**Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH) (e-ISSN : 2504-8562)**
**2024, Volume 9, Issue 7, e002654**
**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v9i7.2654

REVIEW ARTICLE

# Conceptualizing the Relationship Between Course Management, Learning Styles and University Students' Academic Challenges in China

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**KEYWORDS:**
Course management
Learning styles
Academic challenges
University students
China

**CITATION:**
Chongchong, Y., & Soon Singh Bikar Singh. (2024). Conceptualizing the Relationship Between Course Management, Learning Styles and University Students' Academic Challenges in China. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH), 9*(6), e002654. https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v9i7.2654

## ABSTRACT

Improving the quality of higher education has become the main task of the reform and development of higher education. The pressure of students' study is increasing day by day, and the competition is becoming increasingly fierce. course management and students' learning styles in colleges and universities are all important indicators that affect students' academic challenges. Therefore, this paper investigates the relationship between current university course management, learning styles and students' academic challenges, conducts theoretical research and literature review, summarizes the current actual situation of students' academic challenges and course management, and proposes targeted improvement methods and suggestions for education management in order to further discover the problems. It provides reference for more effective education policy and implementation, and more targeted support measures.

**Contribution/Originality:** The contribution of this paper is to find out that the different research views on the relationship between course management, learning styles and university student's academic challenges in the existing literature, then create some new views, which makes a certain enlightenment to the follow-up research.

## 1. Introduction

With the realization of the popular goal of higher education in our country, the quality question has become a pressing question in front of high education. After entering the 21st century, improving the quality of higher education has become the main task of the reform and development of higher education.

China's higher education is faced with a variety of challenges (Zhang, 2001). First of all, the academic pressure of college students is increasing day by day, and the competition is becoming increasingly fierce. College is a stressful time for many students as they go through the process of adjusting to a new educational and social environment. Students deal with the pressures of academic programs, extracurricular activities, and social demands. These challenges can affect students' motivation and academic achievement. Biggs et al. (2017) stress and coping interaction theory shows that: As stressors build up, an individual's ability to cope or readjust can become overloaded, depleting their physical or mental resources. In turn, the likelihood of subsequent physical illness or psychological distress increases (Biggs et al., 2017). Secondly, the diversity of college students also increases the complexity of teaching management. Each student has a unique learning styles, subject preference and development needs, so more detailed and targeted teaching management and course management for individual differences are needed. In addition, the improvement of teaching quality has become an important indicator of the development of higher education, and course management and student learning methods play a key role in achieving this goal.

The lack of course management theory, the imperfect management of the course generation system, the insufficient management participation in the course preparation process, the rigidity of the course management mode, the imperfection of the course evaluation system and the low level of the course management subject are the urgent problems to be solved in the course management of Chinese colleges and universities (Wang et al., 2011). Course design that adapts to students' needs and is closely related to subject knowledge can improve students' learning outcomes and learning experiences (Almoaiqel et al., 2020). Innovative course design, opportunities for student participation, and supportive learning environments can promote active student participation and learning outcomes (Simms et al., 2019). The rising academic pressure has become a serious concern in the educational circle. Many students are under tremendous pressure due to heavy coursework, challenging courses, academic competition, and the desire to maintain high grades. Time management is an important self-regulating process through which students actively manage when and how long they engage in activities deemed necessary to achieve their academic goals (Wolters & Brady, 2021).

## 2. Significance of the study

At present, there are relatively few researches on the factors affecting the academic challenges of undergraduate students in two colleges and universities, which account for a large proportion in China, especially the in-depth discussion on the academic challenges faced by students in specific colleges and academic years. The study will fill a research gap in this area and contribute to a deeper understanding of the academic challenges of college students.

Through in-depth understanding of the influence of factors such as learning pressure, course setting, course evaluation and time management ability on learning challenges faced by sophomore students in the academic environment, this study will be able to provide targeted improvement methods and suggestions. These approaches and recommendations can provide guidance to schools, educational institutions, and educational decision makers to improve student learning experiences and academic outcomes.

