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Behavioral science-based strategy design for promoting good study habits among college students

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SUMMARY: *This paper applies a mixed-format research method and tries to use the facilitation theory from the perspective of behavioral science to facilitate college students' learning styles. A sample of undergraduates from a university was randomly sampled and divided into two groups, the experimental class and the control class, and the experimental class implemented a three-pronged program of facilitation in the areas of learning space reengineering, information feedback, and incentives and disincentives, whereas the control class did not take any intervention measures. The study adopted the longitudinal method of pre and post-testing, using questionnaires and performance statistics as quantitative data, and interview records and on-site observations as qualitative data collection methods. It was found that the boosting effect was significant, as the overall study habits of the students in the control class increased by 24.0 percentage points after the intervention, good use of time increased by 37.3 percentage points, average daily commitment to learning increased by 61.9 minutes, and concentration on learning increased by 35.8 percentage points. In conclusion, the context-feedback-reward integrated boosting model helps college students cultivate good study habits and has certain reference value for the construction of academic style at university level.*

KEYWORDS: *behavioral science; study habits; facilitation strategies; higher education; quasi-experimental design*

1 Introduction

In the growth path of college students, the development of study habits is like a cornerstone, which profoundly affects their academic achievement, thinking quality and even future lifelong development [1, 2]. Good study habits can not only help students better adapt to learning life, but also lay a solid foundation for their future development [3, 4]. However, good study habits are not inherent, but are gradually formed in long-term education, self-practice and environmental cultivation. The traditional methods of cultivating students' good study habits include setting up clear rules and standards, formulating a reward and punishment system, and cultivating self-discipline, etc. However, the effects of these methods are affected by students' own and external variables, and the cultivation effect is not obvious [5, 6].

And as a comprehensive application of psychology, sociology, social psychology, anthropology, economics, political science, history, law, education, psychiatry and management theory and method, behavioral science studies human behavior of the fringe disciplines [7, 8], in the cultivation of students' good study habits play an important role. Behavioral science studies the laws of human behavior generation, development and mutual transformation in order to predict human behavior and control human behavior. In the cultivation of good study habits

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of students in colleges and universities, behavioral science is able to understand the psychological factors of students' learning, such as motivation, cognitive processes, etc., so as to come to the development of appropriate interventions for learning behavior to promote the formation and solidification of good behavior, relatively more scientific than the traditional methods [9-12].

The research scheme of this paper is a mixed-type research, testing the effect of boosting means based on behavioral science theory on college students' study habits in a quasi-experimental design, dividing the subject students into experimental and control classes, and carrying out quantitative analysis as well as qualitative analysis based on pre- and post-tests, with the questionnaire results taken for statistical analysis and the interview results analyzed by thematic inductive analysis. The whole research process includes theoretical construction, intervention program design, implementation and validation, and abides by the ethical principles in research, and analyzes the effectiveness of the interventions and the factors affecting them.

2 Theoretical foundations

2.1 Behavioral Science Theories

Behavioral science is a comprehensive discipline, which has strong depth and guiding significance in analyzing the causes of college students' study habits. Behaviorists believe that human behavior is determined by external stimuli and influenced by internal responses, and they infer that human behavior can be predicted with the help of the linkage law between stimuli and responses, and regard learning activities as the construction of the relationship between stimuli and responses. Their basic relationship formula is:

$$R = f(S) \tag{1}$$

where R represents individual response behavior, S represents external environmental stimuli, and f characterizes the functional relationship between the two.

On this basis, the theory of operant conditioning was developed, and a more accurate model of behavior shaping was constructed:

$$R = f(S, C) \tag{2}$$

where C stands for behavioral consequences, highlighting the decisive role of reinforcement and punishment mechanisms in behavioral acquisition, which makes the formation of students' study habits understood as a behavioral pattern gradually solidified through repeated stimulus-response-reinforcement cycles under specific environmental conditions. When a student is positively reinforced for focusing on learning and achieving excellence in the quiet environment of a library, the likelihood of repeating the behavior in a similar environment increases dramatically, resulting in the establishment of a stable pattern of learning behavior.

With the gradual deepening of the study of cognitive behavior, people pay more and more attention to the attention of internal thinking activities, social cognitive theory that there is an interactive relationship between human thoughts, actions and the external environment, and self-efficacy is an important factor in determining whether a person is willing to do something and how long he or she can insist on it, which is expressed in mathematical form as follows:

$$E = \frac{P \times V}{D} \tag{3}$$

where E represents the level of self-efficacy, P represents the individual's subjective probability assessment of successfully completing a given task, V represents the perceived value of task success, and D represents the degree of difficulty to be overcome in completing the task.

