

Constructing a College Student Mental Health Education Model from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

Zihui Zhao^{1, a}

¹Liaoning Communication University, Shenyang, China

^a460893994qq.com

Abstract

With the development of society and the popularization of higher education, college students are confronted with multiple pressures related to academics, employment, and interpersonal relationships, making mental health an increasingly important issue. Current approaches to college students' mental health education mainly emphasize problem intervention, yet they struggle to fully stimulate students' psychological potential. Positive psychology, which focuses on individuals' positive qualities and the enhancement of psychological capital, offers a new perspective for college students' mental health education. This paper reviews the core concepts of positive psychology, analyzes their relevance to college student mental health education, identifies the problems existing in current educational models, and, from the four dimensions of curriculum, counseling, and activities, proposes pathways for constructing a student mental health education model grounded in positive psychology. In doing so, it enriches the theoretical system of college student mental health education, improves the effectiveness of practice, helps students cultivate positive psychological qualities, and promotes their overall development.

Keywords

Positive psychology; college students; mental health education; educational model; psychological qualities.

1. Introduction

The higher education stage is a critical period for the formation of students' worldviews, outlooks on life, and values, as well as an important stage in which their psychological development moves toward maturity. Against the backdrop of intensifying social competition and an accelerated pace of life, college students face mounting psychological challenges, and their mental health status directly affects their academic achievement, personality development, and future adaptability to society [1-3]. Traditional college student mental health education models have been deeply influenced by negative psychology, focusing mainly on identifying and resolving psychological problems while neglecting the cultivation of positive psychological resources. Since its emergence at the end of the 20th century, positive psychology has broken away from the "problem-oriented" paradigm of traditional psychology, shifting attention toward positive emotional experiences, positive personality traits, and positive social environments, thereby providing both theoretical support and practical approaches for innovating college student mental health education. On this basis, this paper explores the construction of a college student mental health education model from the perspective of positive psychology, which has important practical significance for improving students' mental health and promoting the high-quality development of higher education.

2. Core Concepts of Positive Psychology

As an important branch of psychology, positive psychology builds its theoretical system on the systematic study of individuals' positive psychological phenomena, providing clear theoretical guidance for mental health education. Its core concepts are summarized in Table 1. The first is subjective well-being, which focuses on an individual's overall evaluation of quality of life, involving life satisfaction, the balance between positive and negative emotional experiences, and related mechanisms. The key lies in exploring the internal psychological mechanisms and external environmental factors that influence subjective well-being, thereby offering a theoretical basis for guiding college students to appreciate the meaning of life and strengthen emotional regulation. The second is positive personality traits. Positive psychology holds that individuals possess cultivable positive qualities such as courage, wisdom, kindness, and justice. The formation and development of these traits are key to enhancing psychological resilience and serve as an important internal safeguard against psychological problems, providing direct guidance for the cultivation of sound personalities among college students. The third is positive social environment, which emphasizes the supportive role of family, school, community, and other contexts in fostering individuals' positive psychological development [4-5]. It argues that high-quality social support systems can create favorable conditions for the display and growth of positive qualities, making them an indispensable external pillar of student mental health education. These three core concepts are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, together constituting the theoretical foundation of positive psychology and laying a theoretical basis for constructing a mental health education model for college students.

Table 1. Summary of Core Concepts in Positive Psychology

Concept Name	Core Connotation
Subjective Well-being	An individual's overall evaluation of the quality of life, including life satisfaction and the balance of positive and negative emotions, and the study of internal and external influencing mechanisms.
Positive Personality Traits	Individuals can cultivate positive qualities such as courage and wisdom, which are internal resources for enhancing psychological resilience and resisting psychological problems.
Positive Social Environment	Environments such as families and schools support the positive psychological development of individuals, and a good social support system provides the soil for positive qualities.