While the study focuses on students in specific colleges and academic years, its results have implications for understanding the broader challenges faced by undergraduates at private universities in China. This helps to improve the overall understanding of the academic challenges of Chinese university students, and provides a reference for the formulation of more effective education policies and the implementation of more targeted support measures.

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1. Course Management

School course management is the most dynamic link in the course management system, which is of great significance to the successful implementation of course, the improvement of teachers' professional level and the enhancement of course adaptability. Because of the long-standing tradition of centralized course management in China, the power of school course management is very limited. Since the mid-1980s, China's education reform has gradually given local governments and schools appropriate autonomy (Yang, 2004). The Outline of Basic Education course Reform (Trial Implementation) issued by the Ministry of Education of China in 2001 clearly put forward the implementation of national, local and school course management at three levels (Ministry of Education, 2001).

The reform of the course management system has brought new challenges to the management of basic education in China. The research on course management in China began in the early 1990s. With the popularization of computer technology, the rise of knowledge economy and the vigorous development of basic education course reform, China's course management system came into being. course management is an important topic in the field of contemporary course research, a fact existing in course practice, and a research field that needs to be further developed at home and abroad. To study course management, clarify the meaning of course management, and clarify the similarities and differences of related concepts are the basic premise of course management research. course management is an important task in the course field, and it is also a research field that needs further exploration. The analysis of the connotation of course management and the difference of related concepts is the basis of this study.

The term "course management" is actually rather old, and the term "course leadership" has recently been used in the United States. The so-called "course management" of a school, broadly speaking, is not only limited to the content of the course (course content theory), but also means the creation of various organizational and operational conditions (conditions rectification) in the process of promoting the planning, preparation (P)→ implementation, development (D)→ evaluation (S) of the course content (Zhong, 2002). Boyd (1973) regard the school management organization, which is the premise of school course, as an open circulation system that receives input from the surrounding environment and returns output to the environment. They focus on the resistance and tension within the system that occur during the interaction between the school organization and the environment.

The Japanese educational scholar Katsuya Takano constructed a theoretical model of the P-D-S functional process of course management and the corresponding relationship structure of school management conditions. In the 21st century, course management has entered a stage of rapid innovation, the emergence of course management system,

also known as learning management system or virtual learning environment, is a software system designed to help students manage education course, especially by helping teachers and learners to manage course. The system usually tracks the learner's progress. While often considered the primary tool for distance education, they are also used to support face-to-face classrooms (Kor et al., 2007).

Al-Shboul (2011) pointed out that the research can identify what is currently taking place with CMS integration at higher education institutions, thus, the obtained information can assist university administrators to determine the educational costs regarding CMS integration. First, CMS can complement the traditional course experience. Second, CMS can be used to organize the course experience. McGrath and Geurts (2022) pointed out that course teachers strive to create a course environment that enables students to master the subject for the long term and succeed in and out of the classroom. Despite the efforts of both parties, the results are sometimes not as good as expected.

In short, improving the existing CMS model on the basis of further in-depth research in the future and applying it to actual education scenarios will help promote universities, institutions and distance education organizations to make better use of course management system to support teachers' effective teaching and students' efficient learning.

### 3.2. Learning styles

The term learning style refers to the idea that different people learn information in different ways. Therefore, students' learning styles are different, and teachers' teaching methods are related to learning styles. In addition to this, some of the most popular learning styles schemes include Dunn and Dunn Learning styles models (Dunn, 1990).

The term learning styles refers to the idea that different people learn information in different ways. In recent decades, the concept of learning styles has gradually gained influence. The concept of learning styles includes not only a large amount of written material, but also what appears to be a thriving set of business activities. In the broadest sense, the literature dealing with the concept of learning styles includes several thousand articles and dozens of books. These numbers may seem alarmingly large, for example, in a relatively comprehensive review, Coffield et al. (2004) described 71 different scenarios, and they do not claim that their list is exhaustive (Pashler et al., 2008).

Learning styles is defined as the methods that learners prefer and prioritize in the learning process (Khamparia & Pandey, 2020). Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (ELM) has garnered significant attention and practical applications since its inception in 1976.

