

# Research on the Academic Development Dilemmas and Countermeasures for Economically Disadvantaged College Students in the New Era

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**Abstract:** As China's higher education enters the popularization stage, the student financial aid work in colleges and universities has transformed from "security-oriented" aid to "development-oriented" aid. Against this background, the academic development of economically disadvantaged students has become a hot topic in society. This study aims to deeply explore the academic development dilemmas and multi-dimensional influencing factors faced by economically disadvantaged students in the new era. The research finds that the academic dilemmas of these students are not only reflected in the limited access to learning resources due to economic pressure, but also in comprehensive challenges such as potential differences in psychological capital and insufficient social integration. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen targeted financial aid, promote the comprehensive improvement of poor students' academic abilities and their sustainable personal development, so as to provide theoretical references for colleges and universities to enhance the effectiveness of independent talent training in the new era.

**Keywords:** Colleges and universities; Economically disadvantaged students; Academic development

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## 1. Introduction

At present, the popularization process of higher education in China is accelerating, enabling more children from low-income families to access higher education resources and achieve development through learning. The new era has entrusted higher education with a new mission, requiring colleges and universities to cultivate talents with professional literacy, while balancing educational equity and paying attention to the growth and development of special groups. Although economically

disadvantaged (ED) and non-economically disadvantaged (non-ED) students share the same campus environment, the former are often constrained by their financial situations. Consequently, ED students face more practical obstacles in their academic pursuits and are more prone to academic development dilemmas compared to their non-ED peers. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the current academic development dilemmas and influencing factors of ED students, so as to promote their academic progress and development.

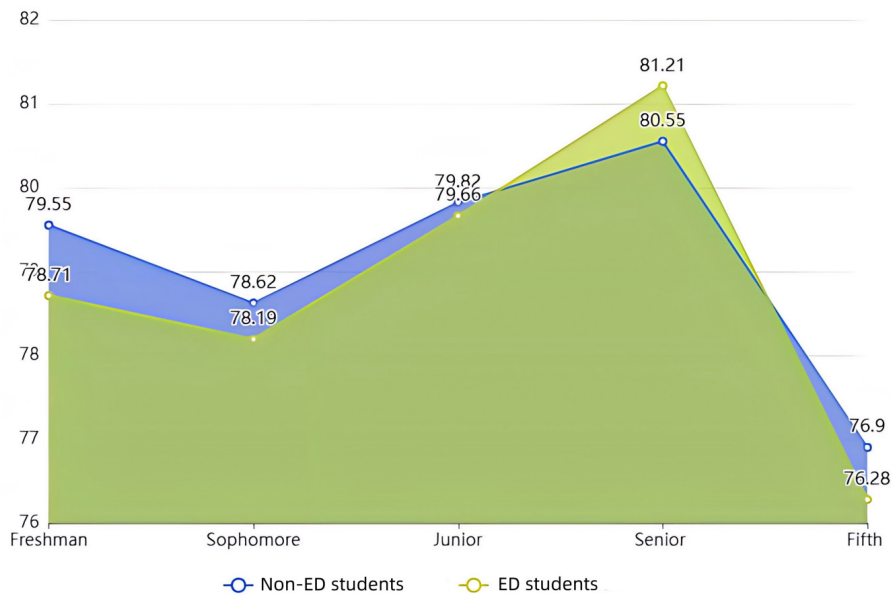
## **2. Core academic development dilemmas of ED students in the new era**

The academic development dilemmas of ED students are not scattered problems in a single link, but systematic issues formed by the superposition of multiple factors throughout the entire university cycle, covering key stages such as enrollment adaptation, core courses, academic stability, and graduation completion, with significant group difference characteristics <sup>[1]</sup>. All relevant academic performance and group comparison data in this paper are statistically derived from the academic data of undergraduate students at Wenzhou Medical University, serving only as a reference for analyzing the academic dilemmas of ED students, and objectively presenting the academic gaps and core pain points between this group and non-ED students. The specific analysis is carried out from four dimensions as follows.

### **2.1. Gap at the Starting Point of Enrollment: Relatively Weak Academic Foundation of ED Students in the Freshman Year**

Upon entering university, ED students face a relative disadvantage at the starting point of their academic journey. This disadvantage is not caused by their personal learning attitudes or abilities, but by the combined effect of their previous growth environment, resource accumulation, and life pressure, which is particularly evident in their academic performance during the initial stage of freshman year <sup>[2]</sup>. According to statistical data (**Figure 1**), the average score of non-ED students in the freshman year is 79.55, while that of extremely ED students is only 78.71, a difference of 0.84 points. Although this gap may seem small, in a 100-point evaluation system, it means that ED students need to make more efforts in every course to catch up with their peers.