3. The Compatibility between Positive Psychology and College Student Mental Health Education

3.1. Goal Compatibility

The fundamental aim of college student mental health education is to promote students' psychological growth, help them develop sound adaptability, and achieve harmony between body and mind. Within the current framework of talent cultivation in higher education, this goal not only involves addressing students' existing psychological difficulties but also emphasizes guiding students to actively tap into their psychological potential and reserve psychological capital for future life development. Positive psychology focuses on exploring individuals' positive psychological resources, guiding them to cultivate positive emotions, positive personality traits, and positive social adaptability, ultimately enabling comprehensive progress and self-realization. Both share the same core: placing students at the center and striving for positive transformation and sustainable development of their psychological states, rather than limiting the scope to short-term problem-solving. Positive psychology's attention to individuals'

upward-oriented qualities is highly consistent with the goal of college student mental health education in promoting holistic development. It offers clear goal-oriented guidance for educational practice and drives the transformation of student mental health education from “problem correction” to “development promotion.”

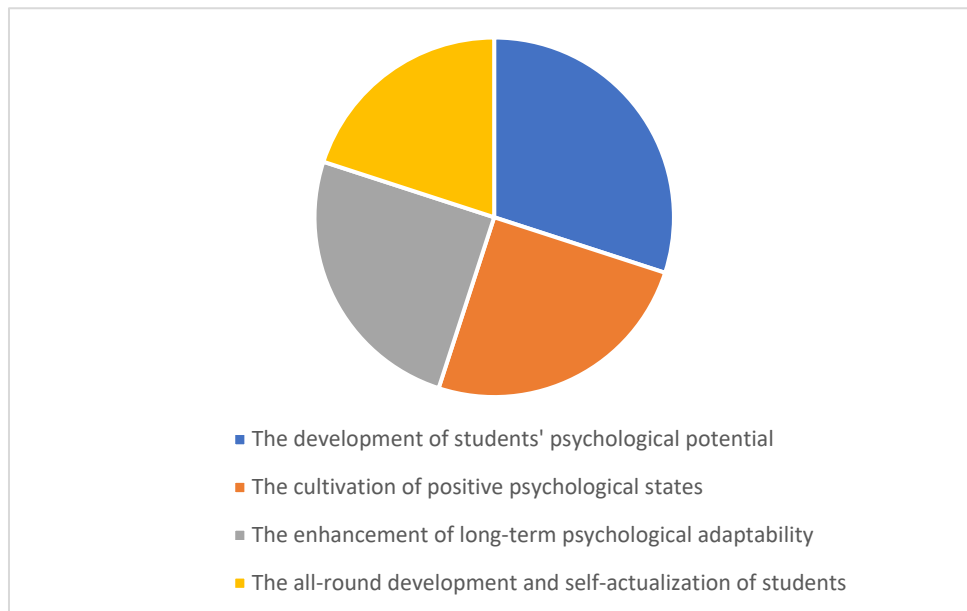


Figure 1. Proportion of Goal Compatibility between College Student Mental Health Education and Positive Psychology

3.2. Content Compatibility

The content of college student mental health education covers multiple aspects, including the dissemination of psychological knowledge, effective emotion regulation, proper stress management, optimization of interpersonal relationships, and comprehensive personality development. The selection of such content must meet the requirements of students' psychological development and align with their actual growth needs. Traditional mental health education content has mostly revolved around psychological problems, such as the identification and intervention of anxiety and depression, with relatively little focus on cultivating students' positive psychological qualities[6-7]. Positive psychology research just fills this gap, emphasizing the promotion of subjective well-being, fostering positive emotional states, carrying out resilience training, and building social support systems. These areas are highly aligned with the needs of college student mental health education to enhance students' psychological literacy. Integrating positive psychology into mental health education can enrich the content system, ensuring it not only provides strategies for coping with problems but also includes approaches for cultivating positive qualities. This allows the content to meet students' diverse needs for mental health knowledge and supports the formation of a comprehensive understanding of mental well-being.

