

# A Study on the Relationship between Chinese Academic Attribution and Learning Burnout among Chinese Language Learners of International Students in China

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**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate the specific situation and relationship between academic attribution and learning burnout among 413 international Chinese learners in Hunan University, and to help teachers understand students' psychological activities and negative emotions, so as to use scientific methods to intervene, alleviate students' burnout, cultivate correct attribution methods, and improve students' self-confidence in learning, improve the teaching quality and efficiency of teachers of Chinese as a foreign language, and promote the all-round development of Chinese learners. In this study, 413 international Chinese learners from Hunan University were analyzed using the SPSS27.0 valid questionnaire. Descriptive statistical analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis and other methods were used to explore the academic attribution and learning burnout of international Chinese learners in Hunan University and the relationship between them, and to understand the differences between them in different demographic variables. The results show that: (1) Individual differences such as gender, country, Chinese language proficiency, study time, and time in China have different levels of effects on academic attribution and learning burnout of Chinese learners; (2) There was a correlation between academic attribution and learning burnout among Chinese learners. (2) Academic attribution of Chinese learners has a significant predictive effect on learning burnout, and luck attribution has the most significant positive predictive effect on learning burnout.

**Keywords:** Chinese Learner, Academic Attribution, Academic Burnout.

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## 1. Introduction

Language teaching should not only be based on the theory of pedagogy, but also guided by the knowledge of psychology. Since the 90s of the 20th century, the field of language acquisition has been deeply influenced by humanistic psychology, and language teaching has gradually changed from teacher-led "teacher-led" to student-led "student-learning", so that learners' psychological activities have become a hot topic in academic research. In the learning process, learners are influenced by various factors, and a positive emotional state is conducive to maintaining students' enthusiasm in the process of learning difficult, unfamiliar second language knowledge, and motivates students to accomplish their goals more efficiently and easily. Negative emotional states will make students feel irritable and bored more frequently in the learning process, which will become a "stumbling block" on the way for students to successfully complete their studies and achieve good grades. It can be seen that the study of affective factors is of great significance in the field of second language teaching.

The author consulted a large number of relevant materials and found that the burnout of Chinese learners is very common but has not been well solved, and students who have burnout are more likely to feel the difficulty of learning and stop making efforts. In addition, in a conversation with international students who were obviously burnout, the author found that Chinese learners often had the idea that "poor grades are due to their lack of language talent", which indicates that the attribution of Chinese learners' achievements may affect the degree of learning burnout. When faced with success or failure in learning, people are accustomed to looking for reasons in terms of their own

abilities or external environment, which is people's attribution tendency. Students who tend to attribute their success or failure to learning to internal factors such as ability are more likely to put in the effort in the learning process, while students who tend to attribute success or failure to external factors such as luck are more likely to shy away from effort. The above-mentioned academic attribution and learning burnout both affect the learning effect of Chinese learners to a certain extent.

Among the influencing factors for language learning, emotional factors are as important as cognitive factors. The author searched for "attribution" and "burnout" as keywords, and found that although there are many literatures on the interaction between the two, the research objects of this paper are mainly middle school students and college students. In recent years, although there is a lack of research on the relationship between the two aspects in the field of second language teaching, the research on other emotional factors of language learners has begun to be paid attention to. The existing literature mainly focuses on several unilateral factors such as learning motivation, self-efficacy, and learning strategies, as well as the cross-relationship between these factors, and the research on learning burnout of international students in China is far from enough. This study will fill the gaps and deficiencies in the research on academic attribution, influencing factors and related relationships of people with learning burnout in the field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. At the same time, this study also contributes to the integration of psychological theories and the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, enriching the theoretical achievements in this area.

In terms of student development, teachers of Chinese as a foreign language should create a harmonious, comfortable

and relaxed teaching environment as much as possible in the classroom, so as to alleviate students' burnout in the learning process and improve the learning effect. From the perspective of learners, paying attention to the rationality of attribution, improving learning confidence, and reducing burnout have a great role in promoting self-development and employment problems. In the long run, it is of practical significance to improve the teaching quality of study abroad education in colleges and universities, as well as the progress of the entire field of international student education.

To this end, the following research questions are set up in this study:

First, are there any differences in the demographic variables of Chinese learning attribution and learning burnout among Chinese language learners in China?

