

Research Progress of College Students' Learning Burnout

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ABSTRACT

Learning burnout is a common psychological problem of college students, which seriously affects college students' academic achievement and physical and mental health, wastes educational resources, and brings various hidden dangers to talent growth and social development. Starting from the definition of the concept of learning burnout, this paper introduces the dimension composition and measurement tools of college students' learning burnout, analyzes the influencing factors of college students' learning burnout, and puts forward the corresponding research prospects in view of the shortcomings of previous research.

1. Overview of Learning Burnout

1.1 Concept of Learning Burnout

The concept of “burnout” originated from the research on personnel (occupation) burnout carried out by clinical psychologist Freudenberger^[1] in 1974, which refers to the phenomena of fatigue, boredom, job involvement and low sense of achievement. Maslach^[2] further defined job burnout as an attitude of alienation, ridicule or negation, which is a comprehensive expression of exhaustion, depersonalization and negative view of oneself. Some scholars define burnout from three aspects such as cognition, behavior and emotion and believe that due to the lack of value reinforcement, result control or personal ability, individuals do not get the expected reward and corresponding punishment. Such a state is job burnout.

The definition of learning burnout is derived from

job burnout, also known as academic burnout. Pines and Katry (1981) found that the learning burnout of college students was higher than the job burnout of helpers, and put forward the concept of “Student Burnout” for the first time, which refers to the energy consumption of students due to long-term academic pressure, the gradual disappearance of enthusiasm for learning and school activities, the indifference and alienation from others, as well as such a phenomenon that students have a negative attitude towards leaning because academic performances are not as good as expected^[3]. Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined learning burnout as students' emotional exhaustion, alienation from their studies and low sense of achievement due to excessive learning needs^[4]. Zhang Zhiyao^[5], a Taiwanese scholar, defined learning burnout as the phenomenon of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low sense of personal achievement caused by academic pressure, academic load or other personal psychological factors in

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the learning process. Yang Huizhen, another Taiwanese scholar, believes that “learning scorching” can better express the original meaning of “burnout”^[6], that is, the obvious decline of mental status in the learning process. Lian Rong, a Chinese scholar, believes that learning burnout reflects the negative learning psychological phenomenon of college students, which means that when students have no interest in learning or lack motivation but have to study, they will feel tired, bored, depressed and frustrated, resulting in a series of inappropriate behaviors of avoiding learning^[7].

To sum up, although there is no final conclusion, many scholars agree that learning burnout refers to the negative state of cognitive, emotional and behavioral deviation in students’ learning due to various factors (especially learning pressure) in long-term learning.

1.2 Structure of Learning Burnout

1.2.1 Three-dimensional Theory

This is a theoretical conception advocated by most scholars, among which Lian Rong’s three-dimensional theory^[7] is the most commonly used in China, that is, learning burnout is composed of the following three aspects (dimensions): (1) **Emotional exhaustion**. This is a symptom at the psychological level. Due to some exaggerated requirements in learning, students show an overload and exhausted mood, and have a strong sense of boredom and exclusion from learning. They are easy to be nervous, tired and inattentive during learning, and may drop out of school in serious cases. (2) **Depersonalization**. Individuals respond to learning and others in a cynical and unemotional way and attitude, which is manifested in perfunctory learning, avoidance of learning and withdrawal behavior. (3) **Low sense of achievement**. Because students can’t correctly deal with and alleviate the pressure of learning, they experience continuous frustration and depression, question their ability, reduce self-evaluation, and even deny themselves completely.

1.2.2 Two-dimensional Theory

Wei Ting^[8] believes that burnout mainly has two components: natural dimension (physical exhaustion) and social dimension (spiritual exhaustion), and also believes that compulsory learning can better summarize the origin of learning burnout.

1.2.3 Single-dimensional Theory

Some scholars believe that among the “so-called” three dimensions of learning burnout, only “emotional exhaus-

tion” is necessary, and the other two dimensions are incidental: De-personalization is an individual’s way to deal with emotional exhaustion; Low sense of achievement is the consequence of emotional exhaustion^[3]. The representative of single-dimensional theory is the research of Pines^[3] and Shirom^[9].