3.3. Method Compatibility

The choice of methods in college student mental health education directly influences its effectiveness and should be scientifically designed according to students' cognitive characteristics, psychological development patterns, and educational content requirements. In the past, mental health education for college students commonly adopted one-way methods such as classroom lectures and special talks, which often resulted in low student engagement and limited effectiveness. Positive psychology, by contrast, emphasizes experiential, interactive, and practice-oriented approaches, such as positive psychological intervention training, group

support, mindfulness practice, and strength exploration initiatives. These methods stress students' active participation and personal experience, which can enhance their subjectivity and initiative. Since college students are at a stage characterized by flexible thinking and eagerness to engage, the methods advocated by positive psychology are highly compatible with their learning characteristics and participation needs. Implementing these methods in college student mental health education can overcome the monotony of traditional approaches, increase enjoyment and interactivity in the educational process, enhance student engagement and sense of gain, and thereby improve the overall effectiveness of practice.

4. Analysis of Problems in the Current Model of College Student Mental Health Education

4.1. Deviation in Educational Philosophy

At present, many universities place the core of mental health education on the prevention of psychological crises, focusing their work on identifying students with psychological problems and implementing crisis interventions in order to avoid extreme incidents. This educational philosophy equates college student mental health education with the treatment of psychological problems, while neglecting the developmental needs of the majority of students who are psychologically normal but seek positive psychological growth. In practice, educators tend to concentrate on students with problems, paying insufficient attention to cultivating positive psychological qualities among ordinary students. This narrows the scope of mental health education, making it difficult to meet the psychological development needs of all students. Such a problem-oriented philosophy not only fails to fully stimulate students' psychological potential but may also reinforce negative perceptions of mental health, leading students to mistakenly believe that participation in mental health education implies having psychological problems, thereby weakening their initiative to engage in such education[8-9].

4.2. Imbalance in Educational Content

The current content system of college student mental health education exhibits a clear imbalance. In terms of design, many universities devote a large portion of their courses or related activities to the introduction and treatment of psychological problems, such as the symptoms, causes, and therapies of common mental disorders, as well as the negative consequences of stress and frustration and ways to cope with them. However, the design of content aimed at cultivating positive psychological qualities is relatively lacking. Topics such as pathways for developing positive emotions, methods for identifying and applying personal strengths, strategies for enhancing resilience, and approaches to building positive interpersonal relationships are rarely addressed or even excluded from the educational system. This problem-centered, growth-neglecting content design results in students receiving mainly negative psychological knowledge, with little opportunity to systematically learn methods of cultivating positive psychology. Consequently, students lack both the awareness and ability to actively nurture positive psychological qualities, making it difficult to fundamentally improve their mental health.

4.3. Singularity of Educational Methods

Today's college students have grown up in the digital age, displaying learning characteristics such as lively thinking, strong curiosity, and a preference for interactive experiences. They place greater demands on the enjoyment, engagement, and practicality of the educational process, favoring hands-on practice and active exploration as means of acquiring knowledge and transforming it into ability. The goals of mental health education for college students have shifted from mere knowledge dissemination to cultivating psychological literacy and enhancing self-regulation. To achieve this, educational methods must create opportunities for practice and

independent reflection. However, the current methods adopted in mental health education remain singular and poorly aligned with students' developmental needs and learning styles. In practice, most universities still rely on traditional classroom lectures as the main method, with teachers explaining psychological knowledge or playing instructional videos. Students thus remain in a passive role, and the effectiveness of education is greatly diminished.

