

The Relationship Between Junior High School Students' Perceived Teacher Expectations and Learner Autonomy: A Review of the Mechanism of Action of Hopefulness and Core Self-Evaluations

Yuhang Wu *

College of Life and Ocean Sciences, Shenzhen University, Shenzhen, 518055, China

wuyuhang_edu@163.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract

With the deepening of the "learner-centered" concept in the reform of basic education curriculum, the cultivation of junior high school students' learner autonomy has become one of the core issues in educational practice and research. As an important source of social support for junior high school students, teachers' expectations—when perceived by students—have attracted much attention regarding their impact on learner autonomy and the underlying mechanism. This paper systematically sorts out the conceptual connotations of perceived teacher expectations, learner autonomy, hopefulness, and core self-evaluations, and focuses on reviewing the research progress of the relationships among the four variables: Perceived teacher expectations have a significant positive predictive effect on junior high school students' learner autonomy; meanwhile, hopefulness and core self-evaluations not only play mediating roles respectively between the two, but also may exert a joint mediating effect through the chain path of "perceived teacher expectations → hopefulness → core self-evaluations → learner autonomy". Based on existing studies, this paper points out the limitations of current research in terms of sample universality, longitudinal research design, and mechanism verification, and puts forward prospects for future research and educational practice, so as to provide a reference for improving the comprehensive literacy of adolescents.

Keywords

Junior High School Students' Perceived Teacher Expectations; Learner Autonomy; Hopefulness; Core Self-Evaluations.

1. Introduction

With the advent of the knowledge economy era, basic education in China is facing new development opportunities and challenges. The concept of quality-oriented education under the new curriculum reform emphasizes the transformation from "educator-centered" to "learner-centered", attaching importance to students' dominant position in learning and striving to cultivate their learner autonomy. However, under the profound influence of the traditional concept of exam-oriented education, the comprehensive implementation of key competencies still faces many obstacles. Against the background of this rapidly changing era, exploring effective paths to improve students' learner autonomy has become an important new topic that the education sector urgently needs to study in depth. For junior high school students, teachers are significant others who maintain stable and close contact with them besides their parents, and teachers' attitudes and evaluations directly affect their learning and psychological development [1]. In teacher-student interaction, teachers form predictive cognition of students'

future behaviors and achievements based on students' behaviors and achievements, i.e., develop expectations for students [2]. At this time, students need to actively perceive teachers' positive expectations and transform them into learning motivation, thereby enhancing internal learning motivation and becoming more proactive in learning, which is manifested as improved learner autonomy [3-5]. Thus, teacher expectations may be an important factor affecting students' learner autonomy.

After perceiving teacher expectations, students do not immediately make changes in learning; instead, they first re-cognize and evaluate themselves according to the level of perceived teacher expectations, and then make changes in learning [1]. Therefore, students will interpret teachers' higher expectations as recognition of their learning ability or behavioral performance, thereby improving their core self-evaluations and demonstrating positive behaviors [6]. It can be seen that core self-evaluations may play a key role in the process of perceived teacher expectations influencing internal learning motivation. At the same time, scholars have found that the improvement of hopefulness can effectively enhance students' self-directed learning motivation and awareness [7]. Students with higher hopefulness have higher self-worth and self-identity; this sense of self-confidence and dignity can improve individuals' core self-evaluation ability, thereby promoting them to take proactive actions [8]. Therefore, when facing the same academic tasks, they tend to be more confident and take the initiative to participate in learning, actively cope with difficulties, and thus their academic performance will be improved accordingly [9].

In educational psychology, teacher expectations, learner autonomy, hopefulness, and core self-evaluations are all important research fields. Teacher expectations affect students' learning attitudes and effects, while students' learner autonomy reflects the degree of their active participation in learning. Hopefulness and core self-evaluations, as two important internal driving forces of students, play a crucial role in students' learner autonomy. This study aims to review the relationship between junior high school students' perceived teacher expectations and learner autonomy, as well as the role of hopefulness and core self-evaluations in this relationship, so as to provide a reference for improving the comprehensive literacy of adolescents.

