

# Relationship between Employment Anxiety and Learning Involution among Arts Majors in the Post Epidemic Era: The Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

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## Abstract

Arts majors in college find it difficult to land a job successfully after graduation, which can easily lead to psychological disorders like anxiety, stress and depression. Psychological health is crucial for the comprehensive development of college students. Having a healthy personality, positive emotions, and a good mental state is beneficial for college arts students to better achieve goals. Individuals with high emotional intelligence can promote the improvement and development of their own intelligence, help manage and control emotions, avoid irrational behavior, and respond positively to changes in life and environment, becoming masters of emotions. This paper adopts the quantitative method and studies four hypotheses to examine the relationship among employment anxiety, learning involution and emotional intelligence and construct an intermediary model. A psychological counseling program is then put forward to cultivate the healthy psychology of college students.

## Keywords

Employment Anxiety; Arts Graduates; Learning Involution; Emotional Intelligence.

## 1. Introduction

Since 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychological anxiety problem of college students has been continuously prominent. Multiple studies have shown that under the COVID-19 pandemic stress state, the incidence of anxiety and depression among college students has significantly increased (Chen et al., 2020). Employment anxiety mainly refers to the psychological state of anxiety and boredom exhibited by college students when facing employment. This reaction to employment can cause emotional, cognitive, and even cognitive changes among college students. Especially after the outbreak of the epidemic, the operation of enterprises has been affected and job positions have decreased. Wang et al. (2020) found that increasing employment pressure can lead to the generation of negative emotions among college students. In addition, the lack of corresponding social experience and employment support among college students, coupled with reasons such as inferiority and sensitivity, has led to a serious tendency of employment anxiety among some college students (Li, 2022).

In the post pandemic era, the social term 'involution' has also caused strong reactions in universities. The term 'internal examination' vividly describes the 'learning dilemma' faced by current university students in unreasonable competition. College students, in a situation where their own advantageous resources are very scarce, seek shortcuts in the evaluation mechanism and ultimately form an "involution". There have been discussions in the academic field regarding the issue of internal examination papers among college students. Guo Yanling (2021), using the qualitative research method, summarized the "internal" factors of Chinese contemporary college students as: the instrumentalization of learning environment, excessive competition in interpersonal relationships, and anxiety psychology; The situation of

"involution" education is becoming increasingly serious, and under excessive competitive anxiety, college students lack sufficient learning and psychological development.

Psychologist Baron (1997) defines emotional intelligence as the emotional thinking and interpersonal communication abilities formed by an individual's interaction with the environment. Joyce G (2011) found that emotional intelligence is beneficial for improving academic performance of college students. Hilda Costa (2013) found that emotional intelligence has a positive effect on enhancing the psychological well-being of college students. Wen Xingsheng, He Peiyu, and Li Yulin (2020) found that the emotional intelligence level of college students can significantly negatively predict their stress perception status.

In summary, there is a correlation between employment anxiety and emotional intelligence levels, both of which have a certain impact on the mental health status of college students. However, due to the relatively late start of research on emotional intelligence and limited research results, existing research has mostly focused on the cognitive function and measurement of emotional intelligence, and the focus is on the current situation of college students' internal competition and the macro level causes of formation, There is currently no research on the relationship between anxiety and emotional intelligence on college students' involution behavior during the epidemic. Therefore, this study introduces the variable of emotional intelligence to understand the current situation of emotional intelligence among liberal arts students, explore the relationship between employment anxiety, emotional intelligence, and learning involution, and seek inspiration for the construction of new liberal arts.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Questions

The research hypotheses to be studied are:

Hypothesis 1: In the post pandemic era, there are differences in anxiety among liberal arts students in demographic variables such as gender, major, grade, and family background.

Hypothesis 2: In the post pandemic era, there is a correlation between employment anxiety and academic involution among liberal arts students, and anxiety has a predictive effect on academic involution.

Hypothesis 3: In the post pandemic era, there is a correlation between academic involution and emotional intelligence among liberal arts students, and emotional intelligence has a predictive effect on academic involution.

Hypothesis 4: Emotional intelligence plays a mediating role in the employment anxiety and academic involution of liberal arts students in the post pandemic era.

### 2.2. Participants

Using simple random sampling method, 800 undergraduate students majoring in humanities from ZYU, a local university in eastern China where most of the students are arts majors divided in languages and non-languages, were selected as the research subjects, including four grades. A total of 800 questionnaires were issued to students majoring in arts such as English, international trade, French, and Japanese who would graduate in 2023, with 746 remaining valid after collection. The participants were picked at random, therefore there were no significant variations in the school's population, gender, or academic achievement.