2. Measurement of Learning Burnout

Over the years, most studies on learning burnout have been carried out based on the theoretical basis of job burnout. Most of the scales used to evaluate learning burnout are the revised version of MBI, such as MBI - Form ED. (Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey), the originally used in learning environment burnout scale and MBI-SS (Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey) developed by Schaufeli et al. They only slightly change the words about the research object, working environment and background in MBI, does not significantly change the definition of the structure and dimensions of MBI, does not consider enough students’ learning situation, and there is also some problems of cultural universality. Gold et al. Revised MBI and developed MBI-CSS (Maslach Burnout Inventory-College Student Survey) for normal students^[10]. Yang Huizhen (1998) revised MBI-GS to measure the learning burnout of college students in Taiwan by changing its location, object and nature of work^[6]. Lian Rong modified Maslach’s three-dimensional theory according to China’s national conditions, and defined the structural dimension of learning burnout as low mood, improper behavior and low sense of achievement. On this basis, the “Learning Burnout Questionnaire for College Students (LBQCS)” is developed and widely used in China. Lian Rong’s research provides a measurement tool in line with national conditions for the study of learning burnout in China. However, Lian Rong’s definition of “learning burnout” is biased, and the validity of the questionnaire is still in doubt.

Pines’ BM (Burnout Measure) can be said to be a unique burnout scale. According to his single-dimensional theory, Pines retained the dimension of emotional exhaustion and combined the other two dimensions of depersonalization and low sense of achievement to obtain BM. BM is a diagnostic tool for the degree of self-burnout including 21 items. The scores of 21 items in BM are accumulated to obtain a simple total burnout score. However, Pines also assumes that BM can measure three different types of exhaustion (physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion and psychological exhaustion), and the 21 items are allocated to these three types of exhaustion according to their definition, In this way, BM is also like a multidimensional questionnaire. Pines believes that burnout can

occur in any occupation and any population, so BM is not designed for any specific occupational group such as helper with the meaning of 21 items very broad^[3]. In other words, BM can also be used to evaluate learning burnout. However, there is still a lack of research on verifying the factor structure of BM.

3. The Harm of Learning Burnout

Learning burnout is a negative learning phenomenon, which will cause losses to students themselves, families, society and other aspects: From the perspective of students themselves, learning burnout makes them reduce learning investment^[11], waste great learning opportunities, and affect their academic development^[12] and physical and mental health^[13]; For schools, if students' learning burnout is widespread, it will inevitably lead to the deterioration of study style and the decline of teaching quality^[14]; From the perspective of social employment, if employees bring burnout to work, it is easy to lead to loose discipline, slow work and low production efficiency^[15].

4. The Incidence of College Students' Learning Burnout

The incidence of learning burnout of foreign and Chinese college students are 9.9-40.3%^[16,17] and 24.8-89.3%^[18-21], respectively, and the incidence of medium and high learning burnout is 25-50%^[16-21]. Poor students, normal college students, medical students, junior college students and independent-college students are more prone to learning burnout^[18-21]. In recent years, with the promotion of college enrollment expansion in China, higher education gradually tends to be popular, the competitive pressure faced by college students is significantly increased. With the learning motivation, major interest and learning enthusiasm significantly reduced, the incidence of learning burnout is increasing year by year, and the degree of learning burnout is becoming more and more serious^[22].

5. Influencing Factors of College Students' Learning Burnout

5.1 Social and Environmental Factors

5.1.1 Background of Times

With the deepening of market economy and the rapid development of science and technology, economic globalization has become an inevitable trend in the development of today's world. It not only brings many opportunities to higher education, but also makes higher education face many shocks and challenges^[23]. On one hand, with the global flow of economic factors, people have improved

their cultural cultivation and updated their backward ideas and technologies in the increasingly expanding and frequent ideological and cultural exchanges. On the other hand, economic globalization has also brought bad foreign ideas and values. At present, many college students regard the pursuit of Western lifestyle and cultural ideas as a symbol of fashion and avant-garde. Money supremacy, money worship, hedonism and extreme individualism are spreading among them. In particular, China is still in the process of social transformation, people's values, ideals and beliefs are in the process of blind and fickle, and negative attitudes such as impetuosity and hesitation are common among students. At the same time, the spiritual power of Chinese traditional virtues such as hard work, diligence and progress has been weakened or even abandoned indiscriminately^[24].

