

THE PHENOMENON OF "STUDY BUDDY" AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: MOTIVATIONS AND INTERACTION PATTERNS

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Abstract: The concept of a "study buddy" has emerged as a new social phenomenon, which is a product of the rapid development of internet socialization. "Study buddy social culture refers to the temporary social relationships and activities formed by individuals due to common interests, hobbies, or needs." In the context of contemporary college students, the term "study buddy" is increasingly understood and defined as a cooperative partner for both academic and recreational activities. "Study buddy socialization" provides students with high-quality emotional value, offering precise companionship. However, it also brings potential risks concerning personal safety, information security, and other related concerns. This study on the phenomenon of "study buddy socialization" among college students aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving ideological trends of this demographic, helping to grasp the rules of students' physical and mental development, their socializing needs, and to enhance the accuracy and effectiveness of ideological and political education in universities, thereby facilitating the growth and success of students.

Keywords: College students; Study buddy; Interaction patterns

1 INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of the dual trends of the widespread expansion of higher education and the digital transformation, the learning methods of college students are undergoing profound changes. In recent years, the phenomenon of "study buddies" has grown exponentially among college students as a new form of peer-assisted learning. This phenomenon is not only prevalent in offline campus life but also spreads widely across social media platforms. For example, the topic "studybuddy" on Rednote has reached over 230 million views, the related discussions on Weibo have exceeded 500,000 posts, and the question "How to find the right study buddy?" on Zhihu has garnered 120,000 views. The rise of this new learning model reflects the contemporary college students' need to supplement traditional classroom teaching and highlights the unique collaborative learning preferences of Generation Z learners[1].

Compared with traditional institutionalized study groups, "study buddies" exhibit three typical characteristics: First, in terms of organizational structure, they are informal, typically consisting of 2-3 students who voluntarily form a group based on common learning objectives, without relying on teacher assignments or course requirements. Second, in terms of interaction, the relationship is based on equality, where there is no fixed "teacher-student" hierarchy. Finally, in terms of functional orientation, study buddies serve multiple purposes, addressing academic needs while also fulfilling a social companionship function. This unique organizational form provides a new perspective for re-examining the peer learning mechanism.

Current research on peer learning primarily focuses on formal educational settings. However, insufficient attention has been given to informal learning alliances, such as "study buddies," which are spontaneously formed by students. This research gap prevents a comprehensive understanding of the true peer support networks of contemporary college students and limits our ability to deeply understand the new forms of peer-assisted learning in the digital age. Particularly in the post-pandemic era, with blended online and offline learning becoming the new normal, investigating this flexible and diverse peer assistance model has important theoretical and practical significance[2].

Based on this, this study focuses on two core issues: first, the formation drivers of study buddies; second, the interaction patterns of study buddies. By addressing these issues, this study aims to provide new insights for the construction of learning support systems in higher education, while also enriching the theoretical research in the field of informal learning.

2 THE MULTIFACETED DRIVERS OF STUDY BUDDY FORMATION

2.1 Direct Drive from Academic Pressure

In the context of increasingly fierce competition in higher education, academic pressure has become the most direct and primary driving factor for college students to form study buddy relationships. According to survey data, most students stated that "dealing with academic pressure" is their primary reason for seeking a study buddy. The formation of this phenomenon has a deep educational sociological background and is based on real-world demands.

From the specific manifestations of academic pressure, it is first reflected in course assessments. The ongoing deepening of teaching reforms in higher education has led to increasingly diversified assessment methods, with new forms of assessment such as group presentations, term papers, and lab reports steadily increasing, alongside the traditional final exams. This change requires students to maintain consistent learning efforts throughout the semester,

rather than relying solely on cramming at the end. Secondly, the rising demands of research training have also intensified academic pressure. With increasing emphasis on cultivating undergraduate research abilities, participation in innovation and entrepreneurship projects, subject competitions, and other research activities has continuously risen. These activities often require team collaboration, and study buddies naturally become the most basic form of research teams. Thirdly, pressure from qualification exams related to career development cannot be overlooked. Long-term preparations for exams such as postgraduate entrance exams, language tests for studying abroad, and civil service exams particularly require stable study partners[3]. This companionship not only provides study supervision but also, more importantly, psychological support.

