly, compared to students who come into contact with a western-style education mode after entering the university (i.e., change after being an adult), accepting a different educational mode during an earlier adolescent age leads to a higher disobedient rate. The result attributes to the coherent connection between an individual’s growing patterns and the ability of adjusting thinking modes and behaviors. Scholars address that teenagers in the adolescent period are in a rapidly changing period, not only physically but also emotionally [8,12]. It is not problematic for them during this period to demonstrate their attitudes by displaying particular behaviors in different situations [8]. Also, the observation of adolescent peak suggests that teenagers are always at the forefront of various changes, including language, taste, clothes, etc. People later achieve stabilization at approximately seventeen to nineteen years old [13]. In this case, individuals’ developmental tendency causes those who transform to another educational model in high school more likely to accept a new learning style and change their learning habits. Thus, their overt reactions in class and thoughts related to better learning experience tend to be more close to students who are thoroughly educated in a western style, meaning they exhibit or accept disobedience in the classroom more. Learning in a western education system advances students to slightly increase disobedient rate though they adopt a new educational environment after the adolescent peak. By contrast, changing behaviors is a bit harder since one’s learning habits and mind tend to stabilize, leading people to be more likely to persist compliant behaviors influenced by the previous learning experience in a Chinese-style mode.

3.3. Other possibilities

It is not sensible to overlook other possible patterns as reasons causing behavioral differences are quite

complex. One alternative pattern is that people who are educated in a western style prefer to learn in a more obedient way albeit they shows higher disobedient rate in class. The corresponding result of self-report is that groups with a western-style education background select more rules relating to the categorization of obedience than the group with a conventional Chinese learning style. Several current studies show that U.S American samples are more likely to evaluate obedience positively [1] and select obedience and good manners in a preferred educational style [2]. One reason causing the psychology is they regard obedience as an ability for people to know how to respond, and disobedience refers to a lack of respect towards a person [1]. Given these results, it seems that students accessing a western education system are more willing to exhibit obedient behaviors to manifest their ability and respect.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results presented above, there is a coherent relationship between the styles of the educational system and students’ level of obedience. Students who receive Chinese education systems tend to have a higher obedient rate and show preference towards an obedient situation in class than those who receive western education systems. Culture has a significant impact on the different behaviors in education. Also, age plays an essential role in the differences of ideas of (dis)obedience in education. The stabilization period of mental development causes people who transform from Chinese to western education system on adulthood are less likely to increase disobedient behaviors compared to those who experience educational-style changes during the adolescent peak.

The study has some potential limitations. Firstly, the study can be improved by enlarging sample sizes. Since participants in this study are only concerned about education systems and age, other variables are not considered to be controlled for in assessing the influence of education styles. For example, individual’s geographic variable of receiving an education is not controlled. Also, other factors might shape and influence one’s behaviors and learning styles such as personalities and parental guidance. Another limitation is the study lacks participants’ examination of disobedient behaviors in education, albeit the existing questionnaire includes participants’ evaluations of a better learning experience. In Milgram’s experiment, participants’ disobedience is regarded as a dissonant behavior of escaping, perceiving as a failure [1]. Participants naturally view disobedience negatively, leading most of them to continue to obey the authority. However, disobedient behaviors are not always perceived negatively. It can sometimes be a rational process, leading to a positive and moral consequence. Therefore, students accessing different

modes of education might have different attitudes, either positive or negative, towards the disobedient behaviors in the classroom. Therefore, understanding participants' discrepant attitudes of different types of (dis)obedient behaviors and investigating implicit reasons for the questionnaire selection is quite important. A more detailed categorization of codes in the questionnaire and more individualized self-report should be considered, like interviewing one-on-one with participants and providing specific contexts in the questionnaire.

As many researchers' suggestion, parents and teachers are the first authorities and educative roles faced by people [1][2]. For the future research direction, scholars can explore the effect of parental control and guidance on children's level of obedience to authority. Also, in response to students' variant level of obedience to authority in the classroom, researchers can explore teachers' perception of students' (dis)obedient behaviors under different education systems. For instance, whether different education system affects teachers' intentionality of students' (dis)obedient behaviors in teaching and learning. Based on these findings, parents, teachers, and schools in diverse educational contexts are able to seek a specific way in the future, which is more conducive to students' mental development and learning experiences in class.

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