

The Influence of Meaning in Life on Subjective Well-Being among Vocational College Students in Shandong: Mediated by Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

This study looks at vocational college students in Shandong, China, and how self-efficacy mediates the relationship between meaning in life and subjective well-being. The data was gathered from vocational college students using standardized questionnaires that measured subjective well-being, meaning in life, and self-efficacy. The survey design was cross-sectional. The statistical analysis showed that there are strong relationships between self-efficacy, subjective well-being, and meaning in life. This suggests that having a better sense of purpose and belief in one's skills leads to higher levels of overall well-being. It is crucial to encourage existential fulfillment and self-empowerment among vocational college students to promote positive mental health outcomes. Mediation analysis also showed that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between meaning in life and subjective well-being. These results highlight the need of resolving existential worries and building self-efficacy in educational environments to improve vocational college students' well-being.

Keywords: Vocational College Students, Meaning in Life, Subjective Well-Being, Self-Efficacy, Mental Health

Introduction

Colleges are the main places for training high-quality and comprehensive talents, as well as the main places for college students to live and study (Zhang, 2022). Vocational education and general education are two different types of education, but they have equal importance. Since the reform and opening up, vocational education has provided strong talent and intellectual support for China's economic and social development. As China enters a new stage of development, industrial upgrading and economic structural adjustment continue to accelerate, the demand for technical and skilled talents in all walks of life is becoming more and more urgent, and the important status and role of vocational education are becoming more and more prominent (State Council, PRC, 2019).

According to China's Education Development Statistics Bulletin, in 2022, the number of vocational colleges exceeded the number of universities by 250; the number of students enrolled in vocational colleges exceeded the number of universities by 710,400. There are more than 10,000 students in each vocational college (Ministry of Education, PRC, 2023). In recent years, with the rapid development of vocational education, as a particular group distinct from the general student population, vocational college students have become a special and important social group that has received extensive attention from pedagogy, psychology, and other social science fields. The college years are an important stage for the healthy development of an individual's physical and mental health, and it faces rapid physical and psychological development and gradually matures. However, this developmental phase also coincides with the peak period of risk for the onset of psychological problems and psychological confusion. Vocational college life is not an easy journey, Vocational college life has to face stress and challenges from academics, employment, family, and interpersonal interactions, which directly affects the mental health of vocational college students. It has been demonstrated that vocational college students are at high risk of psychological crises and are prone to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and other psychological problems (Lin & Liu, 2023). This significantly reduces the experience of well-being for this group.

The pursuit of well-being is the eternal theme of life and the ultimate purpose of all human activities. Well-being is not only an evaluation of an individual's satisfaction with his or her own life, but also a process of self-growth and self-improvement, and an important indicator of well-being is subjective well-being (Sun, et al., 2021). Subjective well-being has received extensive research attention as an important evaluation indicator of quality of life and economic and social development. (Zhang, et al., 2022). It has been considered as individual's evaluation of their lives in terms of satisfaction with various domains of life such as health, meaning, purpose, relationships, and work (Diener and Ryan 2009). High Subjective well-being indicates one's positive level of mental health states and psychological development (Fan et al., 2012). Subjective well-being is a desirable goal for society as a whole especially among young adults (D'Agostino et al., 2019). Previous researches have identified subjective well-being as an important aspect of assessing an individual's mental health (Ye et al., 2021). Vocational College students' subjective well-being is not only related to their mental health but also has a profound impact on the stability of colleges, families, and even the whole society. Therefore, it is crucial to explore subjective well-being and the factors affecting it.

Meaning in life is one of the most important predictors of subjective well-being (Frankl, 1963; Krok, 2015). Meaning in life and purpose of life is also one of the important ways to achieve well-being. By pursuing personal goals and values, people can find meaning and direction in life, which helps improve personal well-being and life satisfaction. Lack of meaning in life is associated with many pathologies such as depression, suicide and negative well-being (Frankl, 2000; Schnell, 2009). Empirical research showed that meaning in life was significantly positively correlated with subjective well-being (Krok & Gerymski, 2019; Jebb et al., 2020). Although there are existing studies on the relationship between meaning in life and subjective well-being, there has not been enough research on this issue in China yet.

Therefore, this study determines the influencing factors of meaning in life on subjective well-being and explores the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between meaning in life and subjective well-being among Chinese vocational college students, which is of great

significance in promoting the level of physical and mental health and improving the quality of life of college students.