And cognitive therapy theory further elucidates the decisive influence of cognitive structure on behavioral patterns, proposing the cognitive triangle model consisting of automated thinking, core beliefs and intermediate beliefs. That is, in the context of learning habit development, students' cognitive appraisal of their own learning ability, their understanding of the value of learning, and the way they attribute learning difficulties directly affect the frequency and duration of learning behaviors. The four-stage social learning theory of attention, retention, reproduction and motivation holds that people can learn certain new behaviors by observing others' behaviors and their results, and points out that observational learning is one of the main means of acquiring behaviors. College students generally observe the study methods, time allocation and attitudes of their classmates around them to influence their own behaviors, and the size of the role modeling effect can be expressed as follows:

$$M = A \times S \times R \times C \tag{4}$$

where M represents the intensity of the role model effect, A indicates the observer's attention to the role model, S represents the salience of the role model's behavior, R represents the observer's memory retention ability, and C represents the intensity of motivation to imitate the behavior, this framework reveals the value of peer influence, teacher modeling, and the building of a learning community in the formation of students' study habits.

Motivation theory is one of the most important disciplines to study the internal forces that motivate people to perform certain behaviors. Desi and Ryan's self-determination theory divides people's basic psychological needs into the three levels of autonomy, competence, and relationship, and suggests that only when the above basic psychological needs are satisfied can people's internal motivation be stimulated and give them the lasting motivation to complete the task, and the strength of their internal motivation can be expressed as follows:

$$IM = \sqrt[3]{A^2 + C^2 + R^2} \tag{5}$$

where, IM represents intrinsic motivational strength, A, C, and R represent the degree of satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relational needs, respectively.

The two-factor theory distinguishes between the different mechanisms by which health factors and motivational factors influence behavior, and the expectancy theory through:

$$F = V \times E \times I \tag{6}$$

Describing the mechanism of behavioral motivation formation, F represents behavioral motivation, V represents outcome valence, E represents the expected relationship between effort and performance, and I represents the instrumental relationship between performance and outcome.

Habit formation theory provides an important support for understanding the automated process of learning behaviors. The habit loop model reveals the cyclic action mechanism of the three elements of cues, practices and rewards in habit formation, and the development of habit

strength can be described by an exponential function:

$$H(t) = H_{\max}\left(1 - e^{-kt}\right) \tag{7}$$

where $H(t)$ represents the strength of the habit at time t, $H_{\max}$ represents the maximum strength of the habit, and k is the habit formation rate constant, which is influenced by factors such as behavioral complexity, environmental stability, and reinforcement frequency.

2.2 Theories related to study habits

The understanding of study habits has changed in educational psychology terminology from the early mechanized and constantly repeated behavioral actions to the later cognitive-behavioral complex of study habits. The interaction of students' individual characteristics and the external environment influences the development of their study habits at the university level, in which cognitive characteristics are endogenous, determining to some extent the direction and level of the development of study habits in university students. Cognitive functions such as working memory, attention management, inhibition and planning affect students' learning methods and action tendencies, and students with high cognitive resources are more likely to develop good learning strategies. Personality is a long-lasting personal trait and can have a lasting impact on study habits, due diligence has a strong correlation with good study habits among the Big Five sexes $r = 0.74$, $p < 0.001$, while high neuroticism reduces the stability of study habits; motivation to learn is a complex internal factor and an important factor in influencing study habits. The odds of transforming intrinsically motivated learning into a fixed habit were expressed as a regression function as:

$$P = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\alpha + \beta_1 IM + \beta_2 SE + \beta_3 GS)}} \tag{8}$$

where, P represents habit formation probability, IM represents intrinsic motivation strength, SE represents self-efficacy level, GS represents goal setting clarity, α is the intercept term, and β_1, β_2, and β_3 are regression coefficients.

Socialization environments such as family environment, friends and school environment can significantly influence students' study habits, SES has a significant positive effect on the quality of study habits $r = 0.45p<0.01$, students with high SES have better educational resources and tutoring conditions to develop good study habits, peer-to-peer influences are transmitted and adopted through observational learning and good role models can have a replicative effect on good study habits.

