



Optimizing College Students' Mental Health Education from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

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Abstract

College mental health education in China has developed rapidly in recent years, but most programs still emphasize psychological problems and neglect students' positive growth. Many courses remain theoretical, lack practical value, and fail to inspire students to build resilience or well-being. This study aims to explore how positive psychology can optimize mental health education for college students. Based on literature review and survey findings, it identifies several key issues: limited integration of positive concepts, insufficient teacher training, and low engagement in learning activities. The research suggests that incorporating positive psychology into course design, promoting interactive learning, and creating a supportive campus environment can help students form optimistic attitudes and strong coping abilities. The study finds that when colleges shift from a problem-centered to a strength-based approach, students show higher motivation, better emotional balance, and improved social adaptation. These findings highlight that positive psychology is not only a useful theoretical framework but also a practical tool for reforming college mental health education. It provides new insights for universities to enhance students' well-being and to cultivate a culture of positivity and growth in higher education.

Keywords

Positive psychology; College students; Mental health education

1. Introduction

The mental health of college students has become an increasingly important concern in higher education. In 1980s, in order to comprehensively raise both the quality and level of college education and meet college students' objective needs for mental health education in the daily learning process, all colleges in China gradually built the mental health education course system and established mental counseling centers (Yu, 2025). Besides, based on the actual needs of social development and the development trend of educational system, the governmental departments concerned continuously introduced various policies to guide and support mental health education. Owing to the joint efforts in many efforts, a prominent result has been achieved in mental health education in China's colleges and college students' mental health level has been improved significantly (Diener et al., 2018). Mental health education has thus evolved from a supportive service into a key part of comprehensive quality education.

However, we must realize that such mental health education in the conventional sense only works for some students with mental diseases and cannot raise the mental health level of the

whole college student group due to its failure to develop positive factors in mental potential, although it can effectively avoid and eliminate a mental disease and raise college students' mental quality and health level. With the deepening of educational activities in China's colleges, the mental health education in colleges will inevitably face an increasingly heavy work stress and diversified working requirements in the process, it is of extremely great realistic significance to organically combine positive psychology with college students' mental health education and excavate the positive factors in mental health education for improving the current situation of mental health education in colleges at the current stage and raising the overall mental health education level of college students (World Health Organization, 2013).

The purpose of this study is to explore how to optimize college students' mental health education from the perspective of positive psychology. Through literature analysis and practical reflection, this paper discusses the current problems in mental health education, explains the key ideas of positive psychology, and proposes strategies for improvement. The aim is to provide a theoretical reference and practical guidance for building a more effective and positive mental health education system in colleges and universities.

2. Positive Psychology

Positive psychology provides the main theoretical foundation for this study and offers new ideas for improving mental health education among college students. It was first put forward by Sheldon, an American psychologist. He thinks that positive psychology is based on the potential and morality of human. It emphatically develops the positive factors in human nature and realizes the cultivation of a good psychological state of individuals or groups by excavating positive factors. Therefore, they can take an optimistic attitude towards the daily life and learning (Seligamn et al., 2009). As a branch of psychology, positive psychology perfects the frame system of psychology via its new theory and makes up for the deficiencies of traditional psychology in the research direction and content. The analysis on the characteristics of positive psychology can help us to further clearly understand its key parts and core requirements in the development process, distinguish the difference between positive psychology and traditional psychology and create extremely favorable conditions for the effective application of positive psychology in practice.

The first is the positive psychological orientation. Positive psychology not only pays attention to the treatment of mental diseases and the adjustment of mental status that the traditional psychology concerns but also emphatically excavates people's innermost positive factors, achieves the all-sidedness and integrity of psychology and makes up for the deficiencies of traditional psychology to meet the social and economic development's appeal for psychology. There is a positive psychological value orientation in positive psychology, which, thus, discovers and excavates people's innermost positive factors to guide them to develop a good behavioral habit and value orientation. As a result, individuals can take a more optimistic attitude towards various mental problems in their work and life, enhance the mental health level and successfully cure mental diseases (Seligman, 2011).

