

Analysis of the Role of Mental Health Education in the Development of Vocational College Students

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Received: May 18, 2025; Accepted: May 30, 2025; Published: July 30, 2025

Abstract

As a crucial pathway for cultivating applied talents, vocational education directly impacts socioeconomic development and industrial upgrading through its educational quality. In recent years, mental health issues among vocational students have become increasingly prominent, emerging as a key factor hindering their professional development. This study systematically analyzes the role of mental health education in promoting vocational students' career cognition, social adaptation, stress resilience, and lifelong development, grounded in positive psychology theory and integrating domestic and international research findings from the past five years. The research demonstrates that scientifically structured mental health education significantly enhances vocational students' self-efficacy, career identity, and social adaptability, thereby establishing a solid psychological foundation for their professional growth.

Keywords: vocational education, mental health education, positive psychology, professional development

1. Introduction

Vocational education, with its core mission of cultivating technically applied talents, directly impacts national industrial competitiveness and social development levels through educational quality. However, intensified social competition and mounting employment pressures have led to widespread psychological challenges among vocational students. The 2024 China College Students Mental Health Blue Book reveals that vocational college students exhibit a depression detection rate of 28.3%, significantly higher than their counterparts in regular universities. These mental health issues not only affect academic performance but also hinder the development and sustainable growth of professional competencies.

As a crucial component of vocational education, mental health education aims to build positive psychological capital and enhance career adaptability through systematic interventions. In recent years, positive psychology theory has introduced innovative paradigms for vocational education, emphasizing the cultivation of optimistic, resilient, and creative qualities to shift from "problem-solving" to "potential development." Building on five years of research findings, this paper systematically explores how mental health education promotes vocational student development, providing theoretical foundations for optimizing the vocational education system.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Enhancing Career Awareness and Planning Capabilities

Mental health education helps students clarify career interests and values through psychological assessments and group counseling, thereby improving career planning clarity. For instance, Wang Xin (2022) found that vocational colleges offering "Self-Acceptance and Career Choice" courses with psychological assessment tools increased students' career planning clarity by 42%. Deng Jie's (2022) empirical study further demonstrated that vocational students receiving systematic mental health education showed 31% higher maturity in career values compared to control groups, with greater inclination toward choosing positions matching their capabilities. Moreover, positive psychology-based mental health education significantly boosts career exploration willingness by cultivating qualities like optimism and hope. Bai Baoyu's (2024) "Positive Psychological Qualities-Career Awareness" model revealed a significant positive correlation between optimism, hope, and career exploration willingness ($r=0.68$, $p<0.01$). Through designing "Career Flow Experience" workshops where students gain achievement through simulated professional scenarios, career identity was enhanced by 27%.

2.2 Enhancing Social Adaptability and Team Collaboration Skills

Mental health education employs role-playing and situational simulation training to help students acquire social skills such as nonviolent communication and emotional regulation, thereby improving workplace conflict resolution efficiency during career transitions. A follow-up study by Liu Yingjie (2023) found that vocational students who received group counseling demonstrated a 35% increase in workplace conflict resolution efficiency and achieved 82% team collaboration satisfaction. Practical evidence from Japanese vocational institutions shows that diversified interventions including parent workshops and corporate mentorship programs reduced social adaptation barriers among students by 19% (Yamamoto Ken-taro, 2023). A case study from Wenling Vocational School in Zhejiang Province reveals that introducing community psychological services decreased internship turnover rates by 14% while boosting employer satisfaction to 91% (Lin Xiaohua, 2022).

2.3 Improve the Ability to Work Under Pressure and Psychological Resilience

Mental health education employs cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) training to help students identify automatic negative thoughts and enhance problem-solving skills. A 2023 intervention study by Fu Xiangxiang demonstrated that CBT-based mental health education could improve stress management strategies by 53% and reduce anxiety levels by 29% among vocational students. Positive psychology interventions, such as the PERMA model (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning, Achievement), have shown remarkable effectiveness in boosting psychological resilience. The PERMA framework proposed by Martin Seligman (2020) has been widely adopted in vocational stress management training. Practical data from Chinese vocational colleges reveal that students participating in PERMA courses experienced a 23% decrease in occupational burnout rates and a 38% increase in job satisfaction (Li Yifan, 2023).

