

# *A Review of Research on Learning Interest among Elementary School Students*

Peng Li

Chengdu University, Chengdu, 610106, China

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**Abstract:** Learning interest is a crucial factor that not only influences students' learning motivation but also affects their academic performance and sustained development. According to Ausubel's theory of achievement motivation, the elementary school stage is a significant period for the differentiation and development of learning interest. This study conducted a thematic search on VIP (China Science and Technology Journal Database) using the keyword "learning interest of elementary school students" for literature published from January 2000 to November 2024. After excluding non-academic literature such as book reviews, conference summaries, job descriptions, and other irrelevant materials, a total of 3,391 valid articles were obtained. By analyzing representative literature, the study shows that elementary school students' learning interest is mainly influenced by factors such as school, family, and individual. Based on research into these influencing factors, strategies to cultivate and enhance learning interest were proposed, including innovating teaching content and curriculum design, improving teaching methods and means, encouraging students to learn and think independently, and promoting home-school cooperation and support. These strategies provide references for fostering and enhancing the learning interest of elementary school students.

## **1. Research background**

Currently, in basic education, due to the emphasis placed by parents and society on examination scores, the educational format remains heavily exam-oriented, resulting in dry and monotonous teaching content that diminishes students' interest and enthusiasm for learning<sup>[1]</sup>. In the long run, this impacts students' subsequent development. *The Guidance on Learning Methods for elementary and Middle School Students (2024 Update)* issued by the Ministry of Education clearly mentions the need to cultivate elementary and middle school students' positive learning interest and enhance their learning enthusiasm. It also points out that learning interest can stimulate students' learning motivation and promote their overall personal development. *The National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan Outline* emphasizes that enhancing students' learning interest is key to improving the quality of education. According to Ausubel's theory of achievement motivation, the elementary school stage is a crucial period for the differentiation and development of learning interest, marking a critical transition in which students' learning motivation shifts from being primarily driven by affiliation to being driven by cognitive motivation and the drive for self-improvement.

The real establishment of the doctrine of interest in education began with Herbart, J.F. and his school of thought, flourished with Dewey, J. and his school of thought during the first half of the 20th century, and then began to make a comeback in the 1990's after nearly 50 years of decline in the mid-20th century. Existing studies have explored the influence of interest on learning, such as Ryan & Deci's Self-Determination Theory theory, which argues that individuals are motivated and have a need for self-actualization and self-growth, which asserts that human behavior is not driven by external pressures but by intrinsic motivation, which also emphasizes the influence of individual interest on learning; Li Hongyu 's study that interest is based on the need to know and explore something, an important motivation that pushes individuals to know things and seek the truth, and is the most active factor in motivation <sup>[2]</sup>; Schunk's study pointed out that learning interest not only stimulates students' motivation to learn, but also promotes the internalization and application of knowledge <sup>[3]</sup>.

Hidi and Renninger classified interest into two categories based on the theory of human-environment interaction, situational interest and individual interest, intrinsic interest refers to students' interest due to their enjoyment of the learning content itself, while extrinsic interest refers to interest triggered due to external rewards or environmental factors <sup>[4]</sup>. Many subsequent studies have been conducted according to Hidi's theory of interest division, and there is a tendency to gradually shift from the cultivation of interest in external contexts to the deepening of personal interest in internal contexts, and from the unilateral efforts of teachers to the collaborative efforts of schools, families, and the society to promote interest development. However, due to the characteristics of modern multidisciplinary, there is still a lack of in-depth research on the interests of different regions, genders and ages in specific disciplines; the research on the mechanism of cross-disciplinary interest interaction needs to be urgently developed; and how to influence students' learning interests through the society and other issues. Therefore, the study of elementary school students' interest in learning will help us deepen our understanding of interest and students' growth, and provide better theoretical references and practical reference for students' comprehensive development.

## **2. The characteristics of elementary school students' interest in learning**

### **2.1. Instability**

Elementary school students' interest is highly changeable. They are curious and full of interest in new things, but this interest often lasts for a shorter period of time and is easily changed by the influence of external factors. For example, they may show great interest in a new toy or a new game, but will soon shift to something else.

### **2.2. Visualization**

Elementary school students primarily engage in visual thinking and are more inclined to be interested in graphic and vivid things. For instance, content presented through animations and games often captures their attention and sparks their interest in learning.

