

The Plight of Alienation in College Students' Learning: An Analysis Based on User-Generated Content

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Abstract: Learning plight is an important topic in the study of college students' learning. Based on the qualitative analysis of User-Generated Content on the video website "Bilibili", this study found that there are three kinds of "alienation" plight in college students' learning, namely, the alienation between the student individuals and their learning process, possible selves, and life rhythms. The alienation plight of college students' learning involves two aspects: intellectual learning plight and life meaning plight. Furthermore, this study suggested the approaches to get out of the plight: creating meaningful learning experiences for students; designing learner-centered environments and forming comprehending communities; inheriting and extending the Confucian learning concept about "learning to be human".

Keywords: College Students' Learning; Alienation; User-Generated Content; Possible Selves; Learning Process; Life Rhythm

Published: Jul 3, 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62177/jetp.v2i3.453>

1. Introduction

Learning plight is an important topic in the study of college students' learning. At present, the common learning plight of college students, such as learning pressure, learning burnout, learning anxiety, and lack of learning involvement, has attracted academic attention. The phenomenons of involution (Zhang Yanglei & Huang Yaping, 2022) and marginalization (Li Rongrong & Cheng Lianghong, 2021) in college students' learning have also been deeply analyzed and reflected in current studies.

However, Rob Jones (2018) suggested the seven microsystems that students experience in college, namely social background, the degree programme, extra curricula activity, preparing for life after graduation, expectations pre-university, transition-settling into student life, university peer and friendship groups. In other words, the learning experience of college students not only refers to the academic involvement, and to the perception of the environment, self and others. We should understand students' learning experiences in a broader sense, such as life and future.

In fact, the learning plight of college students involves two aspects: intellectual learning plight and life meaning plight. The former refers to the problems such as inability to understand curriculum knowledge, unsatisfactory academic performance, and inability to effectively acquire knowledge. The latter refers to the current learning experience could not answer life questions such as "What kind of life will I have in the future", "what is the value of going to college for my life". However, current studies have mainly focused on students' intellectual learning plight, with little reference to the life meaning plight.

Based on the qualitative analysis of User-Generated Content on the video website “Bilibili”, this study found that there are three kinds of “alienation” plight in college students’ learning, namely, the alienation between the student individuals and their learning process, possible selves, and life rhythms. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, alienation is a state or experience isolated from a group one should belong to or an activity one should participate in, which is basically synonymous with estrangement. Alienation is often used to explain the relationship between a person and his or her innermost feelings and desires, or the relationship between individuals and groups. M Seeman identifies five states of alienation: feeling powerless to influence the society in which we live; feeling the loss of discipline and faith; feeling that the end cannot be achieved by fair means or foul; feeling alienated from specific goals and norms; unable to find a truly satisfying activity (Raymond Williams, 2005).

In this study, alienation refers to the existence state of “fading out of subjectivity” in the learning of student individuals. To be specific, first, it is difficult for student individuals to have a sense of ownership of the learning processes and lose their dominant position in the learning processes. Second, it is difficult for student individuals to form clear and accessible possible selves, and their perception of “what they will become”, “what they want to become” and “what they fear to become” is vague. Third, the life rhythms of student individuals are institutionalized as “machine rhythms”, and the individuals lose the grasp of the life rhythms. The alienation plight of college students’ learning involves two aspects: intellectual learning plight and life meaning plight. The former is reflected in the alienation between the individuals and the learning processes, while the latter is reflected in the alienation between the individuals and possible selves and life rhythms.

This study suggested a type of college students’ learning plight, namely alienation. We described and explained three kinds of alienation plight in college students’ learning, and tried to put forward the approaches to relieve the alienation plight. We hoped to provide a deeper understanding of college students’ learning plight.

2. Methodology

User-Generated Content (UGC), as a new information source in mass communication system, provides researchers with more convenient, fast and vivid research materials. In particular, the comment section of UGC videos shows us the user’s understanding of something and the interaction between other users. The data mining of UGC video comment section could help us analyze the user’s overall view of something. Users usually make comments spontaneously during or after watching videos. “Compared with words, visual power is more direct and rapid in evoking emotions” (Peng Lan., 2019), so the opinions expressed in comments are more subjective and emotional.

