

High School Students' Obedience to Teacher's Authority -- A Cross-Cultural Study Between China and America

Zuoqing Lyu

The Experimental High School Attached to Beijing Normal University Beijing 100052 China.

Abstract

The essay mainly discusses the previous studies about students' obedience to authority, and designs an ethical experiment to examine Chinese and American high school students obedient behaviors toward Chinese and American teachers. The potential conclusion is that Chinese students tend to obey to Chinese teacher more. Also, this study provides broader view with scientists examining students behaviors in classes directed by teachers from different countries, and also solids the reference for high schools which have foreign teachers about how to understand students' certain behaviors.

Keywords

Obedience, high school students, teachers, Chinese, American.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Have you ever experienced being forced by your teacher to do something that you are not willing to do? Being punished to recite the school's regulations and write them down on paper, sweeping the floor because you talk during class, and being forced to help your teachers to carry their backpacks. Those are the things that everyone may face at schools, especially at the high schools.

Frankly, it is the phenomenon happens at school, but no one can ignore it. Being educated is an unavoidable process for most people all over the world, so students will definitely meet such circumstances: accept punishments for the so-called mistakes, and they are even forced to do some labors for teachers.

Although teachers may ask students to do some frustrated things, the students rarely disobey the orders. So, we decide to study the students' obedience to teachers when they are asked to do repetitive boring work.

And besides the factors of the repetitive boring work, the globalization becomes a mainstream around the world nowadays, so some Chinese high school students go abroad to experience different educational modes. Therefore, they are taught by American teachers. However, when students face the American teachers, will they obey more or obey less compare to face the Chinese teachers? This question is important because the obedience can reflect some of the natures of the Chinese students when they are facing another form, or culture, of authority, and the conclusion can be used in the future development of China that how to improve the trust of authority of future Chinese young people toward China, and that will help government to figure out a better educational system to improve their cultural identity education. Furthermore, American teachers can also now more about Chinese students' behaviors in the class, and teachers may find out a better teaching method toward Chinese students specifically. Naturally, the question appears: will Chinese students obey more to Chinese teachers or to the American teachers under a repetitive-boring-work circumstance?

1.2. Literature Review

Looking back of the historical experiments and studies about the obedience to authority, there are several materials that are useful to this new research. About the classic Milgram's experiment, the essay *Some Conditions of Obedience and Disobedience to Authority* (Stanley Milgram) [1] sets the experiment with the purpose to test the soldiers during the WW II, and he concludes that people will obey to the authority less when they have more physical contacts with the "learners", implying that the distance may be one of the factors that influences the obedience level. *A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Studies of Obedience Using the Milgram Paradigm: A Review*(Thomas Blass) [2] stresses that the levels of obedience all around the world are the same. In *The Milgram Paradigm After 35 Years: Some Things We Now Know About Obedience to Authority* (Thomas Blass) [3], and Blass indicates how to construe the nature of authority in the obedience experiment, the gender factors in the experiment, and the changes of obedience with time. *Research on the Connotation of Teacher Authority Based on the Theory of Authority Acceptance* (Na Li, 2019) [4], Na Li discusses the theory of the acceptance and the definition of the teacher's authority, describing the teacher's authority as the authority that is granted by "the states and society" so to make students trust and obey. According to *A study of Students' Consent to Teachers Authority and How Teachers Can Achieve Authority in Secondary School* (Chenyin Zhao, 2018) [5], Zhao explains that "teachers' adult and professional identities are greatly different from those of students. As educators, students need to be disciplined by teachers, abide by rules and regulations and follow teachers' arrangement." An analysis of the authority of primary and secondary school teachers in China(Yunshan, Liu) [6] suggests that the Chinese primary and secondary school teachers do not have high authority levels, for their low incomes and relatively low political status.

2. Methods

2.1. Procedure

In the experiment, we first randomly choose the Chinese and American high school students as the participants, and set exams to make sure that they can understand both Chinese and English in listening, and there will be 100 of them in total, and 50 for each nation. Then, the participants with the same nationality will be randomly assigned to two equal groups, and each of them will have 25 participants. After that, the subjects will be sent into four classrooms, which just like the most common ones in our daily life.

In the classroom, however, the circumstance will be slightly different from what people see at school: there is no teacher, but a tape-recorder. And there are 25 pairs of desks and chairs with paper, pencils, and a pamphlet. The paper is with straight horizontal lines, and the pamphlet has formulas about astrophysics, which are impossible for high school students to understand. After the participants all sit on the chairs and ready, the tape-recorder will automatically play a recording, which will be exactly the same but the language: "dear students, welcome to the Capital High school, and I am your teacher. And I need you to complete the following task before you leave school. Now, you can see there is a pamphlet and a lot of paper with lines on your desk, and your mission is to transcribe all of the information in the pamphlet on the paper, and your letters need to be written against the lines. What's more, you have to do this task for a five-hour period without any rest, and if you finish all the information in the pamphlet, you have to transcribe it again until the end of the five-hour-period. As a reminder, you can't stop until the time is on. Now you can begin."

We will arrange the languages of the recording into Chinese and English. Thus, it will have four different groups: Chinese students listening to Chinese recording, American students listening to English recording, Chinese students listening to English recording, and American students listening to Chinese recording.