3 Survey on the current status of study habits of students in higher education

3.1 Survey design and implementation

The structured questionnaire designed for this study went through a series of production procedures of theoretical conceptualization - item design - expert consultation - pre-testing - formal testing. The questionnaire was guided by the four-dimensional theoretical conceptualization of study habits, including four factors: time scheduling habits, study style habits, study place habits and study motivation habits. The study was designed in the form of a

Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, “not at all” to “completely”, with reverse scoring questions to control response bias.

The original project library involved a total of 72 projects. After expert discussion and trial testing, 48 projects were finally determined. Each dimension selected one-third of them as evaluation indicators. Before the scale, an introduction and informed consent form were added. General information included demographic variables such as the respondent's gender, grade, major category, source, and economic condition. For example, in the time management habit dimension, a representative project is "I will make my own study plan and carry it out according to the plan", in the learning method habit dimension, a representative project is "I will adopt corresponding learning methods according to different subjects", in the learning environment habit dimension, a representative project is "I have my own study space", and in the learning attitude habit dimension, a representative project is "I always treat learning with an active and proactive attitude". Finally, open-ended questions were designed, asking students to describe their methods for cultivating learning habits, so as to conduct qualitative research in the later stage.

The sample distribution is shown in Table 1, using stratified random sampling method, and the survey was conducted in a provincial key university. The university has many disciplines such as arts, sciences, engineering, medicine, management and arts, with a total of more than 25,000 undergraduate students. The study used grade level, major category, and gender as stratification variables, with grade level including four levels from freshman to senior; major category was divided into humanities and social sciences, science and engineering, medicine, and arts with reference to the relevant division of the Ministry of Education. The sample size was set according to the statistical efficacy test, whose test level $\alpha = 0.05$, statistical efficacy $1-\beta = 0.80$, and the effect size $d = 0.30$, which resulted in a minimum sample size of 350 cases; a total of 500 questionnaires were distributed, and 463 valid questionnaires were returned, with an effective rate of 92.6%.

Table 1: Distribution of Survey Samples

Hierarchical variable	Category	N	%
Grade	Freshman	118	25.5
	Sophomore year	121	26.1
	Junior year	115	24.8
	Senior year	109	23.5
Professional category	Humanities and social sciences	124	26.8
	Science and engineering	156	33.7
	Medicine	98	21.2
	Art category	85	18.4
Gender	Male	231	49.9
	Female	232	50.1
Total		463	100

The survey was conducted in accordance with standard operating procedures and divided into three parts: pre-preparation, concrete implementation and quality control check. In the process of pre-preparation, graduate students majoring in education were trained as investigators, and the requirements for distributing the questionnaires in the survey and the problems that need to be paid attention to were clarified. In the specific implementation process, graduate students majoring in education as investigators, with the assistance of students from different faculties and departments to use after-school hours to focus on students to distribute and collect questionnaires, each questionnaire to try to ensure that at the same time 30 to 50

students to complete. Ensure that the survey site is quiet. The investigators introduced the content of the survey and how to answer correctly to the subjects and informed them that the results of the survey were not identifiable, that personal data were kept strictly confidential, and that the responses were completed within 15 to 20 minutes. Strict quality control measures were taken to exclude unqualified questionnaires after retrieval at the site; during the data entry process, a two-person independent entry method was adopted to ensure the accuracy of data entry; and unreasonable data, missing items, and inconsistencies were found and corrected during the data cleaning stage, and the relevant circumstances were recorded. After 3 weeks of hard work, complete and effective information was finally collected, laying a good foundation for later data analysis.

3.2 Findings and Analysis

In the process of this research, 463 valid questionnaires were collected, and after detailed data processing, it was found that the study habits of college students were more seriously divided. The results of the study habits of college students are shown in Table 2, from which it can be understood that the total score of college students' study habits is 3.42 (standard deviation of 0.68), which is above the average, but its various indicators are uneven. Among them, time management habit is the lowest (mean value is 2.89±0.82), suggesting that college students lack planning ability for the development of their own study plan and the distribution and arrangement of study time and activities, and cannot implement the study plan well. Learning environment habit is the highest (3.78±0.64), suggesting that students have a good sense of learning place and learning situation. The mean value of learning method habit is 3.56 (standard deviation 0.71), indicating that students basically have certain method learning ability, but not mature and perfect; the mean value of learning attitude habit is 3.45 (standard deviation 0.75), indicating that the students' subjective initiative as well as the enthusiasm for learning still need to be mobilized.

