



Mental Well-being and Self-efficacy Among Students in a Vocational & Technical College in Shaanxi Province, China

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Abstract: This study investigates the interconnected dynamics of mental well-being and self-efficacy among students enrolled at Shaanxi Vocational & Technical College in Shaanxi Province, China. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by students in vocational and technical education, the research adopts a qualitative approach, employing interviews with both students and teachers to gain comprehensive insights. The findings reveal that academic pressures significantly impact students' mental well-being, contributing to heightened stress and anxiety. Social support systems, particularly peer relationships, emerge as crucial in mitigating these challenges, emphasizing the importance of fostering a supportive community. Moreover, self-efficacy is closely tied to practical experiences and skills development within the vocational education system. The study highlights the pivotal role of teachers in shaping students' self-confidence through encouragement and constructive feedback. Career aspirations are identified as influential in shaping self-efficacy, with students having clear goals expressing higher levels of confidence. Based on the findings, the study proposes recommendations to strengthen support systems, promote social support networks, provide teacher training, offer comprehensive career guidance, and enhance the curriculum to incorporate more practical experiences. The recommendations aim to create an environment conducive to the holistic development of students, preparing them for academic success and future careers. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of ongoing research and evaluation to ensure continuous improvement in support systems and educational practices. Implementing these recommendations can significantly contribute to the positive mental health and self-efficacy of students at Shaanxi Vocational & Technical College, ultimately enhancing their overall educational experience and future

Keywords: Mental well-being, Self-efficacy, Vocational and technical education, Student experiences, Support systems

I. Introduction

The well-being and self-efficacy of students are essential factors that contribute to their overall success and satisfaction in educational settings. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of mental health and self-efficacy among students, particularly in the context of vocational and technical education. As students in vocational and technical colleges face unique challenges and demands, understanding their mental well-being and self-efficacy becomes crucial for their personal growth and academic achievements [1]. This study aims to explore the mental well-being and self-efficacy among students in Shaanxi Vocational & Technical College, located in Shaanxi Province, China. Shaanxi Province has witnessed significant developments in its vocational and technical education system, with a focus on equipping students with practical skills and knowledge for the job market. However, limited research has been conducted on the mental well-being and self-efficacy of students within this specific educational context.

Students in vocational and technical colleges in China face specific challenges in comparison to other educational contexts. One of the significant challenges is the high academic pressures they encounter. These students are subjected to rigorous curricula, practical skill development, and assessments within a limited timeframe, which can create intense academic pressure. Another challenge is the emphasis on career aspirations and job market competition. Vocational and technical colleges in China are designed to equip students with practical skills for the job market, leading to increased competition among students and heightened pressure to secure lucrative job opportunities upon graduation [3].

Moreover, students in vocational and technical colleges may experience limited social support systems compared to their counterparts in traditional academic institutions. The focus on practical training and skill development in these colleges may leave little room for social activities or peer support, impacting students' social well-being and sense of belonging [8]. Additionally, the stigma associated with vocational and technical education in China poses a challenge for these students. Historically, vocational and technical education has been viewed as having lower social status compared to academic education, leading to societal stigma or judgments that can affect students' self-esteem and overall mental well-being [10]. To address this research gap, a qualitative approach will be adopted, employing interviews as the primary data collection method. Both students and teachers will be interviewed to gain comprehensive insights into the factors affecting students' mental well-being and self-efficacy in the vocational and technical college environment. By exploring their experiences, perceptions, and challenges, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological well-being and self-efficacy dynamics within this educational setting. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on student well-being and self-efficacy in vocational and technical education. It will offer valuable insights into the specific factors that influence students' mental well-being and self-efficacy, such as academic pressures, social



support systems, career aspirations, and the effectiveness of educational interventions[2]. The outcomes of this research can inform policy development, curriculum design, and support services aimed at promoting the holistic development of students in vocational and technical colleges.

