

Original Paper

A Study on the Factors Influencing the Formation of Representational Marginal People in University Classrooms

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Abstract

Representational marginal people are a unique group among the marginal people in the classroom. They show characteristics that are completely different from most students in the classroom. Although they hardly participate in classroom activities, do not actively interact with classmates, and fail to get the attention of teachers, these students often have very strong autonomous learning ability. This study focuses on this special group. Based on the grounded theory method and through in-depth analysis of the data, the study found that the formation of representational marginal people is affected by multiple factors. These factors include the course teaching methods in the classroom, students' learning attitudes and methods, individual emotions and personal values, and social interactions with classmates. These factors interact with each other and jointly shape the unique learning experience of representational marginal people and their marginalized status in the classroom.

Keywords

Marginalized people, Grounded theory, University classroom

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of marginal people is universal in human society. Where there are so-called central figures, there are so-called marginal people. This structural problem also exists in school classrooms. In the traditional sense, the concept of classroom marginal people is closer to problem students and students with learning difficulties, and is synonymous with the disadvantaged groups in schools. However, there is such a group of people in college classrooms. They are free from the classroom but do not look like students with learning difficulties at all. They are good at learning but are not good students in the eyes of teachers. This study focuses on this group of people and analyzes the influencing factors of the formation of this type of marginal people through grounded theory.

2. Problem Statement

In the modern education system, the all-round development of students has always been the core goal of educators. However, with the expansion of higher education and the increase in the number of students, some students are often ignored or marginalized and become marginalized in classroom teaching. The concept of marginalized people comes from the concept of strangers by German sociologist Simmel (Goldberg, 1941). The so-called strangers refer to foreigners who live in society but are on the margins and do not understand the social mechanism (Li, 2011). The reason why marginalized people are called marginalized people is that they are excluded by the mainstream culture, but they are eager to be accepted by the mainstream culture (Stonequist, 1935). This means that marginalized people are in a disadvantaged position in the exchange with external culture, but they have to rely on this external culture. The phenomenon of marginalized people has been introduced into school classrooms by scholars to describe those individual or group students who are out of the center of teaching activities, on the margins of the classroom, and have not been well developed (Li & Du, 2014). Among these students, there is a special type of students who do not participate in classroom activities, do not interact with others, do not receive the attention of teachers, but have strong independent learning ability. Li Sen defines this group of marginalized people as "representational marginalized people" (Qi & Li, 2014). Different from the traditional concept of classroom marginal people, the superficial marginal people only have deviations in behavior, but their right to education is not actually damaged. They do not fall into the category of "poor students". They do not participate, but they do not stop learning. Excluding the situation of insufficient academic ability, the study of the causes of superficial marginal people can, to a certain extent, reveal the reasons why college students are alienated from the classroom.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Methods

Given that the research on the causes of marginalized people is relatively scattered and the research content is also situational, this study adopts the exploratory research methods and techniques of grounded theory. Grounded theory is a method of qualitative research. Its main purpose is to establish theory based on empirical data. There are generally no theoretical assumptions before the start of the research. It starts directly from actual observations, summarizes empirical generalizations from the original data, and then rises to theory (Chen, 1999). This study follows the logic of grounded theory to generate theories step by step from the bottom up, conducts in-depth description and analysis of the research content, obtains more abundant and practical research data, and then constructs a model of factors affecting the formation of representational marginalized people in university classrooms.

3.2 Research Tools and Research Subjects

3.2.1 Interview Outline Design

This study uses a semi-structured interview method to obtain original research data. Based on extensive

reading of literature, the author compiled an interview outline to conduct pre-interviews with some subjects and refined and summarized the interviews. Combined with this part of the content, the concepts of existing literature were compared and modified to form a formal interview outline. The main contents of the interview are: 1. Do you like class? Why? 2. You often do your own things in class, but your grades are in the upper middle of the class. Why is this? 3. Do you like to stay alone or play with classmates? Why? The interview time for each student is controlled at about 40 minutes in order to obtain the maximum research data.

3.2.2 Selection of Research Subjects

The research subjects of this study are the episodic marginal people in university classrooms. According to Li Sen's definition, the episodic marginal people are students who do not participate in classroom activities, do not interact with others, and do not receive the attention of teachers, but have strong independent learning ability. This is actually rare in university classrooms, and the effect of random sampling is not ideal. Therefore, the author adopts purposeful sampling. In order to reflect the characteristics of the episodic marginal people who do not participate in class and do not interact with others, the author consulted the literature and found that the choice of classroom seats is strongly related to marginal people. Because the episodic marginal people themselves have strong independent learning ability, the research subjects of this study are those students who sit in marginal seats (Wu, 2018) and whose grades are in the top 30% of the class. According to this sampling standard, combined with the author's field observations and interviews, the research subjects are determined to be the following thirteen students.