5. Constructing a College Student Mental Health Education Model from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

5.1. Developing Positively-Oriented Mental Health Courses

Courses are the primary vehicle for delivering mental health education to college students, and developing positively-oriented mental health courses is the core element in constructing a new educational model. As the higher education curriculum system becomes increasingly refined, mental health courses should break away from the traditional problem-oriented content framework, instead redesigning course content and teaching methods under the guidance of positive psychology theory. In terms of course content, it is necessary to increase the proportion of knowledge related to positive psychology, such as the theoretical foundations of subjective well-being, the classification of positive personality traits, and the components of psychological capital. Practical modules should also be designed, such as training for identifying personal strengths and designing programs to enhance resilience, to guide students in transforming theoretical knowledge into practical actions [10]. Regarding teaching methods, interactive approaches such as case studies, group discussions, and role-playing should be adopted to encourage students to share their own positive psychological experiences, thereby enhancing their sense of identification during participation. Course assessment methods should also be diversified, incorporating students' practical achievements and class participation into evaluation criteria, avoiding reliance on a single written examination, and comprehensively assessing both learning outcomes and the cultivation of positive psychological qualities.

5.2. Providing Positively-Oriented Psychological Counseling

Positively-oriented psychological counseling can provide students with more comprehensive psychological support. In traditional counseling, counselors often focus primarily on addressing students' psychological problems, paying attention to their negative emotions and adverse experiences. Positively-oriented counseling shifts this perspective, applying positive psychology theory to not only recognize students' problems but also explore their positive psychological resources. During counseling, counselors should guide students to focus on their positive qualities and past successes, helping them identify their strengths and potential through approaches such as "successful event review" or "strengths inventory," thereby enhancing self-identity and confidence. In addition, counselors should adopt positive psychological interventions such as gratitude exercises, hope therapy, and solution-focused brief therapy to help students adjust cognitive patterns, foster positive emotions, and improve resilience. Furthermore, the boundaries of counseling services should be expanded: in addition to offering individual counseling to students experiencing psychological distress, universities should also organize group counseling activities for all students, thereby addressing diverse psychological needs.

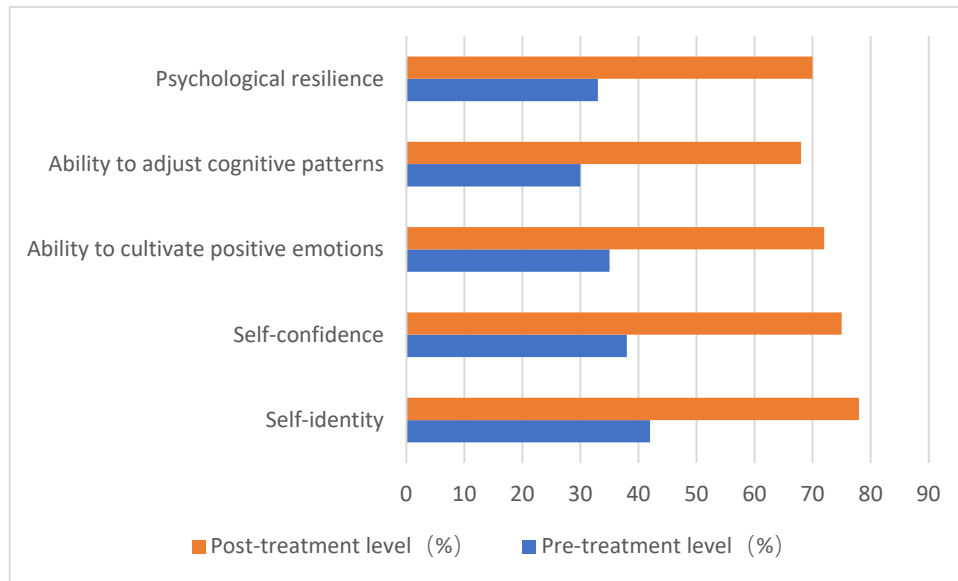


Figure 2. Comparison of Student Ability Changes under Positively-Oriented Counseling

