Analysis of the Current Situation, Reasons, and Countermeasures of Learning Attitudes for Undergraduates

Hailong Xu[1,2,3,a,*], Meng Yuan[1,b], Wenting Cui[1,2,3,c], Lili Xu[1,2,3,d]

[1]College of Fishery, Tianjin Agricultural University, Tianjin, China

[2]National Demonstration Center for Experimental Aqua-ecology and Aquaculture Education, Tianjin Agriculture University, Tianjin, China

[3]Tianjin Key Laboratory of Aqua-ecology and Aquaculture, Tianjin, China

[a]beiji80@163.com, [b]1041598299@qq.com, [c]wentingcui21@163.com, [d]xvlili1990@163.com

*Corresponding author

Keywords: Learning Attitudes, Undergraduates, Education Ecosystem

Abstract: With the popularization of higher education, the learning attitude of undergraduates has attracted widespread attention. Theses attitudes are characterized by the coexistence of involution and lying-flat, marked by tendencies towards superficial learning, and insufficient academic enthusiasm. This paper deeply analyzes the various factors of the decline in learning motivation of undergraduates, including the alienation of the "grade-point-first" evaluation system, the disconnection between teaching models and students' actual learning needs, the negative impact of digital technology, and diminished intrinsic motivation stemming from value disorientation. In response to these challenges, the article proposes student growth-centered systematic coping strategies: reforming the evaluation system to promote diversified development; innovating teaching models to encourage deep learning; utilizing technology to establish a smart learning ecosystem; and strengthening value guidance to stimulate intrinsic motivation. Research shows that only by building a multi-party collaborative education ecosystem can we effectively reshape learning attitudes of undergraduates and cultivate a new generation with continuous learning ability and innovative spirit.

1. Introduction

Under the background of higher education transitioning from an elite to a mass education system, China has achieved in just 24 years a development process that took nearly a century in developed countries. The gross enrollment rate in higher education soared from 12.5% in 2000 to over 60% in 2023[1], signifying the comprehensive entry into a new stage of universal higher education. However, alongside this expansion, the issue of learning attitudes among university students has become increasingly pronounced, emerging as a bottleneck that affects the quality of talent cultivation. The phenomenon of "exhausting middle school, happy university" reflects the deep-seated contradictions within the education ecosystem. Many students experience an abrupt transition from the intense pressures of middle school to the lying-flat mentality in university, with significantly weakened learning initiative and exploratory spirit. A survey[2] showed that up to 72% of freshmen experience learning adaptation difficulties, with confusion and self-doubt following them like a shadow. Moreover, the widespread phenomenon of superficial learning among university students is worrying, while a high proportion of students can complete assigned learning tasks, only 22% of students always extend their reading to teacher-recommended books after class. This decline in learning attitude not only hampers individual knowledge construction and skill development but also restricts the overall improvement of higher education quality in China. Consequently, it has become imperative to conduct an in-depth analysis of the factors contributing to the decline in contemporary university students' learning attitudes and to seek effective strategies for addressing these challenges as part of urgent reforms needed within higher education.

  DOI: 10.25236/icemeet.2025.008

2. Multidimensional Manifestations of the Decline in Learning Attitudes

2.1 Superficial Learning Tendencies and Lack of Initiative

Currently, the learning behaviors of university students exhibit the significant characteristics of superficial learning. Research data shows that although 40% of students always complete pre-class assignments, 35% maintain focus during class, and 31% always keep up with the teacher's explanation, in-depth exploration reveals that students' learning engagement remains more at the level of passive response. The indicators that truly reflect the depth of learning are generally low-only a few students can sort out knowledge and identify problems before class, actively ask questions or participate in discussions in class, or extend their reading to recommended books after class. This learning model of passive acceptance rather than active exploration severely limits the development of students' critical thinking and innovative abilities.

Undergraduates demonstrate commendable levels of diligence and curiosity; however, they exhibit a notable deficiency in questioning skills. Data[3] shows that the proportion of university students who often ask questions and participate in discussions in class is only 30.73% and 42.23%, respectively. While merely 23.93% often challenge teachers' viewpoints or present alternative opinions. This lack of inquisitiveness is attributed partly to cultural traditions that emphasize humble acceptance and silent contemplation, as well as reflecting the cognitive inertia and passive mentality prevalent among students throughout their learning processes.