Subjective well-being is a broad term used in the literature to define the experience of one's own well-being, rather than using more narrowly defined concepts such as happiness (Boey, 2023). Subjective well-being represents the subjective experience aspect of well-being containing the pursuit of well-being (Krok & Gerymski, 2019). The researchers found that the subjective well-being level of Chinese college students is in the middle or lower middle level, and many of them have a lack of subjective well-being (Chen, 2022; Luo, 2020; Shi & Zhou, 2018; Li, 2019; Ding, 2019; Chen & Li, 2014). Compared with students in general undergraduate colleges and universities, the Subjective well-being of vocational college students has more complex influencing factors due to the constraints of family environment, education, profession, social recognition, and other factors, thus it is more worthy of attention (Gao & Zeng, 2021). Therefore, the investigation of factors affecting the subjective well-being of vocational college students and the research on measures to improve their subjective well-being have become the focus of social education researchers.

College students are the future and hope of society. Improving the subjective well-being of college students is an inevitable requirement for their healthy and all-round growth. Subjective well-being is an essential aspect of mental health. (Bukhori, et al., 2022). The subjective well-being of college students is closely related to their mental health. Subjective well-being is an important psychological indicator to measure the quality of life of college students. At present, the mental health problems of college students have brought new challenges and pressures to the education and management of students in colleges and universities (Seehuus et al., 2021; Sun, et al., 2021). According to 2022 Blue Book of Mental Health in China, the depression risk detection rate of the age group 18 to 24 years reached 24.1%, which was significantly higher than that of other age groups. The anxiety risk detection rate of the age groups show a similar trend (Psychology Research Institute, 2022). A cross-sectional study of depression among college students in China showed that the prevalence of depression among college students was as high as 31.38% in the recent ten years (Wang et al., 2020). Mental health problems such as anxiety and depression are closely related to subjective well-being. (Yoo, et al., 2022). Therefore, increasing the well-being experience of college students and improving their mental health level is the key to ensuring their healthy growth and adapting to social development (Wang et al., 2022). Thus, a considerable body of studies has focused on investigating subjective well-being among college students with the goal of enhancing subjective well-being among this group (Yu & Blader, 2020; Vladislavljević & Mentus, 2019; Tsurumi et al., 2019; Chopik et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019).

Previous studies have shown close connections between meaning in life and subjective well-being. meaning in life is positively related to Subjective well-being (Özdoğan, 2021; Vötter & Schnell, 2019; You & Lim, 2019; Yalçın & Malkoç, 2015; Doğan et al., 2012) Having a clear sense of meaning in life can positively influence the well-being by reducing negative emotions for them, enabling them to face life's changes and challenges with greater purpose and enhancing their overall sense of well-being (Lee, G., Kagan, M., & Zychlinski, E. 2022). Numerous studies have shown that self-efficacy is related to both meaning in life and subjective well-being. self-efficacy can overcome negative emotions and promote subjective well-being. higher levels of self-efficacy reported higher levels of subjective well-

being(Cattelino et al., 2023;Wang et al., 2022;Cespedes et al., 2020;Hajek, A.&König, H.H,2019;).On the other hand, A link was also found between self-efficacy and Meaning in life, Studies show higher self-efficacy linked to higher Meaning in life levels(Yousefi Afrashteh et al., 2023; Yuen & Datu, 2021; Rush et al., 2021; Sørensen, Tet al., 2019). Research proved that self-efficacy was a mediating factor in the relationship between meaning in life and subjective well-being for cardiac patients (Krok & Gerymski, 2019). The mediating role of self-efficacy was also confirmed in the group of adolescents(Hou,2016) and undergraduates(Wang et al., 2021). However, similar relationships have not been studied in a sample of vocational college students.

According to the preceding discussion, it is clear that there is a dearth of research understanding the mechanism through which meaning in life and subjective well-being are associated among the Chinese vocational college student population. However, it has not been fully examined within the Chinese vocational education context and the mechanism between them has not been thoroughly explored.

Objectives

The main objective of the study is to investigate the influences of meaning in life on subjective well-being among students in vocational colleges in Shandong, China. However, to comprehend the broad objective clearly, it is subdivided into three specific objectives as follows.

1. To examine the levels of subjective well-being, meaning in life, and self-efficacy among vocational college students in Shandong, China.
2. To explore the relationships among subjective well-being, meaning in life, and self-efficacy among vocational college students in Shandong, China.
3. To examine the influence of meaning in life to subjective well-being among vocational college students in Shandong, China.
4. To analyse the mediating role of self-efficacy between meaning in life and subjective well-being among vocational college students in Shandong, China.