The second is realizing the return of value. In positive psychology, it is hoped that individuals can pay more attention to the positive and beneficial factors in social life and work to realize their social values by giving play to and excavating their own positive strength. Meanwhile, as a psychology branch pursuing human values, positive psychology not only focuses on the treatment and curing of mental diseases the traditional psychology concerns and eliminates the negative effects of a bad mental state on individuals, but also calls for treasuring people's

own values, makes psychology to return to its essence again, tries to correct any errors in the development of traditional psychology, gives full play to the social value of psychology and facilitates its comprehensive healthy development (Seligman et al., 2009). At the same time, to guarantee the scientific and effective development of positive psychology when realizing the return of value, it is required to verify related activities and studies. As an independent science, the guidance of scientific thinking is needed in the development and application of positive psychology. Moreover, scientific research ways and methods, tests, evaluations, inspections and other means should be used to comprehensively improve the correctness of theoretical studies in positive psychology so that it can really meet the objective needs for psychology in the social development process (Suldo & Shaffer, 2008).

Studies on theories concerning positive psychology and explorations into its characteristics can help enhance the understanding of the importance of positive psychology and, thus, create favorable conditions for the follow-up mental health education in colleges. First, emphasizing balance in positive psychology. As a humanistic science, psychology considers human psychology as the focus and core of research and emphasizes the curing of human's psychological and mental diseases to improve the public's life satisfaction and train and excavate talents. The traditional psychology focuses more on the prevention and treatment of mental diseases in the research experiences. Although it can effectively cure relevant mental diseases, it can neither really meet the whole society's mental needs nor guide people to cultivate and maintain a good mental state in the normal status because it uses minority people as service objects (Fredrickson, 2001). Different from the traditional psychology, positive psychology emphasizes the balance of psychology, comprehensively analyzes and studies positive and negative factors in human's mental health and tries to give play to the social value of psychology so that psychology can not only cure various psychological and mental diseases but also achieve a good mental state and the formation of value to meet the social life's objective needs of psychology (Li & Zhang, 2013).

Second, considering positive factors as key research points. Positive psychology studies and excavates positive factors in multiple aspects. Subjectively, positive psychology requires the objects of research to recall the good days in the past, optimistically feel the reality and take a positive attitude towards life and work in the research process (Liu & Lu, 2017). In individual studies, positive psychology emphatically studies the calculation of positive factors in individuals' living habits based on their intelligence and hobbies. However, in social studies, researchers pay attention to the degree of influence of positive factors on the behavioral habit of social members, and chiefly study the psychological relation among individuals, families and colleges, guaranteeing the excavation of positive factors and raising both the social research value and social value of positive psychology.

Third, solving problems with a positive attitude. Different from the traditional psychology, positive psychology emphasizes take a positive attitude towards a mental health issue in the solving process. In addition, positive psychology provides people with more possibilities in solving and handling problems by excavating and cultivating the positive aspects in psychological factors. Taking a positive attitude towards mental health problems can not only effectively respond to possible various mental health problems and achieve the effective prevention of mental diseases, but also comprehensively enhance the mental health level of the whole social group (Park & Peterson, 2009).

In summary, positive psychology provides both theoretical and practical guidance for optimizing mental health education in colleges and universities. It transforms the focus from "psy-

chological problems” to “psychological development,” promoting the idea that every student can achieve happiness and growth through positive self-awareness and active learning. This perspective also aligns with the modern educational concept of whole-person development, emphasizing that mental health education is not limited to helping a few students in difficulty but is a process of fostering strength and vitality for all. Based on these theoretical perspectives, the following section introduces the research methods used in this study to explore the application of positive psychology in college students’ mental health education.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research approach, combining literature review, document analysis, and theoretical reflection. The aim is to explore how positive psychology can be effectively applied to improve college students’ mental health education. Instead of focusing on quantitative data, this research emphasizes conceptual understanding and theoretical interpretation. The research mainly relies on the review and analysis of existing studies, policy documents, and practical reports related to positive psychology and mental health education. By comparing previous findings and summarizing successful cases, the study identifies the main challenges in the current education system and extracts useful insights from schools that have implemented positive psychological principles. Furthermore, the research draws on real cases and experiences from universities that have attempted to apply positive psychology to their teaching and counseling systems. These examples show how theoretical concepts—such as optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy—can be transformed into practical guidance for mental health programs.