### **2.3. Emotional**

Elementary school students' interest in learning is closely related to their emotions. They are more likely to be interested in learning activities that can bring a sense of pleasure and achievement. For instance, they will participate more actively in learning activities when they are praised or rewarded for their efforts.

### **3. Influencing factors of elementary school students' interest in learning**

Existing studies propose various theoretical frameworks for classifying types of interest in learning. These frameworks categorize interest as either temporary, situational interest that is triggered by specific environmental conditions, or as a more enduring personal interest that develops alongside knowledge and emotion. Both situational and personal interests are affected by a range of factors.

#### **3.1. School factors**

The school's educational environment, teaching methods, and teachers' styles all influence elementary school students' interest in learning. A dynamic and innovative teaching environment can stimulate students' interest in learning. Moreover, teachers' encouragement, support, and guidance are crucial in fostering students' interest in learning.

##### **3.1.1. Teacher factors**

Teachers' teaching methods and attitudes have an important influence on elementary school students' interest in learning. Research shows that the use of lively and interesting teaching methods, such as contextual teaching and game teaching, can effectively stimulate students' interest in learning. In addition, teachers' enthusiasm and the care they show to students can also directly affect students' motivation and interest in learning. Whether the teacher's teaching content is attractive and vivid; whether the teaching objectives are suitable for the developmental characteristics of students; whether the teaching strategies, methods are interesting and varied; whether the evaluation is scientific and effective, etc. will affect students' interest<sup>[5]</sup>.

##### **3.1.2. Peer factors**

The influence of elementary school students' peers on the learning process cannot be overlooked. It has been found that positive peer relationships can enhance students' interest in learning. When students interact and cooperate with their peers during learning, the activities become more interactive and participatory, leading to a greater sense of enjoyment and increased motivation to learn. Furthermore, good peer interaction stimulates learning motivation, encourages knowledge exploration and sharing, and under the influence of positive peers, elementary school students are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards learning, achieve better learning outcomes, and thus experience the joy of learning.

#### **3.2. Family factors**

The family environment and education play a crucial role in shaping elementary school students' interest in learning. Parents' educational philosophies, attitudes towards learning, and methods of engaging with their children, as well as the value they place on education and the support and encouragement they provide, can all directly or indirectly influence their children's enthusiasm for learning. For instance, when parents frequently join their children in studying and collaboratively addressing problems, it can ignite the children's interest and eagerness to learn. Furthermore, the cultural ambiance within the family and the availability of educational resources are also significant factors that greatly affect students' interest in learning.

### 3.3. Social factors

Social culture, social values, and the social environment also influence elementary school students' interest in learning. For instance, the societal emphasis on particular subjects or fields can affect students' interest in these areas. Moreover, information channels like social media and the Internet may impact elementary school students' interests, necessitating appropriate guidance and supervision from parents and teachers.

### 3.4. Individual factors

Students' prior knowledge or students' experience level affects students' interest in learning and is more closely related to individual interest<sup>[6]</sup>. The richer the students' prior knowledge, the higher their self-efficacy in being sure of their ability to accomplish this task, and the more full their self-confidence will be. During the learning process, the more adequate the background knowledge, the easier it will be to solve the problem, and the more positive feedback they will get, which will motivate them to put more efforts in this field, forming a virtuous circle. Students' motivation will also affect their interest in learning, and the learning experience will be different whether the goal is to improve performance or to master knowledge, as the latter is more likely to feel the joy and satisfaction of gaining knowledge in learning, and gradually form a stable individual interest<sup>[7]</sup>. Research also suggests that students' personality traits can also influence interest in learning. For example, people without perseverance have difficulty in maintaining long-lasting interest, while hardy people are able to regulate their interest level by taking pleasure in learning.

## 4. Strategies for promoting elementary school students' interest in learning

### 4.1. Creating diversified learning situations and interesting teaching contents

Teachers can create engaging learning environments to pique students' interest in education. For instance, in mathematics, incorporating real-world examples can help students appreciate the practical applications of mathematical concepts. In language studies, storytelling and role-playing can enhance students' comprehension and emotional connection to the text. Moreover, the relevance and appeal of the curriculum content are directly linked to students' motivation to learn. Educators should tailor and adapt the curriculum to align with the interests and life experiences of elementary school students, striving to make the content relatable to their everyday lives. Gao Hongxia, for example, argued that students' enthusiasm for mathematics can be boosted by promoting its practicality, thereby enriching their life experiences with the subject<sup>[8]</sup>. Guo Yanfei believes that fostering a love for reading involves encouraging students and providing a variety of reading materials to stimulate language learning<sup>[9]</sup>. Zhao Ling suggests that selecting English illustrated books based on a thorough understanding of students' learning contexts, abilities, and needs can improve their interest in English<sup>[10]</sup>.

