

Impact of College Students' Learning Engagement on Subjective Well-Being

Lingyan Gong

Huzhou Vocational & Technical College, School of Marxism, Huzhou 313009, China

ABSTRACT

We explored the mediating role of psychological detachment in the classroom field (PDCF) on the relation between learning engagement (LE) and subjective well-being (SWB). A total of 548 Chinese college students participated in this study, and we discovered that PDCF partially mediated the relationship between LE and SWB. As a moderator, self-efficacy is greatly important in the relation between LE and PDCF.

KEYWORDS

Learning engagement; Psychological detachment; Subjective well-being; Self-efficacy

In recent years, the well-being of college students has been a crucial research area, particularly with great changes in the classroom field regarding Internet abuse. Presently, college students spend large amounts of time online, and can potentially experience symptoms of problematic Internet use, e.g., staying online longer than intended. The spread of wireless Internet not only expands the feasible space of amusement but also increases the diversification of learning paths. The former sometimes destroys the rules of a classroom field directly, and the latter changes the traditional mode of teaching and learning in the classroom field. Diversification of learning paths and an ever-increasing complexity of learning environments has become increasingly widespread globally in a climate of learning transformation within colleges alongside the coming of the information society. The popular idea that advanced education can change one's destiny has been interrupted by easier access to numerous information sources, which greatly influence the classroom field. Hence, the well-being of Chinese college students should be carefully considered by researchers.

Previous research into the well-being of Chinese college students have mainly focused on the relations of online communication, psychological capital, materialism, stress, and cultural alienation. Additionally, some other studies have been involved in studying the relation between subjective well-being (SWB) and learning engagement (LE), in which "the higher the degree of the students' learning engagement, the stronger their well-being will get" (Yao, 2011, p. 367). Furthermore, certain studies have closely related LE and SWB. The positive experiences that are brought about by LE are the main source of SWB. Although previous researchers have indicated that college students' learning behavior and study results affect well-being, little is known about LE impacting the SWB mechanisms involved. To this extent, we will focus the mechanisms and boundary conditions on the relation between LE and SWB.

Moreover, previous studies on college students' SWB are mainly concerned about negative factors like study pressure. Some researchers found that addiction to internet reduces the quality of reality-based relationships and decreases well-being for bad relationships, neglecting daily chores

and hindrance of sleep pattern (Baturay, M. H. & Toker, S., 2019). Meanwhile, previous studies mostly described the situation in which the college students face a lot of pressure; hence, they find it difficult to detach themselves from the learning field. More recent studies focus on the phenomenon in which the means of entertainment is so distracting that the college students find it difficult to attach themselves to the learning field. Both these types of research refer to a concept of psychological detachment, whether it is in or out of the classroom field.

On this account, our study attempts to promote the understanding of the relation between LE and SWB by exploring the mediating role of psychological detachment in the classroom field (PDCF) in China. The PDCF can be manifested as a learning burnout, interpreted as “a negative emotional state characterized by feelings of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy” (Stoliker&Lafreniere, 2015). According to this interpretation, we add psychological detachment and self-efficacy (SE) to our hypothesis model to fill in this blank which mentions to the factors—PDCF and SE in the SWB research. We argue that college students who have a higher SE will more likely be engaged in the class; therefore, the psychological detachment will not likely occur. Hence, this negative relationship of LE and psychological detachment is moderated by SE.