Second, is there a correlation between academic attribution and learning burnout among international students in China?

Third, does academic attribution have an impact on burnout?

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1. Theoretical Research on Academic Attribution of College Students**

In 1958, F. Heider published the book "Psychology of Human Relations", which marked the birth of attribution theory, which divided people into "internal control type" and "external control type", that is, intrinsic tendency attribution and extrinsic tendency attribution, internal factors refer to the internal and inherent characteristics or factors of the actor, such as individual efforts, attitudes, etc.; External factors refer to the external environmental factors related to the actor, such as the surrounding environment of the actor, luck, the nature of the work, etc.

B. Weiner's research on attribution theory is largely influenced by Hyde, and Weiner (1985) proposed the three-dimensional attribution theory based on Hyde, which has an extremely important position in the history of attribution theory research. Weiner pointed out that people explain the main reasons for success and failure: personal ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck, and analyzed the reasons from three dimensions: control point, stability, and controllability.

Since 1958, when the social psychologist Hyde first proposed the attribution theory, the research of classical attribution theory has been further deepened in the field of cognitive psychology, until the mid-to-late 80s of the last century, the attribution theory has entered a period of comprehensive development, which is also the beginning of the research on achievement attribution theory in China, and has gradually increased since then. According to Weiner's three-dimensional attribution theory, academic attribution can infer subsequent changes in behavior and emotion, so attribution theory is mainly used in the following three kinds of research in China:

One is to predict and interpret students' academic achievements or behaviors. Ding Jie (2007) showed that there were significant differences in the attribution tendency of learners when there was a gap in their level. Li Caijuan (2020) pointed out that academic attribution has a significant predictive effect on the academic achievement of college students, and has a certain impact on college students' behavior.

The second is to explore the relationship between attribution and other affective factors such as learning motivation, learning anxiety, and learning burnout. Li Duan

(2016) conducted a survey of American students through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, and found that intrinsic motivation and inward attribution tendency have a strong role in promoting students' self-directed learning ability. Fu Ming (2019) took students from Confucius Institutes in Hungary as the research object to explore the individual differences affecting attribution and anxiety, and found that successful effort and successful luck have a greater impact on learning anxiety.

The third is to focus on training students to attribute and guide them to rationally attribute academic success or failure, which is relatively rare, but has high research value. According to the literature, attribution training can generally play a positive role in students, breaking bad attribution habits and improving their interest in learning (Liu 2014; Wang Yuanfang 2017). Among them, Wang Lei (2012) pointed out that the burnout level of the class that had been trained was significantly lower than that of the untrained class, which showed that the impact of attribution training on students was positive.

In summary, attribution theory has been widely used in education, pedagogical research, and practice. The research on attribution in foreign countries started earlier, but few studies focused on second language learners, and the early attribution theory provided a solid foundation for future research. Most of the academic attribution studies in the field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in China focus on the attribution methods of international students when learning Chinese, in addition to studying the different attribution methods of students in different demographic variables.

### **2.2. Theoretical Research on College Students' learning Burnout**

Foreign research on burnout began in the 70s of the 20th century, and the American psychoanalyst Freudenberg first proposed the concept of "burnout". As the field of burnout continues to develop, Pines and Kafry (1980) found that students are more likely to become bored with learning activities than social workers who can achieve corresponding rewards, which may be due to the fact that students are more likely to develop apathy, exhaustion, and loss of enthusiasm for learning in terms of mental, behavioral, and attitudinal conditions. Malanoswki and Wood (1984) point out that burnout occurs when individuals have an increased need to realize their personal worth.

The research on learning burnout in China really began in the 21st century, with college students and middle school students as the main targets, but there are few studies on Chinese learners. The research focuses on the following areas:

In terms of the review of learning burnout, Guo Ying, Zhou Wenjing (2008), Li Hua (2011), Li Bingrong, Peng Xiaohong, Feng Yanzi (2014) and others have collated, counted and analyzed the research on learning burnout at home and abroad on the basis of a large number of literature research, which provides a reliable and detailed reference for future academic work.