The data of this study was collected from the comment section of the video website “Bilibili”. Bilibili is a cultural community and video platform with a high concentration of young generation in China. According to the statistics in 2022, nearly 82% of its users are born between 1990 and 2009, and the average age of users is 22.8 years old, making it the content community with the highest concentration of college students (Tencent, 2022). There are plentiful videos that introduce college life, share college learning experience, complain the college experience and criticize college education on Bilibili. These videos are uploaded by college students or who care about college education.

This study searched for “college students” in Bilibili and sorted the videos according to the amount of views, looking for the viewpoint videos about college students’ learning plight (except the types of vlog and spoof), excluding the videos with too specific themes and too strong guidance (such as involution, freshman, group work). Finally, three videos were screened out (Table 1). Although users will inevitably be guided by the video content when making comments, from the interaction of video playback, comments and likes, this virtual community jointly built by video and comments has a certain universality, which could explain the overall situation of college students’ learning plight to a certain extent.

Table 1 The three videos selected in this study

Video Title	Video Views	Video Likes	Video Comments	Website
Me, a loser from a world-class university.	6.038 million	549000	15300	https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1t3411H7Zw?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=71962d73a3aa27b90d0cf437f5bb7bbd

Video Title	Video Views	Video Likes	Video Comments	Website
How bad the current college education is?	1.963 million	193000	12528	https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1Ey4y1D-7sa?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=71962d73a3aa27b90d0cf437f5bb7bbd
What can we do for ourselves when we are so disappointed with the university?	3.342 million	330000	5991	https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1Mf4y1V71H?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=71962d73a3aa27b90d0cf437f5bb7bbd

In this study, the top 100 comments with the most “likes” were screened out from each video, and 307 comments with a total of more than 30,000 words were finally obtained. Then, we used the qualitative analysis software Nvivo11 to code and analyze the material. Two researchers coded the information from the perspective of “college students’ learning plight” from the bottom up according to the principles of grounded theory. After several rounds of discussion and verification, the code was screened, supplemented and modified, and finally the three-level code information was formed. (Table 2).

Table 2 Coding results

selective coding	axial coding	open coding
the alienation between student individuals and their learning processes	loss of trust in teachers	In college, it’s much better to look up videos of your own courses than to listen to your teacher. The teacher gave me less help and I had to work on my own. The teacher lectures are stiff, read according to powerpoint, lack of ability. The course wasn’t enough for me to really learn more. Bilibili University, MOOC University
	learning outcomes don’t belong to me	I don’t understand. Why do you write this kind of assignment? Disdained to back the key points, I did not get a good ranking. Waiting for me is only my coolie. I have eaten a lot of “serious” and “diligent” deficit. When people around you are not serious, you feel that your serious is meaningless.
	ordinary being	Parental expectations and self-expectations are huge. Lack of self-awareness. Ambition-Power=Pain. Learn to accept their mediocrity, learn to reconcile with themselves. Self confusion, self-confidence, even inferiority. The people around you are too excellent. No obvious learning and academic achievements. Every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.
the alienation between student individuals and their possible selves	no worthwhile effort	The frog from the bottom of the well is fished out and thrown back again after seeing the wide sky. Poor family of origin, trapped in the family. Significant regional differences. The cruelty of education is to let you see the world and then tell you that it has nothing to do with you. I’ve struggled through huge drops and discovered what I call reality.
the alienation between student individuals and their life rhythms	being stuck in a major	I entered a major I didn’t like. The major is not ideal and the prospect is poor. I am not interested in what I have learned. The future is slim, just want to sigh. When I didn’t choose the right major, my life turned into a fork in the road.
	time dominated by others	Go with the flow, do nothing. It’ll be easy in college is the biggest lie I’ve ever heard in my life. I’m tired of not having time to myself. You want to spend your time on things that interest you. Meaningless lessons consume a lot of time. Formalistic activities fill my life. The endless forms make me sick.

3.Results

3.1 The alienation between student individuals and their learning processes

Learning process refers to the process of gaining learning experience and represents how students' learning occurs. Student individuals are the subjects, owners and creators of their learning processes. But they often lose ownership of the learning processes in the unequal relationship between them and teachers as well as some academic assessment ways. As a result, the owner of the learning processes to become teachers and universities. The learning outcomes that students produce during tests and assignments are not for their own growth, but to meet the requirements of teachers and universities (Sarah J. Mann. , 2001). These are all manifestations of the alienation between individuals and their learning processes.