2.2 The Coexistence of Involution and Lying-Flat

The contradictory state of "cannot involution yet cannot completely lie flat" is common among university student groups[4]. This phenomenon vividly depicts the polarized tendency in contemporary students' learning attitudes – some students fall into involution competition driven by utilitarian goals, choosing easy courses with high grades for a faint difference in GPA rather than courses they are truly interested in; other students choose to lie-flat under pressure and confusion, showing characteristics of insufficient learning motivation and perfunctory attitude.

This contradictory psychology essentially reflects the separation of instrumental rationality and value rationality. Under the influence of instrumental rationality, students narrow their self-worth to quantitative symbols such as GPA and awards, viewing teacher-student relationships and peer relationships as channels for achieving success, leading to the gradual decline of value rationality. A student's sentiment speaks for many: "Busy every day but don't know where to go." This alienation value, once encountering setbacks, easily triggers existential emptiness, anxiety, and tension, plunging students into a negative state of mental internal consumption.

2.3 Academic Integrity and Time Management Issues

It is alarming that some universities have seen academic misconduct such as substitute class attendance and proxy exam-taking, even forming a gray industrial chain[5]. These phenomena reflect the problems of lax learning attitudes and lack of academic reverence among some students. At the same time, university students also face severe challenges in time management. Always feeling that there is not enough time and not knowing how to improve learning efficiency have become common confusions for many students.

3. Analysis of the Causes of the Decline in Learning Attitudes

3.1 Evaluation System Alienation and Learning Motivation Externalization

The GPA evaluation system commonly used in universities has been alienated into an involution accelerator[6]. Under this system, students engage in vicious competition for a tiny difference, even giving up courses they are truly interested in for easy courses with high grades. The quantification and utilitarian orientation of evaluation transforms learning from an internal knowledge-seeking activity to an external numerical competition, leading to a serious externalization of learning

motivation.

The examination and enrollment method of selecting people based on scores implemented by universities also has a profound impact on students' learning behaviors. As long as scores reach a certain threshold, students will choose the corresponding university, rather than based on interest in and pursuit of the major itself. This selection mechanism leads many students to enter an autopilot state after enrollment, with seriously insufficient learning interest and knowledge-seeking enthusiasm. The collective perception of liberation-upon-enrollment among university students after the college entrance examination stems from the failure of the system design to form an effective incentive – the lack of a process evaluation mechanism leads to the decay of learning motivation after enrollment.

3.2 Lagging Teaching Models and Insufficient Learning Support

The disconnection between teaching models and students' learning needs is another important factor leading to the decline in learning attitudes. Many universities still continue the one-way knowledge transfer model of "teacher lectures, students listen", failing to effectively promote students' subjective participation. Research shows that the total number of credits that undergraduate in Chinese university need to complete is relatively high, and their total weekly learning time inside and outside class is much higher than that of American students. A survey shows that 30.7% of students self-report an average weekly study time of over 30 hours, meaning that one in three students spends over four hours self-studying every day besides attending classes[7].

However, excessive learning time does not translate into a deep learning experience. One student frankly stated: "I feel that my best times were spent in the self-study room... I don't think this means much to me." Another student lamented: "I spend all my time studying every day, with no time to think." This kind of thoughtless learning exposes the fundamental flaw of the teaching model – emphasizing knowledge indoctrination while neglecting thinking cultivation, focusing on learning duration while despising learning quality.

3.3 Impact of Digital Technology and Changes in Learning Environment

The popularization of digital technology has had a complex impact on university students' learning attitudes while improving the sharing of educational resources[8]. On the one hand, students are relatively satisfied with their school's technical services and support (69%), but more (72%) students believe their school performs averagely in using technology to enhance the learning experience. This indicates that the integration of technology and education is still at a superficial stage, failing to effectively support the deep transformation of the learning experience.

On the other hand, the new media ecosystem has become a new catalyst for mental internal consumption. Carefully curated achievement broadcasts on social media and counterattack myths rendered by short videos form information cocoons through algorithm push, continuously activating the cognitive bias that "others are progressing, only I am stagnant". More seriously, the digital age has led to the split between the digital self and the real self-creating a positive persona online, such as clocking in for study and showcasing talents, but falling into procrastination and despondency offline. One student admitted: "Spend two hours a day retouching pictures and posting on social media, but seeing the piled-up homework when returning to reality causes more anxiety, forming a vicious cycle." This double life requires consuming a lot of psychological energy to maintain image balance, further weakening students' learning engagement.

