



A Review of Factors Correlated With School Alienation Among College Students

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Alienation, first proposed by the famous German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, refers to the process of one's spirit transferring from an object to itself, which means that the spirit is separated from the body (Hegel, 2018). Over time, human alienation mainly manifests in powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness, respectively representing people feeling helpless to control events, failing to see the prospects, and losing sense of rules (Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong, & Thoma, 2003). In recent years, school alienation (SAL) is frequently mentioned in the educational environment and manifests in three domains. Firstly, alienated students might feel disconnected from the learning processes at school; secondly, they might feel distanced from their teachers; and thirdly, they may feel isolated from their classmates (Morinaj & Hascher, 2018). Research shows that many college students have been facing school alienation recently, failing to see the value of schooling, lacking a sense of well-being, getting clinical depression, or even committing suicide (Zhang, 2003). As the negative impacts of school alienation are quite serious, it is imperative for us to identify the primary elements that are correlated with school alienation among university students. To meet this urgency, this literature review will examine current articles on this topic, investigating the factors related to college students' school alienation in recent years. The research question of this paper is: what are the factors correlated with school alienation among college students?

Method

A search of the EBSCO-Education Research Information Center (ERIC) and ScienceDirect electronic databases was undertaken by using the search terms “college students” or “Chinese college students” combined with “alienation”, “school alienation”, “student alienation”,

“campus life” , “mental health” , “self-evaluation” and “dissimilation” in various ways. After the initial search, only studies published within the years of 2010-2024 were selected. Studies that review the literature were excluded. After implementing the inclusion and exclusion criteria and removing duplicates, the paper selected six studies for analysis (see Table 1 for included studies).

Table 1

Articles Included

Author Name	Publication Year	Article Title	Journal Title
David, L. T., & Nită, G. L.	2014	Adjustment to First Year of College-Relations among Self-perception, Trust, Mastery and Alienation	Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences
Wu et al.	2024	Sense of alienation, security, and life satisfaction among undergraduate: a cross-sectional study from China	Research Square
Caglar, C.	2013	The Relationship between the Perceptions of the Fairness of the Learning Environment and the Level of Alienation	Egitim Arastirmalari - Eurasian Journal of Educational Research
Trivedi, R., & Prakasha, G. S.	2021	Student alienation and perceived organizational culture: A correlational study	International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)
Xia, X.	2024	Jiaoyu yihua genyuan yu xiaojie tujing tantao [Discussion on the root of educational dissimilation and its resolution]	Advances in Education
Deng, T.	2024	The interdependence of educational alienation and equality: rethinking China's examination-oriented education system	Cogent Education

The research question is: what are the factors correlated with school alienation among college students? Based on the findings of these studies, I have identified three key themes in terms of personal and external factors that may answer the research question: students' self perception, school learning culture, and education system.

Findings

Students' Self-Perception

Studies have indicated that there is a correlation between self-perception and school alienation among college students. To understand the concept of self-perception, Caselman & Self (2007) have illustrated that self-perception is the understanding of oneself that is built from the interaction of the person and his or her daily life experiences. A study by David & Nită (2014) came to the conclusion that self-perception has a high negative correlation to alienation. They analyzed 435 questionnaires to the freshmen with a mean age of 20.87 from two study programs in Romania, utilizing instruments like the Personal Evaluation Inventory (PEI), Mastery Scale, Alienation Scale, Revised Philosophies of Human Nature Scale, and Faith in People. After using linear regressions, the result showed that there existed a strong and negative correlation between self-perception and school alienation ($r=-0.66$), which indicated that if the freshmen had negative self-perception, then the person was likely to experience school alienation.

Similarly, Wu et al. (2024)'s findings supported this correlation. They distributed 2932 web-based questionnaires to undergraduate students ranging from 17 to 24 years old in nine universities in China. The scales used in the questionnaires came from the Adolescent Students' Alienation Scale (ASAS), Adolescent Students Life Satisfaction Scale (ASLSS), and Security Questionnaire (SQ). After that, they applied SPSS 25.0 software to analyze data. After regression analysis, the result also provided strong evidence that people who believed they had low self worth and low life satisfaction levels experienced school alienation.

To sum up, the lower the level of self-perception, the higher the level of alienation a

student will have (David & Nită, 2014). Both studies strongly demonstrate the significant role of self-perception considering the correlation with school alienation among college students.

