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Institutional Governance of Dingtalk and Students' Management of Their Independent Study in an Economics and Business University in China

Zhao Junhui

Graduate School, Emilio Aguinaldo College
Manila, Philippines

Abstract

In the context of rapidly digitalized higher education in China, enterprise platforms such as Alibaba's Ding Talk have transitioned from emergency remote-teaching tools into core infrastructures for institutional governance. While centralized digital governance aims to standardize workflows and ensure quality assurance, its pervasive datafication—exemplified by automated check-ins, read-receipts, and continuous monitoring—often collides with the pedagogical requirements of student autonomy in self-regulated, independent study. Grounded in the Critical Platform Gaze in Education framework, this study investigates the tension between top-down platform governance and student agency within a Chinese economics and business university.

Employing a descriptive-comparative-correlational design, the study surveyed teacher-respondents from Hebei University of Economics and Business to assess (1) the institutional governance of Ding Talk across six dimensions—administrative approval workflows, organizational communication hierarchy, read-receipt accountability, data-driven decision making, workplace surveillance, and home-school boundaries; and (2) students' management of independent study across five indicators—resource utilization metrics, asynchronous task consistency, proactive peer collaboration, time-management behaviors, and help-seeking patterns. Descriptive statistics, One-Way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation were used to analyze demographic variations and variable relationships, with hypotheses tested at $p < 0.05$.

Findings are expected to reveal the extent to which rigid institutional configurations on Ding Talk either scaffold or constrain authentic self-regulated learning. The study culminates in a proposed Institutional Digital Literacy & Self-Regulation Program designed to help administrators balance accountability with learner autonomy. By transforming administrative data from an instrument of surveillance into a mirror for metacognitive reflection, the research offers evidence-based guidelines for configuring educational platforms that support deep, autonomous learning while maintaining institutional order. The results contribute localized empirical data to the broader discourse on digital education governance in East Asian higher education.

Keywords: Institutional Governance; Ding Talk; Independent Study; Self-Regulated Learning; Educational Platform Governance; Higher Education; Digital Surveillance; Teacher Perceptions; China

1. INTRODUCTION

In the East Asian educational context—particularly within China's heavily digitized higher education ecosystem—Alibaba's Ding Talk has evolved from a commercial enterprise communication application into a primary infrastructure for institutional governance and virtual academic administration. The institutional adoption of Ding Talk represents a structural shift in educational management, moving from fragmented learning management systems toward unified digital governance ecosystems. Institutional governance refers to the systematic frameworks, policies, and technological configurations through which an academic organization exerts leadership, ope rational control, and quality assurance. When a university mandates Ding Talk as its primary administrative and instructional highway, it establishes a centralized data architecture. Recent studies in digital infrastructure emphasize that such top - down platformization allows administrators to standardize institutional workflows and maintain strict operational oversight across virtual campus spaces (Tanaka, 2026).

Critically, this centralized institutional framework alters the traditional boundaries of student management by turning everyday interactions into quantifiable data. Through Ding Talk's integrated modules—such as automated attendance check -ins, real-time read receipts, and centralized task repositories—the university extends its regulatory reach directly into the student's personal study environment. Researchers analyzing educational governance note that this pervasive digital presence creates a highly regulated administrative landscape (Chinetal, 2026). From an educational management perspective, this architecture aims to minimize institutional drift and ensure that independent study phases remain visible to the university's quality assurance mechanisms (Qin, 2025).

However, this top-down institutional control frequently stands in tension with the psychological and pedagogical requirements of student-managed independent study. Independent study relies fundamentally on self-regulated learning, a process where learners actively manage their own cognition, motivation, and behavior to meet academic goals. For independent study to be effective, students require a degree of autonomy to choose their pacing, select learning paths, and evaluate their own progress. When institutional governance via Ding Talk becomes overly rigid, the platform's continuous monitoring can inadvertently shift a student's focus from deep knowledge acquisition to superficial procedural compliance, fundamentally altering the nature of autonomous learning.