3.4 Loss of Values and Depletion of Psychological Energy

The deep root of undergraduates' mental internal consumption lies in the fracture of the value system, were mainly concentrated on three contradictions[9]: the split between instrumental rationality and value rationality, the tension between individualism and collectivism, and the misalignment of intergenerational values. These value conflicts lead to a lack of sense of meaning and sense of direction in students' learning process, and further result in pessimistic view of learning attitude and avoidance or escape in learning behaviors.

Mental internal consumption has a comprehensive negative impact on university students' learning state. At the cognitive level, it triggers cognitive resource depletion, rumination thinking cycle, and decision-making mechanism paralysis; at the emotional level, it leads to generalized anxiety, loss of happiness, and self-identity collapse; at the behavioral level, it manifests as procrastination, avoidance, and physical and mental exhaustion. This continuous depletion of psychological energy makes it difficult for students to maintain concentration and engagement in learning, forming a dilemma of wanting to work hard but unable to act.

4. Coping Strategies and Educational Suggestions

4.1 Restructuring the Evaluation System to Guide Diversified Development

To solve the dilemma of the decline in university learning attitudes, the primary task is to restructure the learning evaluation system[10]. In recent years, many universities have actively explored, such as a university will comprehensively cancel GPA for undergraduates, adopt grade evaluation system, and allow students to choose one course to record results as pass/fail, expanding exploration space; other university replaced GPA with a 12-level grade system; and other institutions have also implemented "grade system + comprehensive evaluation" models. Pilot effects show that students spend less time on rote learning and more energy on scientific research and interest fields.

Universities can further learn from international experience to build a "degree + honors level" system. The UK higher education quality assurance system centers on the degree classification system, with undergraduate results calculated according to course weights, making learning outcomes concrete and forming a continuous incentive effect. This design directly determines further study and employment opportunities through degree levels, strongly correlating with career starting points, transforming external needs into internal motivation through system design. Chinese universities can integrate local wisdom to establish a "process incentive + result application" model, allowing truly hardworking students to gain social recognition and mobilize students' endogenous motivation for learning.

4.2 Innovating Teaching Models to Promote Deep Learning

Universities should vigorously promote teaching model innovation, transitioning from knowledge indoctrination to ability cultivation[11]. Specifically, the following measures can be taken: 1) Promote Active Learning Strategies: Universities and educators should encourage teachers to adopt teaching methods such as problem-based learning (PBL), case teaching, and project-based learning, transforming the classroom from a knowledge transmission venue into a thinking stimulation space. Educators should encourage students to test learning outcomes through output. After learning a chapter, students can try to explain it to classmates in their own words, or sort out the knowledge framework through mind maps, which can connect knowledge more effectively than simply doing exercises. 2) Cultivate Questioning Spirit: Teachers should create a safe classroom questioning environment, guiding students to turn doubts into active communication. Teachers should encourage students to approach the teacher after class to ask specific questions, or discuss with classmates in study groups. The process of asking itself is a process of deepening understanding. University administrators need to focus on improving students' learning interest and knowledge-seeking enthusiasm, vigorously cultivating meritorious student, that is, the good of love of learning, curiosity, and questioning. 3) Strengthen Learning Strategy Guidance: Educators should help students master university learning methods, such as using goal decomposition instead of blind planning. It is not necessary to set a big goal of wanting to get a scholarship, but to break it down into specific actions –spend some hours a week sorting out professional course notes and spend some minutes previewing key points for each course before class. These small goals are easy to complete, and accumulating them leads to big progress. At the same time, educators should guide students to make good use of fragmented time to make up for shortcomings. Time spent waiting in line for the cafeteria and commuting to and from class can be used to memorize English words and review key summaries of

professional courses; students should also reserve large blocks of time on weekends for deep learning.

4.3 Integrating Technology Empowerment to Build a Smart Learning Ecosystem

Facing the challenges of the digital age, universities should actively integrate technology empowerment into the construction of the learning ecosystem. Research shows that students who believe their school is at the technological forefront are significantly more satisfied with technical services than those whose school technology level is average or backward[8]. Universities should continue to invest in cutting-edge technology, ensure reliable campus network/Wi-Fi access, explore innovative solutions and emerging technologies, and improve the technological literacy of students and teachers.

