

# Exploring the Impact of Flow Experience on College Students' Sense of Acquisition in Ideological and Political Theory Courses

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## Abstract

In the context of China, higher education institutions, including colleges and universities, bear the significant responsibility of cultivating proficient contributors and future representatives aligned with the socialist agenda. This is achieved through the provision of ideological and political theory courses. However, students face challenges in achieving desired educational outcomes in these courses. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the process of knowledge acquisition in ideological and political theory courses as experienced by students. This study employs a qualitative case study methodology, based on flow theory, conducted in a selected college located in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, China. The research aims to gather relevant insights by examining data collected from 15 participants through individual semi-structured interviews. Subsequently, the qualitative data is meticulously analyzed using MAXQDA 2020 software. The findings of this study reveal that the factors influencing college students' perception of ideological and political theory courses encompass both internal factors, such as learning behavior and learning holistic quality, as well as external factors, including teaching behavior and teaching holistic quality. Drawing on the model developed in this study to elucidate the impact on college students' sense of acquisition in ideological and political theory courses, it is posited that flow experience constitutes the core factor influencing college students' sense of acquisition, whereby the intensity of flow experienced by college students in ideological and political courses directly affects the extent of their sense of acquisition. This research expands the scholarly exploration of instructional and pedagogical advancements specific to ideological and political theory courses within Chinese tertiary education institutions. Moreover, understanding the influential factors shaping the knowledge acquisition and comprehension process among college students in these courses has the potential to contribute to innovative educational approaches and strategies.

**Key Words:** case study, flow experience, ideological and political theory courses, sense of acquisition

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## INTRODUCTION

The sense of acquisition serves as a significant indicator for evaluating college students' learning outcomes and assessing the quality of teaching (Li, 2021). In recent years, the Ministry of Education in China has consistently emphasized the improvement of the teaching quality and standards of ideological and political theory courses, as well as enhancing college students' sense of acquisition in these courses, as a pivotal objective in higher education teaching reform. This effort encourages students to experience positive emotions, such as happiness, satisfaction, honor, and dignity while acquiring knowledge (Zhang et al., 2020). Consequently, exploring and summarizing methods to enhance college students' sense of acquisition in ideological and political theory courses has emerged as a significant proposition in the realm of university-level ideological and political theory teaching. This study contributes to the literature on college students' sense of acquisition in ideological and political theory courses.

## BACKGROUND OF STUDY

In China, colleges and universities have the crucial task of cultivating qualified builders and successors for the socialist cause. The ideological and political theory courses offered in Chinese colleges and universities are the main means to accomplish this essential historical mission of the Chinese government. As compulsory courses

for students of all majors and disciplines in Chinese colleges and universities, ideological and political theory courses play a significant role in enhancing the personal theoretical quality of college students, improving their moral quality, developing their outlook on life, worldview, and values, and ultimately their maturity (Xi, 2018). Given the critical role of ideological and political theory courses in cultivating qualified builders and reliable successors for the socialist cause in China, these courses must cater to students' needs and meet societal expectations.

The sense of acquisition emphasized in this research refers to the subjective psychological perception formed after the curriculum meets the knowledge and belief needs of students. Therefore, it is the sense of spiritual acquisition (Zhao & Ma, 2021). Only by keeping close to the actual lives of students, meeting their developmental needs, and satisfying their expectations, can the theoretical knowledge and scientific concepts conveyed in ideological and political theory courses be smoothly transmitted to students. In this way, college and university students may internalize and externalize the theoretical knowledge and scientific concepts in their hearts and actions, ultimately receiving a sense of acquisition from the ideological and political theory courses they take (Wang, 2019). In addition, clarifying the current state of the sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses and identifying the factors that influence it is crucial to improving its direction.