The styles proposed by ELM are: active experiment (activist), reflective observation (reflective), abstract conceptualization (theorist) and concrete experience (pragmatist). Moreover, the ELM reflects two separate dimensions: the pragmatist - the theorist (understanding) and the activist - the reflector (transformation). This is closely related to the research of cooperative learning, inquiry learning and autonomous learning.

The development of The Times and the progress of technology constantly promote the change of college students' learning methods, although this situation is constantly changing for the better, but it has not reached the ideal level. Under the new perspective, most college students gradually adopt the deep learning mode and take the initiative to integrate the fragmented knowledge systematically with different learning modes to carry out exploratory learning. The adoption of new technologies has its own characteristics in terms of learning subjects, learning contents and learning forms, and continuously influences college students' learning styles. In this situation, it is not only a good opportunity to break through and transform traditional learning styles, but also faces new challenges (Men, 2023). Autonomous learning is a kind of modern learning mode corresponding to the traditional receiving learning. In the blended learning mode, the students have a high sense of individual confidence, but a low sense of learning ability; the consciousness of learning planning is clear, but the ability of self-monitoring is poor; the use of learning strategies is good, but the evaluation of learning needs to be strengthened (Ping & Xiao, 2023).

From another perspective, in Aguilar et al. (2022)'s study, researchers suggest combining social learning analysis (SLA) tasks (Shum & Ferguson, 2012) to identify activities and tools used in intelligent classroom courses based on students' learning styles. They used the concept of "autonomous loops," combined with external data sources from social networks, to create a profile of student learning styles in smart classrooms based on student activity on social networks and academic systems. The contribution of this study is that it determines students' learning styles based on their interaction on social networks, while defining the autonomous cycle of SLA tasks in order to find the appropriate activities/tools for the course according to the students' learning styles, and finally introducing the concept of "SLA task autonomous cycle" in the context of intelligent classroom to improve the learning process autonomously (Aguilar et al., 2022). This is different from previous studies, most of which focus on students' learning styles to improve teacher teaching and course setting. The study of Aguilar et al. (2022) and other scholars uses the concept of "SLA task autonomous cycle" to create the learning styles of students in different learning environments and to evaluate and improve the learning process, which brings another inspiration to the author of this paper.

### 3.3. Academic Challenges

The concept of academic challenges originated from the emerging investigation and research of college students' learning situation in the United States and other western countries. In China, Shi Jinghuan team of Tsinghua University Sinicized NSSE and tried out a survey of college students' learning situation in China, first using the concept of "academic challenge" in 2009 (Zhuang , 2012). In general, the understanding of this concept generally includes several factors such as students' effort level, perceived advanced learning, and perceived learning environment. In 2012, NSSE adjusted the index system, and the five comparable indicators were changed into four themes and ten indicators. The revised "Academic Challenge" theme has four specific indicators: advanced learning, reflective and integrated learning, learning strategies, and quantitative reasoning (Kuh, 2001). Some scholars pointed out that to improve the degree of academic challenge is not only to let students have pressure, but also to let students voluntarily devote themselves to learning is benign and effective and the real pursuit (Xiao, 2018).

De Luca et al. (2016) investigated the relationship between high school students' emotions, school participation and academic performance, and found that emotional investment is formed spontaneously during students' learning process, students' academic performance will be affected by emotions and school participation in the short term, and students' emotions and school participation are linked through reciprocal relationships (Avenilla, 2003). The challenge degree and difficulty coefficient of university courses are generally low, and students generally feel that the challenge degree of study is not high enough. As the main body of course setting and teaching guarantee, schools should also undertake the task of high-level course construction, reduce knowledge memorization and learning, increase the cultivation of innovative consciousness and innovation of evaluation system, increase academic challenges, and gradually build a high-level golden course system (Wu, 2019).