5.3. Conducting Rich and Diverse Positive Psychology Activities

In the process of promoting campus culture, positive psychology activities should align with students' daily learning and life, while balancing enjoyment, participation, and practical value. In terms of activity forms, universities can design various styles of themed activities, competitions, and practice-oriented events. For example, a "Gratitude Month" theme activity may include "gratitude letter writing" and "gratitude speech competitions," guiding students to express gratitude and cultivate positive emotions. A "Resilience Challenge" may involve simulated frustration tasks such as "team collaboration to solve problems" or "stress scenario response drills," helping students strengthen their ability to cope with stress and setbacks. In terms of organization, student associations—such as mental health associations and volunteer clubs—should be mobilized to stimulate students' initiative and creativity in designing and implementing positive psychology activities. Universities should provide necessary support in venues, funding, and faculty to ensure such activities can be carried out sustainably and systematically, thereby fostering an atmosphere of broad participation and shared benefit.

6. Conclusion

With college students' mental health issues becoming increasingly complex and the demand for mental health education continuing to rise, traditional problem-oriented education models can no longer meet the needs of the times or of students. By focusing on individuals' positive psychological resources, positive psychology offers important ideas for innovating mental health education models. This paper analyzed the compatibility between positive psychology and college student mental health education, identified existing problems such as deviations in philosophy, imbalance in content, and singularity of methods, and proposed constructing a new model from the dimensions of courses, counseling, and activities. This model emphasizes a student-centered approach, highlights the cultivation of positive psychological potential, and fosters positive psychological qualities, thereby realizing a transformation of college student mental health education from problem correction to developmental promotion, and ultimately meeting the needs of students' holistic development.

References

- [1] G. Li, "Psychological health education of college students from the perspective of positive psychology," *Course Education Research*, vol. 31, p. 1, 2019.
- [2] S. J. Sun, L. Luo, and T. L. Chen, "A comparative study on experiential teaching and lecturing teaching of the course of college students' mental health education," *Science & Technology Vision*, vol. 36, no. 36, pp. 60–61, 2018.
- [3] X. Han, "Research on the new mode of college students' mental health education under the network environment," *Contemporary Educational Research*, vol. 4, no. 8, 2020.
- [4] X. Wang, "Research on mental health education for college students," *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 153–157, 2020.
- [5] S. Yuan, H. J. Yu, X. H. Yang, M. W. Liu, J. Zhang, B. W. Tang, D. Gasevic, K. Paul, P. G. Wang, and Q. Q. He, "The impact of a health education intervention on health behaviors and mental health among Chinese college students," *Journal of American College Health*, vol. 68, no. 5, pp. 1–6, 2019.
- [6] S. Li, "Mental resilience analysis and health risk prediction of college students assisted by mental health education," *Work*, vol. 7, pp. 1–9, 2021.
- [7] B. Laura, I. Alayo, V. Gemma, A. José, I. C. Ana, E. Enrique, G. Andrea, G. Margalida, L. Carolina, A. P. José, R. Miquel, S.-S. Victoria, J. B. Maria, C. Pere, M. Philippe, B. Ronny, P. A. Randy, K. N. Matthew, C. K. Ronald, and J. Alonso, "Mental disorders in Spanish university students: prevalence, age-of-onset, severe role impairment and mental health treatment," *Journal of Affective Disorders*, vol. 273, pp. 604–613, 2020.
- [8] D. E. Wilfley, E. E. Fitzsimmons-Craft, D. M. Eichen, D. J. Van Buren, R. R. Welch, A. H. Robinson, B. Jo, R. Raghavan, E. K. Proctor, G. T. Wilson, and W. S. Agras, "Training models for implementing evidence-based psychological treatment for college mental health: a cluster randomized trial study protocol," *Contemporary Clinical Trials*, vol. 72, pp. 117–125, 2018.
- [9] G. Ying, "Methods of mental health education for Chinese college students in the new era," *Research Frontiers of Education*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2021.
- [10] J. Li, "Instructional research on mental health education for college students from the perspective of positive psychology," *Psychology*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 49–53, 2020.