The analysis process follows three main steps. First, it builds a theoretical foundation through a comprehensive review of key concepts in positive psychology. Second, it analyzes the current situation of mental health education in colleges based on literature and observed practices. Finally, it summarizes strategies and suggestions for improvement according to the theoretical framework. This methodological design connects theory with practice and lays the groundwork for the following analysis of existing problems in college mental health education.

4. Current Situation and Problems in College Students’ Mental Health Education

Understanding the current situation of mental health education in colleges is very important. It helps us see how positive psychology can be linked with mental health programs for students. This connection allows educators to design better methods to support students’ emotional well-being. It also provides useful guidance for improving college mental health education in the future (Zhang & Chen, 2020).

4.1 Current situation of the content of mental health education in colleges

In order to obtain a more objective understanding of the current status of mental health education in colleges, a structured questionnaire survey was conducted among 102 college students. The questionnaire focused on students’ perceptions of the teaching content in existing mental health education courses. Based on the collected data, the survey results were summarized and visualized in the form of a pie chart, as shown in Figure 1.

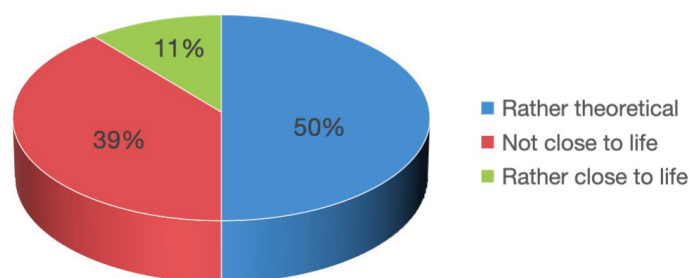


Figure 1 Students' Perceptions of Current Mental Health Education

As is directly shown in the pie chart above, most students are dissatisfied with the mental health education in colleges at the present stages; 89 % of students think the current content of mental health education is not sufficient and perfect enough; 50% of respondents think that the excessively theoretical content in mental health education courses cannot be combined with practice and, thus, cannot give play to its necessary guiding function to improve their mental health conditions (Wang & Wang, 2019). Meanwhile, 39% of respondents think that the content of mental health education in colleges is not close to the social life and lack flexible knowledge content. Therefore, the content in such an abstract mental health teaching mode cannot meet college students' objective requirements for mental health education, and it is difficult for students to quickly and efficiently learn the knowledge about mental health in their learning process, resulting in the low learning efficiency and the difficulty in giving play to the positive function of mental health education in colleges (Waters, 2011).

4.2 Current situation of the forms of mental health education in colleges

Although the significant achievements made in mental health education in China's colleges, the continuous adjustment and optimization of educational forms and the establishment of mental education courses, mental consultancy organizations and research teams have greatly raised the college students' level of mental health, there are still problems in the forms of mental health education. For example, although some colleges provide a series of mental health education courses, the course system is too formal. It is difficult to stimulate college students' enthusiasm and initiative in participating in mental health education via such formalized educational forms in the learning process (Zhou & Ee, 2012). Besides, colleges keep enriching the educational forms when implementing the mental health education, keep organizing all sorts of mental lectures and organize mental health clubs in addition to classroom teaching, greatly satisfying mental health education's objective needs for educational forms. However, it is difficult for college students to resonate with such forms so they don't want to participate. Meanwhile, most colleges wrongly combine mental health education with mental education in the process of mental health education and include it into the teaching of other discipline system. Although this way can guarantee the excavation of faculty to some extent, it also results in the lack of independence and flexibility in the forms of mental health education in colleges as well as the lowered quality and level of teaching.

5. Application of Positive Psychology in College Students' Mental Health Education

Based on the theoretical and methodological framework established in the previous chapters, this section focuses on how positive psychology can be practically applied to optimize mental health education in colleges and universities. By shifting the focus from problem-solving to

strength cultivation, positive psychology provides new directions and methods for building a more effective and developmental education system.

5.1 Principles for mental health education of college students under positive psychology

The application of mental health education of college students under the positive psychology must follow the principle of scientificity (Zhao & Sun, 2018). It is required to fully show the principle of scientificity to attain the application goal of mental health education of college students in positive psychology. Only the meticulous and comprehensive consideration of the realistic significance and operating flow of the application of college students' mental health education under positive psychology from the scientific perspective can maximally guarantee that the mental health education mechanism of college students can meet the actual needs of mental health education under positive psychology. Besides, only under the guidance of scientific spirit, means and concepts can we ensure the scientific and efficient realization of mental health education of college students under positive psychology based on the existing educational means and technical ways.

