

Graduate Statement of Purpose

I wish to pursue a Ph.D. degree in Applied Cognition and Development at the University of Georgia to facilitate my career goal of becoming a researcher in educational psychology. My interest lies in investigating and improving learning and teaching strategies. I believe that my passion for education, my extensive training in Chinese and American research environments, and my deep reflections in educational research make me a strong candidate for your leading Ph.D. program, enabling me to excel as a doctoral student and beyond.

I was first attracted to educational psychology for several reasons. First, the research topics of educational psychology are what I always found myself contemplating during my learning and teaching. When I worked as a tutor, I consciously thought about how I could do a better job explaining the math problems to students, and how biology – which seemed so interesting to me – could be so boring to others. Second, I was fascinated by the research in this field, which not only revealed the answers to my questions, but also provided a comprehensive and rigorous perspective. While reviewing research to determine the reasons behind the silence of Chinese students in the classroom, I discovered that there were scholars who studied from the deficit, surplus, as well as neutral models. I gained a deep understanding of this phenomenon by integrating these diverse perspectives and divided the factors into four categories including the culture, lecturer, student, and environment. Each category also had two to six sub-factors. For example, the lecture ones were interaction strategy, allocations of turns, waiting time, and incentives. These systematical and scientific findings are so valuable in improving educational practices in various settings, making it the third reason why I am interested in this field.

In addition, I experienced firsthand how research findings can guide instructions in actual classrooms. When I worked as a student teacher at Beijing No.7 Middle School, some teachers were struggling and asked me for help because there were students who did not actively participate in class. Guided by research indicating that self-monitoring can promote students' involvement, I made the students record their speaking times in every class and share their feelings about doing this task. The teachers and I felt delighted to see that more students began to participate and were confident to share their opinions after the intervention. From this type of work, I witnessed how scientific research can facilitate learning and even change the entire classroom environment. I also realized that I had found my place in the scientific community: contributing my intelligence to scientific exploration and producing reliable findings, thus being able to generate valuable thoughts to share with the world.

To get involved with pioneering research, I joined a project led by professors from the University of Michigan that inspired my thinking about the future direction of educational psychology. Specifically, it was a project exploring how first impressions and instructional quality impacted students' learning and evaluations with the help of teaching videos and joysticks. Using the joysticks, we collected participants' ratings for teaching quality and learning engagement throughout the lecture. The data revealed some intriguing learning patterns that had not been gained in other experiments. For example, the pattern of the curves reflected what we called information overload. When a graph with lots of information and terms was presented, we saw a negative rating for the level of engagement and instructor. These findings enlightened me in three main aspects. First, I think subtle factors such as information load and content complexity are what educational researchers should work on to improve teaching and learning. Second, it is possible to make great progress in educational research with modern technology. The joystick, eye tracker, and innovative smartphone apps will help us conduct more meaningful research. This reflection also motivated me to assist with a project analyzing mindless reading by tracking participants' eye movements. Plus, with the popularity of online courses as well as the increasing research on multimedia learning, I believe it is time to figure out what we can do to make full use of modern technology and tools helpful for education.

As I delved deeper into educational psychology, I could not wait to initiate my own project. Hence, I conducted research guided by Prof. Ru-de Liu studying a hypothesis generated from my observation of students' learning experiences and previous relevant research experience. This rigorous work guiding significance in practice demonstrated the mediating effects of resilience in the relationship between perfectionism and academic burnout and won second prize in the Students' Academic and Scientific Works competition. Meanwhile, in the lab with Prof. Liu, I was exposed to over 20 projects ranging from cognition abilities such as math flexibility to interventions in case studies. Some were cutting-edge research published in peer review journals, while some were conducted by primary or middle school teachers and closely related to real-world education. I shared my insights, coordinated experiments, and analyzed data in the different studies. This challenging and invigorating work not only advanced my research skills, but also enabled me to see my competence in organizing tasks and solving problems, endowing me with the confidence to succeed in my future graduate studies.

I am particularly interested in the Applied Cognition and Development (ACD) program at the University of Georgia because of its strong emphasis on research. Indeed, the ACD program goals align perfectly with my research interests: investigating learning and teaching processes and putting research findings into practice. Moreover, ACD has highly distinguished scholars who share my interests. Among these preeminent faculty members, I am particularly keen on collaborating with Professor Logan Fiorella, whose research focuses on learning strategies and instructional methods. In line with his research, I am concerned with how to choose effective strategies in the learning process as well as how to present information in ways that help students understand. I hope to develop research in these areas, especially after I joined the research using teaching videos and took some online courses.

Furthermore, one of my research objectives is closely relevant to the studies conducted by Professor XXX. I intend to compare the outcomes of students who learn with generative drawing strategy with those who do not and take two individual factors – spatial ability and spontaneous strategy use frequency – into account. The findings of the research will contribute to generative learning theory and guide the strategy use in instruction. I believe that my work will be further refined as I learn more about the topics. What I do in your program will be very important for me in helping to advance educational development and reform in China once I graduate with my Ph.D. degree. This is my ultimate professional aim. Therefore, I am ready and eager for the opportunity to work with your distinguished faculty in advancing my interests and career in educational psychology.

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