

# Analysis of Innovative Paths for Mental Health Education in Higher Vocational Colleges from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

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**Abstract:** As China's vocational education enters a stage of high-quality development, higher vocational colleges, as the main positions for cultivating technical and skilled talents, must not only attach importance to the improvement of students' professional skills but also pay attention to their mental health. Positive psychology focuses on the exploration, cultivation, and enhancement of human positive psychological qualities, providing a new theoretical perspective and practical guidance for mental health education in higher vocational colleges. Based on this, this paper briefly analyzes the inherent consistency and practical dilemmas between positive psychology and mental health education in higher vocational colleges, and explores corresponding innovative paths, aiming to provide theoretical references for improving the effectiveness of mental health education in higher vocational colleges and promoting students' all-round development.

**Keywords:** Positive psychology; Mental health education in higher vocational colleges; Innovative paths

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## 1. Introduction

Positive psychology, a branch of psychology emerging at the end of the 20th century, breaks through the "problem-oriented" research paradigm of traditional psychology and focuses on exploring, cultivating, and enhancing human positive psychological qualities, endowing mental health education in higher vocational colleges with a new theoretical perspective and action guidance. The traditional mental health education model in higher vocational colleges focuses on the identification, diagnosis, and correction of students' existing psychological distress or behavioral problems, ignoring the positive psychological potential commonly existing in the student group. Integrating positive psychology into mental health education in higher vocational colleges is an inevitable choice for the reform of mental health education in higher vocational colleges in the new era, as well as an inherent requirement for higher vocational colleges to implement the fundamental task of "fostering morality and cultivating people" and cultivate high-quality technical and skilled talents.

## **2. Inherent consistency between positive psychology and mental health education in higher vocational colleges**

### **2.1. Assisting students' all-round development and career growth**

Cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents with “both morality and skills, and integration of work and study” is the core goal of higher vocational education. It not only requires students to master solid professional skills but also to have good psychological health, professional literacy, and the ability to withstand pressure. Positive psychology focuses on shaping individuals' positive psychological qualities and enhancing their sense of happiness and psychological resilience, which is highly consistent with the core goal of mental health education in higher vocational colleges of “promoting students' physical and mental health and assisting their career growth”<sup>[1]</sup>. Higher vocational students will enter various industries in the future and face various challenges, such as workplace competition and post-adaptation. Good positive psychological qualities can not only solve the problems encountered by students in study and life, but also play a good psychological supporting role in their career development.

### **1.2. Focusing on the psychological development needs of all students**

Traditional mental health education in higher vocational colleges mostly focuses on a small number of students with psychological problems, ignoring the psychological development needs of most students, resulting in a small coverage of mental health education and a lack of pertinence. Positive psychology emphasizes “facing all individuals”, focusing on exploring the advantages and potential of each student and paying attention to the positive psychological experiences of each student, which is consistent with the educational philosophy of “all-staff education, whole-process education, and all-round education” in higher vocational colleges<sup>[2]</sup>. The group of higher vocational students is diverse, including top-performing and cheerful students, as well as students with academic difficulties and introverted personalities. Mental health education from the perspective of positive psychology can meet the needs of all students, realizing “everyone gains and everyone grows”.

### **1.3. Emphasizing students' practical experience and active participation**

Practical teaching is an important part of higher vocational education, emphasizing “learning by doing and doing by learning”, and focusing on the cultivation of students' practical and hands-on ability. Positive psychology attaches importance to exploring one's own strengths and accumulating positive emotions through practical activities and active participation, which coincides with the practical characteristics of mental health education in higher vocational colleges. Different from traditional mental health education that emphasizes theory and neglects practice, mental health education from the perspective of positive psychology attaches importance to designing various practical activities, allowing students to experience in the process of participation and grow in the process of experience, thereby improving the effect of mental health education.

## **3. Practical dilemmas of the mental health education model in higher vocational colleges**

### **3.1. Relatively lagging educational concepts**

At present, the mental health education in higher vocational colleges still adheres to the traditional “problem-oriented” concept, regarding mental health education as “psychological problem intervention”. It mainly targets students with psychological problems, focusing on the prevention and treatment of mental illnesses, while ignoring the cultivation of positive psychological qualities of most students. This concept puts mental health

education in a passive response situation, that is, intervention and counselling are only carried out when students have psychological problems, while the cultivation of positive psychology of normal students is lacking attention. At the same time, some higher vocational colleges regard mental health education as a simple substitute for ideological and political education, ignoring the professionalism and scientificity of mental health education<sup>[3]</sup>. Treating psychological problems as ideological problems and using persuasive educational methods to meet students' psychological needs leads many students to be unwilling to participate in mental health education activities and resist psychological counselling, thereby affecting the coverage and effectiveness of mental health education.

