

Analysis of the Current Situation of the Impact of Happy Education Integrated into Classroom Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges on Students' Mental Health Level

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Abstract: Happy education, as an educational philosophy focusing on students' emotional experiences and individual development, its integration into classroom teaching in higher vocational colleges represents a crucial approach to alleviating students' psychological stress and enhancing their mental health. This paper systematically reviews relevant research literature both domestically and internationally, covering aspects such as the core connotations of happy education, the current state of mental health among students in higher vocational colleges, the mechanisms through which happy education integrated into classroom teaching affects students' mental health, the current status of practical applications, and existing issues. The study finds that mental health issues among students in higher vocational colleges are becoming increasingly prominent. Happy education positively influences students' mental health through mechanisms such as creating a positive classroom atmosphere, strengthening interpersonal interactions, and enhancing self-identity. However, in practice, there are still issues such as deviations in the implementation of the concept, homogenization of instructional design, and inadequate evaluation systems. Based on this, future efforts should focus on further deepening theoretical research, optimizing practical approaches, and constructing a collaborative support system to provide references for the effective implementation of happy education in higher vocational colleges and the improvement of students' mental health levels.

Keywords: Happy education; Higher vocational colleges; Classroom teaching; Mental health; Overview of the current situation

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1. Introduction

As vocational education enters a stage of high-quality development, higher vocational colleges not only undertake the core task of cultivating technical and skilled talents but also face the increasingly prominent real-world challenge of student mental health issues. Higher vocational students, who are in a critical stage of

youth, have to cope with academic pressure, the demand for skill enhancement, as well as multiple pressures such as employment competition and interpersonal relationship adaptation. This makes them prone to psychological distress such as anxiety, depression, and interpersonal sensitivity, which seriously affects their all-round development and career growth ^[1]. Happy education, rooted in humanistic educational thought, emphasizes a student-centered approach. By creating a pleasant teaching atmosphere and designing interesting teaching activities, it stimulates students' intrinsic motivation for learning and achieves the educational goal of "learning with joy and finding joy in learning." Integrating happy education into the classrooms of higher vocational colleges not only represents an innovation of the traditional teaching model that "emphasizes skills over emotions" but also serves as an important exploration to promote the deep integration of mental health education and classroom teaching. Currently, some relevant studies have been conducted in academia, but a systematic overview and summary of the current situation has yet to be formed. Therefore, this paper reviews the research on the impact of integrating happy education into the classrooms of higher vocational colleges on students' mental health levels, clarifies the current research progress, existing problems, and future directions, and provides theoretical support for subsequent research and practice.

2. Core connotations and theoretical foundations of happy education

2.1. Core connotations

Happy education does not merely pursue "fun" in the classroom; rather, it is an educational model grounded in the laws of students' physical and mental development, balancing knowledge transmission, skill cultivation, and emotional nourishment. Its core connotations encompass three dimensions: first, a pleasant atmosphere, emphasizing the creation of an inclusive, equitable, and relaxed classroom environment to reduce students' psychological pressure and resistance; second, student agency, stimulating students' interest and enthusiasm for participation through diverse teaching activities, enabling them to transition from passive acceptance to active exploration; and third, holistic development, focusing not only on enhancing students' professional abilities but also on cultivating their psychological qualities such as emotional regulation, interpersonal collaboration, and self-identity, thereby achieving the coordinated development of intellectual and psychological education ^[2].

2.2. Theoretical foundations

The practice and development of happy education rely on solid theoretical support: first, humanistic education theory (Rogers, Maslow) emphasizes respecting students' subjective status and psychological needs, asserting that the core of education is to facilitate students' self-actualization, which aligns closely with the "student-centered" philosophy of happy education; second, positive psychology theory (Seligman) focuses on individuals' positive emotions, psychological resilience, and subjective well-being, providing a theoretical basis for happy education to enhance students' mental health through positive classroom experiences; third, constructivist learning theory (Piaget, Vygotsky) advocates that learning is a process in which students actively construct knowledge, and strategies such as situational creation and cooperative inquiry in happy education are concrete applications of this theory in the classroom ^[3].

