

Major Commitment and Learning Burnout among Undergraduates in China

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Abstract—Learning burnout would directly decide the learning outcome of a student is good or bad during four years in college. Learning burnout among undergraduate students in China is closely related to the degree of their major commitments. Different degrees of commitment could cause different levels of learning burnout. The purpose of this study is to understand how commitment to major influences learning burnout. The research showed that the major commitment is not good and the overall level of major commitment of undergraduates was 12.3061. In addition, each dimension of undergraduates' learning burnout was lower than the average score. This illustrated that the higher degree of learning burnout in this case. Finally results show that the better major commitment the less learning burnout and there is a significant negative correlation between learning burnout and major commitment.

Keywords—*undergraduates, learning burnout, major commitment*

I. INTRODUCTION

Undergraduates are considered to be at the forefront of a country's future and the development of society requires their contribution. If undergraduates are experiencing learning burnout, they cannot learn well or put their knowledge into practice in a professional setting.

There are about 30 million undergraduates each year in China. Therefore, there is reason for concern if they are experiencing learning burnout. It is obvious that the degree of students not preferring their own major was closely related to their learning burnout, and the degree of their major recognition would also lead to different levels of learning burnout.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of learning burnout originated in western societies and is an independent branch concept in the development of occupational burnout research because it could be argued that students are a kind of occupation either. Occupational burnout is thought to result from long-term, unresolvable job stress [1]. Freudenberger characterized burnout by a set of symptoms that includes exhaustion resulting from the excessive demands of work, as well as physical symptoms, such as headaches and sleeplessness, quickness to anger, and closed thinking. He observed that the burned-out worker "looks, acts, and seems depressed." Ozkan and Ozdevecioglu (2013) studied the influence of occupational

stress on job burnout and life satisfaction in Turkey. Results showed that occupational stress was an important factor in reducing life satisfaction and contributing to job burnout [2].

An early definition of learning burnout suggested that students were tired of learning during the learning stage [3]. However, Meier and Schmeck (1985) defined learning burnout as the burnout of individuals' cognition, behavior, and other aspects because they do not align with the original expectation or their own feelings of value are not fully presented [4]. Schaufeli et al. (2002) considered learning burnout to be a series of emotional experiences and conditions, such as emotional exhaustion, experienced by students in overloaded learning environments. The concept of learning burnout is elaborated from three dimensions: Emotional exhaustion, alienation from academic study, and low achievement, which further defines the developmental process of learning burnout [5]. Moreover, Lian et al. (2006) made a summary of learning burnout, calling it passive psychology and behavior due to feeling bored when students were not interested in learning based on their researches [6].

According to the research above, learning burnout has three main features: first, it is not caused by a short-term event and has a unique developmental process; second, it is caused by overload pressure in all aspects of the learning process; and finally, it can lead to physical and psychological discomfort or abnormal behavior.

The concept of major commitment comes from organizational commitment, which was first proposed by Becker in 1960. He considered that commitment type as a mechanism that enables people to produce consistent behavior [7]. Then, Lachman and Aranya (1986) also pointed out that professional commitment means an individual is willing to devote significant amounts of energy to a profession in order to retain the qualifications of the profession. Professional commitment can help an individual achieve specific goals through continual practice based on emotional identification [8]. Then, according to the concepts of western scholars, Lian et al. (2006) have defined major commitment, which is more suitable for undergraduates. They believe major learning is the occupation of undergraduates and should be their main activity, as well. Undergraduates who were committed to major learning and owned a correct attitude such as, positive and active mind [9]. Therefore, undergraduates' major commitment was viewed somewhat as professional recognition and a sign of the students' willingness to make the extra effort. In other words, major

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learning can benefit from major commitment by an individual. The aim of this study was to understand how major commitment influence learning burnout of Chinese undergraduates and to provide information on how undergraduates can effectively avoid learning burnout and improve study efficiency. This study consists of seven hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 1: There is a gender difference in major commitment.

Hypothesis 2: There is a major difference in major commitment.

Hypothesis 3: There is a grade difference in major commitment.

Hypothesis 4: There is no gender difference in learning burnout.

Hypothesis 5: There is a major difference in learning burnout.

Hypothesis 6: There is a grade difference in learning burnout.

Hypothesis 7: Major commitment has a negative relationship with learning burnout.

