

The Manifestation and Implications of Academic Entitlement Among University Students in Henan Province, China

ABSTRACT

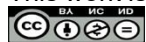
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Academic entitlement refers to a student's subjective belief that they are deserving of academic success even without personal effort or achievement. This phenomenon has been increasingly discussed in higher education literature, with researchers noting a growing trend of entitled attitudes and demanding behaviors among university students in Europe and America across various domains. However, research on academic entitlement within the Chinese student population is limited. Consequently, this study investigates the current state of academic entitlement among university students in Henan Province within the Chinese cultural context and discusses its implications for future research. Utilizing a quantitative research method, the study sampled 886 university students from Henan Province, China, for analysis. The results showed that the academic entitlement level of college students, represented by those from Henan Province, was at a moderately low level, with only 33.4% of students scoring more than 3 points on the academic entitlement scale, indicating that academic entitlement may not be a common phenomenon among college students in Henan Province. Additionally, the study showed that, apart from fourth-year students, whose academic entitlement scores were significantly lower than those of other grade levels, no significant differences in academic entitlement were observed across other demographic variables (gender, number of children, birth order, academic discipline). These findings contrast with those from European and American studies, suggesting that academic entitlement may be associated with cultural context. This study offers three implications for future research (see Discussion): longitudinal designs to examine temporal changes, qualitative or case study methods to explore typical manifestations, and expanded sampling to test generalizability.

Keywords: Academic Entitlement, University Students, Chinese Cultural Context, Henan Province.

1. Introduction

Academic Entitlement (AE) reflects a diminished sense of personal responsibility in academic tasks, a belief that one deserves rewards regardless of effort, and irrational expectations for unearned accommodations or grades (Carollo, 2020; Yu & Li, 2020). It is generally conceptualized as a set of beliefs and behaviors with negative connotations. Since its inception, the concept of AE has garnered sustained academic attention. As early as 2008, Greenberger et al. (2008) noted that the widespread sense of entitlement had attracted significant attention from both the media and researchers. In recent years, AE has become a topic of considerable debate within academia (Knepp & Knepp, 2022).

1.1 The Universality of Academic Entitlement

Currently, academic entitlement is regarded by university educators and administrators as a major concern within higher education. Both researchers and practitioners have observed a growing trend among college students characterized by an increased sense of entitlement and demanding attitudes, a phenomenon noted across various domains of educational research (Halat et al., 2024). This perspective has been substantiated by a considerable body of empirical evidence.

A study by Canadian scholar Huang (2017) found that 80% of participants endorsed items on an entitlement scale. Finney and Finney (2010) reported that 58% of individuals aged 18–29 believed they were entitled to privileges. Since extra credit is often a significant factor in achieving higher grades, the expectation of such opportunities has become a typical manifestation of AE. Hassel and Lourey (2005) found that 62% of students believed it was the instructor's responsibility to offer extra credit. Similarly, Schaefer et al. (2013) observed that more than half (55%) of university students indicated that instructors should provide extra credit assignments to help students improve their grades. Zare (2022) further confirmed that nearly all instructors had been asked by students to provide extra credit. These data illustrate that AE is a highly prevalent phenomenon among university students.

1.2 The Negative Effects of Academic Entitlement

Academic Entitlement exerts multiple negative effects, primarily manifested in four aspects:

First, AE adversely impacts students' academic performance. Kurtyilmaz (2019) identified AE as one of the most critical factors affecting student achievement, noting a strong correlation between AE and poor academic outcomes. Students with high levels of AE are more prone to class absenteeism, using smartphones during lectures, and showing disrespect toward peers and instructors (Lippmann et al., 2009; Mellor, 2011). They are also more likely to exhibit hostile, controlling, and aggressive behaviors—including challenging peer relationships, intentional harm, greed, and overt aggression (Abdellatif, 2022). Furthermore, AE serves as a significant predictor of academic misconduct, including plagiarism, cheating, and academic fraud (Stiles et al., 2018; Chapin, 2018; Vallade & Martin, 2014). These behaviors are bound to lead to poor academic performance among students.

Second, AE impairs students' psychological well-being. As a maladaptive belief and behavioral tendency, AE inevitably affects mental health and may contribute to the development of pathological traits (Boswell, 2012). It is well established that low self-esteem is associated with

various psychological issues. Greenberger et al. (2008) found that students with higher AE tend to have lower self-esteem. Individuals with low self-esteem are more susceptible to negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness.

Third, AE negatively influences students' subjective experiences and interpersonal relationships. Students with high AE often believe they are entitled to make excessive demands of instructors and administrators. When these expectations are not met, they frequently experience frustration, dissatisfaction, anger, or hostility. Moreover, due to a lack of regard for how their actions affect others, highly entitled students are more likely to attempt to control others to satisfy their own needs or vent dissatisfaction through complaints and confrontations (Yu & Li, 2020). As a result, they often experience poor interpersonal relationships.

Fourth, AE exacerbates inequity in the academic environment. Students with high AE typically perform poorly academically yet believe they deserve high grades. They may negotiate with instructors to obtain undeserved scores, which inevitably creates an unfair academic environment, particularly disadvantaging diligent and sincere students. Additionally, AE contributes to grade inflation. Chowdhury (2018) argued that grade inflation has become a widespread phenomenon in universities and colleges globally, with nearly all higher education institutions relying on student evaluations for faculty assessment. Consequently, some students engage in transactional behaviors such as bargaining for higher grades in exchange for positive course evaluations (Gruhlke, 2018).