Table 2: Survey Results on the Learning Habits of college students

Dimension of learning habits	Mean	SD	Minimum value	Maximum value	Skewness coefficient
Time management	2.89	0.82	1.25	4.75	0.23
Learning method	3.56	0.71	1.83	5.00	-0.15
Learning environment	3.78	0.64	2.17	5.00	-0.31
Learning attitude	3.45	0.75	1.67	5.00	0.08
Total score	3.42	0.68	1.98	4.94	0.12

4 Design and evaluation of boosting strategies based on behavioral science

4.1 Design of facilitation strategies

Based on the above theoretical elaboration and survey results, this paper proposes a more complete set of boosting strategies from three aspects: learning environment optimization strategy refers to the provision of physical environment or digital technology support for students to develop good learning behaviors; this is based on the “behavioral setting theory” design concept in environmental psychology, i.e., the expected behavior will be induced in a specific environment. Meanwhile, the function of the intelligent classroom equipment layout system based on the intelligent classroom equipment is also to regulate the lighting according

to different learning activities, which varies between 300Lx~1200Lx; precisely manage the room temperature and indoor air humidity and control them to the optimal state (20℃~24℃, 40%~60% relative humidity); according to different learning scenarios to play the appropriate white noise or nature's sound, beautiful melody. In addition, the use of warm and cold colors to form a suitable color environment for learning state regulation. Online learning tools support personalized learning to achieve support for students' learning process and results. Online learning tools use data analysis technology to mine students' learning characteristics and habits, and accordingly push learning materials and learning paths to students, and its core model is as follows:

$$R_{ij} = \alpha \cdot S_{ij} + \beta \cdot P_{ij} + \gamma \cdot T_{ij} \tag{9}$$

where, R_{ij} represents the composite score of recommended resources j for user i, S_{ij} represents the similarity matching score, P_{ij} represents the personal preference weight, T_{ij} represents the time appropriateness score, and α, β, and γ are the adjustment parameters.

The social function of the learning space is designed to form a good learning atmosphere by means of virtual learning community, network forum, collaborative learning platform, etc., and to realize the penetration and consolidation of excellent learning habits by means of the influence of group members in the social learning theory; the behavioral feedback system is designed to be a multi-dimensional and three-dimensional learning behavior evaluation system, which records the learning trajectory of the students on the basis of the learning process information. The learning behavior mining system constructed in this study can collect information such as learning time, attention value, efficiency and correctness rate, and use eye track features, keyboard and mouse event features, and learning resource access features for learning behavior mining.

The dynamic tracking of the implementation effect of the boosting strategy is shown in Figure 1. The time schedule of the strategy implementation adopts an incremental advancement mode, with the initial phase focusing on the optimization and configuration of the environment, including the transformation of the learning space, the construction of the digital platform and the testing of basic functions, which is expected to take 2-3 weeks, during which students adapt to the new environment and begin to use the relevant tools. The behavioral feedback mechanism is then activated to collect data on learning behaviors and provide initial feedback, so that students can gradually build up an objective knowledge of their own learning status, which lasts for 3-4 weeks. Then the incentive system is fully activated, and features such as point rewards, achievement badges and social recognition are formally launched, and students' motivation to participate and habit adherence are significantly enhanced, lasting 4-6 weeks. The synergistic effect of the whole strategy system reaches its optimal state around the 8th week, when the improvement of various indicators tends to stabilize, and students' good study habits are basically formed and have certain self-sustainability, the expected effect assessment shows that the environment optimization strategy can enhance the degree of learning concentration, the feedback mechanism can enhance the stability of habits, and the incentive design is expected to enhance the degree of participation, and the combined effect of the three strategies will improve the overall quality of learning habits by 94%. The combined effect of the three strategies will improve the overall quality of students' study habits by 94%, laying a solid foundation for the academic success and overall development of college students.