II Literature Review

Regarding to mental well-being in educational settings, it may have a negative impact on the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents, particularly when they are exposed to settings with high rates of crime, violence, delinquency, substance use, abuse, and poverty. Black et al. (1998) present 11 recommendations for urban interventions that build on individual, family, and community strengths to promote the mental health and well-being of urban children and adolescents [3]. Theoretical perspectives and empirical research suggest that spirituality (distinctly and in relation to religiosity) promotes healthy development in adolescents, enhances the ability to cope, and leads to positive outcomes in mental health, psychological well-being, and academic learning. Given the value of spirituality as a source of resilience, implications for educational practices to foster adolescent spiritual development are discussed in the context of school, family, and community settings [4]. Using the Patient Activation Measure-13 (PAM-13), Lara-Cabrera et al. (2015) aim to assess the effect of pre-treatment, peer co-led educational intervention on patient activation. Secondary outcomes included measures of patient satisfaction, well-being, mental health symptoms, motivation, and treatment participation [5]. Shaw et al. (2016) aimed to explore the attitudes of mental health nurses toward service users who self-harm in secure environments, and to inform mental health curriculum development. Adopting a holistic approach to education of nurses about self-harm may assist in developing attitudes and skills to make care provision more effective in secure mental health settings [6]. Pessimistic discourses about crises in youth and children's well-being, mental health and vulnerability permeate English educational policy and practice. These generate vague and slippery elisions of well-being and mental health, and the related rise of an ad hoc, confusing market of psycho-emotional interventions promoted by new types of 'pay-experts'. Revisiting earlier arguments that these developments depict a 'diminished' human subject, Ecclestone et al. (2016) propose that the incoherent state of policy, much research and practice in this area warrants robust challenge and critique [7]. Lin et al. (2017) review empirical studies that explored the associations between the concept of MT and individual differences in learning, educational and work performance, psychological well-being, personality, and other psychological attributes. Taken together, the findings suggest a 'mental toughness advantage' with possible implications for developing interventions to facilitate achievement in a variety of settings [8].

In terms of Self-efficacy in Education, Savolainen [9] report on results from a comparative study of in-service teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy in implementing inclusive practices in South Africa and Finland and its implications for teacher education in these countries. Self-efficacy, in particular efficacy in collaboration, was clearly related to overall attitudes towards inclusion. The aim of Dussault et al. [10] was to investigate the relationship between loneliness and self-efficacy for a sample of 314 French Canadian education majors who were administered French Canadian versions of the UCLA Loneliness Scale and Teacher Efficacy Scale. Analysis yielded, as expected, a negative and significant correlation of -0.25 between scores on loneliness and self-efficacy. Dishman et al. [11] evaluate the effects of the Lifestyle Education for Activity Program (LEAP), a comprehensive school-based intervention emphasizing changes in instruction and school environment, on variables derived from social-cognitive theory (SCT) as mediators of change in physical activity among black and white adolescent girls. The multicomponent intervention emphasized the enhancement of self-efficacy and development of behavioral skills by using curricular activities within physical education classes and health education instruction. The main aim of Palmer [12] was to investigate the relative importance of the various sources of self-efficacy in a primary science methods course. Data on changes in self-efficacy and sources of self-efficacy were collected throughout the course using formal and informal surveys. Dinther et al. [13] investigate empirical literature about the role of students' self-efficacy in education by focusing on the following research question: which are the factors shown to affect the self-efficacy of students within higher educational settings? Several factors appeared to influence students' self-efficacy and provided evidence of the potency of the main sources of self-efficacy.

As one of the types of Chinese higher education, higher vocational and technical education has its own rules and characteristics. A study on its developing condition can help improve the construction of Chinese higher education and serve as a reference for those in other countries. Based on system theory, Li et al. analyze the problems encountered by the development of higher vocational technical education in China in a holistic way and put forward relative advice and countermeasures [16]. Sheng et al. explore the characteristics and flexible schemes of China's higher vocational and technical colleges' students' art troupes. The research results show that China's higher vocational and technical colleges have the following four characteristics [22]. Since Jimei Navigation College of Fujian Province started five-year junior college education in 1984, five-year higher vocational education has become one of the important forms of Higher Vocational Education in China. By combing the development process of Japan's colleges and universities, Wu studies Japan's colleges and universities from the aspects of school running subjects, talent training objectives, training methods, and evaluation methods [23]. According to the process of the development of China's higher vocational education, Han analyzes the present situation and problems of the development of China's higher vocational education in the new normal period. Finally, the study explores the measure of the combination of production and teaching carried out in the development of China's higher vocational education during the period of economic transition [24]. Other influential works include those by Shujun [14], Wang and Jiang [15], Li et al. [16], Zhu and Jiang [17], Xiao-ni et al. [18], Li [19], and Huang and Ma [20].

III. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the mental well-being and self-efficacy among students in Shaanxi Vocational & Technical College. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of individuals' experiences, perceptions, and subjective interpretations, providing rich and detailed insights into the research topic. By conducting interviews with both students and teachers, this study aims to capture a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing mental well-being and self-efficacy within the vocational and technical college context.

B. Participants

The participants in this study will consist of students and teachers from Shaanxi Vocational & Technical College. Purposeful sampling will be employed to ensure diversity in terms of gender, age, academic majors, and levels of academic achievement. A total of 20 participants, including 15 students and 5 teachers, will be recruited for the interviews.

C. Data Collection

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will serve as the primary method for data collection. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face with participants in a comfortable and private setting, ensuring confidentiality and encouraging open and honest responses. An interview guide will be developed, consisting of open-ended questions that cover various aspects of mental well-being and self-efficacy, including academic pressures, social support systems, career aspirations, and perceptions of educational interventions. Probing questions will be used to elicit further details and clarify participants' responses. The interviews are expected to last approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

D. Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis: The collected interview data will be transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. This process involves several stages, including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and refining themes, and finally, interpreting and reporting the findings. Through an iterative process, patterns, similarities, and differences in participants' responses will be identified, allowing for the emergence of key themes related to mental well-being and self-efficacy in the vocational and technical college context.

E. Ethical Considerations

This study will adhere to ethical guidelines and ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, explaining the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and the assurance of confidentiality. Participants' identities will be anonymized in the research data and reporting to maintain confidentiality. The study has received ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board.

F. Limitations

It is important to acknowledge potential limitations of this study. First, the findings may not be generalizable to other vocational and technical colleges or educational contexts. However, the study aims to provide valuable insights into mental well-being and self-efficacy within the specific setting of Shaanxi Vocational & Technical College. Secondly, the sample size is relatively small, which may limit the breadth of perspectives represented. Nonetheless, the focus on in-depth exploration and analysis allows for rich insights into participants' experiences.

IV. Findings

A. Mental Well-being

Academic Pressures: The interviews revealed that students in Shaanxi Vocational & Technical College experience significant academic pressures, which have a profound impact on their mental well-being. Participants expressed that the heavy workloads and the pressure to maintain high grades contribute to feelings of anxiety, stress, and burnout. One student described the constant demands as overwhelming, stating, "The workload is immense, and the fear of failure is always present. It takes a toll on our mental health."

Social Support Systems: Participants emphasized the crucial role of social support in promoting mental well-being among students. They highlighted the significance of peer support, such as study groups and friendships, as sources of emotional support and stress relief. According to one student, "Having a network of friends who understand what you're going through and can offer support makes a huge difference. We help each other cope with the challenges."

Coping Strategies: Participants shared various coping strategies they employ to manage their mental well-being. Seeking social support from friends and family was commonly mentioned, as it provides a sense of belonging and comfort. Engaging in recreational activities, such as sports or hobbies, was also identified as a way to unwind and reduce stress. Additionally, practicing mindfulness and relaxation techniques, such as meditation or deep breathing exercises, were reported to be helpful. Several students mentioned utilizing the counseling services provided by the college as a valuable resource for addressing their mental health concerns.

B. Self-efficacy

Skills Development: Students expressed that vocational and technical education plays a significant role in enhancing their self-efficacy. The hands-on training, internships, and real-world application of knowledge provided them with practical skills, which fostered confidence in their abilities. One student stated, "Through practical experiences, I have gained the skills necessary to perform tasks in my field. It has boosted my confidence and made me believe in my capabilities."

Role of Teachers: Participants emphasized the pivotal role of teachers in fostering self-efficacy among students. Supportive and encouraging teachers who provided constructive feedback and guidance were seen as instrumental in building students' self-confidence. One student shared, "When teachers believe in us and provide guidance, it boosts our confidence. Their encouragement motivates us to strive for success."

Career Aspirations: The interviews revealed that students' career aspirations influence their self-efficacy. Students who had clear career goals and a sense of direction expressed higher levels of self-efficacy. They believed that their vocational education was equipping them with the necessary skills for their desired professions. As one student explained, "Having a clear career path in mind gives me a sense of purpose and confidence. I feel empowered knowing that my education aligns with my goals."

C. Educational Interventions

Importance of Support Services: Both students and teachers recognized the importance of support services, such as counseling and mental health resources, within the college. Participants emphasized the need for accessible and confidential support systems that address the specific challenges faced by vocational and technical college students. They highlighted the significance of providing resources to promote mental well-being and reduce the stigma associated with seeking help.