Table 1. Basic Information of the Research Subjects

| Serial number | Interviewee | major | grade | gender |
|---------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|--------|
| 1 | A | Chinese Language and Literature | Junior Year | female |
| 2 | B | Software Engineering | Junior Year | male |
| 3 | C | Human Resources Management | Sophomore Year | female |
| 4 | D | Preschool Education | Junior Year | female |
| 5 | E | Mathematics and Applied Mathematics | Junior Year | female |
| 6 | F | Educational Technology | Senior Year | male |
| 7 | G | Cyrillic | Sophomore Year | female |
| 8 | H | History | Junior Year | female |
| 9 | I | Chemical | Junior Year | female |
| 10 | J | Geographical Sciences | Sophomore Year | male |
| 11 | K | psychology | Sophomore Year | female |
| 12 | L | Physical Education | Junior Year | male |
| 13 | M | Primary Education | Junior Year | female |

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Open Coding

Open coding is the activity of coding and labeling the original interview data word by word to generate initial concepts and discover concepts from the original data. This study upholds an open attitude to maximize the authenticity and reliability of the data. After sorting, 39 basic concepts were generated.

3.3.2 Spindle Coding

Through the initial decoding stage, we reorganized the concepts of influencing factors obtained from the interview data and found the organic connection between the various parts. We archived them into thirteen categories: external influence, teaching behavior, course importance, course evaluation, learning strategy, learning attitude, learning motivation, personal characteristics, social behavior, classmate interaction, teacher characteristics, emotional experience, and personal values.

3.3.3 Selective Coding

Selective coding is to extract the final core category from the main category, which is to logically test and supplement the previously obtained categories. From Table 2, we can see that the factors that affect the formation of phenotypical marginal people include external influences, teaching behaviors, course importance, course evaluation, learning strategies, learning attitudes, learning motivation, personal traits, social behaviors, classmate interactions, teacher traits, and emotional experiences. Among them, the scope of external influences is relatively broad, and the interaction with classmates and teacher traits overlap, so the external factor category will not be further subdivided. Personal emotional experience has a strong causal relationship with personal traits and social behavior. Therefore, it is classified under the same category. Finally, the following four main categories are obtained: curriculum teaching influence, learning attitude and method influence, emotion and personal value influence, social and classmate interaction influence

Table 2. Interview Results Decoding Table

| Main Category | category | concept |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| A. Teaching and Curriculum | A1 Teaching Behavior | Random questions, group discussion, reading PPT |
| | Importance of A2 Course | Course status, core courses, non-professional courses, course weight, elective courses |
| | A3 Teacher Qualities | Teaching is boring and teachers are strict |
| | A4 Course Evaluation | Classroom activity design, regular class scores, final grades |
| B. Learning attitude and method | B1 Learning Strategies | Memorize, think, ask questions |
| | B2 Learning attitude | Study hard, be lazy, be uninterested, be late, attitude towards the subject |
| | B3 Learning Motivation | The value of knowledge, the significance of |

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| C Emotion and Personal Value | C1 Personality | studying, the value of academic qualifications |
| | C2 Emotional Experience | Character |
| | C3 Personal Value | No sense of existence, unfairness, alienation, targeting |
| D Social interaction with classmates | D1 Social Behavior | Ideals, reality, and yourself |
| | D2 classmate interaction | Sitting in the last row of the classroom, fixed seats, edge seats |
| | | Role model power, competitive pressure |

3.4 Research Findings and Interpretations

3.4.1 The Influence of School Teaching and Curriculum on the Formation of Marginalized People

The activities in university classrooms are essentially about teachers imparting knowledge to students. They are about presenting legal knowledge that conforms to social norms to students after being screened and understood by teachers (Lu, 2018). The current teaching mode in universities is mostly one-way output from teachers to students. One interviewee mentioned that "teachers reading PPT will affect the class. Teachers who read PPT are definitely not as good as teachers who extend the PPT content" (A1). Furthermore, the teaching mode that relies entirely on PPT is essentially the teacher's neglect of students. "It feels like the teacher's attention is not on us, so the class is boring" (A3). Such neglect will greatly increase students' academic frustration. In addition, students will also adjust their participation in class according to different courses. They listen carefully in professional core courses, but behave like marginalized people in non-professional courses and elective courses. In order to keep students focused, some classes will use measures such as regular class points, roll call, and raising hands to answer questions to increase points, so that students have to participate in class for the sake of grades. This turns the original active learning into forced participation in class for the sake of grades. Representational marginal people attach importance to the value of knowledge and have a strong motivation to learn (B2, B3), but in such classes, learning is alienated into watching PPT and speaking for points. As some interviewees said, "I don't like teachers who read completely according to the PPT. It feels perfunctory. We can't see the value of this course. If (the class) is just PPT, why don't we just read it ourselves?" The root cause is that some university classes and teachers only pay attention to form and merely complete teaching tasks without really "inviting" students to enter the classroom to study. Some students will alienate themselves from the classroom and behave like marginal people in the classroom.