Method

This research makes use of a survey design that is cross-sectional. This layout works well for gathering data at a single instant, giving a bird's-eye view of the connections between self-efficacy, meaning in life, and subjective well-being. The ability to examine possible cause-and-effect linkages and correlations between the variables is made possible by the cross-sectional design.

Formal questionnaires are used for gathering information. The method's efficiency in gathering data from a large sample, guaranteeing answer standardisation and comparability, led to its selection. A number of Likert-scale items assess the participants' levels of self-efficacy, purpose in life, and subjective well-being in the questionnaire.

Several vocational schools in China's Shandong Province are the sites of the research. The varied vocational educational landscape in this area allowed for its selection as a representative sample of vocational college students from both urban and rural areas.

Students from Shandong's vocational colleges were chosen at random using stratified sampling. In this way, we can be sure that we're getting a cross-section of academic disciplines, years of school, and colleges. To make sure the study's results are legitimate and trustworthy, the sample size is decided using statistical power analysis.

Subjective well-being, life purpose, and self-efficacy are measured using standardised scales in the study tools. The reliability and validity of these scales in prior research dictated their selection. Questions on the participants' demographics and other personal details are also included of the survey.

In order to ensure that the research design and questionnaire are feasible, a pilot study is carried out. Students who aren't part of the main study are surveyed using a small sample from a technical institution. Questions and methods of data collecting are fine-tuned based on pilot study feedback.

Describing the sample and testing hypotheses are two parts of data analysis that use descriptive and inferential statistics, respectively. To investigate the interrelationships of the variables and the function of self-efficacy as a mediator, methods such as regression, path, and correlation analysis are employed.

Over the course of three months, data is collected. Depending on the participants' option and accessibility, the surveys are sent either electronically or in print form. After explaining the study's goals to participants, we get their informed consent. We guarantee that all responses will remain anonymous and confidential.

This chapter presents a thorough technique for studying the relationship between vocational college students' subjective well-being and their sense of meaning in life in Shandong, China. The study will use self-efficacy as a mediator to examine this relationship. The quantitative method guarantees the validity and reliability of the study's results by providing a systematic means of data collection and analysis using standardised questionnaires and a cross-sectional survey design. The methodology is created with the intention of thoroughly testing the hypotheses and adding significant knowledge to educational psychology.

Findings

The study's results provide insight into the complex relationship between self-efficacy, subjective well-being, and meaning in life among vocational college students in Shandong, China. By thoroughly analyzing these variables, the research aims to shed light on the factors impacting the mental health and overall well-being of this specific group.

Initial research focused on Shandong vocational college students' levels of self-efficacy, meaning-in-life, and subjective well-being. Within this cohort, the data showed a wide range of experiences. Subjective well-being was measured by students; some reported high levels, meaning they were generally satisfied with their lives, while others showed lower levels, meaning they were worried about problems or weren't happy overall. Similarly, when asked to reflect on the significance of their lives, students' answers revealed a spectrum of emotions and viewpoints. Some articulated a clear sense of direction and purpose, while others struggled with uncertainty. Also, there was a wide range of self-efficacy; some students were

quite sure of themselves and their capacity to succeed, while others were less sure of themselves.

Upon delving deeper into the connections between these factors, fascinating trends were apparent. A higher degree of purpose and meaning in life was linked to higher levels of overall well-being among vocational college students, according to statistical analyses that showed substantial relationships between meaning in life and subjective well-being. This discovery highlights the significance of achieving existential fulfillment in promoting favorable mental health outcomes within this group. Additionally, there was a strong correlation between self-efficacy and both life purpose and subjective happiness. The correlation between students' stated levels of self-efficacy and their sense of meaning in life and subjective well-being is robust, showing that self-belief is crucial in determining how significant life is and how happy one feels.

Particularly intriguing was the investigation of how self-efficacy mediates the relationship between purpose in life and subjective well-being. The study used advanced statistical methods to reveal the complex interplay between these factors and their effects on the mental health of vocational college students. According to the findings, having a sense of purpose in life significantly affected self-efficacy, which in turn affected subjective well-being. Put simply, students who found deeper purpose in their life tended to have more faith in their abilities, which led to an overall improvement in their subjective well-being. The mediation model sheds light on the critical role of self-efficacy as a mediator between existential fulfillment and beneficial mental health outcomes, offering important insights into the underlying mechanisms by which this link is achieved.