III. METHODS

A. Participants

TABLE I. PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

	Background	Type	N	%
1	Gender	Male	143	43.3
		Female	187	56.7
2	Nationality	Han	197	59.7
		Ethnic minority	133	40.3
3	Type of senior high school	Ordinary	221	67.2
		Key	108	32.7
4	Only child	Yes	58	17.6
		No	272	82.4
5	Family location	Rural	124	44.8
		Urban	195	70.4
6	Grades	Freshman	82	24.8
		Sophomore	76	23.0
	Majors	Junior	83	25.2
		Senior	89	27.0
7	Parenting styles	Literature	134	40.6
		Science	177	53.6
		Art	19	5.8
8	Parents' education level	Democratic	214	64.8
		Autocratic	26	7.9
		Spoil	11	3.3
9	Parents' education level	Neglect	79	23.9
		Primary school and under	124	37.6
		High School	169	51.2
		College	33	10
		Post-graduate	4	1.2

Participants were recruited through random selection of undergraduates enrolled in grades 1 to 4 in Guizhou University of Finance and Economics in Guizhou Province, China. This university was selected because it provided greater

convenience based on investigation, traffic, and nearby accommodations. I conducted the study along with an undergraduate student. The study was successful due to the enthusiastic participation of students. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed and 330 valid questionnaires were collected, recording an effective rate of 94.29%. The sample consisted of 143 undergraduate boys and 187 girls. (Table I).

B. Instruments

Major Commitment Scale for Undergraduates (MCSU). The MCSU (Lian, Yang & Wu, 2005) is based on the Affective Commitment Scale (ACS) designed by Meyer and Allen in 1990. The MCSU consists of 27 items, including four dimensions: Affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment, and ideal commitment. It is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly not matched) to five (strongly matched). Factor I (affective commitment) primarily focuses on undergraduates' major feelings and wishes. Factor II (continued commitment) mainly reflects the individual's quality, ability, employment opportunity, as well as the corresponding professional wages, welfare and other economic factors that affect continuing major learning. Factor III (normative commitment) refers to undergraduates who understand the criteria and requirements of their major. The reason they choose to remain in their major is obligation and responsibility. Factor IV (ideal commitment) focuses on the undergraduates' belief that their major presents their strengths and allows them to realize their goals and aspirations.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the total scale was 0.927, and the split half reliability was 0.831. The correlation between each item and the total scale ranged from 0.360 to 0.873 ($p < .01$). The correlation between the four subscales and the total scale was 0.873, 0.891, 0.774, and 0.781 ($p < .01$). Confirmatory factor analysis of the indicators in 0.93–0.99, and indicating that the four subscales fit preferably.

Learning Burnout Scale for Undergraduates (LBSU). The LBSU (Lian, Yang & Wu, 2005) is based on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) that was designed by Maslach and Jackson in 1966. The LBSU consists of 20 items, including three dimensions: feeling of depression, misconduct, and low sense of achievement. It is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly not matched) to five (strongly matched). Factor I (feeling of depression) focuses on undergraduates who showed emotional characteristics. Factor II (misconduct) mainly focused on undergraduates who displayed unsuitable behaviors. Factor III (low sense of achievement) focused on undergraduates who felt low achievement in the processes of learning or a low sense of accomplishment resulting from insufficient ability to complete an assignment.

The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the total scale was 0.865, and the split half reliability was 0.880. The correlation between each item and the total scale ranged from 0.408 to 0.762 ($p < .01$). The correlation between the three subscales and the total scale was 0.914, 0.799, and 0.704 ($p < .01$). Confirmatory factor analysis of the indicators in 0.87–0.91, and indicating that the four subscales fit preferably.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The overall major commitment of undergraduates was not high. The average score was 12.3061, which was lower than the average of each referenced dimension. According to the average of each dimension, the major commitments of undergraduates, arranged from highest to lowest, is affective commitment, ideal commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment, respectively (Table II).

TABLE II. STATISTICAL RESULTS OF MAJOR COMMITMENT

	Major Commitment	Mean	SD	Reference Mean
1	Affective commitment	27.6727	6.43666	27.000
2	Ideal commitment	19.9152	5.67446	21.000
3	Normative commitment	17.6152	4.08575	18.000
4	Continuance commitment	17.1818	4.31970	15.000
	Total Scores	12.3061	2.72852	

TABLE III. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS BY GENDER IN MAJOR COMMITMENT

Variable	Male		Female		t	sig
	M	SD	M	SD		
1 Affective	28.5664	6.41363	26.9893	6.38714	2.219	0.027*
2 Ideal	20.8531	5.23391	19.1979	5.90320	2.650	0.008**
3 Continuance	17.8462	4.28444	16.6738	4.28871	2.462	0.014*
4 Normative	17.9860	4.20259	17.3316	3.98211	1.444	0.150
Total Scores	12.7252	2.69602	11.9856	2.71682	2.461	0.014**