This tension is clearly reflected in the way Ding Talk's administrative features interact with student learning behaviors. For example, the platform's instant messaging read-receipts and automated daily check-ins a re designed by administrators to ensure accountability. Yet, empirical studies indicate that such rigorous tracking can induce significant academic anxiety and generate cognitive fatigue among university students (Fazanetal., 2025). Instead of cultivating intrinsic motivation for independent research, the underlying governance mechanics can foster a culture of performance avoidance, where students manage their digital presence to satisfy institutional surveillance rather than pursuing authentic intellectual exploration (Mao, 2025).

Despite these administrative constraints, Ding Talk's structural features can also serve as a powerful scaffolding tool for students who struggle with the open-ended nature of independent study. Selfregulated learning is not an inherent trait but a develop mental skill that requires external

frameworks. Ding Talk's task management calendars, deadline reminders, and centralized resource repositories provide a predictable system that helps students organize their independent study schedules (Baxtiya rovich, 2023). When platforms are structured predictably, they reduce the cognitive load associated with time management, allowing students to allocate more mental energy to complex, self-directed tasks (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2022).

Furthermore, the data generated by Ding Talk's t racking tools provides a useful foundation for reflective self-assessment, a core component of advanced independent study. When institutional governance policies allow students to view their own engagement data, learning analytics can be transformed from an instrument of external surveillance into a mirror for metacognitive reflection. Learners can analyze their own screen time, task completion rates, and collaboration history to identify behavioral patterns and adjust their study strategies accordingly (Fatokun & Gumbo, 2025). This transformation of administrative data into personal learning analytics underscores how modern educational management can use platform metrics to support student autonomy.

The impact of Ding Talk's institutional governance on independent study is also shaped by peer dynamics and collaborative learning. Independent study is rarely a solitary endeavor; it thrives on pee r feedback, resource sharing, and community engagement. Ding Talk's enterprise communication tools—including structured study groups, live st reaming capabilities, and collaborative document editing—allow students to build decentralized, peer-led learning communities within an institutional framework. Scholars have noted that digital learning platforms significantly enhance student engagement through interactive features and immediate feedback mechanisms, showing that platformization can foster robust student-led collaboration (İşman et al., 2026).

For educational administrators, the core challenge is to design an institutional governance framework that balances accountability with autonomy. Over-regulation through digital platforms risks turning higher education into a mechanical compliance system, whereas under-regulation can leave students unsupported in a complex virtual environment (Thinley et al., 2024). Institutional leaders must intentionally configure Ding Talk's parameters to prioritize user agency. This involves establishing clear boundaries for data collection, minimizing intrusive real-time surveillance, and actively training students to use the platform's enterprise tools for personal project management rather than mere administrative box checking.

The institutional governance of Ding Talk and students' management of their independent study exist in a delicate, shifting relationship. As higher education institutions continue to integrate enterprise-level technologies into their core administ rative operations, the role of educational management must expand beyond simple oversight to include intentional pedagogical design. When configured purely for compliance, centralized platforms can restrict student autonomy and induce cognitive fatigue. However, when deployed as a supportive infrastructure that promotes transparency, collaboration, and self-reflection, Ding Talk can provide the necessary framework to help university students succeed as independent learners in a highly digital world.

Statement of the Problem

This study will determine the institutional governance of Ding Talk and students' management of their independent study in an economics and business university in China.

The results of the study will be used as an institutional digital lite racy & self-regulation program.

Specifically, the study will answer the following questions:
1. What is the demographic profile of the teacher respondents in terms of:
1.1. sex;
1.2. age;
1.3. length of service;
1.4. educational attainment; and
1.5. number of attended seminars related to the topic?

2. What is the assessment of the teacher respondents of the institutional governance of Ding Talk in their school in terms of:
2.1. administrative approval workflows;
2.2. organizational communication hierarchy;
2.3. read-receipt accountability;
2.4. data-driven decision making;
2.5. workplace surveillance; and
2.6. home-school boundaries?