2. Concepts of Core Variables

2.1. Perceived Teacher Expectations

Teacher expectations refer to teachers' expectations for students, which are predictive cognitions with certain emotional tendencies towards students' future behaviors and achievements formed in the process of bilateral interaction between teachers and students. These expectations can be either positive or negative [10]. The impact of teacher expectations on students is called the teacher expectation effect, also known as the Rosenthal Effect or Pygmalion Effect [11]. The teacher expectation effect is divided into positive and negative effects: the positive effect refers to the positive impact transmitted by teachers to students, promoting the correct development of students' cognition, emotions, and personalities; the negative effect is the opposite [12]. However, the teacher expectations perceived by students are not completely consistent with the actual expectations that teachers hold for students — only the teacher expectations perceived by students themselves can affect their learning behaviors [5], and this process is called perceived teacher expectations. In teacher-student interaction, teachers can convey expectations through various behaviors, such as verbal interaction [13], smiles, and gestures. Students will pay attention to teachers' behaviors, perceive teacher expectations, and adjust their own behaviors accordingly [6].

2.2. Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy refers to the ability of students—driven by internal motivation—to set clear learning plans before the start of learning activities, self-monitor learning methods, content, and time during the learning process, actively create an environment conducive to learning, and conduct self-reflection and evaluation of learning results after the completion of learning [14].

2.3. Hopefulness

The Hope Cognition Theory holds that hope is an individual's cognition of their ability to achieve expected goals [15], a belief that individuals firmly believe their goals can be achieved, and this belief will motivate individuals to seek and mobilize resources to achieve their perceived goals [16]. Hopefulness refers to the sense of accomplishment and experience generated by the continuous interaction between internal driving forces and strategic thinking when individuals pursue goals. It is a reflective awareness of goals, strategies, and abilities in this process [14], and is regarded as a positive motivational state based on the sense of internal success, as well as an important positive psychological quality in the growth process of adolescents [17].

2.4. Core Self-Evaluations

The term "core self-evaluations (CSE)" is derived from the concept of "core evaluation". Scholar Judge defined it as the most basic evaluation held by individuals regarding their own abilities and values [18], and identified four components of core self-evaluations: self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional stability/neuroticism, and locus of control [19].

3. Research Progress on the Relationships Between Variables

3.1. The Relationship Between Perceived Teacher Expectations and Learner Autonomy

Existing studies consistently show that junior high school students' perceived teacher expectations have a significant positive predictive effect on their learner autonomy. Scholars such as Jiang TT found that compared with ordinary individuals, students who perceive more teacher support have significantly higher self-directed learning motivation [20]. A study by Xie JL et al. on students with learning difficulties further verified that perceived teacher expectations improve academic performance by enhancing academic motivation [21], and the enhanced motivation further promotes students to actively set plans and reflect on results, i.e., improve learner autonomy. This indicates that teachers' behavioral support will be perceived by students as positive teacher expectations, which promote and maintain learning motivation, thereby making students demonstrate behaviors consistent with teachers' expectations in learning and enhancing their learning initiative.

3.2. The Relationship Between Perceived Teacher Expectations and Hopefulness

Perceived teacher expectations are an important external predictive factor of junior high school students' hopefulness. Zhang QL's study found that hope can directly and positively predict academic achievement [22]. When students receive teachers' autonomous support, they will perceive teachers' positive expectations for themselves, thereby adjusting their own state and seeking resources and help to improve academic performance. Even when facing learning difficulties, they can show higher hopefulness, motivate themselves to actively overcome difficulties and increase learning investment until they achieve their goals [23]. This indicates that students' perceived teacher expectations can enhance their hopefulness for learning, and

the latter may play a mediating role between teacher expectations and students' learner autonomy.

