

The Effect of Cultural Capital on Students' Academic Motivation in the Context of Involution: Ecological Perspective

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Abstract. This study aims to explore the effect of cultural capital on academic motivation in the context of involution in China. The study will employ an ecological perspective to understand the interaction between college students and the involuted Chinese social context and job market, and the interaction mechanism between cultural capital and academic motivation. The concept of involution refers to the decreased "effort-to-reward ratio" in the education system, which has been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak and the popularity of internet companies for college graduates. Cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu, refers to a form of capital that can be converted into economic capital and is institutionalized in the form of educational credentials. The study will consider the three forms of cultural capital (objectified, embodied, and institutionalized) and their impact on academic motivation at the school, family, and individual levels. The results of this study will provide insight into the complex relationship between cultural capital and academic motivation in the involuted context in China and will have implications for understanding the phenomenon of study and employment involution.

1 INTRODUCTION

In psychology, motivation to learn has been studied through various theories such as intrinsic and extrinsic, integrative and instrumental, and academic motivation [16]. Social factors such as social class and resource imbalances can impact academic motivation.

Academic motivation is a crucial factor in determining academic performance and achievement [22]. It is the general tendency to perform a task successfully and evaluate its performance [1]. The relationship between academic motivation and developmental objectives has been established. In the context of involution, academic motivation is also related to cultural resources such as intellectual capital and resource capital.

This study aims to provide insight into the effect of cultural capital on academic motivation in the context of involution in China. An ecological perspective will be used to understand the interaction between college students and the involuted Chinese social context, and how the involuted job market influences academic motivation. This study will consider the interaction mechanism between cultural capital and academic motivation to provide references for the phenomenon of study involution and employment involution

2 CONCEPTUAL APPARATUS

2.1 Involution context

The term "involution" was introduced by Geertz (1963) to study rural and agricultural issues and has since been applied to various fields, including cultural and institutional involution. Geertz defined involution as the stagnation or inability to evolve in a social or cultural pattern [15]. Huang [19] highlighted the significance of involution as characterized by high labor input and diminishing returns. However, Liu and Qiu [24] argued that Huang misunderstood Geertz's concept and changed the direction of analysis. Guo [17] summarized that involution is a universal phenomenon that may explain smallholder economy stability. Duara [11] applied the concept of involution of state power to analyze state expansion in China during the first half of the 20th century.

Recently, the concept of involution has gained attention in relation to education following the COVID-19 pandemic. Some studies suggest that the involution of education results from peers competing for limited resources, leading to decreased "effort-to-reward ratio" [34]. In China's job market, involution is manifest in competition for well-paid jobs in internet companies, however, the COVID-19 outbreak has shifted competition to state civil service and teaching positions. The increasing number of college graduates (from 8.74 million in 2020 to 10.76 million in 2022) is a significant challenge for employment stability, according to the Ministry of

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Education of the People's Republic of China. Further research is needed to examine the impact of cultural capital on academic motivation in the context of involution.

2.2 Cultural capital

The concept of cultural capital was first introduced by Bourdieu [4] as one of three forms of capital [32]. Objectified cultural capital refers to educational resources and possessions that impart values, knowledge, and skills valued by teachers [5]. Embodied cultural capital encompasses traits and competencies that contribute to academic success. Institutionalized cultural capital refers to publicly recognized academic credentials [30]. Bourdieu's cultural capital theory aimed to explain unequal academic achievement among social classes, linking it to the distribution of cultural capital [4]. The study examines the effects of cultural capital at the school, family, and individual levels on academic motivation [30]. The correlations between different forms of cultural capital and academic achievement have been established in previous research.

Institutionalized cultural capital, recognized through academic credentials, confers social status and determines academic qualification and literacy level [26]. Family cultural capital, including family resources and atmosphere, as well as parents' cultural literacy and support, can impact academic achievement and motivation [30]. Individual cultural capital encompasses traits, competencies, attitudes, and skills shaped by socio-cultural values, institutions, and culture and motivates individuals to participate effectively in teamwork and social construction [27].

2.3 Ecological perspective

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development [6] outlines a model of development that takes into account the interrelated systems that impact a developing individual. According to this theory, the ecology of human development can be divided into four layers, which correspond to four fundamental structures: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem [6].

The microsystem is the immediate environment in which a developing individual experiences patterns of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships. This includes settings such as the home, classroom, or laboratory. The mesosystem refers to the connections between different microsystems, such as the relationships between family, school, and neighborhood experiences. The exosystem is defined as one or more environments that do not require active participation, but still influence the developing individual. The macrosystem encompasses the underlying belief systems and ideologies that shape the lower-order systems.

Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights the importance of considering the relational systems that impact a student's development, as each layer of the system plays a distinct role. Alterations or conflicts in any one layer will have an

effect on the other layers. This theory argues that a student's own biology, family environment, and social environment interact to drive and guide their development.

