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Learning with AI: Exploring Academic and Emotional Support for Chinese International Students with ADHD

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Abstract. Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly integrated into education, providing new possibilities for personalised and instant learning support. This study explores how artificial intelligence can support Chinese international students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in an overseas learning environment. This study focuses on when and why these students use artificial intelligence to learn, and whether artificial intelligence can improve their learning process and help them with more stable and effective learning habits. This study adopts qualitative research methods to conduct semi-structured interviews with Chinese international students with ADHD to check their learning difficulties, experience in using artificial intelligence and perceived needs. Research results show that artificial intelligence is not only used for academic learning, but also for task management and emotional support. Its immediacy and personalised interaction can reduce the difficulty of task launch, help students organise ideas, and provide quick feedback. However, although artificial intelligence may improve instant participation and action, its ability to develop long-term independent learning habits is still uncertain, and over-reliance on artificial intelligence may also pose potential risks.

Keywords: ADHD, Artificial Intelligence, International Students, Learning Support

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI), the application range of AI continues to expand and gradually enters the field of education and learning. Compared with traditional learning tools, AI can provide interesting and personalised customisation according to the needs of each student through efficient algorithms. Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a developmental disorder characterised by difficulties in concentrating, excessive activity, and impulsive behaviour, as well as the inability to focus on activities or tasks [1]. For ADHD students, this flexibility has a certain potential, because they may not only face difficulties in maintaining attention in the learning process, but also encounter challenges in task start, planning, organisation, time management and continuous completion of tasks.

For Chinese overseas students with ADHD, these learning difficulties may also occur in different language environments, teaching methods, and cultural backgrounds. When they enter the overseas learning environment, they not only need to adapt to the new curriculum requirements and classroom models, but also need to readjust their original learning habits and learning strategies. In

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this process, AI may become a new learning support tool. For example, it can help students understand the learning content, split complex tasks, plan learning steps, adjust the learning pace, or provide instant help when encountering difficulties.

Therefore, this study aims to explore what kind of auxiliary role AI can play in the cross-cultural learning environment from the actual experience of ADHD learners, and how this use will affect their learning process and learning habits. This study mainly focuses on: When Chinese overseas students use AI to support their study and why; and whether AI can effectively assist them in learning and help establish more stable and effective learning habits. In order to solve these problems, this study adopts a qualitative research method and conducts semi-structured interviews with Chinese international students with ADHD to explore their learning difficulties, their experience in using artificial intelligence, and their views on their role in learning. By focusing on this group, the study may provide a deeper understanding of how artificial intelligence supports learners with ADHD and identifies the potential benefits and limitations of learning support based on artificial intelligence.

2. Literature review

ADHD students are more likely to have off-task behaviour in the classroom, especially in passive learning activities that require continuous attention, such as listening and independent reading. In addition, compared with hyperactivity or impulsivity, poor academic performance in primary school-age children has a more significant correlation with inattention [2]. This means that the learning difficulties of ADHD students are not just a matter of classroom behaviour management. More importantly, it may be difficult for them to maintain their focus on learning goals for a long time, and it may be difficult for them to return to their original tasks after being disturbed. However, most studies on the learning performance of ADHD students are based on teenagers aged six to eleven in their own culture. However, there are few studies on the learning performance of young ADHD students in the cultural context of other countries.

Furthermore, in addition to inattention problems, executive functions are also important factors affecting the learning of ADHD students. Executive functions can be understood as the ability of individuals to start, organise, regulate and monitor their own behaviour and cognitive activities to achieve a certain goal. Among these, abilities such as activating, working memory, planning, material organization, and monitoring collectively support students in coping with complex cognitive tasks. However, ADHD students show more difficulties in the above aspects [3]. Therefore, support for ADHD students should not only focus on reducing detriment, but also on helping them organise, start and continue to complete learning tasks. ADHD students need a learning environment that is both structured, flexible and self-supported, and emphasises that personalised learning methods should be adapted to students' differences in attention and executive functions [4]. Therefore, AI can not only impart knowledge, but also assist ADHD students in learning through task splitting, adjusting the learning rhythm and personalised support.