3.3. The Relationship Between Perceived Teacher Expectations and Core Self-Evaluations

A study by Yang XF et al. found that social support can positively predict core self-evaluations [24]. As an important source of social support for junior high school students, teacher expectations may have an impact on their core self-evaluations. Yu HX found that individuals with higher self-worth have higher levels of core self-evaluations [25]. Since core self-evaluations are the most basic evaluation of individuals' own values and abilities, they are closely related to self-worth. This suggests that students' perceived teacher expectations may affect their core self-evaluations by influencing their sense of self-worth.

3.4. The Relationship Between Hopefulness and Learner Autonomy

As a positive psychological quality, hopefulness can positively predict junior high school students' learner autonomy. The improvement of hopefulness can effectively enhance students' self-directed learning motivation and awareness; students with higher hopefulness have a stronger belief in academic goals, and this belief is transformed into internal learning motivation, prompting them to actively participate in learning activities and persist in completing learning tasks [23]. Zhang QL's study also showed that hopefulness can positively predict academic achievement, and the improvement of academic achievement will further strengthen students' willingness for autonomous learning and help them find effective strategies to achieve learning goals, forming a positive cycle of "hopefulness → autonomous learning → academic success" [22].

3.5. The Relationship Between Core Self-Evaluations and Learner Autonomy

Core self-evaluations are the most basic evaluation of individuals' own abilities and values. Studies have found that junior high school students with higher core self-evaluations are more confident in their ability to control the learning process, willing to face learning challenges, take the initiative to set learning plans, monitor learning progress, reflect on shortcomings after learning, and adjust strategies—all of which are manifestations of learner autonomy [1]. This indicates that positive core self-evaluations can improve students' learning motivation, thereby demonstrating positive learning initiative in behaviors.

3.6. The Chain Mediating Relationship Between Hopefulness and Core Self-Evaluations

Existing studies have proved that self-related factors such as self-expectations and self-perceived ability play a mediating role between students' perceived teacher expectations and their academic performance [4], i.e., the level of teacher expectations perceived by students affects their self-cognition, which in turn affects academic performance. Compared with other self-related concepts, core self-evaluations—a comprehensive factor including four components [19]—can more holistically represent the self-changes of students triggered by perceived teacher expectations. It can thus be inferred that the level of junior high school students' perceived teacher expectations may affect their internal learning motivation by influencing their overall self-cognition (i.e., core self-evaluations), and ultimately lead to changes in academic performance.

Fan QC et al. found that there is a significant positive correlation between students' perceived teacher support and intentional self-regulation; intentional self-regulation not only plays a moderating role between perceived teacher support and hope, but also exerts a moderating effect between hope and learning engagement [26]. From the operational dimension, "intentional self-regulation" in this study refers to a series of action processes through which

students optimize their self-development by actively coordinating the relationship between environmental resources and personal goals [27], which is manifested as students re-evaluating their own abilities and taking corresponding measures to achieve goals—i.e., adjusting core self-evaluations and conducting self-improvement and improvement in actions. Therefore, when students perceive teachers' positive expectations, they will increase their hope for themselves and future learning, adjust their core self-evaluations accordingly, and then increase their investment in autonomous learning. This indicates that hopefulness and core self-evaluations may have a chain relationship and jointly act as mediating factors to affect the relationship between teacher expectations and learner autonomy, i.e., the path of "perceived teacher expectations → hopefulness → core self-evaluations → learner autonomy".

4. Limitations of Existing Studies

Although current studies have provided partial evidence for the relationships between junior high school students' perceived teacher expectations, learner autonomy, hopefulness, and core self-evaluations, there are still the following limitations:

First, the representativeness of samples is insufficient. Most samples are concentrated in middle schools in economically developed areas, lacking data from middle school students in underdeveloped areas, which limits the universality of the conclusions.

Second, there are few longitudinal studies. Current studies are mainly cross-sectional, which can only reveal the correlation between variables, but fail to verify the direction of causality, making it impossible to determine the causal order of hopefulness and core self-evaluations.

Third, the direct verification of the chain mediating mechanism is lacking. Existing studies only provide segmental evidence for the relationships between variables, and have not directly verified the significance of the chain path. Further empirical studies are still needed.

