

The Ecological Reconstruction Path of Mental Health Education for Post-00s College Students under Intergenerational Cognitive Differences

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ABSTRACT

Mental health education serves as a pivotal component in fostering students' holistic development and driving the ecological evolution of educational systems. Addressing the distinctive characteristics of Generation Z college students—marked by heightened self-awareness, strong internet dependency, and pronounced community identity—the study examines intergenerational cognitive differences to outline fundamental principles and practical implications for reconstructing mental health education frameworks. The paper proposes five actionable strategies: enhancing preventive mechanisms, strengthening crisis response protocols, integrating educational resources, fostering collaborative pedagogy, and innovating educational platforms. These initiatives aim to transform mental health education from reactive interventions to proactive prevention, while providing replicable models for other institutions.

KEYWORDS

Intergenerational cognitive differences; Post-00s college students; Mental health education; Ecological reconstruction; Basic principles; Practical approaches

1 Introduction

The "Special Action Plan for Comprehensive Strengthening and Improving Student Mental Health Work in the New Era (2023-2025)" explicitly proposes establishing a "Three-Aspect Holistic Education" framework for mental health development ^[1]. Amidst intense intergenerational cultural clashes, post-00s college students are gradually developing unique psychological profiles. In this context, traditional mental health education approaches can no longer adequately meet the evolving psychological needs of college students, making urgent transformation imperative. Promoting ecological development in mental health education for post-00s students could better satisfy their developmental requirements. This paper primarily explores pathways for reconstructing ecological mental health education frameworks for post-00s students under intergenerational cognitive differences.

2 The basic connotation of intergenerational cognitive differences

Intergenerational cognitive differences primarily refer to distinct thinking patterns and behavioral characteristics among different generations influenced by socio-cultural environments, technological evolution, and value systems. ^[2]Currently, the cognitive differences among post-00s college students manifest in three key aspects: value orientation conflicts, cultural interaction clashes, and technological dependency traits. Value orientation conflicts are evident in their dual stance of prioritizing collective interests like patriotic sentiments while maintaining individual needs. Cultural interaction clashes emerge through their dual emphasis on preserving traditional interpersonal relationships and pursuing niche community affiliations with subcultural expressions. Technological dependency traits are reflected in their psychological adaptation patterns—strong reliance on virtual social interactions alongside value for offline engagement. In the new era, implementing mental health education programs for post-00s students based on intergenerational cognitive differences can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of such initiatives.

3 The basic principles of ecological reconstruction of mental health education for post-00s college students under intergenerational cognitive differences

In summary, the fundamental principles for ecologically reconstructing mental health education for post-00s college students, considering intergenerational cognitive differences, include equal dialogue, technology empowerment, and adaptation to subcultures. Firstly, we should focus on the principle of equal dialogue. In the new era, teachers should abandon traditional rote-learning methods and proactively establish an equal dialogue mechanism with students. This approach helps students build trust in educators and encourages them to openly share academic pressures, social anxiety, and other emotional burdens. Such communication effectively bridges the psychological gap between teachers

and students, thereby significantly enhancing the empathetic capacity in mental health education. The second principle is the empowerment of technology. As digital natives, Generation Z college students require tailored mental health education. To ensure effective implementation, educators should enhance digital technology applications by conducting thorough analysis of students' online behavior patterns. This analysis will enable the development of dynamic psychological early-warning models, allowing for timely identification and precise intervention in subtle psychological issues. Third, we need to apply the principle of subculture adaptation. Post-2000 generation college students exhibit generational characteristics of widespread entertainment and niche communities. Educators should proactively understand subcultural platforms and enhance their application, thereby integrating mental health knowledge through student-friendly approaches. By reinforcing emotional management skills through practical activities, this strategy effectively addresses the cognitive gap challenges between generations.

4 The practical significance of cultivating the ecological reconstruction of mental health education for post-00s college students under intergenerational cognitive differences

4.1 Intergenerational evolution—Effectively ensure students' mental health

In traditional teaching models, conflicts exist between university faculty and post-2000s students regarding communication styles and value orientations. The authoritative teaching approach often clashes with the post-2000s generation's preference for equal dialogue, which has hindered the effective implementation of mental health education and diminished its outcomes. In this new era, adopting an intergenerational cognitive difference education philosophy can effectively resolve these conflicts. This educational approach requires teachers to optimize, improve, and reconstruct communication methods between themselves and students. By transitioning from "one-way indoctrination" to "two-way empathy," it fosters trust-building relationships, thereby facilitating the efficient execution of mental health education initiatives.

4.2 Crisis Prevention—Effectively prevent students' psychological crisis

Influenced by both internal and external factors, Generation Z college students are experiencing heightened anxiety. With prolonged exposure to high-intensity digital environments, they may face sudden or latent psychological crises. This necessitates educators to implement mental health education as a preventive measure, actively addressing potential psychological challenges before they escalate. In this new era, teachers should enhance digital technology integration by establishing dynamic monitoring systems. By leveraging AI-powered emotion recognition and VR-based immersive interventions, educators can effectively identify and address these hidden psychological risks, ensuring comprehensive mental health protection for Generation Z students.

4.3 Intergenerational evolution—Effectively ensure students' mental health

As digital natives, Generation Z college students exhibit fragmented cognitive patterns and social compartmentalization. This reality renders traditional psychological education models inadequate for addressing their developmental needs and providing effective guidance. To bridge generational gaps, educators should adopt "intergenerational adaptation strategies" by utilizing popular Gen Z engagement methods such as immersive murder mystery games, artistic expression workshops, and digital media technologies. These approaches not only contextualize mental health knowledge through scenario-based learning but also stimulate students' proactive participation, gradually cultivating healthy psychological habits.