3.1.1 Loss of trust in teachers

In the students' learning plight, "learning by oneself" is especially worthy of attention. Students often refer to "learning by oneself" in the context of a criticism of teachers' teaching, such as:

I majored in animation... The teacher asks us to practice and learn by ourselves everyday. The contents of the courses are either found on the Internet or read according to the textbook. I improve my drawing skills by taking video lessons on my own, so I don't know what I was going to college for.

A comment that "watching online course videos is better than going to college" resonated with students, earning nearly 20,000 likes. Although students could obtain the knowledge they need through self-study, interaction is an indispensable dimension of the learning process, and it is difficult to generate teacher-student interaction in the context of learning by oneself. Learning by oneself can only be used as a supplement to teachers' teaching. But if it becomes the only way for students to acquire knowledge, then students will doubt the meaning of going to college and deny their college experiences. Some students defined university as "learning by yourself" and joked that they are jointly trained by "Bilibili University" or "MOOC University". For students, learning by oneself means helplessness and self-salvation when they are isolated and unable to get support from teachers.

I skipped a very terrible class for more than two months, only to find out that there is no need to go to class because I could get more knowledge from reading than from the class.

In fact, students are very eager to meet a responsible teacher who gives wonderful lectures, and expect to get different knowledge and interactive experience from learning by themselves. But over time, they lose trust and respect for teachers, they doubt the teachers' sense of responsibility, knowledge reserve and teaching ability. Students classified their teachers' teaching styles as Talk About Family Matters, Plays Movies, PowerPoint Reading, Bragging, and, to a small extent, Conscientiousness. Some students considered that teachers let students learn by themselves and call it "cultivate self-study ability" because the teachers do not familiar with the course knowledge. They also realized that:

Very few teachers really try to help you because they don't have to.

A university professor does not deserve to be called a teacher.

3.1.2 Learning outcomes don't belong to me

During assessment sessions such as assignments and exams, some students don't understand why they are doing this assignment and why they are writing papers that are not related to their major. Assignments have no personal meaning to them, just to cope with teachers and get credit. Especially to the end of the term, often thousands of words of paper waiting for students to write become a burden for students, some students say that "be tired clearly in high school, be tired confusedly in college".

I'm majoring in business administration, but I have to submit a final paper of 4000 words for the mental health course and 3000 words for the literature course. I don't understand why this is happening.

In the exam, the students who did not study hard get a good ranking by buying the question bank and reciting the test site, while the students who did not want to take opportunism and want to be responsible for themselves study hard, but finally could not get a good ranking. This made them feel that they have lost ownership of the product of their labor and that they are not in control of their learning outcomes. They believed that they have been treated unfairly and that the number in their academic performance is far from their learning motivation, learning behavior and learning aspirations.

I'm a medical student. I'm above reciting test points. I study until 8:30 p.m. every day, the result of the test scores in the class ranked last.

When the learning outcomes do not belong to the students themselves, the students will have a sense of nothingness and isolation in the learning process, that is, the learning behavior has lost its criterion and destination. At this time, the feeling of "no one to rely on" experienced by the students is also an important manifestation of the alienation plight.

3.2 The alienation between student individuals and their possible selves

Possible selves refer to the future selves, namely an individual's idea of what he/she could become, wanted to become, and feared to become. Possible selves play the role of cognitive and emotional in motivation. It is essential to explain the present self and motivate future behavior. The process of acquiring, realizing, or resisting certain possible selves is the process of individual development (Hazel Markus & Paula Nurius, 1986). Students with clear possible selves tend to set more detailed goals and plans, be more persistent in the face of challenges, achieve higher academic achievement, set higher career goals and take action to achieve them (Jacqueline Stevenson & Sue Clegg, 2011). In addition, possible selves are embodied and social. Daily experiences, socioeconomic status, the words and images in the media all influence the formation of an individual's possible selves.

Human life is towards the future, as Georg Simmel said, there will always be more to life than itself. The consciousness of the future is the spiritual expression of human breaking through the finiteness of life, and it is the nature of human life to imagine the future oneself. However, individuals will also be affected by their own and social factors, so that they cannot form accessible and clear possible selves, which is the alienation of individuals from the possible selves.

3.2.1 Ordinary being

Ordinary is the more common cognitive and emotional response that students have when they envision possible selves. For some students, the sense of accomplishment brought by college is only when they got the admission letter. When they knew that they had been admitted to the university, they were full of infinite imagination about their future selves. But as they entered the college, there was a growing sense that "my future is determined at birth", and a deep sense of the limitations of their family's socioeconomic status on their possible selves.