3. Current status of mental health among students in higher vocational colleges

3.1. Prominent and diverse mental health issues

In recent years, the incidence of mental health issues among students in higher vocational colleges has been on

the rise, exhibiting diverse characteristics. Relevant survey data indicate that approximately 25–35% of higher vocational students experience varying degrees of psychological distress, primarily concentrated in three areas: Firstly, emotional issues such as anxiety, depression, and irritability, which are often associated with academic pressure and employment anxiety. Secondly, interpersonal relationship problems, manifesting as interpersonal sensitivity, communication barriers, and loneliness, are closely linked to the growth environment, personality traits, and inadequate social experience of higher vocational students. Thirdly, self-perception issues, including inferiority, self-denial, and confusion about goals, with some students experiencing a lack of self-worth due to poor college entrance examination scores and misconceptions about vocational education ^[4].

3.2. Shortcomings in mental health education

Currently, the mental health education system in higher vocational colleges still has many deficiencies: Firstly, the educational methods are monotonous, mainly relying on special lectures and consultations in psychological counseling rooms, lacking deep integration with daily teaching, which makes it difficult to achieve comprehensive education for all students throughout the entire process and in all aspects. Secondly, the education lacks targeted approaches, as the content of mental health education often copies the model of general higher education institutions without fully considering the professional characteristics, learning needs, and psychological traits of higher vocational students. Thirdly, the faculty strength is weak, with some higher vocational colleges having insufficient numbers of mental health teachers and uneven professional qualities among them. Additionally, professional course teachers lack relevant training in mental health education, making it difficult for them to effectively monitor students' psychological states in the classroom.

4. The influence mechanism of integrating happiness education into classrooms on the mental health of higher vocational students

4.1. Alleviating psychological pressure and improving emotional states

Traditional classrooms in higher vocational colleges primarily focus on imparting knowledge and training skills, with a tense teaching pace and a single evaluation criterion, which can easily lead to students developing a dislike for learning and experiencing psychological burdens. Happiness education reduces students' learning anxiety through interesting teaching activities (such as classroom games, knowledge contests, and role-playing), flexible teaching requirements, and encouraging evaluations. Research indicates that in a pleasant classroom atmosphere, students' cortisol levels (stress hormones) significantly decrease, while the secretion of neurotransmitters related to positive emotions, such as dopamine and serotonin, increases. This helps alleviate negative emotions like depression and anxiety, and enhances emotional regulation abilities ^[5].

4.2. Strengthening interpersonal interactions and enhancing social skills

The sensitivity to interpersonal relationships among higher vocational students is closely related to the lack of effective social platforms. Happiness education emphasizes collaborative inquiry-based learning, providing students with more opportunities for interpersonal communication and collaboration through group discussions, team tasks, and situational interactions. During the collaboration process, students learn to express their viewpoints, listen to others, and resolve conflicts, gradually improving their communication skills and teamwork abilities. Meanwhile, positive interpersonal interactions can enhance students' sense of belonging and identity, reduce feelings of loneliness, and improve their sensitivity to interpersonal relationships.

4.3. Strengthening self-identity and shaping a positive personality

Happy education emphasizes respect and affirmation for students, enabling them to feel their own value through a diversified evaluation system (focusing on learning attitude, participation, innovative thinking, etc.) and personalized feedback. When students experience success in the classroom (such as completing complex tasks and receiving recognition from teachers and peers), their sense of self-efficacy significantly improves, helping them overcome negative psychological states such as inferiority and self-denial ^[6]. In the long run, such positive classroom experiences can shape students' optimistic mindset and psychological resilience, fostering the formation of a positive personality.

5. Current status of practical application of happy education in vocational college classrooms

5.1. Initial success in practical exploration

In recent years, some vocational colleges have begun to integrate happy education into classroom teaching and have achieved certain results. In terms of practical approaches, three main models have emerged: First, the situational teaching model, which designs workplace simulations and real-life case scenarios in conjunction with professional content. For example, the preschool education major organizes on-campus practical training weeks each semester, using virtual simulation to mimic teaching and operations, and completing real-world environment creation training in designated areas to enhance the fun and practicality of teaching. Second, the interactive teaching model, which enhances student participation through classroom Q&A sessions, group debates, skill challenges, and other formats. For instance, the preschool education major organizes professional skill competitions and awards each semester, encouraging students from different grades to participate together, achieving the goals of promoting teaching and learning through competitions. Third, the personalized teaching model, which focuses on individual student differences and employs tiered tasks and flexible assignments to meet the diverse learning needs of students and alleviate academic pressure ^[7].

