



Intervention Strategies for Employment Psychological Problems of Vocational College Students from the Perspective of Self-Determination Theory

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Abstract. From a historical perspective, career development theories have evolved from trait factor theory to career development self-concept. However, these theories tend to focus on career selection and matching, while neglecting the influence of intrinsic psychological needs on the process of career development. The aim of this study is to analyze the current situation of employment-related psychological problems among vocational college students and their influencing factors. This will be achieved by combining the self-determination theory with literature research methods. Based on this analysis, targeted intervention strategies will be proposed. The study results indicate that by satisfying the psychological needs of college and university students, particularly in terms of autonomy, relatedness, and sense of competence, negative emotions related to employment can be effectively reduced from the perspective of self-determination theory. This research strategy provides a scientific theoretical basis and practical guidance for promoting students' psychological health in employment in vocational colleges and universities, laying a solid foundation for their comprehensive development and future careers.

Keywords: career development, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), psychological needs, employment

1 Introduction

In recent years, due to the reform and transformation of higher education and the implementation of the 'enrollment expansion' policy, there has been a significant increase in the number of fresh graduates. In today's highly competitive and constantly changing social and economic environments, students in vocational colleges and universities may experience negative emotions such as nervousness, anxiety, and a tendency to follow the crowd when seeking employment. Studying the employment psychology of students in vocational colleges and universities is significant for individual career development and social adaptation. It also promotes education reform, enhances vocational education quality, and contributes to social stability and harmony. Higher vocational students often lack self-confidence and self-efficacy when facing employment pressure,

which can lead to psychological problems. The self-determination theory offers a new perspective for understanding and resolving employment-related psychological issues. Self-determination theory proposes that individuals have an innate inclination to pursue self-determination and growth, which can be fostered in a supportive environment, leading to positive behaviors and psychological well-being. This theoretical framework highlights the importance of an individual's ability to maintain self-determination during the job search process, as it has a significant impact on their psychological health and career development. The study aims to analyze the current employment problems of college students in vocational colleges, including their causes and potential solutions. The content of the improved text is as close as possible to the source text, with no additional aspects added. The paper analyses the advances in self-determination theory and its sub-theories and proposes specific and systematic intervention strategies. The language used is clear, objective, and value-neutral, with a formal register and precise word choice. The text adheres to conventional structure and formatting features, and is free from grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, and punctuation errors. Overview of self-determination theory.

2 Overview of Self-Determination Theory

2.1 Theoretical Origins and Development

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was developed by psychologists Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan in the 1980s to explore the motivations for human behavior, specifically the relationship between internal and external motivation. As research progressed, SDT evolved into a theoretical framework that comprehensively explains the relationship between human motivation, self-regulation, and mental health. During the development of SDT, Deci and Ryan revised and improved the theory by introducing sub-theories such as causal orientation theory, organic integration theory, cognitive appraisal theory, and basic psychological needs theory. These sub-theories enable SDT to comprehensively explain the complexity of human motivation^[1]. The theory initially focused on motivation and personality development, and gradually developed into an important branch of positive psychology. SDT posits that human beings have an inherent potential for self-determination and can make free choices about actions based on awareness of personal needs and environmental information^[2]. SDT has developed a theoretical system on human motivation and personality through extensive research. It has found practical applications in education, management, and counseling^[3].

2.2 Key Elements of Self-Determination Theory

The central concept of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is that humans have an innate inclination to pursue self-determination and personal growth. This inclination can be nurtured in environments that promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness, resulting in more positive behaviors and improved mental health. SDT posits that an individual's behavior can be motivated by intrinsic or extrinsic factors. Intrinsic motivation stems from within an individual, such as interest, curiosity, and personal challenge,

while extrinsic motivation is linked to external rewards or punishments. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasizes three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The satisfaction of these needs is crucial to an individual's psychological health and well-being.

2.3 Application of Self-Determination Theory in Vocational Education

The self-determination theory has been shown to explain students' learning strategies, achievements, and persistence in education and teaching. In the field of education, the internalization of motivation has three aspects: the relationship between teacher autonomy support and learning performance, and the impact of target content on learning performance.