School Learning Culture

Besides the factor of students' negative self-perception, research has shown that the school learning culture also has a link with school alienation for college students. A study by Caglar (2013) indicated that students' perception of the fairness of the school learning environment is a significant predictor of their feelings of alienation. Specifically, the concept of fairness or justice in the field of educational organizations, is defined as "conformity to what is right and legal, conceptualized into three aspects: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice" (Caglar, 2013). In this study, 2600 undergraduate students studying at Adiyaman University School of Education participated and filled in Fair Learning Environment Questionnaire. After using a stratified sampling technique and excluding incomplete or defective forms, the study sample included 952 forms for further analysis. After applying normally distributed independent samples t-test and a multiple linear regression analysis, the research found a negative level of significant correlation ($r=-0.40$) between the fair school learning environment and school alienation. The result shows that the less students perceive their learning environment to be fair, the more they experience dissatisfaction and alienation.

Additionally, Trivedi & Prakasha (2021) highlighted that there also existed a strong inverse correlation between students' school alienation and the school's organizational culture. For higher education institutions, organizational culture can be explained with two aspects: the form and extent of control, and the emphasis on policy and strategy (van der Velden, 2012). In order to find out whether students' school alienation and organizational culture are correlated, the

study selected a sample of 600 undergraduate students in one of the top universities in India. With the method of descriptive survey research, the study used a student alienation scale and organizational culture assessment instrument to collect data. A Pearson correlation test and a regression statistical test were also conducted. Finally, a moderate negative correlation was observed between student alienation and the culture of the school organization ($r=-0.448$), and 29.1% of the alienation among college students was explained by the organizational culture on the campus.

In summary, the learning culture in a university is correlated with school alienation among college students. Students' experience and engagement are partly influenced, indicating that they are less alienated if the school has a fair and better learning culture (Trivedi & Prakasha, 2021).

Education System

In addition, literature has also found the education system to be another relevant factor associated with students' school alienation. Starting with Marx's theory of labor alienation, Xia (2024) analyzed the manifestations of educational alienation and deduced that the defects of the current education system were the external cause of students' alienation. The author highlighted that the deficiencies in the education system were mainly manifested in the imbalance of educational resources, the use of good and bad grades as the criteria for evaluating learning outcomes, and the use of academic qualifications as a condition for admission to organizations. Under the influence of these factors, college students were bounded by control of grades and diplomas, facing school alienation. This phenomenon shows that the education system is highly correlated with students' school alienation.

Similarly, a recent analysis by Deng (2024) has supported the assertion that the education

system is a factor correlated with school alienation among college students. The study conducted semi-structured interviews involving 20 college students from across China, including Chongqing, Shandong, Beijing, and Ningbo. During this process, the interview lasted approximately one hour and included the keywords like “exam” , “teaching methods” , “education system” and so on. After the interviews, the study analyzed the qualitative data using a grounded theory approach to conceptualize and generalize the data. Finally, the author concluded that an education system with test-oriented education is related to college students’ school alienation. He also claimed that “the education system ceases to nurture critically thinking individuals and instead operates as an assembly line for training players who can master the rules of the examination game” (Deng, 2024).

To sum up, the education system is a relevant factor associated with students’ school alienation, as it often prioritizes test scores over critical thinking and personal development, leading to a sense of disconnection among college students.

Conclusion

To answer what factors are correlated with school alienation among college students, this article reviewed six papers and found that school alienation is correlated with students’ self perception, the school learning culture, and the education system. Specifically, those studies indicated that if college students had negative self-perceptions, experienced bad school learning culture or harsh education system, they were likely to experience school alienation. These studies used various research methods like semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and thematic analysis, having important implications for understanding the correlation associated with school alienation and its potential impact on education and society.

However, there are still some limitations in the existing literature, including geographical constraints and a lack of long-term follow-up studies. In addition, most studies fail to adequately consider the diversity and complexity of school alienation in different cultural contexts.

Therefore, to research the factors correlated with school alienation among college students, future studies could study across a wider range of geographical places to capture the global diversity in educational and cultural contexts. Moreover, future research is advised to conduct long-term follow-up studies to gain a more objective overview and a more reliable conclusion.

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