In terms of the causes of learning burnout, Xu Yun, Li Jiao, and Zhang Ting (2010) found that the main causes of student burnout are learning fatigue, lack of motivation, low mood and lack of self-confidence. Subsequently, Yang Huizi (2012) took preparatory students as the research object and analyzed the influencing factors of burnout in the process of learning Chinese, mainly from two aspects: environment and

individual.

In terms of the structure of the learning burnout scale, Lian Rong and Yang Lixian (2005) developed the learning burnout scale based on the Maslach three-dimensional scale, which aims to assess the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low sense of achievement shown by students in the learning process. Xu Peipei (2022) for the first time took master's students in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages as the research object, and adapted the burnout scale to measure the current situation and causes of academic burnout among Chinese master's students.

In summary, the scope of research on learning burnout at home and abroad is extensive, but there are still deficiencies in the field of second language acquisition, the correlation between burnout and other variables and the methods to reduce learners' burnout.

### 2.3. Research on the Relationship between Academic Attribution and Learning Burnout Among College Students

Shi Haiyun (2009) used a self-developed attribution questionnaire with good reliability and validity as a survey tool, showing that academic attribution and learning burnout were significantly correlated with each other in middle school students. Zhao Long (2014) took college students as the research object, and used statistical analysis to analyze the differences between academic attribution and learning burnout in demographic variables, and made a regression analysis between the two. Studies have shown that students with a high tendency to attribute success or failure inward to academic success or failure have a lower frequency of burnout, while students with a high tendency to attribution outward have a higher frequency of burnout. This is the earliest literature in China to study the relationship between the two, and it has a reference role for the research on Chinese learners in this paper.

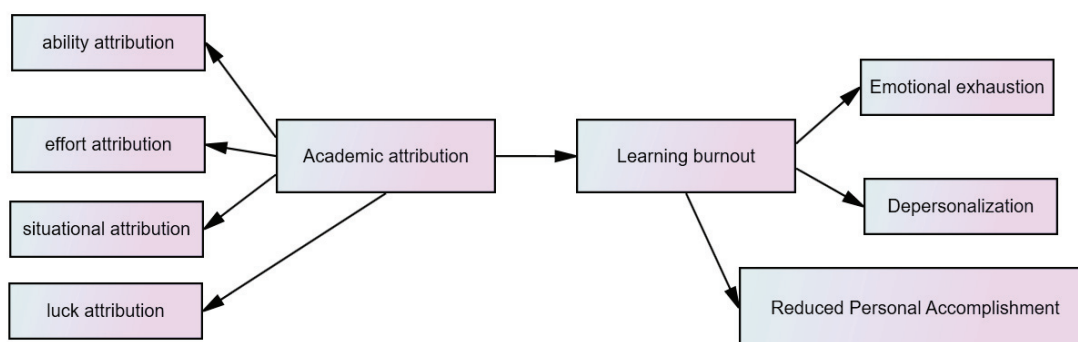


Figure 1. The model of this study

In addition, the following hypotheses were established:

H1, gender, country, level, study time, time in China, and other general individual differences have a certain impact on the academic attribution and learning burnout of Chinese learners.

H2, learning burnout of Chinese learners was significantly negatively correlated with internal factors and positively correlated with external factors.

H3, academic attribution of Chinese language learners can

Tan Caixia, Shi Haiyun (2011) and Chen Ying (2020) respectively took middle school students and adolescents as the research subjects, and unanimously showed that there was a negative correlation between self-efficacy and learning burnout and its three dimensions, indicating that insufficient ability will make them physically and mentally exhausted in the learning process, and in addition to internal factors, students will also feel bored with learning when they encounter bad environment and luck. This inspires the author to study the burnout of Chinese learners from the perspective of the environment, which plays an important role in the formulation of teaching suggestions.

In summary, there are sufficient studies on academic attribution and learning burnout and the relationship between them at home and abroad, but the interaction mechanism between them is rarely explored. In addition, in the field of Chinese as a second language, the research on academic attribution and learning burnout of Chinese learners has just begun. Therefore, this paper takes Chinese learners as the survey object and studies the relationship and interaction mechanism between the two from the perspective of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, hoping to improve the problem of Chinese learner burnout.