3. Methodology

In order to explore how AI can assist ADHD students in learning, this study adopts a qualitative research method to understand the learning difficulties, AI experience and actual needs of ADHD learners in a real learning environment through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are conducted on the basis of predetermining the main research topics and problems, but the order of interviews and the method of follow-up questions are flexible. Researchers can ask

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further questions based on the participants' experiences, views and feelings. Moreover, this method is particularly suitable for studying personal perceptions, opinions and more complex experiences, and can carry out in-depth discussions around issues that participants consider important [5]. Therefore, this study chose semi-structured interviews to understand the learning needs of ADHD learners from their own actual experience, rather than pre-assessing what functions AI should provide.

This interview takes *Red Note* (*Xiaohongshu*) as the main platform to find potential participants. *Red Note* is one of the most frequently used social media platforms in China. Therefore, this study posted a recruitment post on *Red Note* to find potential respondents. The post received a lot of attention, and finally the top ten respondents were selected according to the registration time. After identifying the interviewees, the interviewer contacted them through the message function of *Red Note* and introduced them to the purpose of the research, the form of the interview, the way of participation and the way of using the data. After the participants' voluntary consent, a semi-structured interview was arranged. The final participants are mainly composed of graduate students and doctoral students. This group of people is considered suitable for this study because they have direct experience of living and learning in an overseas educational environment with a clinical diagnosis of ADHD. Since graduate and doctoral studies often involve relatively independent learning, long-term academic tasks and the management of multiple learning responsibilities, their experience provides useful insights into how ADHD-related difficulties may affect task start-up, organisation and learning management. At the same time, their experience of learning in different languages and cultural environments makes it possible to explore how artificial intelligence can serve as a form of learning support in the context of international education.

4. Discussion

This study mainly discusses two issues: first, under what circumstances ADHD international students will use AI to assist learning, and why they choose to use AI; second, whether AI can effectively help them learn and further help them form more stable and effective learning habits. According to the current interview materials, the role of AI is not limited to knowledge acquisition in the traditional sense. The interviewee's experience shows that AI has entered different fields such as academic learning, task management and emotional regulation at the same time. Therefore, the value of AI to ADHD learners may need to be understood from the two interrelated dimensions of academic support and emotional support.

4.1. AI use for study among Chinese international students: situations and reasons

4.1.1. Academic study

The interview first shows that the respondents frequently use AI when they have more learning tasks, need to deal with different tasks at the same time, or encounter specific problems. The interviewee mentioned that because he has other work besides his studies, the interviewee will establish a personal AI workflow and let AI help complete the inspection and some basic and repetitive tasks, to reduce the time and energy they need to invest. This shows that for respondents, the value of AI is not just "giving answers", but helping them reduce the cost of execution in the process of completing complex tasks.

In addition, AI is also clearly described by the interviewees as a kind of teacher. When talking about their interaction with AI, respondents believe that AI can help solve computer, research and

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other problems encountered in the learning process. The Interviewee mentioned that:

"I think that when communicating with AI, the attribute of AI as a teacher accounts for a greater proportion, because I have been learning from AI."

Compared with traditional learning resources, an obvious advantage of AI is its immediacy. Respondents believe that almost any question can be asked of AI immediately and get a quick response.

Therefore, the attraction of AI to ADHD learners may come not only from their intellectual ability, but also from their low waiting cost and highly instant interaction mode. When learners encounter problems, they do not need to wait for the teacher's reply or look for other resources, but can directly continue to advance the current task through dialogue. This kind of real-time interaction reduces the possibility of temporarily stopping the task due to getting stuck in the learning process.

4.1.2. Emotional support

In addition, the interview also mentioned that the use of AI often goes beyond mere academic tasks and enters the field of emotions and relationships. The interviewee pointed out that when a person faces confusion and does not know how to talk to others, they may also choose to talk to AI. Respondents believe that AI can help users sort out their emotions, practice expression, and further understand their needs in the process of communication. Users who establish relationships with AI tend to show high self-disclosure willingness. That is, they are more willing to expose their private thoughts and emotions to AI, and this interaction has less social judgement pressure [6]. Therefore, an important difference between AI and traditional learning tools is that it cannot only process information, but also form a relational interaction through continuous dialogue.