This study posits that the sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses among college students is essentially a subjective conscious experience. This sense of acquisition is contingent upon the level of fulfillment that is experienced by these individuals while studying such courses, known as the flow experience. The flow theory, which underpins this research, postulates that the flow experience represents an optimal psychological state wherein individuals are wholly absorbed in an activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1989). In recent years, several scholars have introduced the concept of flow experience in the domain of education and have combined it with various disciplines to examine teaching effectiveness (Zhang, 2021; Liu & Wang, 2022; Li, 2023). This research has also integrated the flow experience in the context of learning ideological and political theory courses. It asserts that the state in which college students wholeheartedly engage in classroom activities signifies their entry into the "flow experience" state. The effect of the flow experience directly influences the sense of acquisition of college students (Cui, 2021).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that influence college students' learning engagement and to explore how flow experience affects students' sense of acquisition in ideological and political theory courses. The study hopes to answer the following questions: (1) What factors influence college students' learning engagement in ideological and political theory courses? (2) How would flow experience affect college students' sense of acquisition in ideological and political theory courses?

### **Concept of Ideological and Political Theory Course**

In 2004, the CPC Central Committee and The State Council issued "Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Education of College Students," which officially introduced the concept of "ideological and political theory course" for the first time. As a specialized course for ideological and political education in higher education institutions, the concept of "ideological and political theory course" reflects three meanings of the course: a) it is an "ideology course" for the ideological education of college and university students; b) it is a "political course" for the political education of college and university students; and c) it is a "theory course" for ideological and political education for college and university students. Therefore, the name "ideological and political theory course" concisely and accurately expresses the fundamental nature of college ideological and political theory courses, namely "ideological," "political," and "theoretical" (Zhang & Chang, 2021). Specifically, ideological refers to the ideas and beliefs that underlie the discipline. Political refers to the application of ideological principles to political issues and institutions. Theoretical refers to the analysis and examination of ideological and political issues using scientific methods and theories. Therefore, the name "ideological and political theory course" not only reflects the importance of ideological and political ideas but also emphasizes the application of these ideas to political issues and institutions, as well as the use of scientific methods and theories to analyse and examine these issues.

The ideological and political theory courses in Chinese colleges and universities comprise a unified curriculum system for mainstream ideological and theoretical education (Wang, 2020). The system encompasses compulsory and elective courses in ideological and political theory for college students, undergraduates, master's students, and doctoral students. The ideological and political theory courses are a critical matter that "pertains to the overall situation of ideological work, the successor of the socialist causes with Chinese characteristics, and the realization of the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (Ministry of Propaganda, 2015). The ideological and political theory courses are an integral part of higher education teaching content and curriculum

in China. They play a vital role in training socialist builders and successors (Wang, 2020). The ideological and political course aims to impart fundamental Marxist theoretical knowledge and carry out systematic Marxist theory education and value guidance for college and university students (Hu, 2020).

### **Concept of Sense of Acquisition**

The concept of "Sense of Acquisition" is a unique Chinese concept introduced by President Xi Jinping during the tenth meeting of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform in 2015. The President emphasized the importance of demonstrating the value of reform programs to provide the public with a greater sense of acquisition (Huang, Zhang & Zhao, 2017). This emphasis on "Sense of Acquisition" provides a tangible standard for evaluating the effectiveness of reform and a core metric for measuring people's happiness (Kang, 2016). The concept has since become an important topic among government departments and the general public and has garnered attention from academics for theoretical and practical research.

Ding Yuanzhu (2016) defines "Sense of Acquisition" as the degree to which people perceive and feel satisfied with the fruits of reform and development in their daily lives. Similarly, Wang Puchi and Ji Chengyuan (2018) define it as the subjective evaluation of individuals, groups, and organizations concerning their actual acquisitions during the objective process of reform and development. As research on the topic has intensified, the definition of "Sense of Acquisition" has evolved, with many researchers linking it to the hierarchy of needs theory and suggesting that it is closely tied to people's satisfaction with their needs. They contend that it is a positive emotional experience based on the actual benefits people receive (Xin, Jiang & Zhang, 2016; Wu, Jiang & Huang, 2017).