3. Is there a significant difference in the assessment of the teacher respondents of the institutional governance of Ding Talk in their school when they are grouped according to their profile?

4. What is the assessment of the teacher respondents of the students' management of their independent study in terms of:
4.1. resource utilization metrics;
4.2. asynchronous task consistency;
4.3. proactive peer collaboration;
4.4. time-management behaviors; and
4.5. help-seeking patterns?

5. Is there a significant difference in the assessment of the teacher respondents of the students' management of their independent study when they are grouped according to their profile?

6. Is there is significant relationship between the assessment of the teacher respondents of the institutional governance of Ding Talk in their school and the students' management of their independent study?

7. Based on the results of the study, what institutional digital lite racy & self-regulation program can be proposed?

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive-comparative-correlational research design,
focusing on a structured classification of variables, meticulous data processing, and the execution of exact statistical procedures. As noted by Neuman (2020), descriptive investigations are essential for

capturing the true nature of conditions as they naturally exist. Selecting this approach ensures the inquiry is firmly rooted in empirical evidence, delivering an accurate depiction of the participants and contexts being analyzed.

Elaborating on this perspective, Frankel and Wallen (2020) emphasize that descriptive frameworks are crucial in social research for delivering unbiased, thorough documentation of human conduct, cultural shifts, and psychological patterns. By mapping out both the generalized trends and the unique anomalies within a given sample, these strategies allow for a deeper exploration of complex social and psychological dynamics. Consequently, this descriptive foundation builds the vital baseline required for subsequent inferential testing.

Moreover, Bryman (2016) contends that incorporating a comparative element is vital for identifying significant variations and parallels across distinct demographic or experimental groups. This structural angle enables investigators to pinpoint the specific factors that generate differing results, thereby sharpening theoretical models and improving the success rate of practical, real-world solutions.

To complement these approaches, the research incorporates a cor relational component to investigate the connections between the selected variables. According to Pallant (2020), correlational procedures are indispensable for measuring the strength and direction of
associations, offering a data-driven basis for informed decision-making. Within this project, these analytics are applied to discover how various demographic backgrounds intersect with the specific behavioral and perceptual tendencies outlined in the study's goals.

By blending descriptive precision, comparative insights, and correlational strength, this investigation aligns the methodological frameworks supported by Neuman (2020), Fraenkel and Wallen (2020), B ryman (2016), and Pallant (2020). This unified design enhances the study's empirical validity and practical relevance, creating a solid academic framework for both theoretical advancement and professional practice.

This study aims to determine the assessment of the teacher respondents of the institutional governance of Ding Talk in their school and the students' management of their independent study .

The chosen research framework facilitates a quantitative evaluation of the relationships and distinctions among the primary variables. Consequently, the researcher can determine whether statistically significant parallels or variances exist between the assessment of the teacher respondents of the institutional governance of Ding Talk in their school and the Students management of their independent study.

Furthermore, this method enables for an investigation of the relationship between the assessment of the teacher respondents of the institutional governance of Ding Talk in their school and their demographic profile. Similarly, it will determine the assessment of the teacher respondents of the students' management of their independent study and the same demographic profile. Aside from individual assessments, the study will determine the significant relationship between the assessment of the teacher respondents of the institutional governance of Ding Talk in their school and the students' management of their independent study .

A descriptive-cor relational framework is uniquely suited for this study, as the primary goal is to identify underlying trends and statistical associations within a specific population.

Research Locale

This study will be done at Hebei University of Economics and Business in Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province, China. Hebei University of Economics and Business is a key university in Hebei

Province, a multidisciplinary university focusing on economics, management, and law, while also offering programs in literature, science, engineering, and art. The university originated from the Shijiazhuang Cooperative School of the Hebei Provincial Supply and Marketing Cooperative, founded in 1953. In 1995, it was formed by the merger of Hebei University of Finance and Economics, Hebei University of Economics and Business, and Hebei Commercial College. In 2016, it was selected as a second-tier university in Hebei Province's national first-class university construction program.