^a Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table III summarizes the comparison of different dimensions of major commitment among undergraduates by gender. In terms of gender, each item of mean of male

TABLE V. STATISTICAL RESULTS OF EACH DIMENSION OF MAJOR COMMITMENT BY MAJOR TYPES

Dimensions	Majors	M±SD	F	sig	Post hoc tests (sig < 0.05)
Affective	①Literature	27.4478±5.75250	9.648	0.000***	③>①
	②Science	27.1864±6.64132			③>②
	③Art	33.7895±6.26790			①>②
Continuance	①Literature	16.8582±3.66482	8.514	0.000***	③>①
	②Science	17.0113±4.50125			③>②
	③Art	21.0526±5.17981			②>①
Normative	①Literature	17.6045±3.96985	4.674	0.010*	③>①
	②Science	17.3333±4.18963			③>②
	③Art	20.3158±2.92599			①>②
Ideal	①Literature	20.0299±4.84798	5.991	0.001**	③>①
	②Science	19.3051±6.04506			③>②
	③Art	24.7895±5.36013			①>②

^c Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table VI summarizes the comparison of different dimensions of major commitment among undergraduates by grade. In terms of grade, the participants of this study were undergraduates at all levels, from freshmen to seniors. Through analysis, we can conclude that there is only one significant difference in continuance commitment dimension (p < .01). Furthermore, Table VII shows that the senior undergraduates reacted most strongly in continuing commitment. Their scores were lower than the average of freshman, sophomore, and junior undergraduates. In addition, there was a significant difference in the dimension of continuing commitment based

undergraduates' major commitment was higher than that of female undergraduates'. First, there was a significant difference in the affective commitment dimension (p = .027 < .05). Second, there was a significant difference in the continued commitment dimension (p = .014 < .05). Third, there was a significant difference in the ideal commitment dimension (p = .008 < .01). Lastly, there was a significant difference in the average score of commitment (p = .014 < .05). This result mostly supports Hypothesis 1.

TABLE IV. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS BY MAJORS IN MAJOR COMMITMENT

	F	sig	SS	MS
1 Affective	9.017	0.000***	759.515	379.757
2 Continuance	7.286	0.000***	303.860	151.930
3 Ideal	6.962	0.000***	519.060	259.530
4 Normative	4.712	0.003**	152.648	76.324

^b Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table IV shows that different majors have a greater influence on undergraduates' major commitment. Major types have significant influence on each dimension of major commitment. Furthermore, Table V shows that art undergraduates reacted most strongly in affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment, and ideal commitment. Their scores were higher than the average of literature and science undergraduates. In addition, there were significant differences in major commitment in the dimension of affective commitment (p < .001), the dimension of continuance commitment (p < .001), the dimension of normative commitment (p < .05), and the dimension of ideal commitment (p < .01). This result supports Hypothesis 2.

on major commitment (p < .05). This result partially supports Hypothesis 3. Tan and Yao (2012) pointed out that students were pressurized under the influence of long-term value conflicts that resulted in boredom, fatigue, depression, and truancy [10].

The overall learning burnout of undergraduates was not high; the average score was 1.00039, which was lower than the average of each referenced dimension. According to the average of each dimension, the learning burnout of undergraduates, arranged from highest to lowest, was

feelings of depression, misconduct, and low sense of achievement, respectively (Table VIII).

TABLE VI. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS BY GRADES IN MAJOR COMMITMENT

	F	sig	SS	MS
1 Continuance	5.991	0.001**	320.764	106.921
2 Affective	2.616	0.051	320.476	106.825
3 Normative	2.429	0.065	120.101	40.034
4 Ideal	2.175	0.091	207.904	69.301

^d Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

TABLE VII. STATISTICAL RESULTS OF CONTINUANCE DIMENSIONS OF GRADES

Grades	M±SD	F	sig	Post hoc tests (sig < 0.05)
① Freshman	17.5732±3.70529	5.991	0.001**	②>③
② Sophomore	17.9211±3.69058			③>①
③ Junior	17.8434±4.90515			①>④
④ Senior	15.5730±4.41044			

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

TABLE VIII. STATISTICAL RESULTS OF LEARNING BURNOUT

	Learning Burnout	Mean	SD	Reference Mean
1	Feelings of depression	23.9303	6.09384	24.000
2	Misconduct	6.9394	3.53394	6.000
3	Low sense of achievement	-18.8636	4.00868	-18.000
	Total Scores	1.00039	1.32218	

In terms of gender, each item of mean of male undergraduates' learning burnout was higher than that of female undergraduates', including the overall score. However,

there was no significant difference in learning burnout by gender (Table IX). This result mostly supports Hypothesis 4.