5.1.2 Bad Social Atmosphere

A good atmosphere of respecting knowledge and intellectuals has not really formed in the whole society, and the social status and economic treatment of intellectuals still need to be improved. As the job selection mechanism of college students is not perfect, unreasonable and unfair phenomena often occur in employment. These phenomena lead to the idea of "learning is useless" for many college students^[25,26], and then make them treat learning negatively.

5.2 School Factors

First, due to the influence of enrollment expansion, the teaching resources of many colleges and universities can not be updated and increased in time to meet the needs of students. Students have fewer opportunities to participate in experiments and skill operations, fewer channels to participate in academic activities, less satisfaction of the thirst for knowledge and less full play of creative potential, resulting in weak interest in learning^[14]. Second, the learning adaptability of college students is insufficient. The expansion of enrollment has significantly reduced the quality of college students, while college learning is becoming more and more modern in terms of content, methods and means, and the difficulty is gradually increasing, so it is difficult for students to adapt; At the same time, the tuition and living expenses of the university have caused great pressure on many students. In addition, the employment competition has intensified year by year, and employers pay more and more attention to the practical ability of candidates. Therefore, college students tend to believe that the value of theoretical learning in university is not great^[25]. Third, the management system of Chinese universities restricts students' learning freedom. It is main-

ly reflected in the lack of autonomy in curriculum learning, the difficulty for students to participate in the teaching process, and the lack of opportunities to participate in the formulation of teaching plans and decisions. Previous studies have showed that the lack of learning autonomy is one of the direct causes of college students' learning burnout^[27]. Fourth, the specialty setting of some schools is divorced from social needs, the curriculum setting is not reasonable, the teaching are boring and monotonous, the teaching content is old and disconnected from the discipline development, which affects the learning interest^[28]. Fifth, the way to investigate the learning effect is single and the means are rigid: They only pay attention to the memory of knowledge and ignore the mastery and application of skills, which makes students happy to "cram for the Buddha's feet temporarily". They usually don't need to study hard and can pass the exam by memorizing their notes one week before the exam^[28]. Sixth, the campus culture is monotonous^[29], and students' body and emotion can not be effectively adjusted, which is easy to produce psychological fatigue. Seventh, teachers rarely have direct contact with and understanding of college students, and rarely motivate and praise them. Over time, those students with poor foundation are easy to lose interest in learning because of "insufficient reward"^[30], and even have a sense of fear of learning because of poor performance, resulting in burnout. Eighth, there is an interaction between teachers' job burnout and students' learning burnout, and the two strengthen each other^[31].

5.3 Family Factors

The factors of father's and mother's emotional warmth of the Parental Rearing Style Questionnaire (EMBU) are significantly negatively correlated with the total score of Learning Burnout Questionnaire for College Students (LBQCS), and the factors of father's and mother's rejection, as well as the factor of mother overprotection of EMBU are significantly positively correlated with the total score of LBQCS^[32]. The reason may be: If parents set learning goals for their children that are divorced from reality or against their children's wishes, they will increase their children's pressure and make children hate learning; On the contrary, if parents are indifferent to their children's learning, or their requirements are too low, their children's learning motivation will be frustrated.

5.4 Social Support

There is a significant negative correlation between the level of social support and learning burnout. The more social support students get, the less emotional exhaustion

and dehumanization they experience, and the higher their sense of personal achievement. The social support related to college students mainly comes from school, family and society. The relationships between social support from different sources and the three dimensions of Learning Burnout Scale are different, and there are still some debates on the impact mechanism of social support on learning burnout^[5,33-35].

5.5 Individual Factors

5.5.1 Demographic Variables

Demographic variables commonly include gender, grade, self-rated academic achievement, physical activity, only child or not, major, school type, origin, family economic status, stressful life events, etc.^[14,16,25,26,28,36-39]. No unanimous conclusion has been reached on the role of many of the above factors (such as gender, grade, only child or not, origin, etc.), but it is generally believed that there are complex interactions between them^[28,36].