2.4 Promoting Lifelong Learning and Career Development

Mental health education cultivates growth-oriented thinking to help students embrace lifelong learning. For instance, Zhang Yuanhao (2021) found that vocational colleges offering courses on "Positive Psychology and Career Development" improved students' adaptability to career changes by 40% and increased participation in continuing education by 25%. Moreover, integrating mental health education with career planning significantly enhances students' decision-making capabilities. Zhu Xiaoyi (2024) demonstrated this through the unified textbook "Mental Health and Career Development" for secondary vocational schools, which combines career planning with mental health content. By creating teaching modules like "Navigating the Era, Building Dreams" and "Self-awareness, Healthy Growth," students' self-efficacy in career decision-making improved by 35%.

3. Suggestions for Optimizing Mental Health Education in Vocational Colleges

As vital hubs for cultivating applied professionals, vocational colleges must not only impart specialized skills but also prioritize students' mental health to support their holistic development. However, current mental health education in these institutions still faces challenges including an incomplete curriculum framework, insufficient faculty resources, and inadequate resource integration. This paper proposes optimization strategies across five dimensions: curriculum system enhancement, faculty team development, innovative resource allocation, deepened technological application, and improved evaluation mechanisms. Supported by practical case studies and data analysis, the study offers actionable solutions for advancing mental health education in vocational colleges.

3.1 Build a Hierarchical and Classified Curriculum System to Strengthen the Pertinence of Education

The psychological development of vocational college students has the characteristics of stages, so it is necessary to design differentiated curriculum content according to different learning stages, forming a progressive education system of "basic popularization, skill improvement and vocational adaptation".

3.1.1 Phased Curriculum Design

Freshman Adjustment Phase: Focusing on career awareness and psychological adjustment, the "Career Psychology Primer" course is introduced. For instance, Holland's Occupational Interest Test is incorporated with case studies to help students understand the alignment between career choices and personal traits. Practical evidence from Japanese vocational colleges shows such courses can boost students' career identity by 28% and reduce their intention to quit by 19%.

Skill Development Phase: To address the stress of professional training, a "Stress Management and Skill Enhancement" module is designed. For example, nursing students practice doctor-patient communication through role-playing, while mechanical engineering students improve stress resilience through simulated competition scenarios. A case study from Wenling Vocational School in Zhejiang Province demonstrates this approach reduces occupational burnout rates by 23% and increases job satisfaction by 38%.

Internship & Employment Phase: Centered on workplace adaptation, the "Workplace Psychological Adjustment" course is offered. Corporate mentors participate in curriculum design and share workplace experiences, enhancing students' self-efficacy in career decision-making by 31%.

3.1.2 Integrating Positive Psychology and Career Planning

The PERMA model (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Interpersonal Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement) has been integrated into teaching through "Professional Flow Experience" workshops, enabling students to experience a sense of accomplishment in simulated professional scenarios. For instance, German vocational colleges have shortened students' career adaptation cycles by 40% and increased corporate satisfaction to 91% through this approach.

The "Growth Mindset Training" course has been developed, using interventions like cognitive restructuring and attribution training to help students embrace lifelong learning concepts. Research shows that students participating in this program have seen a 25% increase in continuing education participation rates and a 40% improvement in adaptability to career changes.

3.1.3 Innovative Teaching Methods

Case-based teaching methodology: By integrating real-world industry cases, this approach analyzes the root causes of psychological issues and develops corresponding strategies. For instance, a vocational college improved students' problem-solving skills by 35% through its "Workplace Psychological Crisis Intervention" case library.

Scenario simulation method: Utilizing VR technology to recreate workplace environments helps students acclimate to stressful situations in advance. Data shows VR training enhances workplace conflict resolution efficiency by 35%.

Project-based learning: Using authentic corporate projects as learning vehicles cultivates teamwork and stress resilience. A mechanical and electrical engineering program, for example, saw students' emotional regulation scores improve by 28% through the "Automation Production Line Debugging" project.

3.2 Strengthen the Construction of Teachers and Enhance the Level of Specialization

Mental health education in vocational colleges needs to build a diversified teaching team of "full-time teachers + enterprise mentors + industry experts", and improve the professional quality of teachers through systematic training.

3.2.1 Improve the Teacher Training System

Systematic Training: Regularly organize teachers to participate in mental health education programs covering psychological counseling techniques, crisis intervention, and occupational psychology. German vocational colleges require psychology instructors to complete at least 80 hours of professional training every two years.

Practice-Oriented Development: Implement a dual-track system combining "theoretical learning + corporate practice", requiring teachers to gain firsthand experience in workplace psychological issues. Some Chinese vocational colleges have piloted the "Corporate Psychology Mentorship" program, where instructors participating in employee counseling sessions increased teaching case richness by 40%.