2.4 Justification of mechanism

2.4.1 Why construct a three-dimensional model of cultural capital based on the context of involution?

The relationship between cultural capital and academic achievement is complex and varies depending on social context [9][31]. The involution of higher education in China also affects this relationship [25]. Academic motivation is the dominant factor impacting achievement, with cultural capital playing a role in differentiating vocational classes and serving as a predictor of students' academic success [31]. Parenting behaviors, such as academic expectations, play a crucial role in students' academic achievement [29]. The dominant factor affecting academic achievement is academic motivation, which is influenced by various contextual factors including the student's country, school, family, and others [31]. Cultural capital is intertwined with academic motivation in this context and plays a role in differentiating vocational classes. Cultural capital can be represented by a range of indicators that vary with context, such as parental literacy, which can serve as both social and cultural capital indicators for predicting students' achievement. Studies have shown that institutionalized cultural capital, such as parental education level, is positively associated with students' academic achievement [31]. Parenting behaviors, such as academic expectations, verbal stimulation, and home environment, are crucial in facilitating students' academic achievement [29][31]. However, the relationship between parental education and students' academic achievement may vary across different cultural contexts, with some studies suggesting that the effect is more pronounced in some cultures than in others [36]. For instance, Baker and colleagues' study of African American kindergarten boys revealed that mothers' educational level was positively associated with their children's math and reading achievement [2][36]. In spite of this, a study of Chinese elementary school students revealed that neither the father's nor the mother's educational level had any bearing on their math performance [35].

There are practical differences in education systems, wealth levels, and socioeconomic equality that contribute to differences in students' academic achievement [31]. For instance, more developed countries or cities can invest more resources into education, which can contribute to students' academic achievement [18] [23]. Cultural capital has its own value in particular social contexts, such as providing micro-interactive resources for use in certain situations, and affecting parenting behaviors. In the context of the involution of the job market, college students with high embodied cultural capital can transform the knowledge and skills they acquire into cultural resources that help them adapt to their individual needs, avoiding the negative effects of involution [12].

2.4.2 Why do we argue for an ecological perspective on the influence of cultural capital on students' academic motivation in the context of involution?

The ecological theory of human development integrates findings from psychology, sociology, and ecology to explain an individual's functioning and development [7]. The theory's four defining attributes, process, person, context, and time, emphasize the interconnectedness between the individual and their environment. The theory aims to promote youth and family development through policies and programs [7].

The ecological model theory is used to explain the mechanisms that embed individual, family, and school cultural capital within the model [7]. The developing person is viewed as the psychological, social, and cultural context and the corresponding processes (such as perception, learning, behavior) that evolve over time [7]. Socialization is the process by which individuals adjust to a changing social context, and it is important for individuals to understand how the input of social interaction affects the output of social values, attitudes, motivation, and morality [3]. Positively directed individual cultural capital, such as motivation and social values, can be combined with other resources to achieve academic success during the socialization process [3]. Peer groups play a significant role in an individual's development as they provide support, cooperative and role-playing learning experiences, and combine the cultural resources provided by their families and schools [3].

Family cultural capital influences children through the micro-ecosystem of the family, and this influence is reflected in the educational level of the parents, their income, and the community or environment in which they reside [6]. Economic, political, and technological transformations affect the cultural capital imparted to children by their families [13]. The values and behaviors of functional families who can adapt to stress are more likely to have a positive impact on children's developmental outcomes than families at risk of dysfunction under stress. However, a lack of motivation to succeed may be a result of a lack of trust in a social system that excludes lower-class families from welfare. The apparent lack of motivation to succeed among lower-class families may be a result of their profound lack of trust in a social system that excludes them from welfare. In today's involutorial social context, achievement motivation is also influenced by what is perceived to be attainable, but for families struggling to survive, smoothness or security may be more important than achievement. In accordance with the section on school cultural capital [3], it can be observed that the degree programs and cultural activities offered by a school serve as a reflection of its cultural capital. Berns [3] views the school as a microsystem for student development, which is influenced by the larger macrosystem. This macrosystem is shaped by a multitude of factors such as political ideology, economics, culture/ethnicity, religion, and technology.

This study aims to examine the impact of cultural capital on academic motivation by combining an

ecological perspective with the context of involution [10]. The ecological model explains how socialization affects an individual's values, attitudes, motivation, and morality [3]. Family cultural capital influences children through their micro-ecosystem and is shaped by factors such as the parents' education and income [6]. Schools serve as microsystems that impart cultural capital and are shaped by macro-systemic factors such as politics and economics [3]. The Chinese education system highlights the difficulties in addressing the impact of the social system on education.

3 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this paper aims to explore the impact of cultural capital on academic motivation in the context of involution in China. With the involution of the job market and the competition for limited resources leading to a decrease in the "effort-to-reward ratio," it is important to understand the effect of cultural capital on academic motivation and employment prospects of college students. The paper uses an ecological perspective to analyze the interplay between the involuted Chinese social context, college students, and the involuted job market and how cultural capital affects academic motivation. Through the examination of the interaction mechanism between cultural capital and academic motivation, this study provides references for the phenomenon of study involution and employment involution.

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