The university is located in Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province, and has three campuses covering an area of over 2,630 acres. It has 17 undergraduate colleges, 3 teaching departments (centers), a graduate school, a school of Marxism, and a school of continuing education. It boasts 10 provincial-level key disciplines, 16 first-level master's degree programs, 18 professional master's degree programs, and 60 undergraduate majors, including 19 national-level first-class undergraduate majors and 12 provincial-level first-class undergraduate majors. The university has over 21,000 full-time undergraduate and graduate students and over 1,800 faculty and staff members, including over 1,200 full-time teachers.

The university adheres to the educational philosophy of "cultivating morality and talent, serving the local community," focusing on the needs of Hebei Province's economic and social development. It has formed distinctive characteristics in areas such as financial talent cultivation, regional economic research, and the integration of culture and tourism, making it an important base for financial talent cultivation and a think tank for economic and social development in Hebei Province.

The School of Arts at Hebei University of Economics and Business is a key school leveraging the university's strengths in financial disciplines to create a distinctive "art + economics and trade" interdisciplinary app roach. Its predecessor was the Department of Arts of the School of Humanities, established in 2001, and it became an independent School of Arts in 2004. The school currently offers three undergraduate programs: Art and Technology, Music Performance, and Dance Performance. It also has a first-level master's degree program in Design and a professional master's degree program in Fine Arts, with Visual Communication Design being a provincial-level first-class undergraduate program.

The college currently has 76 faculty and staff members, including 64 full-time teachers, 11 professors, 23 associate professors, 18 teachers with doctoral degrees, and 29 master's supervisors. It also employs over 30 renowned domestic artists and experienced professionals in the cultural tourism industry as visiting professors. In recent years, the college has focused its teaching and research on the inheritance and innovation of Hebei local culture, the application of digital art, and the development of the cultural industry. It has undertaken 8 national-level research projects and 42 provincial-level research projects. Students and faculty works have won numerous international and domestic professional awards, providing a large number of interdisciplinary talents for Hebei Province's cultural creativity, performing arts, and cultural tourism integration fields.

Leveraging the university's strengths in finance and economics, the college has developed a distinctive interdisciplinary training model combining artistic creation, market operation, and cultural dissemination. It has established several provincial-level practical teaching platforms, including a digital art laboratory, a music training center, and an art creation center. The college has also established stable internship and employment partnerships with the Hebei Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, Hebei Performing Arts Group, and many leading cultural and creative enterprises in the province. The graduate employment rate remains consistently above 95%.

Zhao Junhui, male, associate professor, master's supervisor, currently teaches in the Department of Music Performance at the School of Arts, Hebei University of Economics and Business. His main

research areas are music performance teaching, arts education management, and the inheritance of ethnic music culture.

Teacher Zhao Junhui graduated from the China Conservatory of Music with a bachelor's and master's degree in vocal performance. He joined the School of Arts at Hebei University of Economics and Business in 2009, and has been teaching vocal performance and opera performance courses for 17 years. He has rich teaching experience and has received numerous honors, including "Most Beautiful Teacher" of Hebei Province, "Distinguished Teacher" of Hebei Province Postgraduate Course Ideological and Political Education, "Excellent Teacher" of Hebei University of Economics and Business, and "Most Popular Teacher Among Students." His students have won awards such as the second prize in the Ministry of Education's College Student Art Exhibition, the first prize in the vocal category of the Hebei Province College Student Art Exhibition, and the second prize in the provincial drama competition. He teaches the Hebei Province Postgraduate Course Ideological and Political Education Demonstration Course, "Opera Performance Art."

Sampling Technique

This research will involve teachers from Hebei University of Economics and Business in Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province, China, using a stratified random sampling strategy to secure a representative sample. By separating the target population into mutually exclusive subgroups, or strata, this probability sampling technique ensures that each segment is tho roughly examined and accurately represented.