In college, academic responsibility increases further, and for students to be successful, they must learn to manage and arrange their time to complete their studies without close supervision from teachers and parents (Fleming & McMahon, 2012). Therefore, it is necessary for college students to further improve their study plan and organization. Research has shown that time management training has a potentially positive impact on stress and the ability to manage the day. In particular, organizational and planning interventions at the beginning of the first semester of college may be particularly effective in managing stress (Stevens et al., 2019). "The Great Dictionary of Psychology" explains the above stress as "the psychological state such as tension produced by students in learning under the interaction of the outside world and individual expectations". Lazarus (2000) believes that psychological stress refers to "the special relationship between the individual and the environment that is evaluated by the individual as a potential threat to physical and mental health and needs to mobilize their own resources to carry or overstep" (Lazarus, 2000). As for the sources of academic pressure, Rawson et al (1999) believes that college students are in the transition period from campus to society and are faced with various complex problems. The pressure generally comes from learning, social communication and employment (Rawson et al., 1999).

Individuals should first learn how to solve problems, and then form the ability to solve problems. Individuals should be self-motivated and hope to deal with more difficult things, and further improve their ability in the process of dealing with them, and the cognitive process of individuals can be reshaped, so as to form a better person (Caro et al., 2016). Problem is the act of creating one's own problem, while using what one has learned to solve others' problems. Problem raising provides students with supplementary knowledge and skills, and when students are able to modify the problem itself or create similar problems, the motivation of their understanding of the problem deepens (Spittler & Bourdillon, 2012). The best way to help students is to create a harmonious learning environment and use teaching methods that closely match students' preferred learning styles (Dart et al., 2000). Taylor explained that learning styles are the ways in which learners interact and respond to learning materials or learning environments, and students may also use different learning strategies depending on the task (Wardle-Pinkston et al., 2019). Learning styles is a major consideration when planning effective and efficient teaching and learning. Previous research has shown that learning styles can affect academic performance.

### 3.4. Course Management and Academic Challenges

Course is the combination of students and society. Students live in society and should go to society after graduation. Students and society are closely connected, and the combination point is course. course management is one of the important and common types of teaching management. First of all, the society's demand for talents is reflected in the course objectives and course structure. For example, the United Kingdom has put forward the national course management goal according to its social requirements for talents: to foster the development of young individuals into accomplished learners, self-assured individuals, accountable members of society, and proficient contributors (Reiss & White, 2013).

At the same time, he also pointed out that the development of course originates from the development needs of students, course learning is to guide students to explore knowledge independently, and the implementation of course should emphasize the interaction and participation of teachers and students. Therefore, the effectiveness of course management has a certain impact and effect on students' understanding of course content and completion of academic tasks.

### 3.5. Learning styles and Academic Challenges

Considering learning styles is crucial in the process of designing teaching and learning strategies that are both effective and efficient. Previous research has shown that learning styles affects academic achievement.

Considering different learning styles is crucial in designing effective and efficient instruction and learning experiences (Li et al., 2014). To support students effectively, it is essential to establish a conducive learning atmosphere while employing teaching approaches that align closely with their individual preferences for acquiring knowledge (Wendler et al., 2010). Researchers argue that although various studies may categorize learning types and styles differently, their objectives and methodologies are essentially alike (Demirbas & Demirkan, 2007).

### 3.6. Course Management and Learning styles

Determining the learning preferences of students can provide valuable insights into their individualized styles. By understanding these preferences, it becomes easier to design, adapt, and enhance educational programs and courses for greater efficiency. Moreover, this knowledge can foster student engagement and motivation towards acquiring expertise (Brown et al., 2009). To enhance undergraduate education, educators should strive to be more cognizant of these diverse approaches (Carmo & Gomes, 2006).

Taylor explains that learning styles are the ways in which learners interact with and respond to learning materials or learning environments, and that students may also use different learning strategies depending on the task (Chen et al., 2019).