Curriculum Enhancements: Participants suggested that the curriculum could be enhanced to incorporate more opportunities for skill development, practical application, and self-reflection. They believed that a balance between theoretical knowledge and hands-on experiences would enhance self-efficacy and overall well-being. Students expressed the desire for more practical projects and real-world simulations that closely resemble their future work environments.

V. Recommendations

- ❖ **Strengthening Support Systems:** It is recommended that Shaanxi Vocational & Technical College enhances its support systems to address the mental well-being of students. This can be achieved by providing accessible counseling services and mental health resources within the college. Additionally, organizing workshops and training programs on stress management, coping strategies, and well-being can help students develop the necessary skills to navigate academic pressures effectively.
- ❖ **Promoting Social Support:** The college should encourage the development of social support networks among students. This can be facilitated by organizing activities that foster peer relationships and collaboration, such as study groups and extracurricular clubs. Creating a sense of community and belongingness will contribute to students' mental well-being and provide them with emotional support during challenging times.
- ❖ **Teacher Training:** Providing professional development opportunities for teachers is crucial to enhance their understanding of students' mental well-being and self-efficacy. Training programs can focus on effective strategies for supporting students, providing constructive feedback, and creating a positive and inclusive learning environment. By equipping teachers with these skills, they can play a pivotal role in fostering students' self-confidence and belief in their capabilities.
- ❖ **Career Guidance and Mentorship:** The college should offer comprehensive career guidance and mentorship programs to help students align their career aspirations with their vocational education. These programs can assist students in setting clear goals, exploring potential career paths, and developing a sense of direction. By connecting classroom learning with real-world applications, students' self-efficacy can be further enhanced, as they see the direct relevance of their education to their future professions.
- ❖ **Curriculum Enhancements:** Based on the feedback from participants, it is recommended that the curriculum be enhanced to incorporate more opportunities for skill development, practical application, and self-reflection. Balancing theoretical knowledge with hands-on experiences, internships, and real-world simulations will provide students with a stronger sense of self-efficacy and better prepare them for their chosen fields. Regular evaluations and updates of the curriculum should be conducted to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in promoting student well-being and self-efficacy.
- ❖ **Research and Evaluation:** Continuous research and evaluation are essential to assess the effectiveness of support systems, educational interventions, and curriculum enhancements in promoting mental well-being and self-efficacy among students in vocational and technical colleges. This will enable ongoing improvements and the implementation of evidence-based practices to better support students' needs.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has delved into the intricate relationship between mental well-being and self-efficacy among students at Shaanxi Vocational & Technical College, uncovering vital insights into the challenges and dynamics unique to this educational context. The research illuminated the considerable impact of academic pressures on students' mental well-being, revealing that heavy workloads and the fear of failure contribute significantly to heightened stress and anxiety within this population. Furthermore, the findings underscored the pivotal role of social support systems in promoting mental well-being. Peer relationships and networks were identified as crucial components that positively influence students' ability to navigate the challenges inherent in vocational and technical education. The study highlighted the positive effects of a supportive community, emphasizing the need for interventions that foster a sense of belonging and understanding among students.

Self-efficacy emerged as closely tied to practical experiences and skills development within the vocational education system. The hands-on training and real-world application of knowledge played a pivotal role in boosting students' confidence in their abilities. Additionally, the influence of teachers in providing support and encouragement was emphasized, underscoring the significance of their role in shaping students' self-efficacy. Career aspirations were identified as influential in shaping self-efficacy, highlighting the importance of clear goals and direction for students. Those with well-defined career paths expressed higher levels of confidence, believing that their education aligned with their desired professions.

Moving forward, the study recommends a comprehensive set of interventions to enhance students' well-being and self-efficacy, including the strengthening of support systems, promotion of social support networks, teacher training, provision of comprehensive career guidance, and enhancement of the curriculum to incorporate more practical experiences. These recommendations aim to create a conducive environment that fosters the holistic development of students, preparing them for both academic success and future career endeavors. It is imperative for Shaanxi Vocational & Technical College to consider and implement these recommendations, with ongoing research and evaluation ensuring the continuous improvement of support systems and educational practices. Through these concerted efforts, the college can significantly contribute to the positive mental health and self-efficacy of its student body, ultimately enhancing their overall educational experience and future prospects.

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