3.4.2 The Influence of Learning Attitude and Method on the Formation of Expressive Marginal People

The study found that the attitude of superficial marginal people towards learning will change according to different learning objects. For example, student C said, "I am not very good at listening to the advanced mathematics courses in management, and I don't understand them, but I will learn the things I am interested in" (B2). After in-depth interviews, it was learned that student C learned English on the

recommendation of a friend and earned a living through English. Another student B said, "Our major is liberal arts, but I don't want to learn too much about liberal arts, nor do I want to memorize things by rote. I am happy to do some math problems in class" (B1). The study found that 76% of the respondents are not interested in the knowledge of their majors, and they lack a sense of meaning for the knowledge of their majors. For example, student F, who studies educational technology, said, "Learning these basic theories is not useful in daily experiments, so it is better to directly learn software operations to save time" (B3). However, for the subjects they are interested in, they often have good learning strategies. In a follow-up with student E, the author found that his professional course books were blank, but his notes were full of codes. Student E explained, "Learning mathematics is useless. It is easier to find an internship in the future by doing code problems" (B3). Students B and C chose to develop another major when they encountered academic setbacks, while students E and F chose to do so out of realistic and practical considerations. This can also explain why positive and negative aspects coexist in the learning attitudes of representational marginal people. In summary, based on different learning preferences, representational marginal people will exhibit different classroom marginal behaviors.

3.4.3 The Influence of Emotions and Personal Values on the Formation of Expressive Marginal People

Galen divided temperaments into sanguine, choleric, melancholic and phlegmatic. Shy and introverted "marginal people" tend to be phlegmatic and rarely participate in class. This is partly due to their personality, and partly because they are afraid of being criticized or laughed at for answering the wrong question or not expressing their meaning. "Marginal people" with low self-esteem and sensitivity tend to be melancholic. They may have wild thoughts due to others' unintentional actions. One interviewee mentioned that the reason she did not answer questions was because she was "afraid of being too active and being gossiped about" (C1). They avoid and withdraw in class; choleric "marginal people" are impulsive. They may change their lively and cheerful personalities due to external factors such as conflicts between teachers and students, ridicule from classmates, family changes, etc., and even become disgusted with the class (Bi & Ouyang, 2019). Negative emotional experiences can also hinder students' participation in class. Sometimes this negative experience comes from the fairness of education. "The teacher just raises his hand to speak, but he doesn't call on you. There is also no extra credit after class for you. This is an unfair phenomenon" (C2). Sometimes it comes from a lack of care and discipline. "You don't feel a sense of existence. It doesn't matter whether you come to class or not." (C2), negative emotional experience is closely related to personality. The two together affect students' mentality in class, making it difficult for students to get positive feedback in class. Therefore, superficial marginal people tend to build their own values inward, "I am an idealist" (C3) "Then no one can help you, you mean that others have to save themselves or rely on themselves, right, you have to start from your own perspective" (C3). Introverted personality and strong self-awareness are the main characteristics of superficial marginal people. They have distinct personalities. Although they cannot get good feedback in class, they are also unwilling to give up on themselves.

3.4.4 The Impact of Social Factors on the Formation of Representational Marginal People

With the expansion of college enrollment, the structure of university members is complex and diverse. Some students do not have close companions and rarely communicate with teachers. They often sit alone in marginal seats. Unlike primary and secondary schools, colleges do not have mandatory seating regulations. In other words, the superficial marginal people actively choose marginal seats to avoid interaction with teachers and classmates. One interviewee mentioned, "I choose my own seats. I usually sit in the last row of the classroom because the teacher will not find out (what I am doing)." (D1). In fact, such a choice is related to their personality and emotional experience. Students are hurt by conflicts in their interactions with others, so they close their hearts and avoid communicating with others. During the author's follow-up, some interviewees mentioned that "others are very difficult to communicate with." The narrow social window leads to the formation of marginal people, but they themselves rarely realize that it is their own reason. The reason for the difficulty in getting along with others is not only personality, but also the competitive pressure from peers. The superficial marginal people are unwilling to compete with others, or avoid competition with others, and cannot recognize the relationship between themselves and other classmates. One interviewee said, "I think if I compare with others every day, it will be too tiring, so I don't want to compete with them." (D2).

4. Conclusion

In general, the representational marginalized are a minority group in the complex university classroom environment, a silent minority. They struggle in the university classroom. The author conducted a grounded study on the characteristics of the research object and the reasons for its formation through interviews, and mainly found the impact of course teaching, learning attitudes and methods, emotions and personal values, and social and student interaction. Marginal people have always existed in large and small classrooms, and are also the most easily ignored group. This study only took a small sample interview study. Although it has described the classroom survival status of this group to a certain extent, it lacks effective suggestions. In the future, further research can be considered on this basis in order to change the classroom survival status of this group.

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