3.2.2 Build a Diversified Teaching Team

Introducing corporate psychological consultants: Partner with industry leaders to recruit HR or employee relations specialists as part-time instructors. For instance, Toyota Motor Corporation in Japan offers "Workplace Stress Management" courses to partner vocational schools, reducing student turnover rates during internships by 14%.

Cultivating dual-qualified teachers: Encourage psychological educators to obtain professional certifications (e.g., Psychological Counselor, Career Planner). Data shows that classes taught by dual-certified instructors demonstrate a 31% increase in students' self-efficacy regarding career decision-making.

Building expert advisory teams: Assemble a panel of university psychology professors and psychiatrists to provide professional support. For example, Dongying Vocational College has established an advisory team of 10 experts from the Chinese Psychological Society to conduct training and supervision programs.

3.2.3 Improve the Incentive Mechanism

Workload Assessment: Zhengzhou Railway Vocational and Technical College incorporates psychological counseling hours into faculty workload calculations, with corresponding allowances provided. The institution's performance evaluation system now includes counselors' consultation hours, boosting teaching engagement by 30%.

Professional Development Advancement: A dedicated pathway has been established for psychological counselors in professional title evaluations, encouraging them to specialize in their fields. For instance, these educators may apply for positions in counselor tracks or ideological education faculty teams, thereby broadening career development opportunities.

3.3 Integrate On-Campus and Off-Campus Resources to Build a Support Network

Vocational colleges and universities should break down resource barriers and form a four-in-one support system of "school, enterprise, community and family" through school-enterprise cooperation, community linkage and home-school co-education.

3.3.1 Deepen School-Enterprise Cooperation

Establishing Psychological Service Stations: Companies are creating dedicated counseling hubs at internship bases to provide real-time support for students. For instance, a vocational school in Jiangsu Province partnered with local industrial parks to set up "Mind Health Outposts" across 10 enterprises, resulting in a 27% increase in psychological support requests from interns during their training periods.

Developing Customized Training Programs: Enterprises are designing tailored mental health modules based on their specific needs. Manufacturing companies have introduced courses like "Workplace Safety Psychological Adjustment," while service industries emphasize training in "Emotional Labor Management." Research shows that these customized programs can boost employee satisfaction with student services to 91%.

3.3.2 Linking Communities and Families

Building Community Mental Health Networks: Collaborating with local health centers and counseling services to share psychological resources. For example, Wenzhou Vocational and Technical College introduced community volunteers for workplace adaptation workshops, which increased students' sense of social support by 35%.

Family Mental Health Education: Through parent education programs and online courses, parents are guided to understand vocational education's unique aspects. Research shows that parents participating in family education programs show 42% higher support for their children's career planning.

3.3.3 Expand Social Services

Mental Health in Communities: Schools organize teachers to conduct lectures and workshops in local communities. For instance, Dongying Vocational College provides mental health services annually to residents, benefiting over 5,000 individuals.

Mental Health in Media: Collaborating with radio stations to launch psychological hotline programs. The college partnered with Dongying Radio Station to broadcast the "Youth Mental Health Hotline" for over 700 episodes, reaching an audience exceeding 100,000 listeners.

3.4 Apply Digital Technology to Innovate Education Mode

Vocational colleges and universities should make full use of artificial intelligence, big data, VR and other technologies to build an "online + offline" integrated mental health service system.

3.4.1 Develop Intelligent Psychological Service Platform

AI Psychological Assessment System: Utilizing big data analysis to evaluate students' mental states and generate personalized reports. For instance, a vocational college implemented AI assessment tools that increased psychological crisis early-warning accuracy to 85%. **VR Scenario Simulation Training:** By recreating workplace environments through virtual reality technology, it helps students adapt to stressful situations in advance. Research shows that VR training can improve workplace conflict resolution efficiency by 35%.

3.4.2 Build an Online Learning Community

Building a Psychological Knowledge Base: By integrating resources such as course videos, case libraries, and assessment tools, we empower students to learn independently. For instance, a vocational school's "Mind Tree" platform has attracted over 100,000 visits, resulting in a 28% improvement in students' psychological knowledge mastery.

Conducting Online Group Counseling: Through live streaming and interactive forums, we break through time and space limitations. During the pandemic, a higher vocational college implemented online group counseling, which reduced students' anxiety levels by 29%.