### 4.2. Adopting diversified teaching methods

Teachers should employ a variety of teaching methods tailored to students' interests. For instance, incorporating games, experiments, and multimedia can make the learning process more engaging and vivid, thereby stimulating students' interest in learning. Liu Na posits that teachers should offer timely praise and encouragement, and introduce a competitive element in the classroom to further motivate students<sup>[11]</sup>. Utilizing the LeTeachLearn platform, the interest in mathematics can be bolstered through the use of multimedia, the creation of learning scenarios,

positive reinforcement, and the assignment of engaging homework. Fostering a positive teacher-student relationship not only increases students' enthusiasm for learning but also enhances their self-confidence and sense of belonging<sup>[12]</sup>. Teachers can actively engage with students through group discussions, classroom Q&A sessions, and individual counseling. Moreover, teachers should be attentive to students' emotional shifts, providing encouragement and support when necessary to help them achieve a sense of accomplishment in their studies.

#### **4.3. Attention to individual differences and encouragement of independent learning**

Each student has unique learning interests and styles. Teachers should recognize these individual differences and tailor their instruction to each student's abilities. For those with diverse interests, guidance can be provided to foster development across multiple areas; for those with a singular focus, opportunities can be offered to broaden their horizons and discover additional fun in learning. Assisting students in actively comprehending and uncovering their own interests and capabilities, and progressively extending the breadth of their learning from these personal starting points, can enhance their enthusiasm for learning and their active engagement in the process.

#### **4.4. Establish a good teacher-student relationship and create a good learning atmosphere**

Teachers should establish a positive teacher-student relationship, showing care for students' academic and personal lives, and offering them encouragement and support. When students sense the teachers' care and trust, they tend to engage more actively in learning activities, thereby enhancing their interest in education. Fostering an environment conducive to independent learning and promoting self-directed exploration is a key strategy for boosting interest in learning. By setting learning objectives, providing choices, and creating opportunities for independent inquiry, teachers can stimulate students' intrinsic motivation. Li Li emphasized that the act of questioning holds more value than answering questions, thus it is essential to enhance the teaching of inquiry skills in the classroom and encourage students to ask questions boldly, enabling them to experience the joy of learning<sup>[13]</sup>. Xu Guilan believes that students should be encouraged to express their opinions freely in the classroom, and teachers should respond appropriately to foster independent thinking, allowing students to ignite the spark of wisdom in a relaxed and engaging atmosphere of discussion<sup>[14]</sup>. When students enter a classroom with an excellent atmosphere, they are subtly influenced by the positive environment and the enthusiastic and proactive learning attitudes of their peers, which in turn increases their interest in learning.

#### **4.5. Collaboration between families and schools**

Families and schools should strengthen their cooperation, and the joint cultivation of elementary school students' interest in learning is crucial for enhancing their academic engagement. Parents should actively participate in their children's learning process and maintain open communication with teachers regarding their children's progress at school. In turn, teachers should maintain close contact with parents, regularly discussing students' academic achievements and shifts in their interests, and encouraging parents to actively engage in their children's education. He Qiaoyun believes that it is essential to reinforce the tripartite collaboration among schools, families, and society to foster a conducive learning environment<sup>[15]</sup>.

### **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, elementary school students' interest in learning is a crucial factor influencing their

academic performance and ongoing development. A review of pertinent literature reveals that learning interest is not only linked to students' motivation, knowledge internalization, and future learning attitudes but is also shaped by a multitude of factors, including school, family, and individual influences. The interest of elementary school students in learning is characterized by its instability, intuitiveness, and emotional aspects, and is influenced by various factors such as family, school, society, and individual differences. To effectively cultivate elementary students' interest, schools, teachers, and parents should create diverse learning environments, develop engaging teaching content, employ a variety of teaching methods, pay attention to students' individual differences, encourage independent learning, foster positive teacher-student relationships, cultivate a supportive learning atmosphere, and enhance the collaborative efforts between families and schools. By implementing these strategies, the interest of elementary school students in learning can be stimulated, their learning outcomes can be enhanced, and a robust foundation for their future development can be established.

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