Compared with non-ED students, most ED students come from rural areas or ordinary families with relatively weak educational resources <sup>[3]</sup>. The knowledge reserve and learning methods formed in high school are not well connected with the independent and professional teaching model of colleges and universities. When they first enter university, they need to quickly adapt to the new learning rhythm, living environment, and daily expense planning, making it difficult for them to fully engage in their studies immediately. Their overall academic start is relatively slow, with insufficient basic adaptability, so their initial academic performance naturally lags behind that of non-ED students.

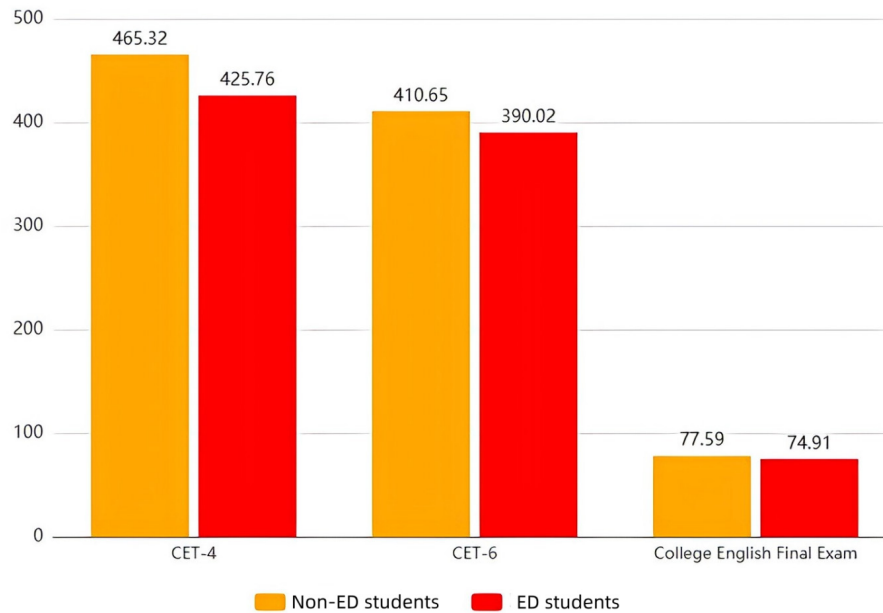


**Figure 1.** Trends in academic performance of ED students and non-ED students across grades; Non-ED = non-economically disadvantaged; ED = economically disadvantaged

## 2.2. Significant backwardness in English scores: Dual Constraints of weak foundation and limited resource access

In terms of the current academic situation of core courses, English is the field where the academic gap between ED students and non-ED students is the most prominent and stable. The English scores of ED students are generally unsatisfactory, and the group gap is much larger than that in other courses, becoming the core shortcoming that drags down their overall academic level and a long-term problem that is difficult to break through in their academic development <sup>[4]</sup>. The scores of CET-4 and CET-6 can most intuitively confirm this gap (**Figure 2**). The average CET-4 score of non-ED students reaches 465, while that of ED students is only about 426, a difference of nearly 40 points; the difference in CET-6 scores is also obvious.

The core reasons for the English score gap among ED students lie in the uneven distribution of resources in basic education and the limited conditions for improvement in university. In terms of the early foundation, most ED students studied in areas with relatively weak educational resources during primary and secondary school. Their foreign language teachers, teaching facilities, and language learning environment are far inferior to those of non-ED students. They started learning foreign languages late with insufficient basic accumulation, resulting in a relatively weak inherent foreign language foundation <sup>[5]</sup>. In terms of improvement during university, preparing for CET-4 and CET-6 and improving foreign language proficiency often require additional investment, such as special training, high-quality review materials, and listening practice equipment. However, due to economic constraints, ED students cannot afford such additional expenses and can only rely on basic classroom teaching for self-study, lacking targeted guidance and high-quality review resources. It is difficult for them to make up for the early foundation gap, and over time, a situation of double backwardness in in-class scores and unified examination results has formed, and the foreign language shortcoming has always been difficult to break through.