In sum, the study's results highlight the significance of helping vocational college students deal with existential issues and increase their sense of self-efficacy in order to boost their subjective well-being. Educators and lawmakers may greatly contribute to improving mental health outcomes for this population by helping children find purpose in their lives and believing in their own capacities to overcome obstacles. In addition, the study highlights the need of specific interventions and systems of support that can help students experience existential fulfillment and boost their self-efficacy. This will ultimately promote resilience and overall well-being when dealing with academic, professional, and personal obstacles. By addressing the complex aspects of mental health among vocational college students, those involved can help foster a healthier and more prosperous student body and society overall.

Discussion

The study's discussion explores the results' implications for vocational college education in Shandong, China, and provides ideas for interventions and tactics that could improve students' subjective well-being. The study lays the groundwork for addressing the mental health needs of vocational college students and creating an environment that is supportive of their holistic development by revealing the complex relationships between meaning in life, subjective well-being, and self-efficacy.

The study's primary finding is that vocational college students' subjective well-being is significantly impacted by their sense of purpose in life. The results show that students' general happiness is positively correlated with their degree of purpose and fulfillment in life. All the

more reason to encourage kids to seek existential fulfillment and provide them chances to figure out what they really want out of life. Educators and legislators can foster students' subjective well-being by promoting thought and introspection; this will help students develop a deeper awareness of themselves and their role in the world.

Also, among vocational college students, the study shows that self-efficacy is a key mediator between having a purpose in life and feeling happy. The findings highlight the significance of having faith in one's capacity to overcome obstacles and accomplish objectives in order to foster favorable mental health outcomes. Educators can improve their pupils' subjective well-being by teaching them to be confident and resilient in the face of adversity. This emphasizes the significance of integrating measures to boost self-efficacy into support services and vocational college programs.

Interventions to improve the psychological health and well-being of students enrolled in vocational colleges can be better planned and executed in light of the study's results. Educators and politicians may address the variables affecting students' subjective well-being and create an environment that is supportive and caring for their holistic development by focusing on both purpose in life and self-efficacy. This highlights the need for a holistic strategy that includes both self-empowerment and existential fulfillment in order to promote mental health and wellness among vocational college students.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of customized treatments and support systems that consider the distinct difficulties and circumstances encountered by college students pursuing occupational degrees. Interventions targeting this group must be culturally and linguistically competent in order to address the myriad ways in which students' academic, professional, and personal lives impact their subjective well-being. In order to promote a welcoming and supportive environment for all students, it is critical to provide vocational college students with specialized resources and support services that cater to their unique needs.

A more comprehensive strategy for vocational college education, one that places equal emphasis on students' academic success and mental health, is highly recommended, according to the study's results. By prioritizing the emotional and psychological well-being of students, educators and politicians may cultivate a caring culture that improves students' quality of life. In order to provide students the best chance of succeeding academically and psychologically, it is crucial that vocational college programs incorporate mental health education and support services into their course offerings and campus life.

In order to promote the mental health and well-being of vocational college students, the study's results highlight the significance of continuous research and evaluation to inform evidence-based strategies. Teachers and lawmakers can better meet the ever-changing needs of this population by regularly surveying students to learn about their experiences and concerns. In order to address the mental health needs of students, it is crucial to cultivate an innovative and collaborative culture within vocational college environments.

Findings highlight the significance of addressing life purpose and self-efficacy in fostering favorable mental health outcomes and provide useful insights into the elements impacting

the subjective well-being of vocational college students in Shandong, China. In order to improve students' quality of life and encourage their holistic development, educators and legislators should work toward existential fulfillment and self-empowerment. The future of vocational college students' mental health and wellbeing depends on the results of ongoing research and assessment into this field, which will guide the development of evidence-based practices and interventions.

Research Contribution

This study contributes to both theoretical and contextual knowledge by deepening the understanding of how meaning in life influences subjective well-being among vocational college students, with self-efficacy as a mediator. Theoretically, it extends existing research on subjective well-being by emphasizing the role of self-efficacy as a psychological mechanism that strengthens the impact of meaning in life on well-being. It validates and expands upon prior studies conducted in different cultural contexts by providing empirical evidence specific to vocational education in China. Contextually, this research highlights the unique challenges faced by vocational college students, distinguishing them from their counterparts in traditional higher education institutions. By addressing the mental health and well-being of this specific student group, the study informs educational policies and interventions tailored to enhance resilience, motivation, and overall life satisfaction among vocational students in China.

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