TABLE IX. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS BY GENDER IN LEARNING BURNOUT

Variable	Male		Female		t	sig
	M	SD	M	SD		
1 Feelings of depression	24.6084	6.48512	23.4118	5.74049	1.773	0.077
2 Misconduct	6.9650	3.58285	6.9198	3.50560	0.115	0.908
3 Low sense of achievement	-19.1818	4.32913	-18.6203	3.73881	-1.262	0.208
Total Scores	1.0385	1.29397	0.9775	1.34621	0.414	0.679

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table X shows that different majors have a greater influence on undergraduates' learning burnout. Major types have significant influences on the feelings of depression (p < .01) and low sense of achievement (p < .001) dimensions of learning burnout. Furthermore, Table XI shows that art undergraduates reacted most strongly in feelings of depression. Their scores were higher than the average of literature and science undergraduates. In addition, literature undergraduates reacted most strongly in low sense of achievement. Their scores were higher than the average of science and art undergraduates. There were significant differences in major commitment in the dimensions of feelings of depression (p < .01) and low sense of achievement (p < .001). This result almost supports Hypothesis 5.

TABLE X. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS BY MAJORS IN LEARNING BURNOUT

	F	sig	SS	MS
1 Feelings of depression	5.537	0.004**	400.227	200.113
2 Misconduct	0.317	0.729	7.942	3.971
3 Low sense of achievement	12.30	0.000***	372.407	186.204

^c Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

TABLE XI. STATISTICAL RESULTS OF EACH DIMENSION OF LEARNING BURNOUT BY MAJOR TYPES

Dimensions	Majors	M±SD	F	sig	Post hoc tests (sig < 0.05)
Feelings of depression	① Literature	23.0672±5.57141	5.537	0.004**	③>②
	② Science	24.1638±6.0754			②>①
	③ Art	27.8421±8.13950			
Low sense of achievement	① Literature	-18.1119±3.81264	12.390	0.000***	①>②
	② Science	-19.0113±3.83167			②>③
	③ Art	-22.7895±4.69727			

^f Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

TABLE XII. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS BY GRADES IN LEARNING BURNOUT

	F	sig	SS	MS
1 Feelings of depression	5.207	0.002**	558.616	186.205
2 Misconduct	1.193	0.312	44.613	14.871
3 Low sense of achievement	2.137	0.095	101.943	33.981

^e Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table XII summarizes the comparison of different dimensions of learning burnout among undergraduates by grade. In terms of grade, the participants of this study were undergraduates at all levels, from freshmen to seniors. Through analysis, we can conclude that there was only one significant difference in the feelings of depression dimension (p < .01). Furthermore, Table XIII shows that sophomore undergraduates reacted most strongly to feelings of depression. Their scores

were higher than the average of freshmen and junior and senior undergraduates. In addition, there was a significant difference in the dimension of feelings of depression based on learning burnout (p < .01). This result partially supports Hypothesis 6.

TABLE XIII. STATISTICAL RESULTS OF FEELINGS OF DEPRESSION DIMENSION ACCORDING TO GRADE

Grades	M±SD	F	sig	Post hoc tests (sig < 0.05)
① Freshman	23.1463±5.51792	5.207	0.002**	②>③
② Sophomore	25.4868±5.68623			③>①
③ Junior	25.0000±6.07474			①>④
④ Senior	22.3258±6.52055			

^h Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Regression analysis was conducted with feelings of depression as a dependent variable, and affective, normative, continuance, and ideal commitment as independent variables. The model was statistical difference ($F = 22.060^{***}$, $p < .001$). Follows by misconduct as dependent variable, the model was statistically difference ($F = 11.520^{***}$, $p < .001$), and low sense of achievement as dependent variable, the model was statistical difference ($F = 71.806^{***}$, $p < .001$). Results show a significant negative correlation between learning burnout and major commitment of undergraduates, which further supports Hypothesis 7.

V. DISCUSSION

Results of multiple regression analyses also showed that affective and continuance commitment were effective predictors of undergraduates' learning burnout, particularly affective commitment. It showed a strong desire for undergraduates to continue studying their majors and not change majors based on deeply held feelings. This helped them to have less learning burnout.