## 3. Research Methods

### 3.1. Research Models and Hypotheses

This study analyzes the academic attribution and learning burnout of international Chinese learners and their correlations, and understands the differences between them in different demographic variables. Among the demographic and sociological variables of the surveyed college students, the gender, major, and grade level of the Chinese language learners who are expected to influence international students in China were set as the control variables, and the model of this study was set <Figure 1> according to the previous study.

effectively predict their level of learning burnout.

### 3.2. Research Objects and Procedures

In this study, we surveyed Chinese language learners from Hunan University, who were international students in China, and after explaining the research subjects, we distributed a self-report questionnaire to 413 students who volunteered to participate in the study. < Table 1> show the basic information of the research object. Dishonest responses and invalid

questionnaires were removed from the questionnaire distributed, and 380 could be used as data for analysis using the SPSS 27.0 program. Firstly, in order to understand the sociological characteristics of the population of the research objects, descriptive statistical analysis was carried out, and in order to verify the reliability of the measurement tools, difference analysis, reliability analysis and independent samples T-test were carried out on the measurement tools.

Secondly, in order to verify the research question, the correlation analysis was carried out to confirm the relationship between the variables. Finally, in the effect of academic attribution on learning burnout, in order to verify the learning effect of academic attribution, independent variables were averaged, interaction terms were introduced, and hierarchical regression analysis was used.

**Table 1.** Basic Demographic Information of the Research Subjects

ingredients		Number	ratio
gender	man	57	55.3%
	woman	46	44.7%
age	18-25 years old	99	96.1%
	26-30 years old	4	3.9%
nationality	Southeast Asian countries	31	33.1%
	European and American countries	54	52.4%
	African countries	10	9.7%
Time in China	Haven't been to China yet	62	17.5%
	Within 1 year	18	22.3%
	More than 3 years	23	22.3%
Time to learn Chinese	Half a year to 1 year	40	38.8%
	1 year to 3 years	40	38.8%
	More than 3 years	23	22.3%
Chinese language proficiency	Beginner level	20	19.4%
	Intermediate level	69	67.0%
	Advanced level	14	13.6%
total		413	100%

### 3.3. Scales for Academic Attribution and Burnout

The academic attribution questionnaire used by Li Zhiqian (2016) based on the multi-dimensional, multi-attribution causality scale (MMCS) developed by Lercourt and Ware et al., with a total of 24 questions. A 5-scale Likert scale from "completely disagree" to "completely agree" was used, with higher scores representing higher levels of academic attribution. The overall Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of academic attribution was 0.861. The use of academic burnout tools mainly refers to Schaufeli's (2002) Student Learning Burnout

Scale (MBI-SS) adapted from Maslach (1981), because the survey subjects are Chinese learners, the author refers to the learning burnout part of Xue Shan's (2018) questionnaire, a total of 11 questions, mainly including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low sense of achievement, among which reverse questions are set on the low sense of achievement dimension in order to test the validity of the questionnaire. All 11 questions used the same Likert 5-degree scale from "completely disagree" to "completely agree". The overall Cronbach's  $\alpha$  confidence coefficient for academic burnout was 0.877. The reliability and composition of the research tools are collated in <Table 2 >.

**Table 2.** Composition of the Questionnaire on Academic Attribution and Academic Burnout

variable	Total number of items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Academic attribution	24	0.861
Academic burnout	11	0.877

Scoring method: 1 point for not agreeing at all, 2 points for disagreeing with others, 3 points for average, 4 points for agreeing with others, and 5 points for completely agreeing.

## 4. Study Results

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Study Subjects

Descriptive statistical analysis was performed to

understand the characteristics of the study subjects as a whole in the academic attribution and burnout variables in this study, and the results are shown in <Table 3 >. The average academic attribution was 3.2832 and the average burnout was 2.4095.

**Table 3.** Overall level of Research Subjects

variable	average value	standard deviation	maximum	minimum
Academic attribution	3.2832	0.42361	4.04	2.25
Academic burnout	2.4095	0.5707	3.45	1.27

## 4.2. Statistical Analysis of Academic Attribution of Chinese Language Learners

### (1) Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Academic Attribution of Chinese Language Learners

According to the classification criteria of the five-point Likert scale scores, combined with the data analysis in <Table 4 >, the overall average of all dimensions of academic attribution was 3.2832, indicating that the attribution tendency of the participants was at a moderate level. The mean of the eight attribution methods of the 103 participants was ranked in descending order as Success Effort> Success Ability> Failure Effort> Success Scenario> Failure Ability> Success Luck> Failure Situation> Failure Luck. Three of the top four attribution methods are internal, while three of the bottom four attribution methods are external. Success ability and success effort are both attributions at a high level.