### **3.2. Content system needing optimization**

On the one hand, the content of mental health courses in many higher vocational colleges mainly focuses on "psychological problem identification, mental illness prevention, emotional management, and interpersonal relationship adjustment", focusing on solving psychological problems. It rarely involves content such as the cultivation of positive emotions, the exploration of advantageous potential, and the shaping of positive personalities, failing to guide students to establish a positive attitude towards life<sup>[4]</sup>. On the other hand, higher vocational education takes the cultivation of professional skills as its fundamental purpose, and students of different majors have different psychological needs and career confusions. Engineering students will encounter "hands-on practice pressure and anxiety about professional skill improvement", while liberal arts students will face "interpersonal relationship troubles and confusion about career positioning"<sup>[5]</sup>. However, the mental health education content of most higher vocational colleges adopts a "one-size-fits-all" approach, without designing corresponding educational content according to the psychological needs and career development characteristics of students of various majors, resulting in the disconnection between educational content and students' actual needs and low student participation enthusiasm.

### **3.3. Relatively single implementation paths**

Higher vocational colleges generally adopt the mental health education method of classroom teaching plus psychological counselling, lacking diverse, interactive, and experiential educational forms, which makes it difficult to mobilize students' participation enthusiasm. In classroom teaching, most of them are traditional teaching models of teacher lectures and PPT presentations, with a dull classroom atmosphere and a lack of interaction. Students passively accept knowledge and cannot actively participate in teaching activities, which is not conducive to students internalizing the learned knowledge into their own psychological qualities. In psychological counselling, it is also mainly passive; that is, counselling services are only provided when students take the initiative to consult<sup>[6]</sup>. Moreover, the form of psychological counselling is single, mainly individual counselling, and group counselling, group guidance, and other forms are rarely used, which cannot meet the diverse psychological counselling needs of students. Although some colleges and universities carry out mental health education practices through the second classroom, there are phenomena such as fragmented practice systems and single teaching forms, failing to give play to the educational role of practical teaching.

## **4. Innovative paths of mental health education model in higher vocational colleges from the perspective of positive psychology**

### **4.1. Updating educational concepts and establishing a "positive-oriented" educational philosophy**

First of all, higher vocational colleges should abandon the old concept that "mental health education is to solve

psychological problems” and establish a new concept of “focusing on advantages and cultivating positivity”. They should shift the focus of mental health education from “intervening in psychological problems” to “cultivating positive psychological qualities”, pay attention to the psychological development needs of all students, explore the advantageous potential of each student, guide students to form a positive attitude towards life, and improve their sense of happiness and psychological resilience <sup>[7]</sup>.

Secondly, mental health education is not the work of mental health education teachers alone, but the common responsibility of all faculty and staff. Higher vocational colleges should establish the concept of all-staff education, guide all faculty and staff such as class teachers, professional teachers, counsellors, and administrative personnel to participate in mental health education work, integrate the cultivation of positive psychology into all links such as daily teaching, student management, and professional training, and create a good atmosphere of “everyone is a mental health educator”. For example, when students feel frustrated due to operational errors in training courses, professional teachers should not only point out the students’ problems but also guide them to see the patience and exploration spirit they have shown in practical operations, encourage them to learn from mistakes, and transform failures into opportunities for growth, so that the cultivation of positive psychology is imperceptibly integrated into professional skill teaching <sup>[8]</sup>; in daily class management, counsellors can regularly organize “strength brainstorming” activities, allowing students to point out and affirm each other’s bright spots, helping students establish positive self-cognition <sup>[9]</sup>.

In addition, the cultivation of positive psychological qualities cannot be achieved overnight, and should run through the entire process of students’ on-campus study, covering all aspects of students’ study, life, and career development. Higher vocational colleges should uphold the concept of “three comprehensives” education, integrate the cultivation of positive psychology into all links such as students’ enrolment education, professional learning, practical training and internship, career guidance, and graduation employment, and create a mental health education situation of “full-process coverage and all-round penetration”.