Mental health education of college students must follow the principle of practicalness. There are various contents and much information data in mental health education of college students under positive psychology. Thus, in order to guarantee the orderliness of mental health education of college students, it is required to necessarily standardize and guide the measures for mental health education of college students. Besides, positive psychology has rather strict requirements on the steps and flows of mental health education of college students at the present stage (Zhang & Chen, 2020). Therefore, technicians concerned are required to necessarily and detailedly handle and operate the application schemes for mental health education of college students and relevant operations. Maximally increase enterprises' compatibility of application schemes for mental health education of college students and reduce the adverse impacts of complicated and redundant information data on mental health education activities of college students under positive psychology. Meanwhile, it is also required to simplify the application flow of mental health education of college students, lower the operating difficulty, and enhance the practicalness of application schemes for mental health education of college students so as to raise the level of mental health education in a short time and guarantee the smooth implementation of mental health education of college students (Zheng & Guo, 2016).

5.2. Approaches to carry out mental health education of college students under positive psychology

The implementation of mental health education from the standpoint of positive psychology necessitates not only theoretical guidance but also practical and systematic approaches. In light of the prevailing deficiencies and limitations in the realm of college mental health education, a range of approaches can be contemplated.

(1) Curriculum Integration and Reform

Colleges should integrate positive psychology concepts into mental health education curricula. Rather than an exclusive emphasis on psychological problems or disorders, courses should cultivate resilience, optimism, and social-emotional competencies. The integration of lectures, group discussions and experiential learning activities within modular courses has been demonstrated to facilitate the internalisation of positive mental health concepts among students (Waters, 2011).

(2) Training and Professional Development of Educators

It is vital to acknowledge the pivotal function that educators and counsellors fulfil in the implementation of positive psychology within educational settings. It is recommended that regular professional development workshops be offered to strengthen their understanding of positive psychology theories and interventions, equipping them with effective strategies to apply in both classrooms and counselling settings.

(3) Diversified Teaching Methods and Interactive Activities

Mental health education should adopt flexible and engaging methods, such as scenario simulations, role plays, mindfulness practices, and peer support groups. These approaches encourage student participation and make mental health education more practical and relatable to daily life.

(4) Campus Environment and Supportive Culture

A supportive campus culture is imperative for the effective delivery of mental health education. In order to promote the mental well-being of students, it is recommended that universities establish student organisations and peer networks with a focus on well-being. Furthermore, the creation of a positive and inclusive environment is to be encouraged, as is the integration of mental health promotion into extracurricular activities.

(5) Application of Information Technology

In the contemporary era of digital learning, information technology provides powerful tools for promoting mental health. Online platforms, mobile applications, and social media can be used to deliver resources, organise interactive campaigns, and offer anonymous counselling services. This approach facilitates the dissemination of mental health education beyond the confines of the classroom environment and ensures the provision of ongoing support.

(6) Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

In order to ensure the effectiveness of such programmes, it is essential that colleges regularly assess the outcomes of mental health education programmes. This can be achieved by using student feedback, psychological assessments and well-being surveys. The necessity of continuous monitoring and improvement is predicated on the assumption that this will ensure that the approaches remain relevant to students' needs and aligned with the principles of positive psychology.

6. Conclusion

This study explores how to optimize college students' mental health education from the perspective of positive psychology. Conventional approaches have placed a strong emphasis on the prevention and treatment of mental illness; however, they have frequently overlooked the cultivation of students' strengths, resilience, and positive emotions, which are equally essential for their holistic development. The application of positive psychology provides a more balanced framework, enabling universities to move beyond deficit-oriented models and towards fostering well-being, personal growth, and social adaptability.

In summary, the integration of positive psychology into the mental health education of college students is not only a theoretical innovation but also a practical necessity. By emphasising

the strengths of students alongside the prevention of problems, colleges can create a more comprehensive and student-centred model of mental health education. It is asserted that such efforts will ultimately contribute to enhancing students' resilience, well-being, and capacity to thrive in the face of academic and social challenges.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Ethics Statement

Not applicable.

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