Weiner (1986) argues that inward and outward attribution

of individuals in the face of success or failure will have different effects, that is, inward attribution will promote the enhancement of pride and learning motivation when individuals face success; When an individual faces failure, inward attribution can lead to an inferiority complex. The data in <Table 5 > shows that the participants generally felt confident in their ability to learn Chinese, and recognized their learning, achievements and efforts from the heart. In addition, they did not blame their own failures on external factors such as the environment, but generally attributed them to their own lack of hard work. This attribution tendency will motivate learners to continuously improve themselves and continue to study hard in later learning, so as to improve their performance, but it is also necessary to prevent learners from developing psychological problems such as low self-esteem. In summary, the overall attribution of Chinese learners in Hunan University is relatively optimistic, which is conducive to Chinese language learning.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics of Academic Attribution

Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
2.25	4.04	3.2832	0.42361

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics on Various Dimensions of Academic Attribution

Dimension	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Success Ability	103	1.33	5.00	4.0906	0.83652
Success Effort	103	3.33	5.00	4.4725	0.59322
Success Situation	103	1.33	4.67	3.0939	0.75178
Success Luck	103	1.67	4.67	3.0485	0.83940
Failure Ability	103	1.33	5.00	3.0647	0.81524
Failure Effort	103	1.33	5.00	3.4628	0.92559
Failure Situation	103	1.00	4.33	2.6602	0.76694
Failure Luck	103	1.00	4.67	2.3722	0.79801

### 4.3. An analysis of academic attribution and burnout among Chinese language learners

In questionnaire studies, the data of the Likert scale used in this study are usually considered to be continuous numerical variables, so the Pearson correlation coefficient is generally used for analysis when analyzing the correlation between the two scales. Pearson correlation coefficient analysis is a method to measure the correlation between two variables or dimensions, but a high coefficient does not mean that there must be a decisive relationship between the two. In most cases,  $0.5 < |r| < 0.8$  indicates a correlation,  $p < 0.05$  indicates a significant correlation, and  $p < 0.01$  indicates a high correlation.

#### (1) Correlation analysis between academic attribution and learning burnout

< Table 6 > shows the correlation analysis between the four dimensions of academic attribution and the three dimensions of learning burnout, and it can be seen from the table that there is a complex positive and negative correlation between the dimensions. In the correlation analysis between academic

attribution and learning burnout and their dimensions, the correlation coefficient between ability attribution and low accomplishment was  $-0.398$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , which was a significant negative correlation, the correlation coefficient between effort attribution and low self-accomplishment was  $-0.278$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , which was a significant negative correlation, and the correlation coefficient between situational attribution and emotional exhaustion was  $0.236$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , which was a significant positive correlation. The correlation coefficient between luck attribution and mood exhaustion was  $0.283$ ,  $P < 0.01$ , which was a significant positive correlation, and the correlation coefficient between luck attribution and depersonalization was  $0.296$ ,  $P < 0.01$ , which was a significant positive correlation. It can be concluded that the higher the degree of learning burnout in the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, the more inclined the learners are to external attribution, i.e., luck and situational dimensions, while the more inclined the learners are to internal attribution, the lower the degree of learning burnout in the low achievement dimension.

**Table 6.** Correlation Analysis between Academic Attribution and Various Dimensions of Learning Burnout

	ability attribution	effort attribution	situational attribution	luck attribution	Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization	Reduced Personal Accomplishment
ability attribution	1						
effort attribution	.592**	1					
situational attribution	.196*	.245*	1				
luck attribution	.128	.063	.595**	1			
Emotional exhaustion	.177	.199	.236*	.283**	1		
Depersonalization	-.186	-.141	.072	.296**	.361**	1	
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	-3.98**	-.278**	-.082	.144	.276**	.346**	1

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ 

#### 4.4. Regression Analysis of Academic Attribution to Learning Burnout

< Table 7 > the fitting analysis of academic attribution to learning burnout, adjusted R<sup>2</sup>=0.106, indicating that the independent variables luck attribution, effort attribution,

ability attribution and situational attribution can explain a total of 10.6% of the dependent variable situation, that is, 10.6% of the dependent variable learning burnout is affected by luck attribution, effort attribution, ability attribution and situational attribution, so the fit of this model meets the standard.