In this study, the term "sense of acquisition" is composed of "acquisition" + "sense" (Wang, 2022). According to the interpretation of the word "acquire" in the Modern Chinese Dictionary, it means "to gain," which includes both tangible and abstract things (Zhang, 2019). It can be observed that "acquisition" focuses on the objective level of acquisition, while "sense" refers to feelings, emotions, and impressions (Zhang, 2019). In Shuo Wen Jie Zi, an ancient Chinese dictionary, "feeling" is defined as "touching the heart." Therefore, "sense" mainly concerns the emotional level of individuals. This study proposes that "sense of acquisition" aims to attain "acquisition" while focusing on "sense" (Zhang, 2022). Thus, the "sense of acquisition" can be understood as the positive psychological feeling of individuals resulting from the acquisition of material or spiritual things.

### **Concept of Sense of Acquisition of Ideological and Political Theory Course**

Based on an examination of current scholarship, the connotations of the sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses can be categorized into two main groups. The first group considers the sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses as a collective term for the actual gains and personal benefits achieved by all college students, through the learning of these courses at the intellectual, value, and methodological levels. This category defines the sense of acquisition as a process. The second group, which is more commonly accepted, views the sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses as a subjective psychological feeling. Within this category, there are several different definitions of the sense of acquisition. Some scholars believe that it is a sense of satisfaction, while others argue that it arises from the satisfaction of needs. For example, Fang Guangshun (2019) et al. suggests that the sense of acquisition is a positive and continuous psychological feeling that arises after the development needs and expectations of college students are met. Some scholars suggest that students' sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses is a subjective feeling of the nature, breadth, and depth of the objective role played by these courses in their growth and development.

There is a lack of agreement on the meaning of the sense of acquisition in ideological and political theory courses, despite the growing interest of scholars in studying this concept. Although some front-line teachers of ideological and political theory courses view the sense of acquisition of the course as a recent buzzword, the "sense of acquisition" can be generally defined as a favourable psychological feeling arising from a college student's personal growth and development needs in the process of learning ideological and political courses, which include theoretical knowledge, emotional resonance, firm belief, behavioural habits, and so on. The content of ideological and political theory courses is a progressive organic system that encompasses the sense of acquisition at the level of knowledge theory, the sense of acquisition at the level of values as the core, and the sense of acquisition at the level of methodology as the key. These levels of sense of acquisition possess unique presentation styles and characteristics. However, more than just acquisition is required to generate a sense of acquisition. In other words, the actual acquisition of college students in ideological and political theory courses does not always lead to the corresponding sense of acquisition or the intensity of the sense of acquisition.

### **Concept of Flow Experience**

The flow experience is a concept originating from positive psychology and has become a theoretical basis for marketing and behaviour research. Recently, more scholars have applied the concept of flow experience to the field of education, integrating it with different disciplines to study its effects on teaching. (Gao, 2021; He et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023) In this study, the researcher combines the flow experience with the ideological and political theory course, proposing that the state of flow experience is achieved when college students are fully engaged in the classroom and that this experience directly affects their sense of acquisition.

Psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1975) first proposed the concept of flow experience in 1975, which drew widespread attention from society and became a research hot topic (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) defined flow experience as a state of focusing on activities caused by an individual's inner pleasure. It is a psychological state characterised by high participation, no sense of time, and perceived entertainment. The flow experience refers to the state of optimal psychological experience when individuals are fully immersed in their activities (Wilder et al., 1989). Originally used to describe the feelings of dancers or rock climbers during their best experiences, individuals who have a flow experience completely concentrate on their activities and experience positive psychological characteristics, such as enjoyment and loss of self-awareness (Hu et al., 2013).

Generally speaking, applying the flow theory and the sense of acquisition in the field of ideological and political theory courses learning can help students understand and pursue a sense of happiness and achievement in learning, thereby improving the quality of learning.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

A qualitative description approach was adopted as the research design. Participants' perceptions of a phenomenon being examined can be described using a qualitative descriptive approach (Neergaard et al., 2009), which produces a straightforward explanation of participants' experiences in their own words (Sandelowski, 2000).