From the perspective of coping mechanisms, study buddies provide a unique buffering role. The Social Comparison Theory can well explain this phenomenon. When students observe their buddy's learning progress, it fosters a sense of positive competition. Surveys show that 72.8% of students acknowledge that their buddy's learning performance influences their own effort levels. Additionally, according to Social Support Theory, the emotional support between study buddies can effectively alleviate academic anxiety[4]. When facing learning difficulties, students with a study buddy are significantly more likely to seek help compared to those studying alone.

From the grade level perspective, the phase-specific changes in academic pressure also influence the formation of buddy relationships. First-year students mainly seek buddies to adapt to university learning methods; second-year students are more likely to form study buddy relationships for foundational major courses; and senior students solidify their buddy relationships due to demands such as graduation projects and job preparation. This evolution reflects the dynamic adjustment of the functions of study buddies.

The development of digital learning environments further strengthens the connection between academic pressure and the formation of study buddy relationships. The popularization of learning management systems (such as Moodle and Chaoxing) makes academic progress visible, with 83.7% of students stating they would use system data to find potential study buddies with similar progress. At the same time, online learning communities (such as Zhihu Learning Circle, Bilibili Study Rooms) provide new channels for pressure relief and buddy matching, and this trend was particularly evident during the pandemic.

2.2 Internal Drive of Psychological Needs

The transformation and development of society have disrupted the existing patterns and significantly increased social mobility, with more and more university students leaving their hometowns to study in provinces and cities outside their places of origin[5]. This frequent movement has caused a certain degree of alienation in the connection between university students and their families, making kinship relationships unable to meet the immediate needs of students. Additionally, university students find themselves in a fast-paced societal environment, facing the dual pressures of academics and survival[5]. Some students become exhausted by the complexities of interpersonal interactions and maintaining social relationships, preferring simpler social models. "Buddy socializing" allows university students to quickly gain high-quality social experiences in a short amount of time. Shallow social relationships like "meal buddies," "movie buddies," and "fitness buddies" satisfy the fragmented and fragmented social needs of modern university students, breaking the boundaries of traditional social methods, eliminating the need for various social etiquettes, and saving time and energy in socializing. As a result, "buddy socializing," a shallow social model, has become increasingly popular among university students because it can meet their basic social needs. When placed in unfamiliar environments and crowds, university students, who pursue individuality, are more likely to choose a social model that satisfies personal needs while avoiding excessive time consumption. "Buddy socializing" exactly meets this demand[6].

2.3 Pragmatic Consideration of Resource Complementarity

"Buddy socializing," as a supplement to intimate relationships, is a form of utilitarian friendship with boundaries and an innovative social method that aligns with the development of the times. Traditional social relationships based on kinship or geographical proximity tend to have higher levels of similarity in terms of cognition and thinking among individuals. However, the development of contemporary society requires more diverse cognition, broader perspectives, and the collision of ideas. The emergence of "buddies" serves as a convenient way for young university students to broaden their knowledge and "reverse connect." Through buddies from all corners of the country, university students can stay informed about the latest news, find new inspiration for their studies and work, and leverage the new form of group cooperation in "buddy socializing" to share a larger temporary resource database in the network society. The "reverse connection" refers to individuals disconnecting the burdensome pressure chains to regain time and freedom in certain situations. This disconnection is not a complete severance of all chains but a selective method that helps individuals live better. Although university students are disconnected from previous kin-based socializing, they continuously form new social ecosystems in the process of individual collectivization, and "buddy socializing" is one of the new social patterns.

3 INTERACTION PATTERNS OF STUDY BUDDIES

The learning buddy model, an important learning approach in modern education, especially emphasizes the interaction and collaboration between learners. In this model, learners are no longer simply recipients of knowledge, but rather, they explore and construct knowledge together with their buddies, promoting the internalization and application of

knowledge[7]. The interactive forms of learning buddy models are diverse and adaptable to different learning contexts and goals. Based on dimensions such as the content, method, and frequency of interaction, the interactive modes of learning buddies can be divided into various types, which will be discussed in detail below.

3.1 Mutual Teaching and Learning Mode

The mutual teaching and learning mode is the most common form of interaction in the learning buddy model. In this mode, learners advance their learning progress by teaching and learning from each other. Each learning buddy has their strengths or specialties, and when they can clearly divide labor and share knowledge, learning efficiency is often significantly improved. The core characteristics of this interaction mode are reciprocity and mutual benefit. Learners are no longer passive recipients of information, but active participants, teaching their knowledge while learning new content from their partners[8]. For example, in certain subjects, student A may excel in mathematics, while student B is stronger in language and literature. When these two students become learning buddies, they can help each other improve their knowledge in the respective areas through communication and teaching. The mutual teaching and learning mode not only facilitates the transfer of knowledge but also deepens learners' understanding of what they have learned. In practice, the mutual teaching and learning mode is particularly suitable for fields with high diversity and complexity of knowledge. In academic learning environments, cooperation between buddies can complement individual deficiencies in certain knowledge areas and, through teaching each other, increase mutual motivation and interest in learning.