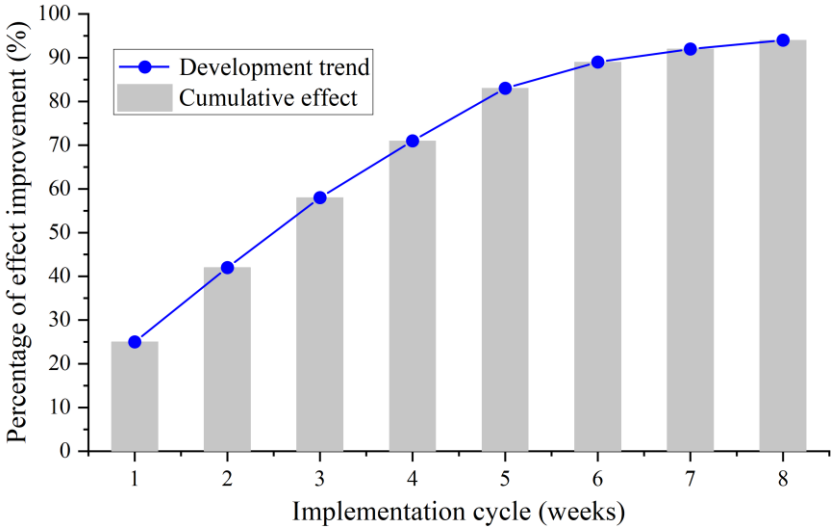

Figure 1: Dynamic tracking chart of the implementation effect of the boosting strategy

4.2 Assessment of the effectiveness of implementation

In order to examine the effectiveness of the boosting measures, a quasi-experimental method was used in this study, and the changes in the learning situation of the two groups of students over a two-month period were analyzed and compared to determine whether the boosting measures taken were effective. A total of 480 undergraduates were selected as subjects from across the university and divided into two groups of 240 students each, with the first group implementing the boosting measures and the second group not implementing the boosting measures. Comparison of the total scores of each study habit as well as the scores of each item at the baseline level of the study subjects was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), so it can be assumed that the comparison between the two groups before and after the intervention was conducted was meaningful. The unified learning routine scale and the statistical results of the system operation data were used as the measurement tools. The learning routine scale has high reliability and validity (Cronbach' s $\alpha = 0.89$, r(retest) = 0.85), while the learning data were automatically collected and generated by the learning management system, including the dimensions of the average online time, the value of attention, the correctness rate of assignments, and the learning performance. Measurements were conducted at fixed time points for testing, and subjects were assessed before the intervention, 4 weeks after the intervention, 8 weeks after the intervention, and 4 weeks after the end to reflect the development and continuity of the strategy effects. Data were analyzed by repeated measures ANOVA, independent t-test and effect size calculation, judged at the level of $\alpha = 0.05$, and the Cohen effect size was used to indicate the size of the actual effect, i.e., d = 0.2 for small, d = 0.5 for moderate, and d = 0.8 for large.

The results of the assessment of the effect of the implementation of the boosting strategy are shown in Table 3, and the experimental results reveal that the boosting strategy has a significant positive effect on all key indicators, and the comparison of the effect of the increase in the boosting strategy is shown in Figure 2. As can be seen from the table, the scores on all dimensions increased significantly and statistically significant after the adoption of boosting measures; the total score of students' learning behaviors in the experimental class increased by 24.0% from 3.41±0.67 to 4.23±0.58; the total score of students' learning behaviors in the control class increased by 3.8% from 3.39±0.69 to 3.52±0.71; both groups Comparing the two groups, the difference was statistically significant ($F = 156.73$, $p = 0.000$), with an effect value of d = 1.12, which is more than a moderate effect. In terms of the sub-items, time management habits

improved significantly, with an increase of 37.3% and Cohen's d value of 1.24, indicating that the improved learning environment and timely feedback have a facilitating effect on students' effective use of time; secondly, the methodological habits of improved learning increased by 21.8%, with a Cohen's d value of 0.95; thirdly, improved learning environment habits, with an increase of 17.6% and Cohen's d value of 0.89; and finally, improved learning attitude habits, with an increase of 23.9% and Cohen's d value of 1.01. The four aspects were developed in a complementary manner, highlighting the more holistic and coordinated nature of the design of the booster. Meanwhile, the objective behavioral variables also proved the authenticity and effectiveness of the intervention. After the implementation, the subjects' daily study time increased from the mean value of 4.2 hours to 6.8 hours, an increase of 61.9%; the concentration level increased from the mean value of 62.4 to 84.7, an increase of 35.8%; and the effectiveness of the study increased from the mean value of 3.28 to 4.56, an increase of 39.0%, which indicates that after the intervention, the behavior of the subjects has been greatly improved, and not only in terms of conceptual changes, but also substantial progress in their actions.