In this study, the qualitative approach with a case study design was appropriate because it was used to validate the complex phenomenon under investigation by identifying various consistent factors (Padget, 2016). A generic qualitative design was used to provide flexibility and structure in addressing contemporary research needs (Kahak, 2014). Generic qualitative designs are well suited for investigating research questions that relate to an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and opinions (Percy et al., 2015). The researcher served as the research instrument, and the primary data source was semi-structured interviews with second-year college students. The open-ended questions focused on students' experiences and opinions. The thematic analysis guided the research within this qualitative paradigm, and the participants' discourses supported the interpretation (Peel, 2020).

### **Participants**

This study employed a purposeful sampling method to select fifteen (15) third-year undergraduate students from a college in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, China as research participants. The rationale for this choice is that they have completed all ideological and political theory courses, and the evaluation of the teaching effectiveness of ideological and political theory teachers will not negatively impact their academic development, while also providing meaningful data for the study. The interviewers avoided teaching interactions to avoid potential biases in the research results. The interviews were conducted in a neutral emotional context to ensure that participants were able to freely express their thoughts and feelings, thereby ensuring the high representativeness of the participants.

### **Data Collection**

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to conduct in-depth interviews with the participants and recorded them to collect first-hand original data about college students' sense of acquisition. Each interview lasted about one (1) hour. Because of the epidemic situation, the interview was conducted by online video conference. For the convenience of recording, the whole interview was recorded on the screen. According to the interview recording, more than 50,000 words of interview materials were sorted out, and then the materials were integrated and coded. Interviews with students mainly include their love for the ideological and political course, their learning feelings, the completion of their learning tasks, the difficulties and challenges encountered in the learning process, the factors affecting their participation in the classroom, their awareness of the importance of the ideological and political course, their learning experience, and their evaluation. This study was conducted between April and May 2022.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The data was analysed using the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first author read each verbatim transcript multiple times to gain an overall understanding of the content and to develop a sense of the data's core essence. Meaningful units relevant to cognitive changes as discussed in the interviews were identified and coded. Based on similarities and differences in codes, these were categorised into subcategories (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). These subcategories were then grouped together based on their relationships, resulting in the formation of categories containing multiple subcategories. For example, from the following interview content, it can be analyzed that students' motivation and learning interests are important factors affecting students' learning engagement.

*"The ideological and political theory course is compulsory, so I must take it. However, I aim to pass the exam; I don't want a high score. Because I will not take the postgraduate entrance exam, learning is useless. I'd better spend my time on my major courses; after all, I will find a professional job."* (SP 2, Position 23).

*"I am not interested in the ideological and political subjects, so it is difficult to devote myself to study."* (SP 1, Position 33).

Thematic Analysis is deemed the most appropriate method for this study since it seeks to uncover findings through interpretation. Dominant position analysis enhances comprehension of the whole by carrying out a systematic analysis of the frequency of the dominant position. The technique not only enhances the meaning of the study but also imparts accuracy and complexity. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) also observed that thematic analysis is particularly appropriate for research on learning and teaching as it is a flexible approach that is not bound by any particular epistemological or theoretical perspective. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a method for "identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) in data" (p. 79). Themes aim to capture critical ideas from data relevant to the research question or purpose of the study and reflect patterns or meanings from the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis provides a broader and deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Marks & Yardley, 2004).

To facilitate data transcription, individual interviews and focus group interviews or discussions (FGD) were completed using ZOOM and recorded via EV recording software. The transcribed interviews were then uploaded to MAXQDA for the researcher to organise the codes during the coding process (Saldana, 2016). MAXQDA2020 was used for data analysis because it is easy to use, does not lag easily, and is relatively inexpensive. The software benefits the researcher by allowing them to store all item data in one location, code quickly and easily, and create information visualizations. The data analysis procedure for this research is based on Braun and Clarke's six-stage analysis, which includes familiarizing with the data, generating initial code, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and generating reports.

### Study Rigour and Trustworthiness

The following strategies were used to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the data analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The analysis was confirmed through supervised discussions between the first and second authors—both of whom have experience in qualitative research—until a consensus was reached. Furthermore, to ensure the transferability of findings, the analysis process was explained in detail. The dependability of findings was determined by verifying the consistency of the findings and reflecting the raw data in the categories as much as possible. The results were explained to the participants, and no one objected. Finally, the study was supervised by a researcher experienced in qualitative research.