When a young man in a backcountry begins to see prosperity, when he sees those tall buildings, it is really full of beautiful scenery as far as his eyes can see. Your state of mind will be very complicated. How can I describe it? It is a kind of wishful conquest of the world before the surging and heroic, mixed with the fear of the world out of place and shyness.

The English class was the first time for some students to feel the difference between themselves and others. It was the first English class after the new term that obliterates their ambition. The cognition of present self based on classroom experience and academic achievement influences the construction of future self of students. The students realized that they are ordinary being, which means that it is difficult for students to form clear self-expectations, and also affects students' happiness in the overall college experience.

Coming from a less developed city, I had never worried about my English before coming to Shanghai. However, I had a terrible experience in the first class of "Listening and Speaking for Academic English". The differences between different regions, including the educational gap caused by different family backgrounds, were insurmountable.

I come from the northwest region (undeveloped area), compared with my classmates who were born in Beijing, I recognize my own ordinary. Now I'm swinging back and forth between trying and not trying. It's too exhausting.

3.2.2 No worthwhile effort

"Even if you try your best to be an ordinary person" and "no matter how hard you try" are probably their most painful experiences in college. They referred to themselves as "losers from top universities" and ridiculed themselves as "small-town people who are only good at exams". Family and social environment could not only generate some possible selves, but also inhibit or even collapse some possible selves. Some students, who weren't even "losers from top universities", said they got the lowest-level configuration life script. Their families, regions, universities and majors all belong to poor levels. They are pessimistic about their future. Perhaps the period when they know that they are admitted to university is the only dazzling day in their life.

Take a frog from the bottom of a well, wait for him to see the wider world, then throw him back. I'm like that frog.

Some students' confusion about the future was due to aimless effort. They regarded hard study as their only capital, but they didn't know why they study hard, because "hard study does not necessarily lead to happiness". This kind of uneasy and disoriented experience, as well as the loss of meaning in learning, is also an important expression of the alienation between student individuals and their possible selves.

3.2.3 being stuck in a major

For college students, major has a strong future meaning. It refers to what a student will do and what he or she will be after graduation. Studying a certain major is usually a preparation for life after graduation. But when the major is not one's interest, the student's whole college life will lose its purpose. "Taking a major that doesn't interest you" or "not wanting to do it after graduation" will lead to identity confusion such as "who am I" and "who am I going to be" for students, who feel stuck in their major their whole life.

Ever since I went to college, my life has gone off the rails. After I didn't pick the right major, I started feeling sorry for myself. I got depressed, I dropped out of the university, and now I'm back. At the beginning of the set goals are probably not achieved, later also do not know what will happen, can only live day by day.

In addition, there are students escaped from independent thinking and freedom of choice for the future, give up their subjectivity and are willing to surrender to others or rules. Even if some students did not give up, but their efforts were not toward the "possible selves", but muddy drift or willing to be led by external standards (such as Scholarship Selection Criteria), they would like to achieve merit rather than self-enrichment.

I don't want to do what I am studying when I graduate, and I don't know what I want to do. I'm like a character in a game. I don't know where to go without being controlled, and I don't have any ideas of my own.

I found that more than 90% of students around me do not like their majors and have no plan for their future and career. They study hard for the \$500 scholarship at the end of the semester.

3.3 The alienation between student individuals and their life rhythms

Life is lively but harmonious, that is to say, life is rhythmic (Zong Baihua,2008). The student individuals' grasp of their own life rhythms is an important expression of subjectivity. The life rhythms should come from the internal pursuit of individual life, such as the pursuit of truth, justice and freedom. Students should devote more time and energy to things full of life meaning and conducive to "learning to be human" (Tu Weiming,2018). However, universities often institutionalize the life course of student individual. As a result, individual life could only operate according to the established rules, and there is no space for creating, changing and generating personal meaning. The events experienced by individuals lack enthusiasm, investment and will. The life rhythm of the individual has lost its vivid spirit, and become a kind of machine rhythm. This is the alienation between student individuals and their life rhythms.

One's own time is dominated by others, which is the main expression of students' alienation from the rhythm of life. "Waste of time" was a local concept that often appeared in students' learning plight. Classes, extracurricular activities, exams and assignments are the things that made students feel the most waste of time, because these things "don't mean anything to me". Sometimes learning is really painful. Some teachers' teaching are very poor, so I have to study again after class, which is equivalent to, my time is twice consumed. If I don't have to go to class and have free time, I can spend part of my time doing things that are really good for my growth.