5.5.2 Individual Psychosocial Factors

(1) Personality and behavior characteristics

Personality and behavior characteristics are the most important internal causes of learning burnout. Students who are more prone to learning burnout usually have following factors such as external control belief^[5], incorrect attribution style^[23], low self-esteem^[35], low psychological resilience^[20,39], low optimism^[12], low core self-evaluation^[40], low psychological capital^[41,42], low achievement motivation^[42], low personal growth initiative^[43], low emotional regulation ability^[38], poor time management^[20], low academic self-efficacy^[20,35], low self differentiation^[44], high self handicapping^[44], non-adaptive perfectionism^[45] and non controlled coping style^[12,18,20].

(2) Interpersonal disorder

Interpersonal conflict will affect personal self-evaluation and learning attitude. At the same time, people often experience bad emotions such as frustration and disappointment in interpersonal conflict. Poor interpersonal relationship will even reduce social support. All the above situations may lead to the parties' behavior of avoiding learning. Previous studies have shown that self-rated teacher-student relationship negatively predicts learning burnout^[37], and the total explanation rate of self-esteem, conflict, intimacy and avoidance in the Teacher-Student Relationship Questionnaire to learning burnout is 41.6%^[46].

(3) Bad mood

Anxiety has a significant positive predictive effect on the total score and the scores of all dimensions of the Learning Burnout Scale [27]. Happiness is a negative predictor of the total score and each dimension score of Learning Burnout Scale [13].

(4) Learning psychological factors

It can be divided into two categories: **Risk factors.** Among them, learning load is the most important teaching variable. The results of most studies show that there is a high positive correlation between task volume and duration and burnout. Task overload will lead to individual burnout [16,23,34,47], which has a particularly significant impact on the two dimensions of emotional exhaustion and dehumanization. Academic pressure related to teaching style is another positive predictor of learning burnout: Academic pressure related to teaching attitude positively predicts emotional exhaustion, and academic pressure related to teaching behavior positively predicts emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low sense of achievement [48]; Achievement motivation to avoid failure [49] positively predicts learning burnout: College students who tend to use achievement motivation to avoid failure are more likely to feel depressed and afraid because of some inevitable failures in learning, resulting in learning burnout. **Protective factors.** Professional commitment [7], learning adaptability [39], classroom psychological contract [50], professional satisfaction [50], achievement motivation for success [49], learning self-control [47], learning strategies [51], fitness between major and professional preference [52], learning flexibility and involvement [53], meta-cognitive ability [28] and other factors negatively predict and inhibit the generation of learning burnout.

6. Research Prospect

6.1 Weak Basic Theoretical Research

Most of the learning burnout theories involved in the previous research are derived from Western research results before 1980 and there are few original and localized research results, which can't meet the current situation. There are still many disputes on the concept, characteristics and dimension composition of learning burnout.

6.2 Measuring Tools to be Improved

At present, the scales for evaluating learning burnout (including foreign and domestic) have various deficiencies such as simply applying the content or method of the job burnout scale, defining dimensions unclearly and unre-

sonably, as well as low reliability or validity.

6.3 Insufficient Attention to the Role of Group Motivation

Previous studies involved a wide range of influencing factors, including external factors (including social, school and family factors) and personal factors (such as demographic factors, personality and behavior characteristics, emotional state, learning psychological and interpersonal relationship factors). However, they all ignore the role of college students' peer groups. Peers and peer groups are extremely important to the psychological and social development of college students, and their importance even exceeds that of parents, families and teachers.

6.4 Insufficient Attention to Comprehensive Effect of Multiple Influencing Factors

Previous studies focused on the analysis of the role of a single variable or a limited number of variables (such as demographic, psychosocial and teaching variables), mainly on the main effect of a variable or the interaction effect of two or three variables, which make the conclusions scattered and one-sided, and fail to integrate many variables to reveal the internal mechanism of learning burnout from an overall perspective. So they have little significance in the diagnosis and intervention of learning burnout.

6.5 There are Few Studies on Intervention Methods and Effect Evaluation

Previous studies mostly focus on the causes, structure and influencing factors of learning burnout, and there are few studies on the intervention means. On the other hand, studies on the countermeasures are mostly limited to theoretical analysis, less in-depth and practical empirical intervention studies, and less evaluation studies of the intervention effect.

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