### 2.3. Instruments

#### 2.3.1. Questionnaire

Questionnaires are adopted to acquire information on humanity students' employment anxiety, academic state and emotional intelligence in the post-pandemic era. Based on questionnaire

surveys and augmented by interviews, using highly reliable survey questionnaires and interview outlines as data collection tools, and humanity students from target universities as survey and interview subjects, this study investigated the current state of employments anxiety, learning involution and emotional intelligence in the post-pandemic era, providing as comprehensive and accurate information as possible for research. Attempt to build an intermediate model using SPSS 26 statistical software for differential, correlation, and regression analysis. This primary method of the paper was the adoption of a questionnaire themed "Career Selection Anxiety Questionnaire for College Students". There were altogether 28 items in this questionnaire, and the data for this study were collected. The questionnaire was written in Chinese so that subjects could have a better understanding of the questions and give an easier response. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A had 12 items, all of which were objective factors including lack of employment support, employment prospects. Section B included 16 items about subjective factors covering socio demographic ones to see the general level of employment anxiety for arts students under the influence of the epidemic. The questionnaire was given online to the subjects during the experiment. The design of the questionnaire was taken from other study which has been tested to be trusted and applicable.

### 2.3.2. Interview

After conducting the questionnaire study, the author spoke with 10 students from Zhejiang Yuexiu University who had also been the subjects of the questionnaire. They were from six different majors. Semi-structured interview was adopted for subjects to explain any hazy concepts that had come out of the questionnaire. 5 male and 5 female students with various levels of anxiety were present. The students were given free rein to express themselves during the 30-minute interviews, which were conducted in their native Chinese and later transcribed.

## 2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

To better understand the anxiety, emotional intelligence, and mental health state of liberal arts majors in the post-pandemic age, college students were subjected to anxiety, learning involution, and emotional intelligence assessments. The effective data was statistically analyzed using SPSS 26.0 software, and t-tests and analysis of variance were done to see if there were any significant variations in anxiety, learning involution, and emotional intelligence among demographic characteristics. To examine pairwise relationships between variables, use the correlation analysis approach. The mesmeric influence of emotional intelligence on employment anxiety and learning involution is investigated in this research, as is the link between the three variables. This research builds a structural model mediated by emotional intelligence on this foundation.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Employment Anxiety Among Arts Students in Post-epidemic Era

Research has found that the average score of employment anxiety among college students was between 2.9 and 3.31, which indicated that college students generally exhibited moderate employment pressure. Among the six dimensions, the contradiction between professional supply and demand had a significant impact on the employment pressure of college students. Because of the various unknowns regarding the outbreak's progression, the present job situation remains dire, with fewer college recruitment posts available and lower pay. At the same time, overseas students are returning to China in search of work, and competition is heating up. Furthermore, pupils who graduated last year but did not find a job as scheduled will also increase the difficulty of employment.

Research has also found that there is a significant difference between students from rural areas and students from urban areas in terms of the total score and various dimensions of employment pressure. In contrast, students from rural areas have greater psychological anxiety on employment. The reason might be that the existing job situation has not yet achieved its optimal condition due to the overall demand imbalance and few job openings; Second, because of the effect of their living environment from infancy, rural college students may have inferior talents when compared to urban students, affecting their progress in getting jobs. Third, as compared to urban college students, rural students have less network resources and contacts, limiting their possibilities to work in better units. As a result, rural college students confront increased job challenges.

According to the research, there were significant differences in employment pressure scores among students in the four grades of freshman to senior year, including the total score of employment pressure and the dimensions of employment competitive market, self-awareness and marketing positioning, lack of job hunting assistance, professional supply-demand contradiction, and employment psychological expectation. In the four grades, the employment pressure ranked from high to low as follows: senior, junior, freshman, and sophomore. In five dimensions, the employment psychological anxiety of college students of different grades is significantly different. The employment anxiety for senior graduates is the greatest. This might be because graduates have more direct work concerns and are influenced by more employment obstacles than students in other grades. There is a huge difference between graduates' psychological expectations and the real marketing environment in the tough and rigorous job backdrop. They face dual pressures both internally and externally due to their lack of outstanding comprehensive abilities and confusion about future job choices. Furthermore, even though graduates have some experience in job hunting, there are many talented people in society, and the influence of grade cannot be underestimated. As a result, graduates should calm down and look for work before deciding on a career. The study found that there was a significant difference between males and females in the total score in each dimension score of employment pressure. Female student's employment psychological anxiety was greater.

In the total score of employment pressure, the dimension of self-awareness and marketing positioning, and employment psychological expectation, there was a significant difference between language majors and non-language majors. Language majors' employment psychological anxiety was greater. There is a considerable difference in job pressure ratings, with liberal language major students experiencing more employment pressure. Those students may have a restricted variety of job alternatives and fewer posts than non-language major students. Furthermore, the conventional ideas of "valuing science over literature," have virtually increased the psychological anxiety of language major students, reducing their psychological expectations of employment. Both of these objectively increase the employment anxiety for language major students.