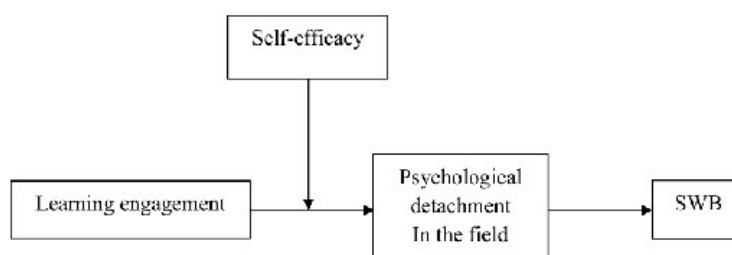


Fig.1 Conceptual model of the study

1 Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

1.1 Learning Engagement and Psychological Detachment

Psychological detachment is defined as “the individual’s sense of being away from the work situation” (Etzion, Eden & Lapidot, 1998). It has generally been used in the off-job time for existing research, but this study focuses on the students’ absent-minded states regarding working time. PDCF implies that the college students lack focus in the learning situation, largely owing to the fact that attention spans in class are crippled by overflowing new media in the informatization process. Nevertheless, the students who are engaged in learning tend to direct their concentration toward interaction in class, instead of indulging themselves in other activities. Students who actively participate in learning tasks are more likely to perform better and commit themselves to learning in various ways, i.e., using cognitive strategies, actively interacting with peers and teachers, and maintaining a positive emotion in class (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Furthermore, when facing a large amount of workload, employees may feel overwhelmed by the amount of work to be done and will continue to think about the tasks to be accomplished even when they are at home (Sonnentag et al., 2010), i.e., LE will make the college students focus on their work, so that PDCF does not occur easily. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Learning engagement will be negatively related to PDCF.

1.2 Mediation Influence by Psychological Detachment

Engagement is well-known as “... a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is

characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Similarly, LE can be comprehended as a positive, fulfilling, learning-related state of mind that has been identified as "positively affecting achievement of learning outcomes" (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006). Hence, the definition of well-being is "a positive state in which the personal, relational, collective needs and aspirations of individuals and communities are fulfilled" (Evans, 2014).

Negative feelings are unavoidable in the classroom field. What happens if the college students lack positive and fulfilling states of mind in class? Away to cope with the negative feeling is to get rid of the situation via psychological detachment. Research has shown that psychological detachment helps in recovering from work stress (Sonnentag, 2006). It is a fact that psychological detachment does work for recovering when one is not at work. What about the situation when one is at work? Of course, it is beneficial for the individual to reduce his stress of working requirements. However, psychological detachment in the field (which is negative) will cause more/other stresses as "positive experiences and pleasant events are known to promote high positive affect" (Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000). Besides, "a person's general level of work engagement is positively related to positive affect, and negatively related to negative affect, at the end of the working week" (Sonnentag, Mojza, Binnewies & Schollet, 2008). Thus, psychological engagement is contained in the engagement with work. Therefore, individuals who do not enjoy a generally high level of engagement at work will have more negative experiences and general pressure, so that their SWB will be impacted upon negatively. This is similar with college students during working time. In fact, psychological detachment in the field of classroom plays a mediating role on the relation between LE and SWB. On account with this, we put forward the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis2: The relation between LE and SWB will be mediated by PDCF.

1.3 Moderating Effect of Self-Efficacy

SE is a personal judgment of "how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982). Similarly, LE will present a high level of psychological integration when the students have high SE with the result that the negative psychological detachment does not easily emerge. People avoid activities that they believe exceed their coping capabilities, but they assuredly undertake and perform those that they judge themselves capable of managing. Those who think they are inefficient in coping with environmental requirements will be trapped in their own impossibilities and consider that the potential difficulties cannot be overcome (Carpi, Ronan, Falconer & Lents, 2017). If college students think that it is more difficult to cope with learning in class, they are more likely to fall into a state of PDCF. Briefly, the SE of college students will influence the degree of the relation between LE and PDCF. Thus, the following hypothesis is asserted:

Hypothesis 3: Self-efficacy will moderate the relation between LE and psychological detachment as high SE will strengthen relationships and vice versa.

2 Method—Participants and Procedure

A total of 630 surveys were distributed to the college students, from freshmen to senior students, in China, of which, 611 were returned, and the response rate was 96.9%. The final sample is 548 after some unmatched surveys were deleted. Of the participants, 69% were women and 31% were men; 47.3% were freshmen, 24.6% were sophomores, 19.7% were junior students, and 8.4% were senior students.

3 Measures

3.1 Subjective Well-Being

SWB was measured with an 18-item version of the General Well-Being Schedule (Fazio, 1977), which was revised by Duan (1996). A sample item is "How about your general feeling in the past month?"

3.2 Psychological Detachment

Psychological detachment was assessed with a 4-item scale adapted from the Recovery Questionnaire developed by Sonnentag and Fritz (2005). In accordance with the situation of the classroom field, a relative adjustment was made. A sample item is "I often forget to follow the teacher in class."