Relevant empirical studies have demonstrated that these practical models can effectively enhance students' classroom participation and improve their mental health. For instance, research has shown that in higher vocational classes employing the happy education model, students score significantly lower on factors such as anxiety, depression, and interpersonal sensitivity in the SCL-90 scale compared to those in traditional teaching classes. Moreover, students in these classes exhibit higher levels of learning satisfaction and subjective well-being ^[8].

5.2. Existing problems and challenges

Despite the progress made in the practical exploration of happy education, several issues persist. Firstly, there is a deviation in the implementation of the concept, with some teachers interpreting happy education superficially, equating it with "entertainment-oriented teaching." They excessively pursue a fun-oriented approach in classroom formats, neglecting the core objectives of knowledge transmission and skill development, resulting in poor teaching outcomes. Secondly, there is a lack of diversity in teaching design, with the integration of happy education lacking deep alignment with professional characteristics. Teaching activities across different majors and courses tend to be similar, failing to meet students' individualized needs. Thirdly, the evaluation system is inadequate, with current teaching evaluations in higher vocational colleges primarily focusing on exam scores, while process-based evaluations and assessments of emotional attitudes account for a relatively low proportion. This makes it difficult to objectively reflect on the implementation effects of happy education and fails to

effectively motivate teachers and students to participate. Fourthly, there is a deficiency in teachers' professional qualities, with some professional course teachers lacking relevant concepts and teaching skills related to happy education. They struggle to design and implement effective happy education teaching activities and lack keen observation and guidance capabilities regarding students' psychological states^[9].

6. Research limitations and future prospects

6.1. Research limitations

Currently, relevant research still has numerous limitations: Firstly, the research perspective is singular. Existing research mostly focuses on the overall impact of happiness education on students' mental health, lacking in-depth exploration of the influencing mechanisms on specific psychological dimensions (such as psychological resilience, self-efficacy, and interpersonal adaptability). Secondly, there is an imbalance in research methods. There are relatively few empirical studies, and most of them are short-term intervention studies, lacking long-term follow-up studies, making it difficult to verify the durability of the impact of happiness education. Thirdly, the sample representativeness is insufficient. The samples in existing empirical studies are mostly concentrated in certain regions and a few higher vocational colleges, with a relatively narrow coverage, and the universality of the research results needs to be improved. Fourthly, there is a scarcity of qualitative research. Existing research mostly employs quantitative research methods, lacking exploration of the implementation process of happiness education and students' real experiences through qualitative methods such as interviews and classroom observations, resulting in incomplete research conclusions.

6.2. Future prospects

Future research can be carried out from the following aspects: Firstly, deepen theoretical research to further clarify the internal mechanism by which happy education influences the mental health of vocational college students, and explore the roles of mediating variables and moderating variables such as personality traits and learning motivation. Secondly, optimize practical approaches by designing personalized and specialized happy education teaching plans in line with the characteristics of different majors and course types, so as to enhance the pertinence and effectiveness of practice. Thirdly, improve the evaluation system by constructing a diversified evaluation system that takes into account knowledge and skills, emotional attitudes, and psychological qualities, to objectively reflect the implementation effects of happy education. Fourthly, strengthen teacher training by incorporating the concept and skills of happy education into the teacher training system of vocational colleges, so as to enhance teachers' classroom design capabilities and mental health education literacy. Fifthly, expand research methods by adopting mixed research methods that combine quantitative and qualitative approaches, broadening the sample scope, conducting long-term follow-up studies, and enhancing the scientificity and universality of research results.

7. Conclusion

Integrating happy education into the classrooms of vocational colleges has a positive effect on improving students' mental health through mechanisms such as alleviating psychological pressure, strengthening interpersonal interactions, and enhancing self-identity. It serves as an effective path to address the current mental health issues of vocational college students and promote the in-depth integration of mental health education and classroom teaching. Currently, relevant theoretical research is continuously enriching, and practical exploration

has achieved initial results. However, there are still issues such as deviations in the implementation of concepts, homogenization of teaching designs, imperfect evaluation systems, and insufficient teacher literacy. In the future, it is necessary to further deepen theoretical research, optimize practical approaches, and improve support systems to promote the standardized and regular implementation of happy education in vocational colleges, safeguarding the all-round development and mental health of vocational college students.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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