The participants will sit in front of the desks to transcribe the difficult and boring formulas for five hours, and as the time is on, the recording will play, "now it is the time to end today's tasks. Good bye students."

Then, after all of the subjects come out of the classrooms, we will collect all the paper they have written on in groups. We will analyze both the time each of them persisting in transcribing the formulas in the pamphlets as well as the qualities. For the lengths of time, we will examine from the monitor in the classrooms and determine the stop time of each of them during the five-hour period. And from the length of the time they endure to transcribe, we can decide the obedience of the students because they obey to the teacher's rule of they "have to transcribe it again until the end of the five-hour-period"; from the time the participants make their letters written against the horizontal lines on the paper, we can decide whether they obey the other rule of teacher.

2.2. Measurement

For each group, we will compute the mean of their duration times before the five-hour period, and the larger the number is, the more obedience the participants show to their teachers. Also, we will calculate the mean of their letters exactly against the lines of the paper, and the larger the number is, the participants show more obedience to their teachers.

2.3. Explanation

The reason why we choose to force participants copying astrophysics formulas is quite simple: since the participants can't understand those formulas, all the work they have done will be meaningless for them, and people do not usually do meaningless things, especially when it will take you five hours to do that, so the participants will feel bored during the experiment and have no motivation, and it will be hard for them to continue writing; and here comes the conflict, participants want to stop, but the order from the teacher, which is conveyed by the recording, asks them to keep copying, so they may feel ambivalent because they do not want to continue but they also do not want to disobey the teacher; thus, if they have a higher obedient level, they will keep writing, otherwise they may stop. Meanwhile, the identity of the teacher is a key factor in this experiment. If they obey more to a foreign teacher, they will have a higher mean number when they listen to a foreign-language recording; if they obey the teacher from the same nation more, they will have a higher mean number when they listen to a recording using their mother language.

3. Conclusion

3.1. Results

Since the experiment has not been finished yet, we hypothesize that the Chinese students will obey to the Chinese teachers more.

According to *Earthbound China* (Xiaotong Fei, 1948) [7], the Chinese bound a huge community which people obey more to customs rather than rules, and people gain the trust from each other from the familiarity. In our experiment, if the Chinese students can have the same national identities with their teacher, they will be more willing to obey to the teacher and will result in a higher level of mean number.

The familiarity is also an important factor for the result. A Study on the Influence of Cultural familiarity on Image perception and Decision-making Intention of tourist Destinations -- A Case study of Thai residents traveling to China (K., 2018) [8] proves that people will be more likely to choose a cultural-familiar place as their destinations of a tour, so it explains that how influential the cultural familiarity is that it influences people's decisions. Thus, we infer that this factor will have the similar effect under our experiment. When the Chinese students listen to a

Chinese recording, their conventional thinkings will make them consider they are listening to a Chinese teacher talking, which is the national identity and language they are familiar with, and therefore they will obey; however, when they listen to a English recording, they consider that an American teacher is talking to them, so they may be hesitate to obey and will not persist in transcribing, so they quit the task.

Finally, the special educational system will also play an important role in the experiment. In traditional Chinese culture, people regard teacher as parent, who is strict but knowledgeable, so students sometimes fear teachers more than respect them. According to School Education and fear-making(Shengde Gao, 2010) [9], Chinese teachers sometimes create anxiety among students such as “if you do not be industrious and study hard, you will be a loser when you enter the society”, and that kind of threat and sometimes even insults will pull students away from teachers, so students will be afraid of disappoint their teachers and get criticisms that they obey their teachers to avoid those results. On the contrary, Chinese students know that the foreign teacher will not punish them if they stop transcribing, so they will be more relaxed during the experiment when they listen to an English recording, and they will be more likely to quit the mission.

3.2. Values

Overall, this cross-cultural obedient experiment examines the high school students from different nations have different reactions to both same-country and foreign teachers. And it will not only give suggestions to the educational method in high school, which may has foreign teachers, but also reveals the issues during the teaching process of Chinese teachers.

3.3. Drawbacks

But it is not flawless. The first problem is that we did not examine the races factors (such as the difference between African Americans and White Americans) especially in the American-teacher group, and their different accents may also affect the students' obedience, for they have different impressions toward these races. Secondly, the language can't fully reflect the national identity of the teachers, because appearances, gestures, and dressing can also be parts of the factors, and students may have preferences of appearances of the teachers, so for example, if they like the teacher who has brown eyes, they will obey to the teacher having brown eyes more. Lastly, and the lack of diverse independent variable can decline the generalization of the experiment that teachers do not usually appear just by voice, so the use of sound tape can't tell whether it fully represents the role of teacher.

3.4. Prospect

In the future, this experiment can contribute to the China high school education system, suggesting potential teaching methods teachers can use to enable students obey the rules without harming them. Additionally, the scientists can also improve the experiment by adding extra factors to make the settings more realistic. Lastly, the topic about this study can be broadened to the worldwide education system, and finds special methods to treat local and foreign students in proper ways, making the school be an attractive place rather than “prison” and thus uplifting the number of educated people all over the world.

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