3.3 Learning Engagement

LE was measured with 17 items of the UWES-S (the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale- student) which is compiled by Schaufeli in 2003 and revised by Li in 2010. A sample item is "I am in high spirit and full of energy when I study."

3.4 Self-Efficacy

SE was measured with 10 items of the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1999) revised as per the Chinese background. For example: "Try my best and I am sure to solve all the problems."

4 Results

4.1 Tests of Hypotheses

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and internal reliabilities among all key study variables. All scales have good internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha coefficients are from 0.709 to 0.930). The magnitude and direction of these correlations were consistent with predictions and provided initial support for our hypotheses.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	5
1. Learning Engagement	4.248	0.864	(.930)			
2. PDCF	2.834	0.862	−0.383**	(0.845)		
3. Self-efficacy	2.754	0.469	0.444**	−0.118**	(0.833)	
4. SWB	3.886	0.416	0.390**	−0.345**	0.383**	(0.709)

Note. N=548. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Internal reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha coefficients) are given in parentheses along the diagonal.

Table 2 presents the regression results from testing the mediating hypotheses for the full sample. In line with our expectation, LE was negatively related to PDCF ($\beta = -0.400$, $p < .001$), which supported Hypothesis 1. Based on Hypothesis 1 and Models 1 and 2, Hypothesis 2 can be examined, showing that psychological detachment in the class field mediated the relation between LE and SWB (Model 3, $\beta = -0.343$, $p < .001$). The formerly significant relation between LE and SWB is also significant ($\beta = 0.324$, $p < .001$), indicating PDCF partly mediated relations between JS and KS, which

supported Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 was tested in Models 3 and 4. In Model 3, SWB was significantly influenced by PDCF ($\beta = -0.343, p < 0.001$). After entering SE and the interaction for LE and SE, the effect of the interaction was positively significant ($\beta = -0.080, p < 0.05$), meaning that SE played a role of a moderator. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Table 2 Regression Results for Testing Mediation and Moderation

Variable	PDCF	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Sex	0.068	0.038	0.025	0.010	0.019
Grade	0.092*	-0.137***	-0.118**	-0.070	-0.124**
LE	-0.400***	.411***	0.324***		0.352***
PDCF			-0.116***	-0.343***	
SE					-0.210***
LE* SE					-0.080*
F	34.098***	31.308***	36.145***	25.662***	29.860***
ΔR^2	0.154	0.167	0.205	0.119	0.209

Note. N=548. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

4.2 Discussion

In this study, an integrated model has been tested to reveal the mechanisms underlying the relation between LE and SWB. The results show that LE is associated with PDCF, which is, in turn, concerning vis-à-vis the college students' SWB. It is clear that the college students' SE moderates the relation between LE and psychological detachment.

Firstly, LE is linked negatively to PDCF. Students who experience a low level of LE will cause a high degree of PDCF. Students who are motivated to interpret what they are learning are more cognitively engaged as meaning making involves analytical intellectual processes of analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing information gathered or produced via the learning process. When the students regard that it is meaningless but not intellectual in the classroom field, they will be disengaged from class. Accordingly, our research about the predicting of negative effects on LE in relation to PDCF can contribute to the research regarding college students' engagement in diverse fields.

Next, our results explain that psychological detachment mediates the relation between LE and the SWB of college students. It is very helpful that the mediating effect of psychological detachment is applied to LE and college students' SWB, which expands the results revealed in prior research. The abuse of smart phones affects the structure of the classroom field. College executives may implement stricter regimes so as to force college students to be more engaged in class. This kind of classroom field will decrease the degree of LE. The result is that PDCF will ultimately affect the college students' SWB. Generally speaking, PDCF mediates the relation between LE and the SWB of college students.

Finally, the moderating influence of SE on the mediating model is uncovered in this research. Namely, for individuals with higher SE, LE will be strengthened as well as the negative relation of LE and PDCF. Perceived SE affects people's choice of activities and behavioral settings, how much effort they expend, and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and adverse experiences (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Taking SE as a moderator provides a meaningful evidence for the applicability of prior theories in current background of learning evolution. The Chinese college students with higher SE hold a higher level of LE under the circumstances of learning evolution and who will thus be more automatically be engaged in the classroom field without negative psychological detachment. So, research on the relation between LE and psychological detachment

are extended to include the function of SE.