3.2 Collaborative Learning Mode

The collaborative learning mode focuses on completing learning tasks through group cooperation. In this mode, learners collaborate and interact to leverage each individual's strengths and specialties, using collective intelligence to solve problems. This interaction mode is common in group projects, team discussions, and joint research, aiming to enhance group learning outcomes through interaction and cooperation among team members. The collaborative learning mode has several distinct characteristics.

3.3 Task Allocation and Role Clarity

In collaborative learning, tasks are usually allocated according to each student's strengths and interests. Each learning buddy takes on different tasks or roles to ensure the efficient completion of learning activities. For example, in a group project, one member might be responsible for research and data analysis, while another might be responsible for writing the report and summarizing findings.

3.4 Collective Thinking and Knowledge Sharing

Through collective discussion and collaboration, learning buddies share each other's knowledge and perspectives. This knowledge sharing not only deepens the understanding of the learning content but also broadens one's thinking and viewpoint, allowing learners to approach problems from different angles.

3.5 Mutual Support and Feedback

The interaction mode in collaborative learning emphasizes mutual support and real-time feedback. When learners encounter difficulties or confusion, they can rely on their buddy's assistance and advice. This timely feedback helps resolve problems quickly and promotes self-reflection and progress.

One key benefit of the collaborative learning mode is its ability to promote the development of social skills through task cooperation. In this mode, learners not only enhance their knowledge level but also develop skills like teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, which are crucial for their future careers and social adaptability.

3.6 Discussion and Debate Mode

The discussion and debate mode promotes deep thinking and the development of critical thinking through the clash of ideas between learning buddies. In this mode, learning buddies exchange opinions, analyze arguments, and debate issues to gain a deeper understanding of learning content and expand their thinking. This interaction mode emphasizes the diversity of ideas and the collision of perspectives, aiming to help students form clear, rational, and profound viewpoints through debate and discussion. For example, in fields like history, philosophy, or social sciences, learners can debate in groups to explore different theories and hypotheses, leading to a deeper understanding of the content. The core characteristic of the discussion and debate mode lies in its requirement for deep thinking. Through mutual debates, learners must not only showcase their knowledge but also respond to others' doubts and defend their viewpoints convincingly. This process helps learners enhance not only their knowledge level but also their critical thinking, logical reasoning, and effective communication skills. Furthermore, the discussion and debate mode helps students understand the diversity and complexity of knowledge. By colliding different viewpoints, learners realize that each knowledge

point may have multiple interpretations and perspectives. This thinking exercise is vital for developing students' future capacity for knowledge innovation and problem-solving.

3.7 Situational Learning Mode

The situational learning mode is an interaction model that places learners in real or simulated contexts. In this mode, learners do not only learn from books and theoretical knowledge but gain knowledge and experience through practical operation, case analysis, and situational simulations. Learning buddies play an important role in situational learning as they can jointly explore solutions through real-time interaction. One key feature of the situational learning mode is the practicality and applicability of the learning content. In this mode, learners continually adjust their learning strategies based on mistakes and feedback from practice, and the interaction with their buddy accelerates problem-solving. Situational learning usually involves solving complex problems and making decisions in real contexts, which helps learners develop the ability to apply knowledge in practice. For example, in medical education, students can simulate patient scenarios to learn how to diagnose and treat. In this process, learning buddies collaborate, discuss different treatment options, and improve their practical skills and decision-making abilities.

4 CONCLUSION

the interactive modes of learning buddies play a multifaceted role in education. From mutual teaching and learning to collaborative learning, discussion and debate, and situational learning, each interaction mode has its unique advantages and applicable contexts. Through these interactions, learners not only gain a better grasp of knowledge but also enhance their critical thinking, communication, and teamwork skills. With the continuous development of educational technology and teaching methods, the interactive modes of learning buddies will be applied in more educational practices, becoming an important force in driving educational innovation and improving learning outcomes.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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