For ADHD learners, this emotional effect may have further educational significance. Learning difficulties do not necessarily occur only in understanding the knowledge itself, but may also occur before entering the learning state. If learners are unable to start acting due to stress, frustration or too many tasks, the AI that can get quick responses and support may first help them stabilise their emotions and then re-enter the learning tasks. Therefore, academic support and emotional support are not necessarily two separate functions, but may participate in the learning process together.

4.2. Effectiveness of AI in supporting learning

4.2.1. Support for task startup

In the interview, the content that most directly reflects the learning effect of AI in the interview is related to the interviewee's description of their own procrastination and action. The interviewee clearly pointed out that:

"Because I am an ADHD person, I am particularly procrastinating, and I have too many ideas, so my ability to act is very low. But with this AI, it can immediately implement many of my ideas and let me get positive feedback quickly, so my action power will be infinitely increased."

This description suggests that the greatest help of AI to respondents may not be simply to improve the efficiency of knowledge acquisition, but to shorten the distance between ideas and actual actions. Respondents do not lack ideas, but have so many ideas that it is difficult to translate ideas into concrete actions. Therefore, AI assumes an external support function here. That is, users can input immature ideas into AI, and AI can transform abstract ideas into specific content that can be further processed. Respondents do not need to wait until the whole task is completed to know

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whether their direction is feasible, but can get a preliminary result through AI at an early stage. This quick feedback further reduces the uncertainty at the beginning of the task.

However, this result needs to be distinguished from forming stable learning habits. The current interview can more strongly show that AI has improved the respondents' ability to act immediately, but it has not yet proved that this effect has been transformed into a long-term, stable and independently maintainable learning habit. If learners can only start the task quickly when AI exists, then AI may continue to assume some self-regulation functions, and may not really cultivate a learning strategy that can be used independently from AI.

4.2.2. Dual role of emotional support

Compared with the more obvious positive role in academic learning, the emotional role of AI is more complex. On the one hand, the continuous response and non-judgment of AI allow users to express their emotions more freely. Users in human-computer relationships are often willing to carry out deeper self-disclosure, and the emotional response provided by AI can help some participants gain a sense of security, positive emotions and personal growth [6]. That is, the emotional support provided by AI may help ADHD learners reduce their frustration and indirectly promote learning participation.

However, the respondents believe that this highly personalised response may cause a reaction. People-to-people relationships need to face misunderstandings, rejections, different needs and continuous negotiation, and AI can often understand and respond to users in a timely and highly cooperative manner. If the user is in this relationship for a long time, the user is used to being understood and satisfied. This may be a way to strengthen a more self-centred interaction.

Therefore, although AI can respond to the emotional needs of users in a timely and effective manner, it may also be the cause of dependence. For ADHD learners, instant affirmation and personalised responses may reduce the psychological cost of starting learning. However, if AI always provides feedback that meets users' expectations, it may also reduce learners' chances of facing failure, uncertainty and different views.

5. Conclusion

Through semi-structured interviews, this study explores how Chinese ADHD students can use AI in the overseas study environment, and whether AI can help them improve the learning process and form more stable learning habits. The study found that the role of AI is not limited to knowledge acquisition in the traditional sense, but also extends to many aspects such as academic learning, task management and emotional regulation. For respondents, the instant response, personalised interaction and low threshold of use of AI enable them to quickly get help when they encounter learning difficulties. And reduce the difficulty of task launch through task splitting, idea organisation and instant feedback.

In addition, this study also found that the emotional support of AI has a dual role. Non-judgmental and continuous responses can help learners express their emotions, relieve stress, and re-enter the learning state. However, highly personalised feedback may also increase users' dependence on AI. Therefore, the research results at this stage can better show that AI can be used as an external support tool to improve the immediate mobility and learning participation of ADHD learners, but it is not enough to prove that it can cultivate independent and stable learning habits in the long run. Future research on AI and ADHD learning should pay more attention to the long-term effects of use and how to avoid overdependence while providing support.

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