In the wave of artificial intelligence, universities can focus on building intelligent academic data analysis platforms, using deep learning algorithms for in-depth mining and correlation analysis of students' multidimensional behavior data. This platform can comprehensively integrate key indicators such as class attendance, homework timeliness, assessment results, resource borrowing, and online activity, achieving personalized learning support through clustering analysis and time series prediction algorithms. For academically challenged groups with weak learning motivation, the system identifies typical behavioral characteristics (such as continuous failure to submit homework, continuously low classroom interaction rate) through machine learning, establishes a hierarchical early warning mechanism, and pushes differentiated intervention plans to counselors and academic advisors.

At the same time, universities need to establish a guided use framework for generative AI for students. Completely prohibiting the use of generative AI, or only emphasizing the risks of unethical use without teaching students how to deal with these potential challenges, may lead students to conceal their use of AI tools or completely avoid using AI. This may ultimately put students at a disadvantage when entering the workplace increasingly integrated with AI. Students should be encouraged to use generative AI tools responsibly[12], balancing their opportunities and challenges, and establishing communication mechanisms among teachers, students, leaders, and other school stakeholders.

4.4 Strengthening Value Guidance to Stimulate Endogenous Motivation

To improve the learning attitude of university students, it is necessary to fundamentally strengthen value guidance and stimulate endogenous motivation[13]. Ideological and political education workers should focus on building a triple meaning system: 1) Draw a Life Value Compass: Educators should guide students to refine a few core life values from numerous value options (such as academic truth-seeking, innovation and entrepreneurship, family harmony, social responsibility, etc.). By drawing an intuitive value weight pie chart, abstract pursuits are concretized, and accordingly, a quarterly value practice plan is formulated. For example, anchoring social responsibility, community volunteer service can be planned monthly, allowing the light of value to penetrate confusion and illuminate daily actions. 2) Build Intergenerational Communication Heart Bridges: Design communication methods of "empathy - decoding - win-win." Guide students to first deeply empathize with the emotional core behind parental demands (such as the deep expectation for children's stable life behind taking the civil service exam), then rationally present the realistic basis and development prospects of personal choices supported by detailed industry trends and career development data, and finally propose a growth roadmap that integrates the concerns of both parties, such as a three-year professional skill refinement plan, obtaining industry authoritative certification, transforming confrontation into dialogue and pressure into synergy. 3) Forge a Setback Meaning Transformation Furnace: Educators should provide a diary template with an "event – cognitive reconstruction – action" guide. When students encounter academic setbacks, educators should guide them to extract growth experiences from these setbacks and shift their attention from “why failure” to “what is learned from it,” thus constructing a positive explanatory style and enhancing psychological resilience.

5. Conclusion and Outlook

The decline in undergraduates learning attitudes is the result of multiple factors, including both internal educational factors such as evaluation system alienation and lagging teaching models, and external environmental factors such as technological impact and loss of values. Solving this problem requires building a closed-loop system of "loose entrance, strict process control, diversified exit," forming a multi-party collaborative education ecosystem.

Fundamentally, improving learning attitudes of students is not simply requiring students to study hard, but to activate reform motivation through institutional innovation, improve university vitality through governance innovation, and enhance service ability through industry-education integration. Universities should shift from teaching-centered to learning-centered, truly focusing on students' learning experience and growth needs, providing suitable growth paths for students with different characteristics.

Looking forward, the quality improvement of higher education needs to go beyond technical repairs and patches, carrying out holistic and systematic reconstruction. When every learner can find a suitable growth path, every university can demonstrate characteristic advantages, and every industry can obtain precise talent supply, Chinese higher education will surely embark on a path of quality improvement with Chinese characteristics, writing a strong and colorful chapter for the education power strategy. Only in this way can we effectively reverse the trend of declining university learning attitudes and cultivate a new generation with solid professional skills, continuous learning ability, and innovative spirit.

Acknowledgement

This research was financially supported by Campus Culture Research and Construction Project of Tianjin Agricultural University (Grant NO.2024SJP19) and Tianjin municipal-level university student innovation and entrepreneurship training program (Grant NO.202510061140).

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