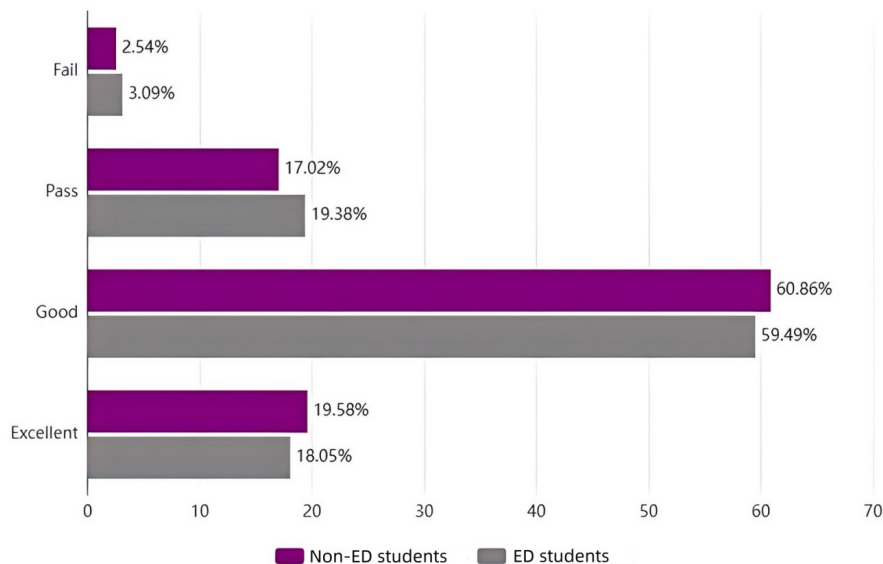


**Figure 2.** Bar chart comparing English scores of ED students and non-ED students; Note: non-ED = non-economically disadvantaged; ED = economically disadvantaged

### 2.3. High Proportion of academically challenged students: More ED students on the edge of passing

In terms of the overall stratification of academic performance (**Figure 3**), the proportion of academically challenged students among ED students is significantly higher, especially the number of students whose scores hover around the passing line with insufficient academic stability is much larger than that of Non-ED students, which has become a prominent hidden danger in the academic development of this group <sup>[6]</sup>. Compared with the distribution characteristics of non-ED students' scores concentrated in the excellent and good ranges, the score structure of ED students is more biased towards the medium and low segments, with a lower overall academic error tolerance rate. A little slack can easily lead to failures, academic warnings, and other problems, making it more difficult to ensure the overall academic quality.

The reason is that the academic performance of ED students largely depends on their personal independent learning ability. A small number of ED students who have developed good learning habits since childhood and have a relatively solid academic foundation can maintain self-discipline after entering university, keep up with the teaching progress, and successfully maintain stable grades. However, some other ED students with weak foundations and insufficient learning initiative, facing the relatively loose management model of university campuses and more external temptations, coupled with the lack of real-time supervision and guidance from their families, find it difficult to take the initiative to concentrate on their studies. Their daily learning lacks planning and execution, and links such as pre-class preview and post-class review are difficult to implement. Over time, the academic gap gradually widens, and their scores always hover around the passing line, making them the main component of academically challenged students among ED students and directly increasing the proportion of students on the edge of passing.



**Figure 3.** Bar chart comparing academic grades of ED students and non-ED students; Note: non-ED = non-economically disadvantaged; ED = economically disadvantaged

#### 2.4. Superimposed pressure in graduation season: Greater decline in scores during internships

Entering the graduation internship stage, affected by the superposition of multiple pressures, the decline in academic performance of ED students is significantly greater than that of non-ED students, and their academic status fluctuates more obviously, becoming a prominent dilemma in the final stage of their academic journey (**Figure 1**). Compared with non-ED students, ED students have to deal with academic-related matters such as professional internship tasks and graduation thesis writing during the graduation season, while also balancing the dual pressures of employment and life. Their energy is seriously distracted, making it difficult to balance internship practice and university studies, leading to a significant decline in final exam scores, with an overall decline much higher than that of non-ED students. Comparing the academic data of each grade, from the peak academic performance in the senior year to the internship stage in the fifth year, the scores of non-ED students decline but the range is small, while the scores of ED students decline more significantly, and the overall score gap is obviously larger than that of non-ED students, highlighting the greater impact of pressure in the graduation season on the academic performance of ED students.

On the one hand, most ED students need to rely on internships to earn income to supplement their living expenses and tuition fees, alleviating the economic pressure on their families. They often invest a lot of time and energy in internship work, and even need to work overtime to complete internship tasks, leaving no time for course review, academic assessments, and thesis polishing, resulting in extremely compressed learning time <sup>[7]</sup>. On the other hand, the employment competition during the graduation season is fierce. ED students lack family resources and connections, and need to spend more energy preparing for job hunting and participating in interviews, which further occupies their academic energy <sup>[8]</sup>. In contrast, non-ED students do not have to worry about internship salaries and economic pressure, and can rely on family support to obtain more stable internship and employment channels. They can reasonably allocate time to balance internships and studies, so the decline in their scores is minimal, and the gap between the two groups further widens at this stage.