### Ethics

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the faculty of the university to which the authors are affiliated (No.136). When briefing potential participants, the researchers explained the purpose and requirements of the study, the participants' right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and the possibility of publishing the results. Participants were informed that their personal information would be kept confidential. These guidelines were explained verbally and in writing, and written consent was obtained. Interested students were required to email the researchers. Only after this step did the researchers begin scheduling interviews.

## RESULTS

Fifteen (15) students (SP1-SP15) took part in the semi-structured interviews. The study explored what were the factors that influence college students' learning engagement in ideological and political theory courses. Secondly, how flow experience affects college students' sense of acquisition in ideological and political theory courses. After

subjecting the data to thematic analysis, two main themes emerged, each with several sub-themes. The first theme is Learning Issues which addresses the factors that influence college students' learning engagement in the ideological and political theory course. There are six sub-themes derived from Theme 1: a) learning content, b) learning interest, c) learning motivation, d) learning environment, e) learning pressure, and f) teachers' and classmates' factors.

The second theme, which is Student's Reflection and Experience appears to explain how flow experience affects students' sense of acquisition in ideological and political theory courses. Five sub-themes emerged within; a) knowledge experience, b) emotional experience, c) psychological experience, d) interest experience, and e) achievement experience.

**DISCUSSION**

Theme 1 explores the factors that impact college students' learning engagement in the classroom, which in turn is related to the second theme that shows how flow experience affects students' sense of acquisition in ideological and political theory courses. The sub-themes within Theme 1 and Theme 2 are the factors that seem to influence classroom engagement and the flow experience of students in this study. Table 1 illustrates the relationship between the factors that affect college students' classroom engagement and the three dimensions of the flow experience. The first dimension includes four factors from the sub-themes in Theme 1: learning motivation, content, pressure, and teachers' characteristics. The second dimension comprises three factors from the other sub-themes from Theme 1: learning environment, learning interest, and classmates' and teachers' characteristics. The third dimension pertains solely to learning interests.

**Table 1:** The Relationship Between Factors Influencing Classroom Engagement and Flow of College Students

Factors	Performance	Features that Produce Flow	Flow Dimension
1.Learning motivation	Promotion without failing a course	Have clear objectives	The first dimension: Flow generation prerequisites
2.Teachers' factor	Teacher comments and corrections	Timely feedback	
3.Learning content	Content is too difficult	Challenge and skill balance	
4.Learning pressure	Fear of failing a course		
5.Learning environment	Large class sizes	Action-awareness integration	The second dimension: Flow experience process
6.Classmates' factor	Talking, chatting, and playing with your phone	High attention span	
7.Teachers' factor	Lectures are boring and old-fashioned.		
8.Learning interest	Like, interested	Sense of control	The third dimension: Flow experience results
9.Learning interest	Ignore distractions other	Loss of self-awareness	
	Time flies A sense of accomplishment, satisfaction	Time-shift An enjoyable experience	

The generation of a flow experience requires clear goals, accurate feedback, and a balance of challenges and skills (Zhang, 2022). Clear goals have a direct impact on students' listening state during class. Students with a clear goal to improve their performance, show a serious and committed state during class. Conversely, students who aim to simply succeed, may not take the class seriously. Goals and feedback are complementary, as goals promote students' concentration and motivation, while also providing reference information for feedback. Accurate feedback enables individuals to gauge their progress toward their desired goals, thereby boosting their confidence and mood incrementally (Yu & Xu, 2022). Timely feedback is also essential for students to experience a flow state. Feedback refers to timely corrections and comments from the teacher that allow students to assess their mastery of the subject matter.

Accurate feedback can also reduce anxiety when students face an imbalance between low skills and high challenges in their learning process. Similarly, an imbalance of high skill and low challenge can result in boredom, and accurate feedback can guide students toward their desired goals, thereby reducing boredom. For example, students who perceive the learning content to be too difficult would fall into the category of low-skill, high-challenge, leading to anxiety. The stress of learning creates similar anxiety due to the fear of failing the course, which is caused by the imbalance between the student's skills and challenges, leading to fear of failure. This analysis pertains to the first dimension of the flow experience.