Curriculum Design (to Stimulate Students' Intrinsic Motivation)

To stimulate students' intrinsic motivation, teachers can create a learning environment that supports autonomy, competence, and relevance. This can be achieved in vocational education by designing elective courses or projects that align with students' interests and career plans^[4]. This approach can significantly increase students' motivation and engagement, challenge them appropriately to develop their sense of competence, and foster strong teacher-student relationships. In terms of vocational education's supply structure, it provides majors that align with market demand. The curriculum should be designed to meet the future career needs of students, helping them to understand the practicality and relevance of the learning content. This will enhance their sense of competence and intrinsic motivation to learn.

Teaching Methods and Evaluation (Promoting Internalization of External Motivation)

University teachers should create an environment that supports student autonomy and intrinsic motivation. They should encourage students to actively participate in the learning process, freely express their opinions, ask questions, and provide positive feedback. The self-determination theory emphasizes the importance of a sense of correlation. Therefore, teachers can promote communication and cooperation among students by organizing collaborative learning activities, such as group discussions and role-playing. This not only enhances students' social skills but also boosts their learning motivation. Teachers should provide specific and constructive feedback to help students identify their strengths and areas for improvement and promote their self-improvement.

Mental Health and Vocational Guidance (to Satisfy Self-Selectivity)

The self-determination theory highlights the significance of fundamental psychological needs. College teachers assist students in coping with the pressure and challenges of learning and career development in a self-determined manner through psychological counselling and support. Students can enhance their sense of career efficacy and self-determination ability by experiencing and learning in a real professional environment

through internships, practical exercises, or simulated work scenarios. Assist each student in developing personalized career plans based on their interests, abilities, and goals to enhance their career autonomy and goal orientation. The self-determination theory provides a theoretical basis for career counselling. Teachers should help individuals explore their interests, values, and abilities to make informed career decisions.

3 Analysis of the Current Situation of Employment Psychology of Students in Vocational Colleges and Universities

3.1 Manifestations of Psychological Difficulties in Employment

The term 'employment psychological dilemma' refers to the psychological pressures and confusion that individuals may experience during the job search process. These pressures and confusions can lead to negative emotions such as anxiety, confusion, and feelings of inferiority, which can in turn affect the enthusiasm and effectiveness of job seekers. This dilemma is mainly reflected in four aspects^[5]. Firstly, employment anxiety is manifested as tension and unease before starting work. Secondly, long-term employment pressure can cause employment depression, leading to low mood and depression. Individuals may feel hopeless about their future employment prospects, lose confidence in themselves, and even have thoughts of self-abandonment. Thirdly, negative inferiority complex can stem from competition for highly educated talent and prejudice against vocational college graduates. It is believed that graduates from this university may not be as competitive as those from other universities, which can lead to a lack of self-confidence and affect job performance. Additionally, some students may lack initiative or have impulsive thinking, which can result in irrational employment choices. Individuals with this mindset may select unsuitable jobs, increasing the likelihood of job failure.

3.2 Analysis of Influencing Factors

The factors that influence psychological difficulties in employment for vocational college graduates include family, school, society, media, and personal factors. Personal factors include asymmetric employment information and unreasonable employment concepts. Some students struggle to accurately understand the development trends and employment prospects of various industries due to a lack of understanding of future employment prospects and specific job requirements. High expectations and pressure from family and society can contribute to this issue. This gap between expectations and reality can lead to negative employment psychology among students. Furthermore, societal evaluations and perceptions of different professions can significantly impact students' career choices. Utilitarian and hedonistic values have influenced the outlook on life, values, and worldview of some students, leading to psychological challenges when seeking employment. Additionally, students' lack of professional skills, comprehensive qualities, and job-seeking abilities can also affect their employment prospects.

4 Intervention Strategies from a Self-Determination Theory Perspective

From the perspective of self-determination theory, human motivation is mainly divided into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation^[6]. Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation for individuals to participate in certain activities or tasks due to their natural interest or enjoyment, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards or punishments. The self-determination theory holds that satisfying an individual's autonomy, ability, and belonging needs is the key to promoting their intrinsic motivation. Therefore, from the perspective of self-determination theory, intervention strategies for student employment psychological problems are mainly conceived from three aspects: enhancing student autonomy, enhancing their sense of ability, and cultivating their sense of belonging.

4.1 Enhancing Student Autonomy

Autonomy is a crucial aspect of individual self-determination. It allows students to make choices and decisions based on their interests, values, and goals. Enhancing students' autonomy during employment can help them gain a better understanding of their career interests and development directions. This, in turn, can lead to career choices that align more closely with their inner needs and expectations. This strategy aims to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation and encourage them to be more actively involved in job preparation and career planning.