Human beings experience time in two ways: the use of natural time and the control of the life rhythm (Chen Shaoming,2020). The latter is the more fundamental meaning of time. Students' time is controlled by others, so they lose their freedom of action. The things that fill their time appear to be "rich activities" provided by universities and teachers, but are actually "defeat garrulous". Students' time is filled with meaningless events, but there is nothing in their spirit. They are tired, but they don't know what to work for.

In fact, it is not "busy" that makes students get into trouble, but "busy" that lacks personal meaning. Some students joked: "Attending classes in university really delays learning". The life rhythms should follow not only the external order, but also the inner spiritual order. It should be based on the individual's personalized pursuit of life, and determined by the individual,

which is the expression of the uniqueness and creativity of individual life.

Now I am a freshman. I am really anxious. I feel that I am already very busy, and I have no time to play games every day, but I still haven't reviewed a lot of things, and I am still confused about the exam.

In addition, the domination of one's time by others makes students feel less dignified, because their hard work may be worthless in the eyes of the teachers and the universities, which is the master.

The assignments are usually to write more than 3000 words of the paper. I do not understand, dozens, hundreds of students of 3000 words of the paper handed in, the teacher has the time and energy to read? The teacher will not be able to really read, maybe, we write hard papers were thrown away by the teacher. Is our time so cheap?

4. Discussion

Using UGC as the data source, this study found three kinds of alienation plight in college students' learning through qualitative analysis. In addition, we found that college students will not only encounter intellectual learning difficulties, but also encounter difficulties in the meaning of life, such as the alienation of individuals from their possible selves and the life rhythms. Based on the above research results, this study would like to put forward some suggestions to relieve the alienation plight of college students in learning.

Firstly, universities and teachers should create meaningful learning experiences for students. A meaningful learning experience means that students have a high level of engagement and energy in the classroom, and that the classroom brings meaningful and lasting change to the students, as well as adds value to the students' future lives (L.D. Fink, 2006). Facilitating student participation in their own learning is the key to creating meaningful learning experiences. In addition to imparting objective knowledge, teachers should also lead students to reflect on what this learning experience and these learning contents mean to me? How do they relate to my future life? What are the values of them to my life growth? When objective knowledge is related to students' lives and self-knowledge is formed, students could use self-knowledge to explain problems encountered in different real situations. Students feel that they have become the master of learning, which will reduce the sense of powerlessness and nothingness in learning.

Secondly, a learner-centered learning environment should be created, and an "comprehensible" learning community should be formed between teachers and students. Learner-centered learning environment requires teachers not only to have a deep studying of the learning content, but also to have a high degree of cultural sensitivity (Zhong Qiquan, 2015), understanding of students' interests, beliefs, culture, past experiences and expectations for the future. At the same time, teachers should also actively reveal themselves to students, present their own learning experience, value reflection, life expectations, professional beliefs and so on to students. They should strive to be a model personality for students to learn, and encourage students to reflect on themselves in their understanding of teachers. In this way, teachers and students form a closer relationship based on personality interaction and spiritual contract. With the support of this "comprehensible" learning community, students can feel more "I am comprehended" and "I can comprehend myself and others".

Thirdly, the Confucian view of "learning to be human" is worthy of attention. Confucianism regards learning as a practice of life cultivation that accompanies the whole life course. Liang Shuming said that "learning is the spontaneous pursuit of life", which is the most widely accepted and influential interpretation of Confucian learning view so far (Yuanbiao Lin, 2018). In other words, learning is the unity between learning and being human, or between knowledge acquisition and moral cultivation. The purpose of learning is to become a whole person, rather than being satisfied with meeting assessment standards, finding a job, acquiring material life, etc. The main axis of Confucian education is personal enrichment, not to obtain the affirmation of others or their own interests (Li Hongqi, 2017). That is, the purpose of learning is to realize learners' self-perfection and spiritual enrichment, rather than for fame and fortune as well as showing off. Under the social and cultural background such as meritism and value comparison, it may be the fundamental way to relieve the alienation plight to cultivate students' sensibility to life and self, the critical ability and reflective ability to external standards, and guide students to aspire to be human.

Funding

no

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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