It was found that the overall situation of undergraduates' major commitment is on the low level. This indicates that undergraduates have a low major commitment on their affective, normative, continuance, and ideal commitments. In affective commitment, whether undergraduates were passionate about learning or their majors, whether their majors could help present their strengths or help them realize their dreams, these factors could all affect their major commitment to a certain extent. When it came to the ideal commitment aspect, the undergraduates had no awareness about their major and lacked guidance for career planning from teachers. Hence, it led to professional goals being unclear. Next, in the area of normative commitment, professional knowledge was not widely utilized in students' daily life, leading to the theory that major learning cannot be integrated into practice. Finally, in continuance commitment, undergraduates were unsatisfied with their majors, which led to lower learning motivation, attitude, and interest. If these four factors of major commitment were lower, greater learning burnout would be evident.

It was found that learning burnout is not very serious, but it cannot be ignored. According to the study, there were three aspects that lead to undergraduates' learning burnout. First, when it came to the feelings of depression dimension, undergraduates were exhausted, depressed, and frustrated when they had no interest in or lack of motivation to study, but were required to do so. Second, from the misconduct dimension perspective, undergraduates enrolled in classes as a routine practice and were not aware of the importance of studying. Therefore, they rarely engaged in active studies after class, only temporarily for upcoming examinations. These students could not schedule their study times reasonably. Finally, from the low sense of achievement dimension, undergraduates were not interested in their majors, which affected their attitude toward learning and led to burnout. Undergraduates also exhibited a low sense of achievement when they discovered that coursework in their majors was difficult. This indicated that if undergraduates have more major commitments there was less learning burnout.

From the gender point of view, male undergraduates have higher major commitments than female undergraduates. Compared to females, males characteristically more enjoyed challenges and difficulties. Additionally, males were more likely to experience joy and fulfillment after overcoming difficulties and they were more actively involved in hands-on practice. Chen et al. (2013) research showed that female students were more likely to feel pain than male students. In addition, the research indicated that the extent of the student's pain increases with the increase of learning pressure [11].

From the major point of view, art undergraduates were very significant in four aspects of major commitment: affective commitment, normative commitment, continuance commitment and ideal commitment. This resulted because art undergraduates have more specialized requirements in their major and their development prospects were more specific and clear. Therefore, the degree of major commitment of art undergraduates was higher than literature and science majors. When it came to learning burnout, literature undergraduates were particularly significant in the area of low sense of achievement. Because literature tends to be a common major in general, which means literature undergraduates can be easily substituted in society. Next, art undergraduates were particularly significant in feelings of depression. Art undergraduates would be requested to provide higher criteria whenever they faced learning problems; therefore, they easily felt depression.

From the grade point of view, there was only one significant difference in the continuance commitment dimension, and senior students reacted most strongly. Due to the pressure of taking entrance exams for postgraduate schools, and for various kinds of professional certifications in order to obtain employment major commitment for senior students were the lowest. When it came to learning burnout, there was only one significant difference in the feelings of depression dimension, and sophomore students reacted most strongly. In fact, sophomore and junior students were very strong in the feelings of depression dimension, showing a great degree of depression. According to the survey, there were some problems during these two undergraduates' levels because of heavy load of required courses. For example, some students provided responses such as, "I want to study, but majors feels so boring" and "I am tired of learning". It cannot be ignored that sophomore and junior students were in a state of learning burnout. Glozah (2013) studied the effects of learning stress and perceived social support on mental health. He believed the effect of learning stress on mental health was buffered by perceived social support [12].

VI. CONCLUSIONS

It could be argued that helping undergraduates enjoy their major of choice and become more engaged in it is more important than choosing a so-called 'good major.' First, it is necessary to help undergraduates fully understand their majors by having professional lectures, such as the role of the major in the professional world, future research direction, and employment prospects. Secondly, universities should regularly provide one-on-one counseling by its staff to help undergraduates resolve any issues they may have with their

majors. Thirdly, changing one's major should be easy so undergraduates can have the opportunity to devote their attention to new majors that suit them. However, the number of major changes should be limited. Finally, teaching methods should be based on the actual needs of society and teachers should always be willing to incorporate innovation into their lessons.

This study has limitations, however. First, the study only focused on Guizhou Province, thus future researchers should conduct comparison studies to examine differences in other provinces. Secondly, the study only used questionnaires to gather information. Therefore, future studies should combine methodological approaches to enrich the research results. Finally, the dimensions that affect learning burnout are complex and diverse. This study only focused on the impact of major commitment on learning burnout, which obviously did not supply enough data. Hence, future studies should be conducted with more dimensions, such as learning environment and self-efficacy, in order to improve the credibility of the findings.

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