### **3. Countermeasures for the academic development of ED students in the new era**

#### **3.1. Individuals: Strengthen individual empowerment and improve self-development capabilities**

As the main body of academic development, ED students should strengthen individual empowerment and improve their learning abilities and psychological qualities to fundamentally get rid of academic dilemmas. To this end, the following points should be achieved: First, strengthen learning guidance and improve learning abilities. ED students should take the initiative to change their learning concepts, form correct learning goals, cultivate the awareness of independent learning, develop good habits of reasonable time planning, and actively consult teachers and classmates to solve learning difficulties. Second, adjust their psychological state and enhance learning self-confidence<sup>[9]</sup>. ED students need to correctly understand their economic situation to get rid of inferiority and sensitivity, build self-confidence, take the initiative to integrate into the collective, and improve their communication and teamwork abilities. At the same time, they should learn to regulate psychological pressure and actively seek psychological help, such as participating in school psychological counseling and communicating with family and classmates to maintain an optimistic attitude. Third, clarify professional cognition and make career plans. ED students should fully understand the training objectives, curriculum system, and employment directions of their majors to cultivate their enthusiasm for the major<sup>[10]</sup>.

#### **3.2. Families: Optimize the family environment and lay a solid foundation for students' development**

As a supporting force for the academic development of ED students, optimizing the family environment can provide support for their development. This requires the following efforts: First, attach importance to education and strengthen family education. Parents should change their educational concepts, enhance their attention to education, recognize the important significance of knowledge changing destiny, strengthen the guidance and supervision of students' academic performance, and encourage students to form good learning qualities. At the same time, parents also need to strengthen their own learning, improve their quality and abilities, and create a good family atmosphere. Second, strengthen communication and pay attention to students' psychological needs<sup>[11]</sup>. Parents should take the initiative to communicate with students, fully understand their academic situation, psychological state, and practical difficulties, and provide them with the necessary help and support. Third, make reasonable plans to alleviate economic pressure. Parents should reasonably plan family expenses and actively seek ways to increase income to alleviate family economic pressure, thereby reducing students' economic burden and allowing them to better focus on their studies<sup>[12]</sup>.

#### **3.3. Colleges and universities: Improve school support and strengthen students' academic development**

As an important place for the academic development of ED students, colleges and universities need to improve the support system, strengthen the academic support mechanism, and provide support for their academic development. First, build a comprehensive education system including economic assistance, academic support, psychological counseling, and comprehensive quality training<sup>[13]</sup>. On the premise of doing a good job in economic assistance, strengthen academic support, and carry out targeted training according to the learning characteristics and difficulties of ED students to help them make up for academic deficiencies.

Colleges and universities should also strengthen mental health education, establish psychological files for ED students, and carry out psychological counseling activities to help them relieve psychological pressure and adjust their psychological state. Second, optimize the education and teaching model to meet the actual needs of ED students<sup>[14]</sup>. Colleges and universities need to strengthen curriculum settings, adjust the difficulty of courses according to the foundation and cognitive level of ED students, increase practical teaching links, and cultivate their practical and innovative abilities. At the same time, innovate teaching methods, adopt heuristic and inquiry-based teaching to stimulate the learning interest of ED students and achieve good learning effects. Third, create a good campus cultural atmosphere, promote the style of diligence and frugality, and help students establish correct values.

### **3.4. Society: Improve graduation guarantee mechanisms and balance the dual pressures of academic studies and employment**

The government should take the lead in building a regional internship and employment service platform, guide and encourage enterprises to fulfill their social responsibilities, develop more stable, standardized, and relatively flexible internship positions for ED students, expand the supply of high-quality internships through policy incentives, school-enterprise cooperation, and other methods, and effectively improve the situation of insufficient internship resources and passive choices for ED students<sup>[15]</sup>. At the same time, allocate special internship subsidies for ED students through financial coordination, and issue living subsidies, transportation subsidies, etc., to eligible students to reduce their economic burden during internships and avoid neglecting the completion of academic studies due to excessive pursuit of economic income.

Education authorities should further improve the relevant policies for college graduation management, encourage colleges and universities to adopt flexible measures such as flexible academic systems, delayed defenses, and online assessments for ED students facing greater internship and employment pressure, providing them with a more relaxed and humanized environment for completing their studies. At the social level, relying on public welfare organizations, industry associations, and other forces, regularly carry out public welfare employment guidance, job search lectures, and vocational training for ED students, providing free support in resume writing, interview skills, employment policies, etc., to help them efficiently improve their employment competitiveness, reduce energy consumption during job hunting, and achieve a smooth transition between academic completion and employment development<sup>[16]</sup>.

## **4. Conclusion**

In summary, in the new era, the academic development of ED students is a key issue in the realization of educational equity, and it is also the result of the interaction between individuals, family environments, school education, and social environments. As the main position for supporting ED students, colleges and universities should adhere to student-centered development, build a more comprehensive support system, and provide support for the academic development of ED students. In the future, multi-party collaboration is still needed to solve the current development dilemmas of ED students and promote their all-around development.

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