The second dimension of the flow experience is the process stage, which involves the individual's concentration on the activity being performed, the development of a sense of potential control, and the integration of behavior and perception. During this stage, irrelevant information does not preoccupy the individual, and the mind is more focused on studying (Wang, 2022). The individual is confident in their ability to deal with problems encountered, and the is integrated with perception. Internal logic guides the body's movements, and the self feels at ease. The study's data analysis identified that the factors affecting students' high concentration levels include the extensive course learning environment, peer factors such as chatting, playing with mobile phones, and teacher factors such as boring lectures and old-fashioned teaching methods. The lack of focus affects the individual's sense of control, and their behaviour and perception do not merge, ultimately impacting their ability to produce a flow experience.

The third dimension of the flow experience is the outcome stage, which involves the loss of self-consciousness, a distorted sense of time, and a pleasurable experience. Individuals are fully immersed in the present moment during this stage. They lose self-doubt and confidence, time flies by without awareness, and there is a sense of pleasure and satisfaction (Zhang & Yu, 2022). The study found that a student's interest in learning directly affects the three critical variables of this dimension. Strong interest automatically allows the student to ignore distractions and become fully immersed in the course, resulting in a feeling of time flying by and a sense of satisfaction and achievement.

On the contrary, lack of interest makes it difficult to immerse the student, leading to a perception of slow time passing, the days feeling like years, and ultimately, an unenjoyable experience (Zhao & Zhang, 2018). The teachers' factor is also a key factor influencing students' immersion in the classroom. For example, some students will grab a seat because they like the teacher, actively answer questions, and listen carefully, leading to an enjoyable experience.

In summary, the findings from this study demonstrate that the factors influencing students' engagement in the classroom during the process of learning behaviour are the same factors that impact the generation of flow experiences. Flow experiences are significantly associated with levels of learning engagement.

Theme 2 aims to examine how the factors affect the contentment and satisfaction of college students in the learning process from the student's perspective, and explore their learning effects. Based on the analysis of Theme 1, multiple factors impact the learning experience of college students, which is closely associated with their learning effects. Positive learning experiences usually promote learning effects, while negative learning experiences can harm learning effects (Yang, 2022).

As presented in Table 2, college students' learning experiences can be either positive or negative, both of which are influenced by various factors. The factors that promote positive learning experiences for students include gaining knowledge, emotional recognition, feeling psychologically relaxed, being interested in the course, and achieving a sense of accomplishment. These factors can directly facilitate positive effects during the learning process, leading to the experience of flow, which Csikszentmihalyi (1975) defines as a positive experience.

In contrast, the factors that impede the production of positive learning experiences and hinder students' sense of acquisition include problematic understanding of knowledge, emotional criticism, disagreement with the teacher,

feeling psychologically stressed, lack of interest in the course, and lack of a sense of accomplishment. Therefore, the findings also indicate that the learning experience significantly affects the learning effect, thus influencing the contentment and satisfaction of college students in the learning process, that is, their sense of acquisition.

**Table 2:** Promoting and Inhibiting Factors of College Students' Learning Effect

Sub-themes from Theme 2: Learning Experience	Facilitators	Inhibitors
1. Knowledge experience	Gaining	Problematic understanding
2. Emotional experience	Praise and recognition	Criticism
3. Psychological experience	Relaxed	Stressed
4. Interest experience	Interested	Lack of interested
5. Achievement experience	Sense of accomplishment	Lack of sense of achievement