To achieve this, students should be encouraged to explore different career fields through internships, part-time jobs, volunteer services, and other means, to discover their interests and passions. This way, students can make career choices based on intrinsic motivation rather than external influences. Secondly, students can enhance their decision-making skills, including goal setting, problem-solving, and risk assessment, through career planning courses and specialized tutoring. This will enable them to make wise and autonomous choices during the job search process. Thirdly, personalized career guidance should be provided to students to help them identify their strengths and weaknesses. This will enable them to develop career plans that are tailored to their individual characteristics, allowing them to choose the most suitable learning and development path based on their career goals and values. Fourthly, students should be guided to engage in in-depth self-reflection to understand their career interests, values, and expectations. They should also consider the impact of these factors on employment choices and job satisfaction to achieve more autonomous career decision-making. Additionally, it is important to establish an environment that promotes independent decision-making in both schools and classrooms. This can be achieved by offering a variety of courses, flexible learning plans, and open educational resources. By doing so, students can select learning materials and methods that align with their interests and objectives. Sixth, to strengthen students' intrinsic motivation, provide positive feedback, recognition, and rewards. This will allow them to focus on personal growth and career development, rather than solely pursuing external praise and rewards.

4.2 Enhance Students' Sense of Ability

Sense of ability refers to an individual's confidence and recognition of their ability to complete tasks and achieve goals, as well as their confidence in their abilities and understanding of the environment^[7]. It is the driving force behind positive actions and sustainable development. Students with strong abilities are better equipped to improve their employment competitiveness by accumulating relevant knowledge and skills.

Universities should offer more practical and internship opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and develop their skills in the workplace. This will enhance their career confidence. Additionally, tasks should be designed to be challenging yet supportive, allowing students to experience growth while receiving necessary support and resources from teachers. This will prevent them from feeling isolated and helpless. Thirdly, the sense of ability also emphasizes timely and positive feedback and recognition, affirming the efforts and progress of students, and stimulating their confidence. Fourthly, personalized career guidance and planning can help students draw career blueprints based on their own situations, clarifying their strengths and potential. Fifthly, successful alumni and industry elites can be invited to share their experiences and set a traceable example for students. In summary, improving students' sense of ability can assist them in approaching career challenges with greater composure and achieving their personal career development objectives.

4.3 Cultivate a Sense of Belonging Among Students

A sense of belonging is the feeling of being accepted and recognized by a group or organization. When intervening in employment difficulties for vocational college students, it is equally important to cultivate their sense of belonging. This can be achieved by strengthening teacher-student interaction, organizing group activities, and creating a positive campus culture. By doing so, students can feel the warmth and support of the school, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging.

During the stage of preparing for employment, a sense of belonging can strongly encourage students to actively participate in career planning and employment guidance activities. Schools can organize career planning lectures, mock interviews, industry sharing sessions, and other activities to help students understand industry trends and job markets, while strengthening their connections with alumni and industry experts. When students feel a sense of belonging within the school community, they are more likely to actively seek and accept help, which better prepares them for employment.

Additionally, a sense of belonging can promote information sharing and resource assistance among students during the job search process, while also providing necessary psychological support. It is important to recognize that information is a valuable resource. Students who have a strong sense of belonging are more likely to share information about employment and interview experiences with their classmates. Refusals and setbacks are common experiences for job seekers, and a student with a strong sense of belonging is more likely to receive encouragement and support from classmates, teachers, and alumni, which can help them regain confidence faster and move forward.

5 Conclusions

Self-determination theory strongly suggests that an individual's autonomy, competence and sense of belonging are the core elements that drive intrinsic motivation and the development of psychological health. Satisfying these psychological needs is crucial, especially at a time when students in higher education are experiencing employment difficulties. When students' autonomy is enhanced, they will be able to make career choices that are more in line with their expectations, based on their deep interests and strong values, which will undoubtedly greatly increase their job satisfaction and career loyalty. By enhancing students' sense of competence, their self-confidence and adaptability in the job market will also increase significantly, effectively reducing employment anxiety. Fostering a sense of belonging will create a solid social network for students, which will not only provide emotional support, but also a platform for sharing resources, which will greatly help students to face and solve the challenges in the employment process.

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