5 Conclusion

Just like any study, some limitations also can be found in this research. On the one hand, it is noteworthy that it is not the only factor which mediates the relation between LE and SWB, besides which, there are other relevant factors such as learning interest and procrastination. On the other hand, the limits of effect and influencing variables of psychological detachment in the field have not yet been fully considered, though this study has proved that LE has an impact on college students' SWB through PDCF. Further research is needed in the boundary conditions, for instance, the differences between professional and non-professional courses.

Funding

This article is supported by Zhejiang (China) Provincial Philosophical and Social Science Planning Project, Research on the "Learning Center Paradigm" of Ideological and Political Course Teaching in Colleges and Universities - Exploration Based on Field Theory (Project No. 23GXSZ064YBM).

About the Author

Lingyan Gong, PhD, Research direction: Theory and practice of ideological and political education.

References

- [1] Bandura, A (1982). Self-Efficacy Mechanism in Human Agency. *American Psychologist*, 37(2), 122-147.<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.37.2.122>
- [2] Baturay M. H. & Toker S. . (2019). Internet addiction among college students: some causes and effects. *Education and Information Technologies*, (3), 1-23.<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-019-09894-3>
- [3] Bindl U. K., & Parker S. K. (2010). Feeling good and performing well? Psychological engagement and positive behaviors at work. *Handbook of Employee Engagement Perspectives Issues Research& Practice*.
- [4] Carini R. M., Kuh G. D., & Klein S. P.(2006). Student engagement and student learning: testing the linkages. *Research in Higher Education*, 47(1), 1-32.<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-005-8150-9>
- [5] Carpi A., Ronan D. M., Falconer H. M., & Lents N. H. (2017). Cultivating minority scientists: undergraduate research increases self-efficacy and career ambitions for underrepresented students in stem. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*,54(2), 1-26.<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tea.21341>
- [6] Drachsler H.,&Kirschner P. A. (2012). Learner Characteristics. *Health Information Systems*, 53(2), 324-331.https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6_347
- [7] Etzion D., Eden D., & Lapidot Y.(1998). Relief from job stressors and burnout: Reserve service as a respite. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 83(4), 577-585, 579.
- [8] Evans, S. (2014). Well-Being. In: T. Teo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology* (pp. 2073-2075). New York, NY: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_330
- [9] Fredricks J. A., Blumenfeld P. C., & Paris A. H. (2004). School engagement: potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59-109.
- [10] Gable S. L., Reis H. T., & Elliot A. J. (2000). Behavioral activation and inhibition in everyday life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(6), 1135-1149.
- [11] Li, X. & Huang, L. (2010). Revision Report of University Students' Learning Engagement Scale (UWES-S). *Psychological Research*, 3(1), 84-88.
- [12] Liem A. D., Lau S., & Nie Y. (2008). The role of self-efficacy, task value, and achievement goals in predicting learning strategies, task disengagement, peer relationship, and achievement outcome. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 33(4), 486-512.<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2007.08.001>

- [13] Sonnentag S. (2006). Psychological detachment from work during off-job time: The role of job stressors, job involvement, and recovery-related self-efficacy. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 15(2), 197-217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320500513939>
- [14] Sonnentag S., Kuttler I., & Fritz C. (2010). Job stressors, emotional exhaustion, and need for recovery: a multi-source study on the benefits of psychological detachment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 76(3), 355-365. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.06.005>
- [15] Sonnentag S., Mojza E. J., Binnewies C., & Scholl A. (2008). Being engaged at work and detached at home: A week-level study on work engagement, psychological detachment, and affect. *Work & Stress*, 22(3), 257-276. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02678370802379440>
- [16] Stoliker B. E., & Lafreniere K. D. (2015). The influence of perceived stress, loneliness, and learning burnout on university students' educational experience. *College Student Journal*, 49(1), 146-160.
- [17] Yao J. Z. (2011). A Preliminary Study on the Relationship between College Students' Learning Involvement, Personality Display and Happiness. *Chinese Journal of Behavioral Medical and Brain Science*, 20(4), 366-367. [10.3760/cma.j.issn.1674-6554.2011.04.026](https://doi.org/10.3760/cma.j.issn.1674-6554.2011.04.026)