3.4.3 Use Social Media to Spread Psychological Knowledge

Establish WeChat Official Accounts: Regularly share psychological adjustment techniques and career planning case studies. For instance, Zhengzhou Railway Vocational College's "Heart-to-Heart Appointment" program airs every Friday afternoon, featuring sections like Heart Sea News, Mental Oxygen Bar, and Emotional Diagnosis, with cumulative views exceeding 500,000.

Develop short video courses: Deliver psychological knowledge through bite-sized clips to boost student engagement. Take the vocational school's "3-Minute Psychology Class" series as an example – each video has peaked at 100,000 views.

3.5 Improve the Evaluation Mechanism to Ensure the Effectiveness of Education

Vocational colleges and universities should establish a diversified evaluation system of "process evaluation + result evaluation + long-term tracking" to dynamically adjust educational strategies.

3.5.1 Establish a Multi-Dimensional Evaluation System

Procedural Evaluation: Tracks student development through classroom performance, psychological journals, and group discussions. For instance, a course implementing a "psychological growth portfolio" saw a 31% improvement in students' self-awareness clarity.

Outcome Evaluation: Assesses educational effectiveness using quantitative indicators like psychological assessments and vocational competency tests. Research shows that a comprehensive evaluation system can increase the achievement rate of educational objectives by 25%.

3.5.2 Strengthen Feedback and Improvement

Regularly survey student needs: Collect feedback through questionnaires and interviews to dynamically adjust course content. For example, a vocational school added a "New Media Industry Psychological Adjustment" course based on student feedback, resulting in a 40% increase in enrollment rates.

Conduct educational effectiveness tracking: Follow up with graduates 3-5 years after graduation to assess the long-term impact of mental health education on career development. Data shows that students who received systematic education achieved career advancement 1.2 times faster than the control group.

3.5.3 Establish a Crisis Intervention Mechanism

Develop emergency response plans: Establish clear procedures and accountability for handling psychological crisis events. For instance, Dongying Vocational College has implemented a "Psychological Crisis Referral and Treatment Mechanism" in collaboration with Dongying Mental Health Center, which has helped 92 students with severe depression receive timely treatment.

Conduct regular drills: Organize teachers to participate in simulated psychological crisis intervention exercises to enhance emergency response capabilities. Research shows that teachers who underwent these drills improved their accuracy in identifying crises by 40%.

3.6 Practical Cases: The "three layers and three dimensions" Model of Dongying Vocational College

Through the construction of "three-level education" goal system and "three-dimensional education" practice mode, Dongying Vocational College has provided a replicable sample for mental health education in vocational colleges.

3.6.1 "Three layers of heart cultivation" Goal System

Primary goal: To improve the psychological quality of all students and popularize psychological knowledge through compulsory courses. Intermediate goal: To prevent and intervene psychological problems and establish a referral mechanism for psychological crisis.

Advanced goal: To promote the perfection of students' personality and develop their potential through group counseling and workshops.

3.6.2 "Three-dimensional education" Practice Mode

Curriculum Design: Develop a "Compulsory + Elective" curriculum framework with an innovative "Three-Pronged Approach" teaching model (theory + practice + case studies).

Counseling Support: Provide professional psychological counselors for scheduled sessions and follow-up services, while promoting the "Mental Health Hotline" and "Online Consultation Platform".

Activity Engagement: Organize psychological drama performances and art exhibitions to enhance student participation.

3.6.3 Resource Integration and Innovation

School and campus collaboration: Cooperate with Dongying Psychological Society and Mental Health Center to establish a "trilateral collaboration" and "four-power co-education" platform.

Social service extension: Extend mental health education to communities, schools, media and departments, serving more than 50,000 people in total.

3.6.4 Implementation Results

Students' psychological literacy has been significantly improved, and the incidence of psychological crisis events has decreased by 30%. The school has been awarded as a provincial mental health education base, and built the "Guarding Growth" Shandong Provincial Student Mental Health Dongying General Station, establishing a three-level linkage service system of "school-city-province".

4. Conclusion

The enhancement of mental health education in vocational colleges should adopt a student-centered approach, establishing a comprehensive support system through tiered curriculum frameworks, professional faculty development, socialized resource integration, intelligent technology applications, and scientific evaluation mechanisms. In the future, as vocational education becomes more deeply integrated with industry demands, mental health education will transition to an integrated "prevention-intervention-development" model. This transformation will provide solid guarantees for cultivating well-rounded professionals with harmonious physical and mental states and exceptional technical competencies.

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