### **3.2. Correlation between Employment Anxiety and Academic Involvement among Liberal Arts Student**

The total score and different dimensions of employment pressure among college students, as well as the total score and various element scores of mental health, were discovered in the research. There are substantial positive associations, demonstrating that the more the employment pressure on college students, the better their mental health. This could be because: when college students' employment psychological anxiety is too high, it will affect their mental health, cause them to become anxious, depressed, inferior, and fearful, worry about whether they will be able to find an ideal job, worry about failure in job selection, bleak future, depressed mood, weaken self-efficacy, and become depressed. When it comes to picking a job, there is a propensity to retreat, which can have an influence on one's own health and normal life.

### **3.3. Correlation between Employment Anxiety and Emotional Intelligence**

The total score and different aspects of employment pressure among college students, as well as the total score and various dimensions of emotional intelligence, were discovered in the research. There is a substantial negative link, demonstrating that the larger the employment psychological anxiety of college students, the less capable they are of regulating their emotions. This might be because employment pressure can alter college students' emotions, causing them to be unstable and create various unpleasant feelings such as anger, despair, pessimism, panic, anxiety, and so on. The high-pressure and difficult employment scenario can cause certain students to feel excessive pressure, and their nerves are tense, leaving them prone to poor emotions and a higher chance of developing depression, which can lead to extreme behavior.

### **3.4. Correlation between Academic Involvement and Emotional Intelligence**

The total score and multiple dimensions of emotional intelligence among college students, as well as the total score and various element scores of academic involvement, were discovered through research. There is a substantial negative link, showing that the greater a college student's emotional intelligence level, the lower their academic involvement condition. This might be because having a pleasant or stable emotional state can enrich one's vitality, enhance the efficiency of mental and physical work, widen one's own thinking, extend one's perspectives, improve intellectual level, and have a positive influence on students. When their emotions are excessively negative, they can't concentrate, their judgment and memory suffer, their motivation suffers, and their overall academic performance suffers.

### **3.5. A Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence in the Employment Anxiety and Academic Involvement among Liberal Arts Students**

This study used emotions to dive deeper into the link between job anxiety and academic performance. Intelligence can vary. College students' emotional intelligence level has a partial mediation effect between employment anxiety and academic involvement, indicating that on the one hand, college students' employment anxiety will directly affect their academic performance. The more the employment anxiety, the poorer their academic performance; on the other side, it can boost college students' emotional intelligence level and therefore improve their academic status. Some college students lack enough preparation for employment due to their hazy career aspirations and personal standing. When confronted with increasingly challenging job scenarios, college students are psychologically difficult to accept, prone to emotional anxiety, panic, and even excessive conduct, which affects their study. Individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence may therefore aid to enhance their study performance and encourage their physical and mental health growth. College students should be good at learning to perceive emotions, accept emotions, learn methods and techniques for managing emotions, learn to transfer and release emotions, and be good at detecting and paying attention to the emotions of others, enhancing their emotional intelligence, forming harmonious interpersonal relationships, cultivating positive and healthy psychological qualities and improve their mental state in academic study.

## **4. Conclusion**

Following the COVID-19 at ZYU, employment anxiety is frequent among college students studying in arts and it has an influence on their academic state. Some teams of students with a greater level of anxiety are emphasized in close association with elements such as females, family backgrounds, and grades in the midst of the pandemic's poor work conditions. Future interventions should focus on developing programs to improve students' mental health and well-being. The school is expected to implement group psychological treatment for junior students. Leaders should promptly complete the group psychological counseling record form



after each group counseling session, record the activity process, key events occurrence and development, member emotional changes, activity sharing, etc., and adjust the group counseling activity for the next week based on the performance and feedback of group members this week, ensuring the logical and targeted nature of the group counseling activity. The theme of this group psychological counseling activity is to enhance emotional intelligence and be the master of emotions. The first stage is the initial stage of group support, which mainly involves breaking the ice and helping members become familiar with each other as soon as possible. The second stage is the group assistance growth stage, with the theme of improving emotional intelligence. Through this stage, the aim is to help group members better identify and evaluate and express one's own and others' emotions, learn to manage and regulate emotions, become the master of emotions, and master the methods of using emotions to promote thinking. The third stage is the final stage of group support, where members send blessings to each other, embrace each other, and start anew with satisfaction for themselves and expectations for the future. Apart from group psychological assistance for junior students, a combination of college English study and psychological education could also be conducted from the beginning of college years for freshmen since a lot of English materials are connected to psychological elements such as value, motivation, belief, self-esteem and so on. The psychological education can be wisely integrated into discussions, debates, assignment or presentations so that students can be cultivated into those with higher emotional intelligence to better deal with psychological disorders especially the employment anxiety in this era.

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