Given the increasing concern surrounding academic entitlement in higher education, the present study aims to investigate AE among Chinese university students. This research addresses two questions:

First, what is the level of AE among university students in Henan Province?

Second, are there differences in AE based on gender, grade, number of children, birth order, or academic discipline? Given China's one-child policy, which has been in effect for decades, a considerable proportion of current university students are only children. This unique demographic context makes family size (i.e., number of children) a potentially relevant variable for understanding academic entitlement in the Chinese setting, in addition to conventional variables such as gender and grade level. Beyond these empirical questions, the study also seeks to interpret the findings within the Chinese cultural context, with particular attention to how cultural norms and educational practices may shape the manifestation of academic entitlement.

This study makes several contributions to the existing literature on Academic Entitlement. First, it provides evidence from a large mainland Chinese sample drawn from Henan Province, a region that is demographically representative yet underexplored in prior AE research. Second, it replicates and extends the psychometric validation of the Academic Entitlement Questionnaire (AEQ) in the Chinese context, building upon the work of Hu et al. (2021). Third, it examines demographic correlates of AE—such as grade level, birth order, and only-child status—that have received limited attention in mainland samples. Collectively, these contributions offer a more contextually grounded understanding of AE and help clarify whether previously observed patterns generalize beyond Western and small-scale Asian samples.

2. Literature Review

Research on Academic Entitlement has predominantly been conducted in European and American countries. A review of the literature using "academic entitlement" as a keyword reveals that the majority of articles draw their samples from these regions. Due to the relatively mature higher education systems and pronounced student rights consciousness in Western societies, AE has attracted academic attention there at an earlier stage. This has led to the widespread yet unsubstantiated assumption that AE is a common and universal phenomenon, even though most supporting evidence comes from students in American institutions (Blincoe & Garris, 2017). Blincoe and Garris (2017) regard this as a noteworthy issue in the existing literature. In reality, there remains a scarcity of studies exploring AE in non-Western contexts. This does not imply that AE is absent among university students in these regions; rather, it highlights the need for more empirical research to verify its prevalence and manifestations. Many researchers agree that AE is not exclusive to individualistic Western cultures but should be regarded as a shared concern for educators in both Eastern and Western contexts (Huang & Kuo, 2020; Blincoe & Garris, 2017).

Due to differences in socialization processes and value systems, the manifestations of AE may vary significantly across cultures. In Western individualistic cultures, AE often takes the form of externalizing responsibility, asserting one's rights, and directly challenging institutional rules (Rao & Kay, 2026). In contrast, within the Chinese collectivist society rooted in Confucian culture, where emphasis is placed on diligent study, respect for authority, and self-discipline (Lu et al., 2023), students are less likely to openly question their instructors or explicitly externalize responsibility. Hong et al. (2016) found that individualism was significantly associated with AE, whereas collectivism showed no significant correlation with AE. Similarly, Ellis et al. (2021) suggested that while AE is prevalent among Asian students, it tends to manifest in more implicit ways. Therefore, in the context of mainland China, the dimensions of AE may exhibit different patterns of intensity and mechanisms of action compared to those observed in Western settings. Based on this cultural perspective, this study aims to explore the occurrence of AE among Chinese university students, represented by those from Henan Province, within Chinese cultural context.

First, a number of studies confirm the cross-cultural relevance of AE research. Hong et al. (2012) investigated the relationship between relevant variables and AE among students from eight universities in Taiwan, confirming the presence of AE among university students in the region. Gwinner et al. (2021) surveyed business students in Taiwan and found that AE was not only prevalent but also manifested at relatively high levels. Ellis et al. (2021), in two consecutive studies, found a small yet statistically significant increase in AE among Asian students compared to their White counterparts. Furthermore, research in Turkey has explored the applicability of the Academic Entitlement Questionnaire (AEQ), developed by Kopp et al., within Turkish culture (Kurtyilmaz, 2019). Scholars in countries and regions such as Saudi Arabia have also conducted studies on the relationship between AE and professional perception (Halat et al., 2024) as well as between AE and moral intelligence (Al-Adamat et al., 2024). These studies collectively demonstrate both the feasibility and necessity of cross-cultural research on AE.

Furthermore, Chinese university students also exhibit many behaviors associated with AE. Disruptive classroom conduct, disrespect towards instructors, and cheating have been empirically linked to AE, and such behaviors are relatively widespread among students in China. Wu (2019) found that university instructors in China have reported an increase in disruptive classroom behavior in recent years, noting a lack of self-discipline among students. Moreover, the widespread implementation of “student evaluations of teaching” in many Chinese institutions has led to a phenomenon where instructors inflate grades to secure higher student ratings. This “implicit collusion” between students and instructors contributes to a decline in teaching quality (Lu & Jian, 2021) and may also foster increased AE among students. Additionally, academic cheating is not uncommon in Chinese higher education. A study by Lin and Pu (2018) surveying four universities in China revealed that 12.2% of students admitted to having engaged in cheating on exams. These behaviors have all been empirically linked to AE.