The implementation of a stratified framework allows for the systematic grouping of subjects based on pertinent demographic variables central to the investigation. Acknowledging and integrating the inherent variance of the teacher demographic in this manner mitigates sampling error and enhances empirical validity. Ultimately, by partitioning the population according to these shared dimensions, the researcher ensures that every distinct cohort is fairly reflected in the final data set.

To achieve a 95% confidence level, the initial sample size calculations we' re based on the total population of (N) educators at _____. Following this determination, a random selection of (n) teachers will be drawn from the established st rata. This rigorous selection process ensures that the gathered data possesses the necessary statistical power to validate the study's broader empirical findings.

Research Instrument

The primary data collection instrument for this study will consist of are searcher-developed questionnaire specifically engineered to assess the targeted variables. These instruments will be tailored to evaluate the assessment of the teacher respondents of the institutional governance of Ding-talk in their school and the students' management of their independent study .

Data collection instruments will be administered to the participants face-to-face. Utilizing a physical distribution strategy helps preserve the integrity of the data collection environment, optimizes participant response rates, and allows for the immediate clarification of any technical terminology.

The questionnaire will be composed of the following parts.

Part 1 – This section determines the demographic profile of the teacher respondents.

Part 2 – This section determines the assessment of the teacher respondents of the institutional governance of Ding Talk in their school.

Part 3 – This section assessment of the teacher respondents of the students' management of their independent study.

A panel of subject matter experts will oversee the comprehensive content validation of the research instruments, which consist of both adapted and researcher-developed scales. This evaluation process ensures that the survey items accurately reflect the underlying theoretical constructs under investigation. To enhance the conceptual precision of the tools, the final iterations will meticulously incorporate the experts' structural feedback and recommendations. A minimum of five specialists will critique the instruments for clarity, design, and readability, after which a pilot study will be executed to establish internal consistency. The pilot data will be processed via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) using Cronbach's alpha. This reliability analysis, combined with expert insights, enables the researcher to refine the scales through empirical testing, thereby securing the instruments' academic rigor and overall validity.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher will obtain official authorization to conduct the study from the office of the university president at Hebei University of Economics and Business in Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province, China. Upon receiving institutional clearance, an informed consent process will be initiated with the participating educators. Consent forms outlining the study's parameters will be distributed, signed, and returned to the investigator, thereby ensuring that participation is entirely ethical and voluntary.

Once consent is obtained, participants will receive standardized inst ructions alongside a detailed overview of the research objectives. Administering the questionnaires in person during supervised sessions ensures that respondents have adequate time to provide precise and meaningful data.

Following the administration of the survey, the researcher will audit all completed instruments and input the data. The raw data set will be processed, tabulated, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This statistical examination aims to identify underlying trends that will guide the development of an institutional digital lite racy & self-regulation program.

The study will culminate in a comprehensive review and analysis of the collected data. This scholarly assessment concludes with a synthesis of the empirical findings, the articulation of definitive conclusions, and the development of evidence-based recommendations for future research and practical application.

Statistical Treatment of the Data

To ensure computational precision, the collected survey data will be systematically coded, tabulated, and organized utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analytical phase will commence with the application of descriptive statistics— specifically frequency counts, percentage distributions, arithmetic means, and standard deviations—to profile the respondents' demographics and evaluate the central tendencies of their responses. To investigate the research hypotheses and identify statistically significant differences across subgroups, inferential procedures such as the Independent Samples t-test and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) will be performed. Additionally, the Pearson Product-Moment Cor relation Coefficient (r) will be computed to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the primary variables. All statistical evaluations will be bench marked against a predetermined alpha level of $p < 0.05$ to establish empirical validity.

Ethical Considera tions

The researcher is committed to protecting the welfare, dignity, and rights of every participant by adhering closely to recognized ethical guidelines. The execution of this research is governed by the following ethical standards,

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