**Summary**

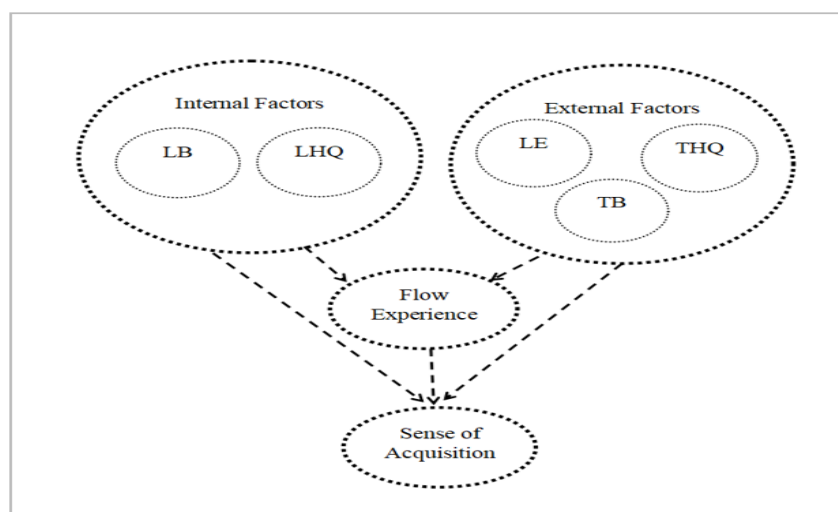
**Factors Influence College Students' Sense of Acquisition**

This study aims to explore the factors that influence the sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses among college students enrolled in an institution situated in Hebei Province, China. Based on the research themes identified in the previous study, it is evident that various factors impact the sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses for college students, as illustrated in the table below:

**Table 3:** Influencing Factors of College Students' Sense of Acquisition of Ideological and Political Theory Courses

Themes	Sub-Themes
Theme 1: Learning Issues	Learning content, learning interest, learning motivation, learning environment, learning pressure, teachers' and classmates' factors
Theme 2: Students' Experience and Reflection	Learning experience, knowledge experience, emotional experience, psychological experience, interest experience, and achievement experience

After summarizing and categorising the significant factors listed in the Tables 1 and 2, it is found that the determinants of college students' sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses can be classified into two broad categories: internal factors and external factors, which are further subdivided into five categories as illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Model of Influencing Factors of College Students' Sense of Acquisition of the Ideological and Political Theory Courses



The sense of acquisition concerning ideological and political theory courses undergoes modulation due to a confluence of diverse determinants, thereby exerting an impact on the flow experience manifested by college students. These determinants can be dichotomized into the realms of internal and external influences, encompassing both the Learning Holistic Quality (LHQ) and Learning Behavior (LB) exhibited by students, alongside the Teaching Holistic Quality (THQ), Teaching Behavior (TB), and Learning Environment (LE) facilitated by educators. Within LHQ, encompassing students' cognitive domain, are encapsulated variables of learning pressures, learning interest, and learning motivation. On the other hand, LB encapsulates an amalgamation of knowledge experience, emotional experience, psychological experience, interest experience, and achievement experience.

In the trajectory of erudition, the sense of acquisition germane to ideological and political theory courses is not solely circumscribed by the internal factors inherent to students but also bears the imprint of extraneous variables stemming from educators. For instance, the acumen of instructors, their pedagogical attributes, and their instructional allure—collectively termed Teaching Holistic Quality (THQ)—alongside the instructional strategies, pedagogical styles, and didactic conduct—referred to as Teaching Behavior (TB)—is contingent upon the overarching Learning Environment (LE). The Learning Environment encompasses variables such as the pedagogical scale of instruction, the tenor of the learning ambience, and the institutional emphasis accorded to ideological and political pedagogy. This intricate interplay underscores the multifaceted nature of the factors shaping the acquisition of ideological and political erudition within the academic domain.

These factors exert differential degrees of influence on the flow experience encountered by students, subsequently affecting their perception of acquisition. For instance, in cases where students encounter a deficiency in fundamental comprehension and require additional support, the attainment of a state of flow within the course becomes arduous, culminating in a diminished sense of acquisition. Correspondingly, instances arise where students encounter challenges in acclimatizing themselves to the pedagogical style and instructional methodologies employed by the educator. In such scenarios, the ability to effectively engage in the milieu of classroom learning becomes compromised, leading to a discernible deficit in the sense of acquisition. Consequently, within the purview of acquiring ideological and political theory courses, the collective impact of diverse factors is discerned by college students

### **Core Factor in Promoting the College Students' Sense of Acquisition**

From the above model, it can be concluded that college students' sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses is influenced by both internal and external factors. The internal factors include college students' "Learning Holistic Quality" (LHQ) and "Learning Behaviour" (LB), while the external factors are "Teaching Holistic Quality" (THQ), "Teaching Behaviour" (TB), and "Learning Environment" (LE). Whether college students can participate in classroom learning depends on not only their interests, learning foundation, learning objectives, and other internal factors but also external factors such as teachers' teaching methods, teaching characteristics, and teaching styles. These factors directly affect college students' evaluation of the course and their sense of acquisition of the course.