Finally, research focusing on mainland Chinese university students remains insufficient. Hu et al. (2021) adapted the Academic Entitlement Questionnaire (AEQ), originally developed by Kopp et al., into Chinese and examined its reliability and validity, thereby establishing a foundational tool for AE research in China. In the same year, Lu and Jian (2021) explored the influence of student background, course learning experience, and academic self-efficacy on AE. Shafait and Sahibzada (2024) collected data from higher education institutions in Xi’an, Sichuan, and Hangzhou, revealing a positive and significant direct relationship between the Dark Triad (DT) personality traits and AE. Additionally, several studies have investigated AE among nursing students. One research team focused on the impact of parental overprotection on AE in nursing students, finding significant correlations among all variables and identifying external locus of control and psychological entitlement as sequential mediators between parental overprotection and academic entitlement (Peng et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2024). Sang et al. (2023) examined the status and influencing factors of AE among undergraduate nursing students, indicating that AE levels were relatively high, with career choice autonomy, family affection index, and learning self-efficacy serving as significant influencing factors. Zhou (2023) compared AE between undergraduate and diploma nursing students, finding that diploma students exhibited higher levels of AE than undergraduate students ($p < 0.05$). Overall, there is still a scarcity of studies targeting students in general universities and colleges, underscoring the necessity for further research on AE in the Chinese context.

The present study adopts a theoretically informed yet non-causal framework to contextualize academic entitlement and its variation across student groups. Drawing on Social Learning Theory, AE can be understood as a belief system developed through repeated social interactions, observational learning, and reinforcement processes (Bandura, 1977). In academic settings, students may internalize entitlement-related beliefs when they observe that outcomes such as grades or academic accommodations are not consistently contingent upon effort, but can instead be influenced through negotiation, institutional practices, or external support.

At the same time, ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2000) suggests that individual differences in such beliefs are shaped by variations in developmental contexts. Demographic characteristics—including gender, grade level, birth order, and only-child status—can be viewed as proxies for differences in socialization experiences, family expectations, and educational environments. These contextual variations may lead to differential exposure to reinforcement patterns and expectations, thereby contributing to variability in AE. Taken

together, these perspectives provide a conceptual foundation for examining not only the overall level of AE but also its distribution across demographic groups.

3. Methodology

The main purpose of this study is to explore the AE level and performance of Chinese college students from Henan Province, and to examine the impact of demographic variables (gender, grade, number of children, birth order, academic discipline) on AE. The participants in this study were full-time undergraduate students, and the study has been approved by the ethics review department of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), approval number JKEUPM-2024-582.

3.1. Research Tools

This study employed a quantitative research design and utilized the revised Chinese version of the Academic Entitlement Questionnaire (AEQ) developed by Hu et al. (2021). The original AEQ, developed by Kopp et al. (2011), conceptualizes academic entitlement as a unidimensional construct reflecting generalized entitlement beliefs. Although some studies have proposed multidimensional conceptualizations of AE, the AEQ remains one of the most widely used instruments due to its parsimony and empirical support (Kinne et al., 2022).

Hu et al. (2021) translated, back-translated, and culturally adapted the AEQ for use in the Chinese context. The resulting scale retained the original unidimensional structure, consisting of eight items. Their validation study, based on a sample of 1,102 university students in Guizhou Province, demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$) and satisfactory test-retest reliability ($r = 0.70$, $p < .01$). In addition, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicated a good model fit (CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.90, IFI = 0.93, GFI = 0.97, NFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.04), supporting the structural validity of the instrument.

However, given ongoing debates regarding the dimensionality of AE and the potential influence of cultural context on its measurement, further validation across different Mainland Chinese samples is warranted. Therefore, the present study adopts the Chinese AEQ and conducts CFA to re-examine its factor structure in a larger and regionally distinct sample from Henan Province. The detailed items of the scale can be found in Appendix 1 (Chinese and English).

3.2. Sampling Methods and Sample Size

This study employed a stratified cluster sampling method to conduct an on-site questionnaire survey among full-time four-year undergraduate students at a university in Xinxiang City, Henan Province, China. Data collection was carried out during the regular teaching period in November and December 2024.

First, one major from the liberal arts and one major from the sciences were randomly selected from the university. After obtaining permission from department administrators and faculty members, questionnaires were administered on site during breaks between classes. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation and completed the survey voluntarily.

A total of 950 questionnaires were distributed, of which 907 were returned, yielding a response rate of 95.47%. After data screening, 21 questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete responses or identical and systematically patterned answers across items. The final valid sample consisted of 886 participants, corresponding to an effective rate of 97.68%.

To justify the adequacy of the sample size, an a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1. A small effect size ($f = 0.15$) was assumed based on the conventional benchmarks proposed by Jacob Cohen (1988), which are widely adopted in social and educational research. With an alpha level of .05 and a desired statistical power of .80 for one-way ANOVA, the required minimum sample size was 344. It was substantially smaller than the actual sample size ($N = 886$), indicating that the present study was sufficiently powered to detect small effects. Notably, the observed effect size for grade differences ($\eta^2 = 0.02$; $f \approx 0.14$) closely aligns with the assumed small effect size, further supporting the adequacy of the sample size.

3.3. Test of Validity and Reliability

To examine whether common method variance might influence the results, an exploratory factor analysis was performed in which all measurement items were entered simultaneously. The analysis yielded two factors with eigenvalues greater than one. Importantly, the first unrotated factor explained 37.65% of the total variance, which did not exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 40% (Fuller et al., 2016). These results indicate that common method bias is unlikely to substantially affect the validity of the present findings.

The internal consistency of the AEQ was satisfactory, as reflected by a Cronbach’s α value of 0.74. To further investigate the construct validity of the scale, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) index was 0.82, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity reached statistical significance, confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis.

Table 1. Communalities of Items from the Exploratory Factor Analysis

	Initial	Extraction
AE1	0.23	0.25
AE2	0.01	0.003
AE3	0.21	0.22
AE4	0.21	0.23
AE5	0.36	0.43
AE6	0.35	0.38
AE7	0.31	0.37
AE8	0.40	0.51

Note. Initial communalities represent the proportion of variance explained by all factors prior to extraction. Extracted communalities represent the proportion of variance explained by the retained factor(s).