5. Future Research Prospects and Educational Implications

5.1. Future Research Prospects

Future research needs to address the existing limitations and advance from three aspects:

First, expand the source of samples. Include junior high school students from underdeveloped areas, rural areas, and schools of different educational levels to improve the universality of the conclusions.

Second, deepen the longitudinal research design. Conduct longitudinal follow-up studies for 1-2 years to reveal the long-term development trajectory and causal relationship between variables.

Third, deepen mechanism verification and expand research perspectives. Use empirical data to directly verify the chain mediating mechanism of "perceived teacher expectations → hopefulness → core self-evaluations → learner autonomy", clarify the effect size and significance of each path, and provide data support for this chain path.

5.2. Educational Implications

In teaching practice, teachers should accurately convey positive expectations through personalized encouragement, detailed academic feedback, and targeted learning guidance; at the same time, help students set short-term achievable academic goals to enhance their hopefulness, and help them accumulate successful experiences and optimize their core self-evaluations by affirming their learning efforts.

Schools need to create a good campus atmosphere, establish a diversified evaluation system and a mutual assistance mechanism between teachers and students, and actively expand home-school cooperation channels.

Families should maintain communication with schools, collaboratively convey positive expectations, guide students to overcome academic difficulties through daily communication, enhance their hopefulness, and optimize their core self-evaluations.

Society needs to promote the implementation of the new curriculum reform policies, reduce students' academic burden, provide diversified learning resources and platforms, and build a learning-oriented society. Finally, through the joint efforts of multiple subjects, the comprehensive development of students' moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education will be promoted.

6. Conclusion

There is a close internal connection between junior high school students' perceived teacher expectations, learner autonomy, hopefulness, and core self-evaluations: Perceived teacher expectations can not only directly and positively predict learner autonomy, but also indirectly affect learner autonomy through hopefulness and core self-evaluations respectively; meanwhile, hopefulness can positively predict core self-evaluations, and the four variables together form a potential chain mediating mechanism of "perceived teacher expectations → hopefulness → core self-evaluations → learner autonomy".

Existing studies have provided partial empirical evidence for this relationship network, but there are still limitations in terms of sample representativeness, longitudinal research design, and mechanism verification. Future research needs to further improve the research by addressing the above issues; meanwhile, in educational practice, teachers, schools, and families need to work together to give full play to the positive role of perceived teacher expectations, help improve junior high school students' learner autonomy, and lay a solid foundation for their lifelong learning and all-round development.

References

- [1] Kang, X.W. (2024) The relationship between junior high school students' perceived teacher expectations and intrinsic learning motivation: The mediating role of core self-evaluation and its intervention. Unpublished master's thesis.
- [2] Qu, M.M. (2020) The relationships among junior high school students' perceived parental academic expectations, perceived teacher expectations, achievement goal orientation, and academic possible self, and their educational implications. Unpublished master's thesis.
- [3] Liu, Y. (2017) A study on the relationship between junior high school students' perceived teacher expectations and English learning achievement motivation. *Overseas Engl.*, 10: 3-5, 12.
- [4] Wang, X.L. (2012) Research progress and implications of junior high school students' perceived teacher expectations. *Ment. Health Educ. Prim. Sec. Sch.*, 18: 7-10.
- [5] Weinstein, C.S. (1989) Teacher-education students' preconceptions of teaching. *J. Teach. Educ.*, 40(2): 53-60.
- [6] Kang, X.W., Ni, R.H. (2024) The mediating role of junior high school students' core self-evaluation between perceived teacher expectations and intrinsic learning motivation. *Ment. Health Educ. Prim. Sec. Sch.*, 29: 5-11.
- [7] Wang, Z.X. (2018) Strategies for cultivating middle school students' autonomous learning ability with improving psychological capital as the core. *Teach. Manag.*, 27: 65-67.
- [8] Li, L.Z., Zhou, M. (2021) The impact of junior high school students' hope on career adaptability: The mediating role of core self-evaluation. *Ment. Health Educ. Prim. Sec. Sch.*, 11: 8-12.