However, this study believes that flow experience is the core factor in promoting college students' sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses. Whether college students can experience flow directly affects their sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses. Flow is defined as an "intense experiential involvement in a moment-to-moment activity. Attention is fully invested in the task at hand, and the person functions at his or her fullest capacity" (Csikszentmihalyi, Abuhamdeh, & Nakamura, 2005, p. 600). Flow is a mental state in which the person is so involved in a given task that nothing else matters at the time. The experience of flow is so enjoyable that individuals want to engage in it, even if it requires considerable energy or effort (Cuadra & Florenzano, 2003).

In the academic context, there is evidence suggesting that if students experience a state of flow while engaging in academic activities, they will not only continue learning and improving but will also enjoy the process. This intrinsic reward associated with learning has been described by Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen (1994). The experience of flow is so pleasurable that individuals seek to repeat it. For instance, if students experience flow when reading literature or studying, they will want to repeat the experience by reading more books or studying further. Similarly, if students achieve flow while solving mathematical or chemical problems, they will actively seek out more problems to solve (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1994). Therefore, this study posits that the experience of flow is a central factor in promoting college students' sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses.

### **Limitation of Study**

While the case study approach provides detailed, qualitative information, future researchers need to consider some limitations. Credible results require expertly reviewed protocols, compliance with membership checks, and diverse data. Furthermore, it is necessary to describe each process in detail to increase the likelihood and feasibility of replication, and to allow for the investigation of impractical or difficult research contexts.

One of the limitations of this study was the small sample size, consisting of only 15 participants from one college located in Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province, China. Although qualitative research focuses on a small number of participants to provide in-depth descriptive data, some researchers argue that the limitations of qualitative research sample sizes do not allow for generalization to larger datasets. Therefore, the findings of this study should only be generalized to other groups with further research.

In addition, the limited sample scope of this study should be considered. The sample was selected from a public specialist higher education institution in Shijiazhuang, which may not apply to other undergraduate institutions. Students from higher education institutions and undergraduate institutions have very different learning backgrounds, which can impact the results. Furthermore, the case study methodology itself has limitations. Generic qualitative inquiry provides a relatively shallow understanding of a phenomenon and does not allow for generalization like quantitative studies. Although this study fills a research gap, it needs to be further investigated using other research methods, such as quantitative research. Finally, more intuitive data and charts are needed to analyze the generation of college students' flow experience in ideological and political theory courses and their sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study employs a qualitative case study methodology, adopts flow theory as the theoretical foundation, and utilises nine characteristics and three dimensions of flow experience as indicators to explore the sense of acquisition of ideological and political courses among college students. The findings of this study reveal that the factors influencing college students' perception of ideological and political theory courses encompass both internal factors, such as learning behaviour and learning holistic quality, as well as external factors, including teaching behaviour and teaching holistic quality.

Drawing on the model developed in this study to elucidate the impact on college students' sense of acquisition in ideological and political theory courses, it is posited that flow experience constitutes the core factor influencing college students' sense of acquisition, whereby the intensity of flow experienced by college students in ideological and political courses directly affects the extent of their sense of acquisition.

Although this study fills a research gap, it needs to be further investigated using other research methods, such as quantitative research. Finally, more intuitive data and charts are needed to analyse the generation of college students' flow experience in ideological and political theory courses and their sense of acquisition of ideological and political theory courses.

### **DECLARATION STATEMENT**

The lead author affirms that this manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study being reported; that no important aspects of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned (and, if relevant, registered) have been explained.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare. All co-authors have seen and agree with the contents of the manuscript and there is no financial interest to report.

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