As shown in Table 1, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using principal axis factoring (PAF) with a single-factor solution specified, consistent with the theoretical assumption of a unidimensional AE construct. The results indicated that communalities varied

across items. Notably, AE2 exhibited an extremely low communality (0.003), suggesting that it shared minimal variance with the underlying factor. Consistent with this, communalities were low for several items: AE1 (0.25), AE2 (0.003), AE3 (0.22), AE4 (0.23). While the original AEQ has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties in Western samples (Kopp et al., 2011), the present results suggest that several items—particularly AE2 (“Professors should only lecture on material covered in the textbook and assigned readings”)—may function poorly as indicators of academic entitlement among university students in mainland China. This could reflect genuine cultural non-equivalence of certain entitlement-related beliefs. In the Chinese educational context, where lectures often go beyond textbooks and students are generally expected to follow the instructor’s lead, endorsing or rejecting this item may carry different meanings than in Western settings. Thus, the low variance explained and low communalities may not merely reflect sampling variation but rather point to the need for cultural adaptation or revision of the AEQ for use in Chinese student populations. Future research should consider developing or validating context-specific measures of academic entitlement that better capture its manifestations in non-Western educational environments.

To further evaluate the measurement structure, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS 26.0. Two models were specified and compared: the original 8-item model and a revised 7-item model that excluded AE2. As shown in Appendix 2, the 8-item model yielded mixed fit indices (CFI = .91, TLI = .88, RMSEA = .08), although the χ^2/df ratio was high (6.93). The 7-item model did not improve model fit; instead, fit indices deteriorated slightly (CFI = .91, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .10, χ^2/df = 9.65). The changes in fit indices (ΔCFI = -.002; $\Delta RMSEA$ = +.017) indicate that removing AE2 did not meaningfully enhance model fit. SRMR was available for the 7-item model (.06) but was not reported for the 8-item model in the AMOS output. The absence of SRMR for the 8-item model is due to software output limitations rather than analytical omission. Therefore, model evaluation primarily relied on other widely recommended fit indices, including CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and χ^2/df . In addition, modification indices were examined to identify potential areas for model improvement; however, no post hoc modifications were implemented due to the lack of clear theoretical justification.

Table 2. Standardized Factor Loadings from Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Item	Loading (Std.)	S.E.	C.R.	p
AE1	0.48	—	—	—
AE2	0.06	0.05	1.51	0.13
AE3	0.44	0.08	9.80	<.001
AE4	0.46	0.09	10.01	<.001
AE5	0.66	0.10	11.72	<.001
AE6	0.64	0.09	11.42	<.001
AE7	0.62	0.11	11.55	<.001
AE8	0.72	0.10	12.53	<.001

Note. Values represent standardized factor loadings obtained from confirmatory factor analysis.

As reported in Table 2, the standardized factor loading of AE2 was extremely low (.06), whereas the remaining items showed moderate to strong loadings (.44–.72). This result is consistent with the EFA findings and further indicates that AE2 contributes minimally to the latent construct. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were

calculated to assess reliability and convergent validity. For the 8-item model, CR was 0.75, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, whereas AVE was 0.30, below the suggested criterion of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). After removing AE2, CR increased slightly to 0.78, while AVE improved to 0.34. Although the AVE values were below the recommended threshold of 0.50, this result can be attributed to the relatively moderate factor loadings of several items and the presence of an item (AE2) with extremely low loading. In constructs reflecting broad psychological attitudes, it is not uncommon for AVE to fall below the suggested criterion, particularly when multiple indicators capture diverse aspects of the construct.

Moreover, prior research has suggested that adequate composite reliability may compensate for lower AVE values (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Given that CR values exceeded the recommended threshold and all retained items demonstrated significant factor loadings, the convergent validity of the construct below conventional thresholds, but CR was adequate. This pattern is commonly observed in studies involving attitudinal or perceptual constructs. Although AE2 demonstrated extremely low communality (0.003) and a near-zero factor loading (0.06), suggesting that this item does not capture academic entitlement as understood in the Chinese cultural context, its removal did not improve overall model fit. Nevertheless, on conceptual grounds—given that the belief “professors should only lecture on the textbook” is rarely endorsed or meaningfully interpretable in Chinese educational settings where lectures routinely go beyond prescribed materials—AE2 was excluded from subsequent analyses. The resulting 7-item scale showed improved content relevance for the present sample, though model fit remained suboptimal ($\chi^2/df = 9.65$; RMSEA = 0.10). These results highlight the need for cultural adaptation of the AEQ rather than indicating a true absence of academic entitlement among Chinese students.

4. Findings and Discussion

Data processing and statistical analysis were performed using the SPSS 29.0 software package. To address the three research objectives, the means and standard deviations of the seven items on the AEQ were compared. Independent-samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were conducted to examine the effects of five demographic variables on AE. Basic information regarding the demographic variables is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Demographic Factors of the Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	383	43.2
	Female	503	56.8
Grade	Freshman	396	44.7
	Sophomore	247	27.9
	Junior	115	13.0
	Senior	128	14.2
Number of children	Only children	88	9.9
	Non-only children	798	90.1
Birth order	First	435	49.1
	Second	377	42.6
	Third	61	6.9
	Fourth	13	1.5

Academic discipline	Liberal Arts	325	36.7
	Sciences	561	63.3

Note. N = 886.