- [9] Zilvinskis, J., Masseria, A. A., Pike, G. R. (2017). Student engagement and student learning: Examining the convergent and discriminant validity of the revised National Survey of Student Engagement [J]. *Research in Higher Education*, 58(8): 880-903.
- [10] Ren, Y.N. (2021) A correlational study on junior high school students' perceived teacher expectations, academic self-efficacy, and learning engagement. Unpublished master's thesis.
- [11] Wang, L. (1999) Strategies for optimizing the teacher expectation effect. *J. Ningbo Univ. (Educ. Sci. Ed.)*, 04: 12-16.
- [12] Zheng, H.Y., Zhang, M.Q. (2008) Development of the perceived teacher expectation scale for junior high school students. *Psychol. Dev. Educ.*, 03: 113-118.
- [13] Zuo, M.Z., Zhang, Y., Wang, W.Q., Luo, H, Hu, Y. (2023) The impact of teachers' verbal interaction strategies on learning motivation in dedicated classrooms: A case study of dedicated classrooms in Chongyang County, Hubei Province. *China Educ. Technol.*, 06: 34, 98-105.
- [14] Zheng, S.H. (2024) The relationship between junior high school students' perceived teaching style and learning autonomy: The chain mediating role of hope and emotional engagement and intervention research. Unpublished master's thesis.
- [15] Yang, Z. (2024) The relationship between family cohesion and social anxiety among junior high school students. Unpublished master's thesis.
- [16] Lin, F.F. (2019) A study on the effects of different intervention methods on improving high school students' hope. Unpublished master's thesis.
- [17] Zhang, G.L., Lu, Y.B., Chen, Y. (2025) The impact of parental rearing styles on school adaptation among junior high school students: The chain mediating role of hope and self-control. *J. Neijiang Norm. Univ.*, 40(04): 32, 99-105.
- [18] Judge, T.A., Bono, J.E. (2001) Relationship of core self-evaluations traits—self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability—with job satisfaction and job performance: A meta-analysis. *J. Appl. Psychol.*, 86(1): 80-92.
- [19] Judge, T.A., Locke, E.A., Durham, C.C. (1997) The dispositional causes of job satisfaction: A core evaluations approach. In L.L. Cummings, B.M. Staw (Eds.), *Res. Organ. Behav.* (Vol. 19): 151-188. JAI Press.
- [20] Jiang, T.T., Cao, Y., Gong, S.Y., Liu, X.X., Wu, Y.N, Lang, Y.R. (2023) The impact of teachers' autonomous support on senior high school students' online learning engagement: The roles of autonomous motivation and proactive personality. *Psychol. Sci.*, 46(06): 1336-1343.
- [21] Xie, J.L., Huang, J., Tong, G.Q., He, C.F. (2023) The relationship between underachieving students' perceived teacher expectations and academic achievement: The mediating role of academic motivation. *Neijiang Sci. Technol.*, 44(03): 139-141.
- [22] Zhang, Q.L. (2021) The relationships among junior high school students' hope, daily academic resilience, academic emotions, and academic achievement, and educational countermeasures. Unpublished master's thesis.
- [23] Wu, J. (2023) The impact of teachers' autonomous support on junior high school students' academic perseverance: The roles of growth mindset and hope. Unpublished master's thesis.
- [24] Yang, X.F., Xu, S.A., Zheng, X. (2009) A study on the relationship between college students' social support, core self-evaluation, and subjective well-being. *Chin. J. Spec. Educ.*, 12: 83-89.
- [25] Yu, H.X. (1998) A preliminary study on the relationship between self-worth and self-evaluation of middle and college students. *Psychol. Dev. Educ.*, 04: 46-50.

- [26] Fan, Q.C. (2023) A study on the impact of perceived teacher support on senior high school students' learning engagement: A moderated mediation model. Unpublished master's thesis.
- [27] Wang, G.X., Liu, X.L., Gai, X.S., Wang, A.J. (2012) An interview study on the characteristics and influencing factors of adolescents' intentional self-regulation. In: Proceedings of the 15th National Academic Conference on Psychology. Guangzhou.