An Empirical Study of the Employment Motivation Laziness Model: A Survey of Students in Higher Vocational College in China

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Abstract

Identifying slow employment (SE) and lazy employment (LE) will help graduates to improve the quality of employment. Based on the self-determined motivation theory, the study proposes a theoretical model of employment motivation laziness (EML), which consists of study burnout, laziness, lack of responsibility and lack of self-confidence, and is divided into two dimensions: controlled motivation (CM) and non-motivation (NM). However, the literature suggests a lack of empirical validation of EML, which seems to be a recent phenomenon of employment difficulties among Chinese graduates. The sample consisted of 1,033 students (50.1% male, 49.9% female). We proposed a developed questionnaire to the respondents. Cronbach's alpha measurements indicated that reliabilities ranged from .877 to .929. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the construct model included the dimensions of CM and NM. However, because of the complexity of motivation, other more variables may also be included, which requires further exploration.

Key words: Employment Motivation Laziness; Empirical Research; Higher Vocational College

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Competition for Employment

Employability. According to the data of *the Research Report on Employability of College Students in 2021*, *the Research Report on Employability of College Students in 2022* and *the Research Report on Employability of College Students in 2023* released by China Wisdom Recruitment, about 12.8%, 15.9% and 18.9% of Chinese graduates chose to be slow-employed in the years of 2021-2023 respectively, which is showing an increasing trend year by year. At the same time, the number of graduates in China in the past 10 years has been increasing. The scale of graduates in 2021-2023 will be about 9.09 million, 10.76 million and 11.58 million. It can be seen that the degree of competition for graduates' employment is getting more and more intense.

1.2 Employment Motivation Laziness

Slow Employment. Lazy employment (LE) and slow employment (SE) are two closely related but different employment behaviours. SE is the employment behaviour of graduates who do not take up employment quickly after graduation but make other choices. For example, staying at home, studying abroad, taking care of parents, preparing for vocational exams, or other non-employment directions and behaviours. It is a kind of employment psychological characteristics and behaviours that appear in the employment process of graduates (Wang & Li, 2022).

Employment Motivation Laziness. LE is an irrational employment behaviour that continues to deteriorate from SE (Wang & Hao, 2009). EML is a negative

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employment motivation that possesses the psychological characteristics of LE. These people have an ostrich mentality, are unwilling to face the problem, and tend to depend on parents even upon reaching adulthood (Bian, 2016). Similarly, graduates with EML may lack a sense of responsibility, self-confidence and career planning (Zhang, 2020). Moreover, they may have the trait of labour burnout, unwilling to choose innovative jobs, lack of hard work spirit, avoiding manual labour, believing that grassroots employment as a sign of "no talent". They always envy negative social phenomena such as "getting rich overnight" and "getting something for nothing" (Tang, 2022). Burnout, laziness, lack of responsibility, lack of self-confidence and other negative factors are possible sets of variables (Wang, 2020; Cao, 2020; Yan, et al., 2022). Unfortunately, no direct measurement tools have been found. The relevant construct information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Information table on the meaning and items of EML

Classifications	Latent variable	Meaning	Items	Source	Code
Controlled Motivation (CM) dimension	Study Burnout	Emotional exhaustion, which is characterized by a lack of personal energy, lack of enthusiasm for learning, and feeling extreme mental fatigue.	I feel that what I have learned is useless.	Neufeld A, Malin G, 2021; Wang Chinghua, 2021	LB1
			I feel tired of studying every day.		LB2
			I am tired of studying.		LB3
			I am tired of studying for tests.		LB4
			I want to study but always feel boring.		LB5
	Laziness	Good-for-nothing, uninspired, undisciplined.	I have poor self-control.	Hu Baoming, 2011; Li Hong, 2012	LITAB1
			I am too lazy to learn skills.		LITAB2
			I lack regularity in my habits.		LITAB3
			I think late and truant behavior is normal.		LITAB4
			I don't know the purpose of study and I don't like to think actively.		LITAB5
Non-motivation (NM) dimension	Lack of Responsibility	Lack of enthusiasm for the reality of learning and future work, and failure to realize their own responsibility as social subjects.	I am confused about career development.	Connie Wu, 2017	LOR1
			I am not clear about the prospect of professional development and the demand for related majors in the job market.		LOR2
			I have not seriously planned my future life.		LOR3
			I don't think it is necessary to accumulate contacts and resources during school.		LOR4
	Lack of Self-confidence	Don't believe in themselves, doubt their own abilities and knowledge, and even question what they have done or the decisions they have made	I am socially not very sociable.	Che Liping, 2002; Wu Aimee, 2019	LOC1
			I am very nervous about speaking in public.		LOC2
			I find it difficult to find a satisfying job with my present abilities.		LOC3
			Many times, I don't feel as capable as others.		LOC4
			I'm careful about what I do but it doesn't always feel right.		LOC5

2. THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Theory. Self-determined motivation theory posits that motivation is a continuum of varying levels of self-determination, consisting of three main types: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and NM (Ryan R.M., & Deci E. L., 2000). Subsequently, Ryan and Deci (2000) further categorized intrinsic motivation, as well as identified regulation, integrated regulation in extrinsic motivation, as autonomous motivation (AM). In contrast, external regulation and introjected regulation in extrinsic motivation are categorized as CM. They (Deci & Ryan, 2008) believe that individual behavior may respond to stimuli or possible punishment from External Regulation. That is, individuals act deliberately in order to achieve a certain goal or avoid a certain outcome. Similarly, introjected regulation is partially internalized external motivation, in which the individual performs and acts in order to feel a sense of self-worth and Ego, or perhaps to avoid shame, reduce anxiety, maintain self-esteem, etc. However, the most important characteristic of NM is that the individual has no interest in the activity at all and does not recognize or identify with the results and effects of the behavior at all. In addition, under the influence of CM, people are subjected to additional psychological stress due to thinking, conditioning or acting in a particular way, which is another implication of the theory.

Hypothesis. EML may contain elements of external regulation, introjected regulation, and NM, which resemble a state of CM and NM. Graduates who possess such motivations respond to stimuli from external regulation (e.g., competition and pressure for employment) or possible punishment (cannot obtain a job). At the same time, in order to avoid shame, reduce anxiety levels,

maintain self-esteem, and other purposes (introjected regulation), and thus are not interested in employment activities and do not identify with the positive impacts and outcomes that job can bring (NM). To test the model, we created the following hypothesis:

H1: EML contains CM dimension such as study burnout and laziness.

H2: EML contains NM dimension such as lack of responsibility and lack of self-confidence.

H3: CM dimension and NM dimension are interrelated within EML.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Sampling

The study was conducted at a higher vocational college in Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, China. The information on its official website shows that there are about 20,000 students enrolled in 2024, which are divided into eight secondary departments, four of which have less than 2,000 students while the remaining four have more than 2,000 students. Therefore, the proportional sampling method is the more suitable method. For the 4 secondary departments with less than 2000 students, the sampling percentage was 40% with an average of 10% for each. For the 4 sectors with more than 2000 students, the proportion was 60% with an average of 15% for each. Moreover, the maximum sampling error allowed was 7% with a confidence level of 95%. The final valid sample consisted of 1033 enrolled students.

3.2 Participants

About 50.1% of the subjects were male and 49.9% were female. Since the subjects were all current higher vocational college students, the age distribution was concentrated around 16 years old. In terms of grade level, about 29.2% were freshmen, 31% were sophomores, and 39.8% were juniors.

3.3 Measurement Tools

Because of the lack of direct measurement tools and to further validate the research hypotheses, the study will attempt to conceptualize the latent variables from study burnout (Wang, 2021), laziness (Hu, 2011; Li, 2012), lack of responsibility (Wu, 2017), and lack of self-confidence (Wu, 2019), which contain 19 items and are based on a five-point Likert scale. The study burnout variable from *Scale for Chinese College Students* was derived showed Cronbach's alpha of 0.881, and the lack of self-confidence variable from *the Personal Evaluation Questionnaire* was derived showed Cronbach's alpha of 0.830.

3.4 Pilot Study

We obtained 1033 valid questionnaires at one time, from which we randomly selected about 20%(N=219) of total cases as pilot study data using the random sample of cases function of SPSS23.0, to further analyzed the psychometric properties of the questionnaires. Based on the reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis, 2 items (LOC1, LOC2) were deleted, leaving 17 items. The data showed that the 17 items generated 2 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 using principal component analysis, with a cumulative variance explained of 61.593%. The modified questionnaire was used in further subsequent studies to verify that the psychometric properties of the questionnaire were at an acceptable level.