It should be specifically noted that in this study, only 88 out of the surveyed college students were from single-child families, accounting for 9.9%. The non-only-child college students numbered 798, accounting for 90.1%. This indicates that among the sample population of this study, non-only-child college students are in the majority. Furthermore, in terms of birth order, 61 college students ranked third, accounting for 6.9%, while only 13 college students ranked fourth in their families, accounting for 1.5%. This indicates that the majority of Chinese families have 1 or 2 children.

4.1. Average Levels and Performance of Academic Entitlement

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics, including the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation, for each item.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for All Items

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
AE1	886	1.00	5.00	3.05	1.13
AE3	886	1.00	5.00	3.02	1.02
AE4	886	1.00	5.00	3.07	1.12
AE5	886	1.00	5.00	2.21	0.97
AE6	886	1.00	5.00	2.18	0.88
AE7	886	1.00	5.00	2.72	1.12
AE8	886	1.00	5.00	2.21	0.93
AE	886	1.00	5.00	2.64	0.67

As shown in Table 4, the overall level of academic entitlement among Chinese university students is moderately low, with a mean score of 2.64 (SD = 0.67). AE1 (“If I don’t do well on a test, the professor should make tests easier or curve the grades”), AE3 (“If I am struggling in a class, the professor should approach me and offer to help”), and AE4 (“It is the professor’s responsibility to make it easy for me to succeed”) (Kopp et al., 2011) received scores slightly above 3. AE1 corresponds to the “entitlement to knowledge” dimension, while AE 3 and AE4 reflect “externalization of responsibility”(Kopp et al., 2011). These survey results indicate that students may believe they have the right to acquire knowledge, and that professors should be held accountable for their academic performance; however, the scores for these three items were only slightly above 3 points, and were still far from reaching the 4 points.

The remaining four items all scored below 3. Among them,AE5 and AE6, which represent “external attribution of learning problems”(Kopp et al., 2011) also received relatively low scores, suggesting that Chinese students are not inclined to attribute all learning difficulties to external factors. AE7 (“No matter the reason for my absence, I should be allowed to make up the exam”) reflects “student control over course policies” (Kopp et al., 2011)and AE8 (“Because I paid tuition, I deserve a passing grade”) corresponds to “entitled expectations of

outcomes”(Kopp et al., 2011). These items received low scores, indicating that Chinese college students may not fully agree with most of the items on the AEQ. One possible explanation for the relatively lower scores on externalisation-related items is the influence of family education norms within the Chinese cultural context. Chinese families typically emphasise effort, responsibility, and respect for authority in educational settings. As a result, students may be less likely to attribute academic outcomes to external factors such as teachers or institutions, and instead show a stronger tendency toward internal responsibility. This pattern is consistent with prior studies highlighting the role of collectivist values and effort-based beliefs in shaping students’ academic attitudes. In order to better understand how many college students scored 3 points or higher, this study conducted a statistical analysis of the distribution of scores within different score ranges and the corresponding percentages. The analysis results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Distribution and Percentages of Academic Entitlement Scores

Scores Range	n	Percent(%)	Cumulative Percent(%)
5.00	4	0.50	0.50
4.00–4.99	22	2.40	2.90
3.00–3.99	270	30.50	33.40
2.00–2.99	475	53.60	87.00
1.00–1.99	115	13.00	100.00

Note. Scores represent the mean academic entitlement score (range = 1–5). N = 886

Descriptive analysis indicated that 296 students (33.4%) obtained a mean AE score of 3.0 or above, suggesting that approximately one-third of the sample demonstrated moderate to relatively high levels of academic entitlement. To examine whether the prevalence of AE was associated with demographic characteristics, a binary logistic regression analysis was conducted. AE was dichotomized as ≥ 3.0 versus < 3.0 , with gender, grade, and number of children entered simultaneously into the model. The results indicated that none of these variables significantly predicted the likelihood of scoring 3.0 or above (all $ps > .05$), suggesting that AE prevalence was not strongly associated with these demographic factors.

Table 6. Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Academic Entitlement (≥ 3.0 vs. < 3.0)

	B	S.E.	Wald	p	OR	95% C.I. for OR
Gender(1)	-0.22	0.15	2.27	0.13	0.80	[0.60, 1.07]
Grade	-0.09	0.07	1.84	0.18	0.91	[0.79, 1.04]
Number of children(1)	0.02	0.24	0.01	0.93	1.02	[0.64, 1.62]

Note. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; Gender was coded as 1 = male and 2 = female; Number of children was coded as 1 = only child and 2 = non-only-child.

In the present study, academic entitlement was dichotomized using a cut-off point ($AE \geq 3.0$) to facilitate logistic regression analysis. However, it is important to note that dichotomizing continuous variables may lead to a loss of information and reduced statistical power. As noted by MacCallum et al. (2002), the practice of dichotomization can obscure underlying variability and potentially distort relationships among variables. Therefore, to address this limitation, the present study also conducted analyses using the continuous AE variable and performed

sensitivity checks across alternative cut-off points to ensure the robustness of the findings. The specific values are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Multiple Regression Predicting Academic Entitlement

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	3.30	0.40	—	8.27	< .001	[2.52, 4.08]
Gender	-0.10	0.05	-0.09	-2.26	0.02	[-0.19, -0.02]
Age	-0.02	0.02	-0.05	-1.08	0.28	[-0.06, 0.02]
Grade	-0.02	0.03	-0.03	-0.64	0.53	[-0.07, 0.04]
Number of children	0.03	0.07	0.01	0.38	0.71	[-0.11, 0.16]
Discipline	-0.11	0.05	-0.09	-2.37	0.02	[-0.20, -0.02]

The results showed that the overall model was statistically significant, $F(5, 880) = 2.70, p = .02$, although the explained variance was relatively small ($R^2 = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$). Among the predictors, gender ($\beta = -0.09, p = .024$) and academic discipline ($\beta = -0.09, p = .02$) were statistically significant. In contrast, age, grade, and number of children were not significant predictors ($ps > .05$). Overall, demographic variables demonstrated limited explanatory power for academic entitlement.