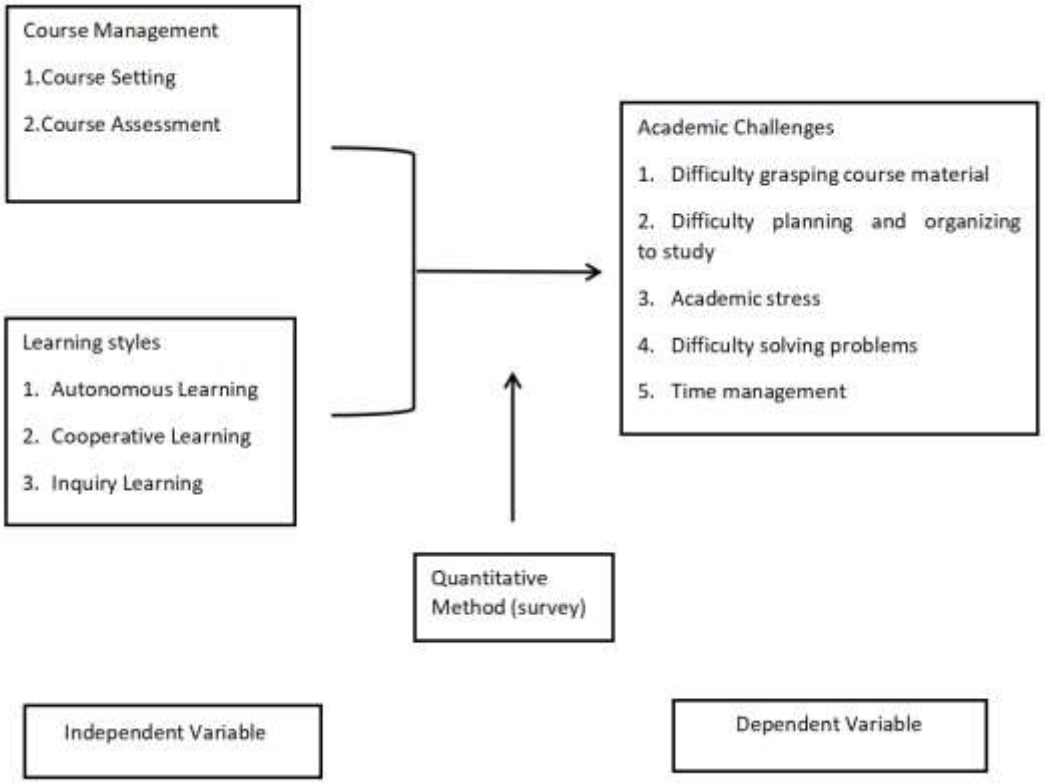
According to literature analysis, in terms of higher education teaching research in China, there is very limited research on how to adjust course management and the fit of student learning styles with academic challenges, and the quantity and quality of research are far from sufficient. How to make the innovative reform of Chinese higher

education teaching management glow in the history of university teaching is worthy of our further careful study.

## 4. Proposed conceptual framework

The theory of student participation relates not only to students' learning motivation, but also to course management and learning styles. The conceptual framework of this study is shown in Figure 1. A conceptual framework reflects what a researcher is doing using the theory in a given study (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of course management and students' learning styles on academic challenges in order to stimulate students' intrinsic positive learning motivation and help students grow and become talented. In terms of this basic concept, the theoretical framework meets the relevant requirements, can guide the development of research, and can integrate new efficiencies and effects.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework




This study presents a conceptual framework developed by the researchers based on several variables present in the study. This conceptual framework is important because it systematically lists the questions to be studied through background research, literature review, and questionnaire analysis, making the research results more systematic. This study examines the relationship between course management, student learning styles, and student academic challenges at Huanghe Jiaotong University.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has systematically reviewed existing literature on the interrelations among course management, learning styles, and student academic challenges. Our analysis has delineated the connections between these elements and provided a multi-faceted

perspective on the educational dynamics within universities. Key findings highlight how theories such as student participation, learning engagement, and constructivism significantly contribute to understanding and addressing academic challenges faced by students.

While our review consolidates current understandings, it also underscores the necessity for future empirical research to explore these theoretical connections in practical educational settings. By identifying these gaps, our study sets the groundwork for subsequent investigations aimed at enhancing educational practices and student outcomes. Theoretical insights from this review could guide the development of interventions that align course management strategies with diverse student learning styles to foster improved academic engagement and achievement.

In moving forward, it is essential to integrate these theoretical frameworks more deeply into empirical research to validate and extend their applicability in enhancing student learning experiences and academic performance in diverse educational contexts.

**Acknowledgement**

Part of this article was extracted from a doctoral thesis submitted to Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu.

**Funding**

This study received no funding.

**Conflict of Interest**

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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