3.5 Validation Study

Correlation Coefficient. We divided the data into two main parts and randomly selected about 80%(N=826) of total cases as validation study data, using the same function of SPSS 23.0. The data showed Cronbach's alpha of 0.929 for the CM dimension and 0.877 for the NM dimension, with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.086 (p<0.05) between them.

Normal Distribution. We also calculated the skewness and kurtosis coefficients for each item to test for normal distribution. The data showed that most of the skewness values were distributed between -1 and 1, which approximates what would be expected from a normal distribution.

3.6 Procedure

Outliers. Multivariate data can be analyzed for multivariate outliers using Mahalanobis Distance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The critical threshold for the case dataset can be calculated based on the relevant formulae as 40.79. If the Mahalanobis Distance of a case is greater than 40.79, it means that the case is a multivariate outlier. After analyzing the cases, it is found that case number 100 is a multivariate outlier and the strategy of deletion should be adopted.

Common Method Bias. Self-reported questionnaires have the potential to generate an error called common method bias that affects validity. Harman's single-factor test can be used to test the extent of this type of error. The results showed that the explained rate of the first common factor (unrotated) in the Harman's single-factor test was about 36.857%, which is less than 50% (Philip & Dennis, 1986). Therefore, we believe that the common method bias present in the study may not be significant.

CFA Thresholds. In order to test hypotheses H1, H2 and H3, we conducted CFA, employing metrics such as CFI, SRMR and RMSEA to assess the structural validity. According to Cutoff Criteria (Hu & Bentler, 1999), we can get the threshold information of the model indices.

4. RESULTS

Reliability and Validity. For the CFA results of EML model and its two dimensions: CM and NM, as shown in Table 2 and Figure 1. The CM dimension contains the

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study burnout and laziness variables. The NM dimension contains the lack of responsibility and lack of self-confidence variables. Cronbach's alpha and CR values are close to 0.929 and 0.877. The related AVE values are also greater than 0.5, indicating that the construct model has acceptable reliability and convergent validity. In addition, the HTMT analysis can further discriminate the discriminant validity of the constructs. Hair et al. (2017) stated that HTMT analysis is a superior method to test the discriminant validity of a model. A valid HTMT indicator should be below 0.85. The HTMT value of the EML model was 0.098, which is below the level of 0.85.

Table 2
Information table of factor loadings, reliability of the construct model

Dimension	Label	Mean	SD	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
CM	LB1	2.666	1.258	0.798	0.929	0.929	0.570
	LB2	2.972	1.167	0.725			
	LB3	2.691	1.352	0.883			
	LB4	2.705	1.247	0.816			
	LB5	2.890	1.157	0.734			
	LITAB1	2.401	1.435	0.831			
	LITAB2	3.137	1.147	0.660			
	LITAB3	2.380	1.405	0.852			
	LITAB4	2.824	1.186	0.726			
	LITAB5	3.024	1.143	0.655			
NM	LOR1	2.398	1.369	0.821	0.877	0.877	0.507
	LOR2	2.708	1.281	0.754			
	LOR3	2.936	1.139	0.728			
	LOR4	2.847	1.065	0.685			
	LOC3	2.839	1.206	0.723			
	LOC4	2.884	1.178	0.741			
	LOC5	2.866	1.139	0.698			