The findings of this study differ in notable ways from those of research conducted on non-mainland Chinese student populations, which represents an intriguing outcome. Greenberger et al. (2008) found that Asian students showed significantly higher levels of AE than their Caucasian counterparts. Similarly, Gwinner et al. (2021) reported that AE was both prevalent and relatively high among business students in Taiwan. Other cross-ethnic studies have also consistently identified elevated AE among Asian student samples. For instance, two separate studies by Ellis et al. (2021) revealed that Asian students displayed a small but statistically significant increase in AE compared to White students. In contrast, the present study, drawing on data from undergraduate students in Xinxiang City, Henan Province, found that only about one-third of participants demonstrated academic entitlement, with an overall low mean score. These findings suggest that students from this mainland Chinese sample may differ from Asian student populations examined in Western contexts. Cultural background may represent an important contextual factor underlying these differences.

4.2. Differential Analysis of Academic Entitlement in Demographic Variables

This study examined the effects of five demographic variables on academic entitlement. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Differences in Academic Entitlement Across Demographic Variables

	Demographic Variables	M	SD	t/F(df)	p	Effect size	
AE	Gender	male	2.72	0.69	t(884)=1.15	0.25	d=0.08
		female	2.67	0.65			
	Grade	Freshman	2.69	0.68	F(3,882)=4.36	0.005	$\eta^2 = 0.02$
		Sophomore	2.75	0.65			
		Junior	2.78	0.65			
		Senior	2.50	0.67			
	Number of children	Only children	2.67	0.62	t(884)=-0.38	0.71	d=-0.04

	Non-only children	2.69	0.68			
Birth order	First	2.67	0.65	F(3,882)=1.35	0.26	$\eta^2 = 0.005$
	Second	2.71	0.71			
	Third	2.77	0.59			
	Fourth	2.41	0.69			
Academic discipline	Liberal Arts	2.74	0.65	t(884)=1.63	0.14	d=0.11
	Sciences	2.66	0.68			

Note. Independent-samples t tests were conducted for dichotomous variables, and one-way ANOVAs were conducted for variables with more than two categories. Effect sizes are reported as Cohen’s d for t tests and partial eta squared (η^2) for ANOVAs.

First, this study found that gender had no significant effect on academic entitlement. In contrast, studies from other countries have yielded inconsistent results: some indicated that male students exhibited higher levels of AE than females (Greenberger et al., 2008; Ciani et al., 2008; Hartman, 2012), while others found that female students scored significantly higher than male students on AE (Al-Adamat et al., 2024). In any case, the research results indicate that there are significant differences between male and female college students. However, the results of this study indicate that male students scored slightly higher than female students among Chinese university students, but statistical tests revealed that this difference was not significant. Several other studies focusing on Chinese university students also reported no significant gender differences in AE (Lu & Jian, 2021; Shafait & Sahibzada, 2024).

According to the 2022 National Education Development Statistics Bulletin released by the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (2023), among the students of regular undergraduate programs, the proportion of female students is 52.4%; among those of regular vocational colleges (dual degree programs), the proportion of female students is 50.6%. Overall for both undergraduate and vocational education, female students now make up the majority. Liang and Zhou (2023) reported that female students outperform their male counterparts in both academic and non-academic domains. This advantage is consistently observed across different majors and grade levels, and is particularly pronounced among female students in humanities disciplines and those enrolled in non-elite universities. Historically, Chinese traditional culture has valued sons over daughters. However, with the development of society, Chinese female college students have not only shown advantages in the participation in higher education, but also in academic achievements. Therefore, it is understandable that Chinese female college students’ AE scores are lower than male students’, but the difference is not significant.

Second, significant differences in AE were observed across grade levels. Prior to the analysis, Levene’s test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met, $F(3, 882) = 0.15, p = 0.93$. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of grade on AE, $F(3, 882) = 4.36, p = 0.005, \eta^2 = 0.02$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that senior (fourth-year) students reported significantly lower levels of AE than students in the other three grades, whereas no significant differences were found among freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. Existing literature presents two contrasting perspectives regarding the relationship between time and AE: one argues that older students possess a stronger sense of entitlement (Schaefer et al., 2013; Parker, 2017; Lockett et al., 2017), while the other suggests that younger students report higher AE (Huang, 2017). However, inconsistent findings—such as those from Lemke et al. (2017), who conducted two surveys at a liberal arts college and reported discrepant

results regarding gender differences in AE between 2009 and 2017—indicate that the effect of time on AE may be moderated by additional factors.

The lower level of academic entitlement among senior students may also be understood from a developmental perspective. As students approach graduation, they are increasingly exposed to external evaluation systems such as the job market and postgraduate entrance examinations. These experiences may be associated with a more realistic appraisal of their own abilities and reduced expectations of special academic treatment. In this sense, academic entitlement may reflect a dynamic and context-dependent construct rather than a stable individual trait.