## **4.2. Optimizing the content system and building a “needs-oriented” content framework**

The content system is the core of mental health education. Mental health education in higher vocational colleges from the perspective of positive psychology should highlight the core of positive psychological cultivation, and build a three-dimensional content structure of “basic module + professional module + practical module” in combination with the psychological characteristics and career needs of higher vocational students. The basic module is oriented to all students, mainly cultivating students’ positive emotions, positive personalities, and positive cognition, laying a solid foundation for students’ mental health <sup>[10]</sup>. Specifically, it includes the cultivation of positive emotions, guiding students to perceive, express, and regulate positive emotions, cultivating positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, hope, and optimism, and improving emotional management ability; the shaping of positive personalities, exploring students’ strengths and potential, cultivating positive personality traits such as courage, wisdom, kindness, justice, temperance, and transcendence, and improving students’ self-identity and self-confidence; the cultivation of positive cognition, guiding students to establish correct self-cognition, academic cognition, and career cognition, view difficulties and setbacks in life from a positive perspective, and cultivate positive attribution styles and psychological resilience. We can learn from the design idea of the textbook “Positive Mentality, Happy Growth - Mental Health Education for Higher Vocational Students” to create an experiential content system of “watching happiness, listening to happiness, feeling happiness, and measuring happiness” to enhance students’ practical experience <sup>[11]</sup>. The professional module designs corresponding educational content according to the psychological characteristics and career needs of students of various

majors to achieve the deep integration of mental health education and professional education. For example, for engineering students, it mainly cultivates their positive qualities such as patience, carefulness, perseverance, and teamwork, helping them overcome the pressure and setbacks in practical training and practice.

The practical module mainly relies on various practical activities to enable students to experience the process of participation and grow in the process of experience, transforming positive psychological knowledge into their own psychological qualities and behavioral habits. For example, carry out group counselling activities, design group counselling activities with themes such as gratitude counselling, strength exploration, and teamwork, and improve students' communication ability, collaboration ability, and self-cognition level through interaction<sup>[12]</sup>. Teachers introduce group counselling methods such as "happy tree" theme painting, and guide students to identify positive psychological resources and enhance psychological resilience through the symbolic structure of tree roots (internal resources), tree trunks (external support), and crowns (future visions).

### **4.3. Innovating implementation paths and carrying out "rich and diverse" teaching practices**

Classroom teaching is the main channel of mental health education. It is necessary to break the traditional teaching model of teacher lectures and student listening, change teaching methods, and create an interactive and experiential classroom. Teachers can use teaching methods such as case teaching method, group discussion method, role-playing method, scenario simulation method, and mindfulness training method to enable students to actively experience and learn in the process of participating in classroom teaching<sup>[13]</sup>. For example, when learning content related to "emotional management", teachers set up an "emotional roller coaster" scenario simulation, allowing students to play new workplace employees encountering different pressure scenarios such as project failure and customer complaints, while other students act as "emotional observers" to record their non-verbal behaviors and coping styles. Then, through group discussions, analyze the generation mechanism and transformation strategies of positive and negative emotions, making abstract emotional theories concrete. In this process, teachers should pay attention to creating a classroom atmosphere, creating a relaxed, inclusive, and supportive classroom environment, allowing students to dare to express their feelings and ideas, and improving their sense of participation and belonging. Practical activities are the main way to cultivate positive psychological qualities. Teachers should enrich the forms of practical activities and create a "regular and systematic" practice system. For example, carry out regular psychological practice activities, integrate mental health education into campus culture construction, and regularly hold psychological culture festivals, psychological melodrama competitions, psychological comic exhibitions, gratitude-themed activities, etc., allowing students to experience the power of positive psychology in activities; implement targeted psychological counselling for students of different groups, establish academic difficulty groups, interpersonal relationship groups, career confusion groups, etc., carry out personalized psychological counselling for students of each group, solve students' specific psychological problems, and cultivate their positive psychological qualities<sup>[14]</sup>.

In addition, with the rapid development of information technology, teachers should also use internet technology to promote the integration of online and offline mental health education in higher vocational colleges and create an "all-round and convenient" mental health education platform. On the one hand, establish an online mental health education platform, including online mental health courses, psychological evaluation systems, psychological counselling platforms, etc., so that students can learn mental health knowledge, complete psychological evaluations, and obtain psychological counselling services anytime and anywhere<sup>[15]</sup>. On the other hand, use new media platforms such as WeChat official accounts, video accounts, and Douyin to release content

such as positive psychological knowledge, psychological adjustment methods, and excellent cases through new media, creating a positive campus psychological atmosphere.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, the innovation of the mental health education model in higher vocational colleges has become one of the main contents of the reform of higher vocational education in the new era. In the future, higher vocational colleges should continue to strengthen the research and application of positive psychology, and according to the development of the times and the characteristics of students' psychological changes, constantly improve the mental health education model, update educational concepts, optimize the content system, innovate implementation paths, promote the comprehensive integration of mental health education with professional education, ideological and political education, student management, and other work, create an "all-round, whole-process, and full-coverage" mental health education pattern, and cultivate more high-quality technical and skilled talents with both morality and skills and physical and mental health.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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