CFA Results. Figure 1 shows the standardized coefficients for items. According to the calculated model fit indices, compared to Cutoff Criteria, we obtained $\chi2$ = 703.491, df = 118, $\chi2$/df = 5.962 (>5, Terrible), CFI = 0.928 (<0.95, Acceptable), SRMR = 0.064 (<0.08, Excellent) and RMSEA = 0.078 (>0.06, Acceptable).
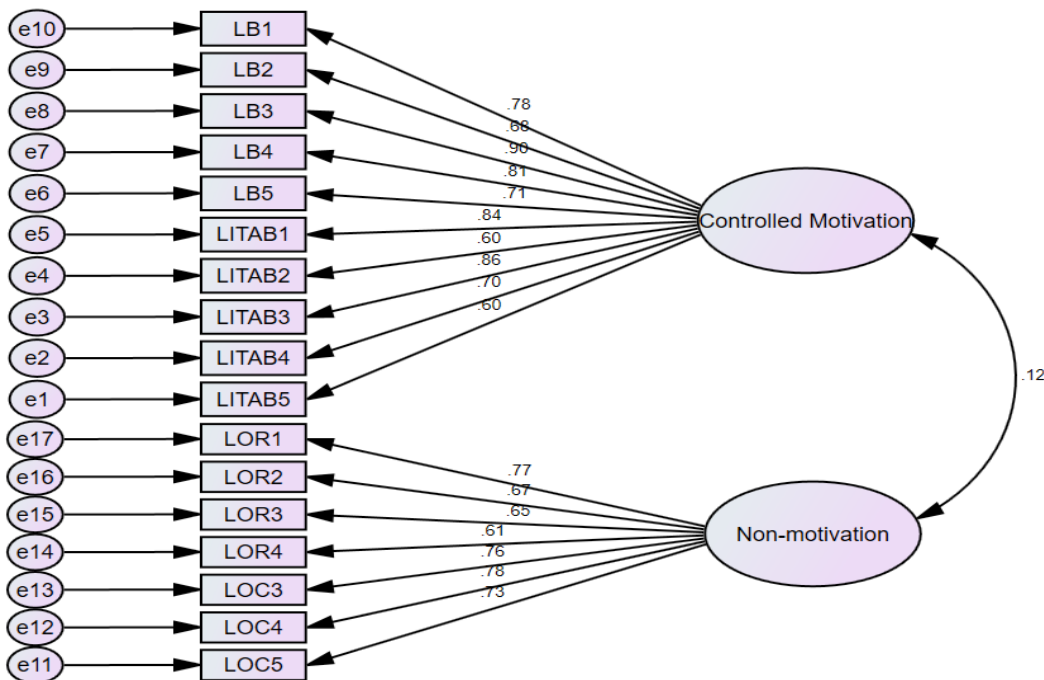

Figure1
Results of CFA for the EML Model

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Possible Approaches. Self-determined motivation theory suggests that intrinsic motivation is an inherent human tendency. It is closely related to an individual internal factors such as interest, enjoyment, etc. It is a highly autonomous type of motivation and represents the archetype of self-determination. Deci & Ryan (2008) argued that, when influenced by AM, people can act to gain self-recognition and satisfy their need for autonomy. Moreover, it leads to a better state of mental health and promotes effective behavioral performance. This is corroborated with the research of Dubois, P., Guay, F., & St-Pierre, M. C. (2023). Thus, AM has the potential to allow students to achieve more well-being between different state transitions of study and work. These suggest that focusing on the mechanisms of the shift from CM to AM may be an effective solution for facilitating the shift from irrational to rational employment motivation (e.g., EML) among graduates.

Two Perspectives. There are two different views on SE, optimism and criticism. Optimists believe that we should maintain an understanding, tolerant and even supportive attitude towards graduates' SE behavior (Sheng, 2018). Critics believe that we should maintain an attitude of questioning, vigilance and even opposition (Li, 2022). In fact, both views seem to lack a comprehensive understanding of the causes of SE and LE (Ji & Deng, 2022). The psychological traits and behaviors of having a positive spirit, being willing to put in more effort for the future, temporarily slowing down the pace of acquiring a job, which should be understood and supported. However, the negative psychological traits and behaviors of avoiding employment, having no clear pursuit of the future, unwilling to take social responsibility, pursuing to get something for nothing, which are worth questioning and reflecting on. Thus, adopting an objective attitude to view on the employment psychology and behavior of students can effectively identify SE and LE, and help graduates to achieve higher quality employment (Wang, 2020).

Support and developing. The indexes of reliability and validity of the construct model can effectively support hypotheses H1, H2 and H3, indicating that the model of EML can be analyzed and understood from the dimensions of CM as well as NM. This will help schools, students and other stakeholders to correctly identify SE and LE, and help graduates to establish healthy and rational employment value. However, the model fitting index also indicates that the EML may contain more complex motivation elements, which need to be further researched and developed.

6. LIMITATIONS

The fit index of the conceptual model was not perfect, indicating that there are still shortcomings. First, EML is a negative and complex motivational factor. The two dimensions represented by CM and NM are only a meaningful exploration and do not represent the only definite criteria. Other variables included in the construct can be added later to further refined. Second, the sample was students enrolled in higher vocational colleges. Subsequent studies can further expand to undergraduate and postgraduate groups to improve the representativeness of the sample sampling.

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