Third, the number of children in the family had no significant effect on AE. Stiles et al. (2017) suggested that China's one-child policy made only children the center of their families and the focus of future expectations, leading parents to place higher academic demands on them. This pressure was thought to make only children more self-centered. Based on this, the present study hypothesized that only children in China would exhibit higher levels of AE than non-only children. However, the results showed no significant difference in AE between these two groups. One possible explanation is that in contemporary Chinese culture, children who attend university generally receive substantial family attention and support regardless of the number of siblings, which may diminish the effect of family size on AE. Another reason could be the relatively small sample size of only children ($n=88$) in this study, which may have limited the statistical power to detect existing differences.

Fourth, birth order had no significant impact on AE among university students. This variable was included based on Adler's theory of birth order, which proposes that individuals' personality and abilities differ by birth order, with first-borns often exhibiting greater leadership and competitiveness (Sultan & Malik, 2023). Wray-Lake et al. (2010) found that first-born children had more autonomy than their younger siblings. However, this study did not find birth order to be a significant factor influencing AE. It is possible that AE represents an attitude that stabilizes in early adulthood, rather than being shaped by university environment or short-term experiences.

Fifth, no significant differences in AE were found across academic disciplines. Jakiel (2020), in a study of a military academy, reported that students in science, health sciences, and professional colleges had the lowest AE scores, suggesting that stricter admission standards in these fields may filter out applicants with higher levels of AE. Additionally, Ellis et al. (2021) found that physician assistant students displayed lower AE compared to those in other majors. The discrepancy between these previous findings and the results of this study may be due to the broad categorization of disciplines in this study—only dividing into arts and sciences without further specialization—as well as the fact that the sample was drawn from comprehensive universities where management policies and student requirements are relatively uniform across disciplines, thereby reducing observable differences in AE.

4.3. Discussion

The present study examined the prevalence of academic entitlement and its relationship with demographic variables among Chinese university students. The findings indicate that although academic entitlement is not highly prevalent, a non-negligible proportion of students still exhibit moderate to elevated levels, suggesting the need for continued attention from educators and researchers. Importantly, demographic variables showed limited explanatory power in predicting academic entitlement, with one exception: senior students reported significantly

lower AE than their juniors, suggesting that developmental transitions (e.g., approaching graduation and facing job market pressures) may reduce entitled attitudes. This finding indicates that academic entitlement may be more strongly shaped by psychological and contextual factors rather than basic demographic characteristics. Such an interpretation aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of individual beliefs, motivational processes, and educational environments in shaping students' academic attitudes.

The small amount of explained variance further highlights the complexity of academic entitlement as a construct. It is likely influenced by a combination of cultural, familial, and individual psychological factors, rather than isolated demographic variables. In the Chinese cultural context, where collectivist values and respect for authority are traditionally emphasized, the emergence of academic entitlement may reflect ongoing social and educational transformations. The limited predictive power of demographic variables may also reflect the poor performance of the adapted AEQ in this sample. Several fit indices failed to meet acceptable standards, indicating weak model fit. This suggests that certain AEQ items may not be culturally appropriate for Mainland Chinese university students. Thus, the low academic entitlement scores observed in the Xinxiang sample may be partly due to poor item functioning rather than a true lack of entitlement. This underscores the need for culturally adapted measurement tools. These findings contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence from a large Mainland Chinese sample, extending prior research that has predominantly focused on Western contexts. At the same time, the limited predictive power of demographic variables suggests that future research should focus more on psychological constructs such as academic self-efficacy, personality traits, and parenting styles.

5. Conclusion, Significance and Recommendation

5.1. Conclusion

This study, through an empirical investigation of the current situation of academic entitlement among Chinese college students, has reached the following main conclusions:

Firstly, this study found that the overall academic entitlement of Chinese college students is at a moderately low level, with the average score being lower than the theoretical median. More importantly, only about one-third of the students showed a certain degree of academic entitlement tendency. This finding suggests that academic entitlement may not be a widespread phenomenon among Chinese college students. This is in contrast to many Western studies that view academic entitlement as a common predicament in higher education. The discrepancy suggests that academic entitlement may not represent a universally shared belief across cultures and may be associated with specific cultural, educational, and social contexts.

Secondly, in the analysis of demographic variable differences, this study reveals the unique manifestation of academic entitlement within the Chinese cultural context. Apart from the grade variable, academic entitlement did not show significant differences in terms of gender, the number of children, birth order, and academic discipline. The uniqueness of this result lies in two aspects: Firstly, the absence of gender differences stands in contrast to some Western studies, suggesting that academic socialization in China may be associated with relatively smaller gender differences in entitlement attitudes. It challenges the stereotype repeatedly reported in Western literature that "male students have greater academic entitlement" (Greenberger et al., 2008). Similarly, the lack of effect of family structure variables

may be related to broader cultural emphases on educational investment across all children, rather than differential treatment based on birth order or only-child status. Secondly, the academic entitlement level of senior year students was significantly lower than that of students in other grades. This pattern may be associated with students' increasing awareness of their own abilities and responsibilities as they approach graduation and face the pressures of the job market or postgraduate entrance examinations, which coincides with lower levels of academic entitlement.

Third, these findings carry important implications for understanding AE within the Chinese cultural context. The relatively low prevalence and weak demographic differentiation of AE suggest that this construct should not be uncritically generalized from Western contexts to Chinese higher education. Instead, AE among Chinese students appears to be more situational and developmental rather than a stable or widespread attitudinal problem. From a practical perspective, these results caution against over-pathologizing Chinese college students' academic attitudes and suggest that educational interventions should be targeted toward specific developmental stages, particularly earlier years of university study. More broadly, the study underscores the importance of incorporating cultural context into both the measurement and interpretation of academic entitlement, thereby contributing to a more culturally sensitive understanding of this construct. Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, the findings should be interpreted as associations rather than causal relationships.