Table 3: Evaluation Table of the Implementation Effect of the Nudge Strategy

Evaluation index	Experimental Group		Control group		P	Effect size (*d*)
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test		
Learning habits (Total)	3.41±0.67	4.23±0.58	3.39±0.69	3.52±0.71	<0.001	1.12
Time management	2.87±0.81	3.94±0.63	2.91±0.84	3.08±0.79	<0.001	1.24
Learning method	3.54±0.72	4.31±0.61	3.58±0.70	3.71±0.68	<0.001	0.95
Learning environment	3.76±0.65	4.42±0.55	3.79±0.63	3.89±0.61	<0.001	0.89
Learning attitude	3.43±0.76	4.25±0.64	3.47±0.74	3.58±0.72	<0.001	1.01
Study duration (h/day)	4.2±1.3	6.8±1.1	4.1±1.4	4.5±1.3	<0.001	1.89
Concentration index	62.4±12.8	84.7±9.6	63.1±13.2	66.8±12.1	<0.001	1.67
Learning efficiency	3.28±0.84	4.56±0.67	3.31±0.82	3.42±0.79	<0.001	1.52

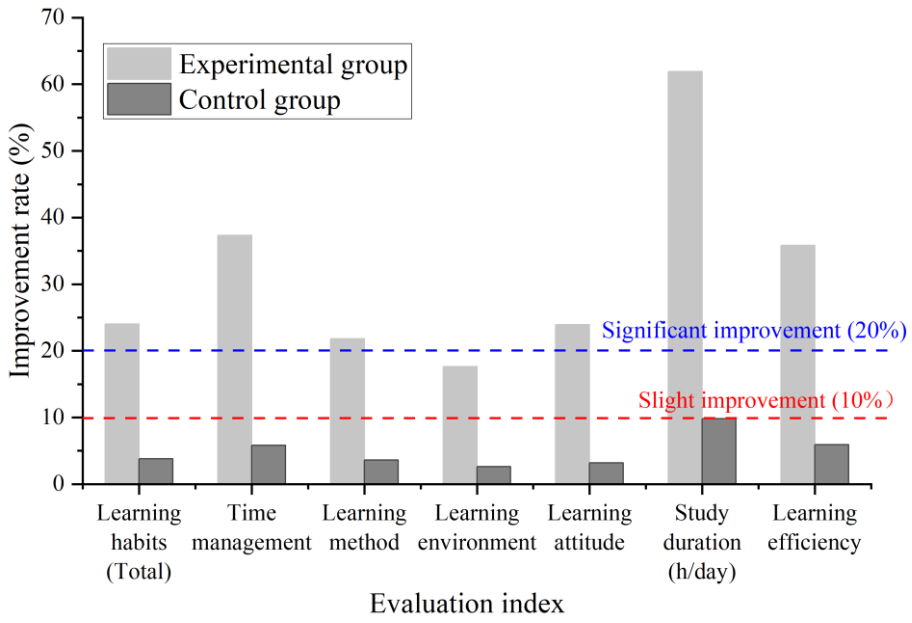

Figure 2: Comparison chart of the implementation effects of the boosting strategy

Accordingly, we have the following three suggestions for improvement:

(1) Construct a better personalized intelligent recommendation model to provide targeted

personalized environment settings and personalized resource recommendations for students with different learning styles, learning abilities and learning interests.

(2) Construct a long-term reward system, and add phase rewards (e.g., every school year), yearly rewards (e.g., every year), and graduation rewards into the incentive system to enhance students' motivation.

(3) Strengthen the self-adaptive ability of the strategy, form a machine learning mechanism that can be automatically adapted according to the use of the situation and the effect of information, realize the self-improvement and development of the strategy, and enhance the effectiveness of the promotion.

5 Conclusion

This study adopts the methods of theoretical exploration and empirical research to explore a behavioral-based mechanism for promoting the development of good study habits among undergraduates. Currently, the study habits of undergraduates show a polarizing trend, with self-time management being the greatest disadvantage and study space planning being an advantage, thus, this in turn provides directional guidance for targeted interventions. The results of the quasi-experimental study showed that the implemented boosting strategy had a significant positive effect on all variables, with increases of 24%, 37.3%, 61.9%, and 35.8% in total behavioral scores, time planning habits, daily study time, and concentration, respectively, with a mean effect size of d = 1.18 belonging to the large effect; follow-up data showed that the effects achieved were still maintained after four weeks. It suggests that the changes induced by boosting behavior have been fixed as a habitual way of behavior. This paper is the first to apply boosting theory to university education practice, providing a new theoretical framework and methodological path in the development of college students' study habits, and providing useful methodological reference for the guidance and counseling of college students' daily ideological and political educators in the development of college students' study habits.

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