**Table 7.** Regression Analysis of Academic Attribution on Various Dimensions of Learning Burnout

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R-squared	Errors in standard estimation
1	0.376a	0.141	0.106	0.539533

- a. Predictive variables: (constant), luck attribution, effort attribution, ability attribution, situational attribution  
 b. Dependent variable: Learning burnout

<Table 8> shows the effect of each variable on self-efficacy. Luck attribution can significantly positively affect self-efficacy, and the regression coefficient is 0.329 (t=3.394,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that academic attribution has a significant negative predictive effect on learning burnout. Comprehensive collinearity diagnosis, etc., can show that the

results of this operation are accurate and reliable. Based on all the above analyses, the regression equation between the independent and dependent variables is as follows: self-efficacy = 2.234 - 0.201 \* ability attribution + 0.06 \* effort attribution - 0.08 \* situational attribution + 0.329 \* luck attribution.

**Table 8.** Regression Coefficients of Academic Attribution Dimensions on Learning Burnout

	B	Unstandardized coefficient Standard error	Standardization coefficient Beta	t	p	VIF
(Constant)	2.234	0.425		5.261	<0.001**	
Ability attribution	-0.201	0.118	-0.199	-1.705	0.091	1.559
Effort attribution	0.060	0.110	0.065	0.543	0.588	1.613
Situational attribution	-0.080	0.110	-0.087	-0.722	0.472	1.660
Luck attribution	0.329	0.097	0.399	3.394	<0.001**	1.580

- a. Dependent variable: Learning burnout

$p < 0.01$

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Analysis of Results

According to the results of correlation analysis, there is a significant correlation between academic attribution and learning burnout. The more inclined the learner to external attribution, the higher the degree of emotional exhaustion and depersonalized burnout, and the stronger the learner's inclination to internal attribution, the higher the degree of burnout with low sense of achievement. Therefore, hypothesis one holds.

The results of regression analysis can also verify the correlation between the two. The specific relationships are as follows: first, academic attribution, especially luck attribution, has a significant positive predictive effect on learning burnout, indicating that the more students think that grades are related to good luck, the higher the degree of learning burnout, that is, it is necessary to minimize students' luck psychology; Therefore, hypothesis two holds.

Through difference analysis and regression analysis, independent samples T-test can also verify the mutual influence of the two, and the academic attribution of Chinese learners can effectively predict their learning burnout level.

## 5.2. Conclusion and Discussion

### (1) Conclusion

In this study, SPSS27.0 was used as an analysis tool to survey 413 Chinese learners in Hunan University. Firstly, descriptive statistics and difference analysis were carried out on the survey data, and the specific results were as follows:

1) Chinese learners in Hunan University tend to attribute success and failure inward, and the specific attribution tendency is as follows: successful effort> success ability> failure effort> success situation> failure ability> success luck> failure situation> failure luck.

2) The degree of learning burnout is basically at the lower middle level, which is manifested in emotional exhaustion> depersonalization> and low sense of achievement.

Secondly, the relationship between academic attribution and learning burnout is analyzed, and the relationship between the two is generally consistent with previous studies, but this paper analyzes the relationship between each dimension in depth

1) The more learners are inclined to internal attribution, the lower the degree of learning burnout in the low achievement dimension, and the higher the learners who are inclined to external attribution, the higher the degree of burnout in the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

### (2) Shortcomings and prospects of research

After a series of analyses, this study has achieved certain results, but there are still some shortcomings, which need to be further improved in future research. Specifically, the following points are the shortcomings and prospects of this study:

First, in terms of the selection of participants, this study only selected Chinese learners from Hunan University, which is narrow, and if more Chinese learners from colleges and universities can be surveyed, the results may be more representative and universal.

Second, in terms of research methodology, this study mainly used the literature analysis method and the Likert scale questionnaire method, although the questionnaire survey has many advantages such as convenience and speed, but it will be limited by the survey data generated by the participants. In subsequent studies, interviews can be added to allow for more diverse and specific analysis.

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