5.2. Significance

Based on the above conclusions, this study has both theoretical and practical significance.

5.2.1. Theoretical significance

This study contributes to the cross-cultural understanding of academic entitlement in two main ways:

1. It provides empirical evidence from an Eastern context, suggesting that academic entitlement may not be a universally prevalent phenomenon across cultures.
2. It highlights the importance of incorporating cultural values (e.g., collectivism, respect for teachers and elders) and educational systems (e.g., family and school education) into the theoretical framework of academic entitlement.
3. The study reveals potential cultural non-equivalence of a widely used AE scale (the AEQ) in the Chinese context. This finding calls for caution when directly applying Western-developed instruments to Eastern educational settings and underscores the need for culturally grounded measurement development.

5.2.2. Practical significance

The findings of this study offer several implications for higher education practitioners and administrators:

1. Strengthening academic responsibility education: Universities should continue to emphasize the cultivation of students' academic responsibility rather than treating academic entitlement as a widespread issue.

2. Enhancing awareness and early guidance: Educators should remain attentive to a small group of students who exhibit higher levels of academic entitlement and provide timely guidance.
3. Minimizing negative classroom impacts: Targeted strategies should be implemented to reduce the potential negative effects of academic entitlement on classroom dynamics, teacher–student relationships, and the overall educational environment.

5.3. Recommendation

This study has several limitations, which point to directions for future research.

First, this study adopted a cross-sectional design, which cannot confirm causal relationships behind the observed grade differences. Future research should employ longitudinal tracking designs to reveal the dynamic trajectory of students' academic entitlement from enrolment to graduation and its underlying causes.

Second, this study relied primarily on quantitative questionnaires, lacking in-depth description and analysis of the specific behavioral manifestations of academic entitlement among Chinese students (e.g., how they make requests to instructors). Subsequent research should introduce qualitative interviews or case studies to clarify the unique characteristics of academic entitlement among Chinese college students.

Third, although the sample size of this study was relatively large, all participants were drawn from a single, unnamed university in Xinxiang City, Henan Province—a mid-tier inland city in central China. This university is not among the nation's elite "985" or "211" institutions. Students in Xinxiang may differ substantially from those in coastal megacities (e.g., Shanghai, Guangzhou), elite universities, western interior provinces (e.g., Xinjiang, Gansu), or vocational education contexts. Therefore, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other regions or types of institutions. Future research should expand the sample to include more diverse regions and institutional types to test the replicability of these findings.

Fourth, future research should prioritize the cultural adaptation or revision of the AEQ for Mainland Chinese samples. The poor performance of specific items (e.g., AE2) suggests that some entitlement-related beliefs manifest differently in collectivist, authority-respecting educational cultures. Developing a context-appropriate scale—through qualitative exploration of how Chinese students express academic entitlement—would enable more accurate measurement and cross-cultural comparison.

Fifth, to better understand how academic entitlement manifests in Chinese students' daily academic lives, future research should conduct qualitative follow-up studies. For example, semi-structured interviews or focus groups could explore how students formulate requests to instructors, interpret course policies, and negotiate grades. Such qualitative data would complement the present quantitative findings by capturing the nuanced, context-dependent expressions of academic entitlement that standardized scales may miss. This would also inform the cultural adaptation of measurement tools.

In addition, although Henan Province has relatively low higher-education tuition levels compared to national averages (Henan Provincial People's Government, 2020) and comprehensive financial aid policies are in place, these contextual characteristics reflect only

a subset of China's diverse higher education landscape. Thus, the results are specific to university students in Xinxiang, Henan Province, and should not be generalized to students from other regions or institution types in China.

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Statement on AI-Assisted Tools

AI-assisted tools were used exclusively for translation and language polishing of the authors' original Chinese manuscript. No artificial intelligence tools were involved in the study design, data analysis, or interpretation of the results. The authors take full responsibility for the content of this manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix 1.

Items of the Academic Entitlement Questionnaire

Item	English Version	Chinese Version
1	If I don't do well on a test, the professor should make tests easier or curve the grades.	□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□
2	Professors should only lecture on material covered in the textbook and assigned readings.	□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
3	If I am struggling in a class, the professor should approach me and offer to help.	□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□
4	It is the professor's responsibility to make it easy for me to succeed.	□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
5	If I cannot learn the material for a class from lecture alone, then it is the professor's fault when I fail the test.	□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□□
6	I am a product of my environment. Therefore, if I do poorly in class, it is not my fault.	□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□
7	I should be given the opportunity to make up a test, regardless of the reason for the absence.	□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□
8	Because I pay tuition, I deserve passing grades.	□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Note. The English version of the scale was developed by Kopp et al. (2011), and the Chinese version was adapted by Hu et al. (2021).

Appendix 2.

Comparison of CFA Models Before and After Removing AE2

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	IFI	NFI	SR MR	RM SEA	RMSEA □90% CI□	ΔCFI	$\Delta RMSEA$
8-item model	138.62	20	6.93	.91	.88	.91	.900	—	.08	[.07, .10]	—	—
7-item model (AE2 removed)	135.12	14	9.65	.91	.87	.91	.902	.06	.10	[.08, .11]	-0.02	+0.017