5 The practical path of ecological reconstruction of mental health education for post-00s college students under intergenerational cognitive differences

5.1 Improve the prevention system

To prevent severe mental health issues among students, mental health education initiatives should prioritize prevention and address the root causes of psychological challenges faced by Generation Z college students. (1) Establishing a systematic prevention framework. First, universities should utilize professional psychological assessment tools to evaluate incoming students' mental health status, identifying potential psychological concerns and providing data-driven support for subsequent educational programs. Second, regular mental health assessments should be implemented through semester or academic year cycles, enabling comprehensive monitoring of students' well-being.

This approach facilitates timely psychological interventions, prevents problem escalation, and supports early recovery from mental distress ^[3]. Additionally, technologies like classroom attendance tracking systems and Wi-Fi behavior analysis should be enhanced to monitor abnormal behaviors through psychological evaluations and digital activity patterns, effectively preventing serious mental health issues. (2) Strengthening mental health awareness campaigns. Universities should create supportive environments for mental health education through targeted publicity efforts. For instance, universities should actively utilize campus radio broadcasts to disseminate mental health-related content, constantly reminding students to prioritize their psychological well-being ^[4]. Institutions may proactively establish WeChat mental health official accounts, leveraging the widespread usage among college students to continuously promote mental health knowledge and share real-life cases, thereby enhancing students' awareness of mental health ^[5]. (3) Establishing mental health records. By maintaining mental health profiles, universities can gain a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of students' current psychological conditions ^[6]. Therefore, universities should develop mental health records through three key modules: basic psychological development information and status data, four categories of priority students (those prioritized in psychological screenings, financially disadvantaged students, single-parent students, and academically struggling students), and feedback materials regarding mental health status in class. Based on these mental health records, universities can provide more professional and effective psychological support and services to students.

5.2 Strengthening crisis response

To effectively address psychological crises and prevent the escalation of students' mental health issues, universities must enhance students' crisis management capabilities. (1) Higher education institutions should develop comprehensive emergency response plans addressing student psychological challenges, focusing on clarifying crisis protocols, defining accountability, and integrating resources. When students exhibit psychological distress, institutions should implement systematic intervention measures. (2) Establishing early warning systems is crucial. In the new era, universities should utilize student interviews and surveys to identify emotional vulnerabilities, interpersonal conflicts, and academic pressures through close communication. Immediate psychological counseling should be provided upon detecting "red flags." For high-risk students, tracking profiles with AI-powered emotional assessments via online platforms enables continuous monitoring, ensuring effective intervention outcomes and reducing relapse rates. Additionally, universities should form interdisciplinary teams including licensed psychologists and psychiatrists. These teams should implement virtual reality exposure therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy to address social anxiety and short video addiction issues.

5.3 Integration of educational resources

Currently, mental health issues among Generation Z college students primarily manifest in emotional and affective competence deficiencies. To address this, universities should prioritize enhancing students' emotional management capabilities as a foundational approach, establishing a curriculum system that integrates emotional intelligence education with interpersonal communication skills development, intimate relationship building and maintenance, and emotional competency cultivation. The proposed framework includes (1) developing "Practical Activities + Theoretical Research" courses by establishing social-emotional competence laboratories and organizing regular academic forums on social emotions and mental health, thereby progressively improving students' psychological well-being through practical engagement. (2) Creating an integrated curriculum combining "Core Courses + Electives + Specialized Programs." This includes developing scientific and comprehensive courses such as "Emotional Regulation," "Interpersonal Communication," "Romance & Marriage," and "Self-Exploration" to build students' emotional foundation. Elective courses like "Emotional Management Training" and "Discovering New Selves Through Artistic Expression" allow students to select courses tailored to their mental health status and developmental needs, ensuring sustained psychological well-being. Specialized programs such as "Artistic Expression & Emotional Growth" and "Romance Development Training" equip students with effective emotional regulation skills, enabling them to maintain stable emotional states, analyze issues calmly, and reduce psychological distress.

5.4 Strengthen collaborative education

The family serves as the foundation, family education as the method, and family ethos as the soul. Family environment is an important factor that influences students' mental health. A positive family atmosphere can positively guide college students and contribute to developing their healthy personalities. Therefore, universities should proactively engage with families through home-school collaboration, effectively guiding students. For instance, institutions could enhance information technology applications to establish two-way communication channels, creating feedback mechanisms.

Teachers should regularly share students' psychological status, behavioral patterns, educational philosophies, and plans with parents. Additionally, universities should utilize social media platforms to create online communication bridges, improving the convenience and effectiveness of home-school interactions. To boost parental involvement in mental health education, universities could develop mental health guides for parents, fostering collaborative efforts to promote students' psychological well-being^[7]. Furthermore, universities should partner with social organizations to provide diverse extracurricular activities, helping students strengthen their sense of social responsibility and civic awareness through practical experiences, thereby understanding individual and collective relationships. For introverted students who prefer solitude, universities can leverage peer support systems—allowing friends to serve as psychological counselors through open communication.

5.5 Innovation in educational delivery

In the new era, universities should proactively innovate educational approaches. First, they must enhance the application of science and technology in mental health education by establishing a "psychology + technology" cultivation model: (1) Develop an integrated cloud-based psychological education platform. In the AI era, universities can create a comprehensive online platform combining knowledge instruction, educational promotion, counseling services, and skill training. Modules like "Heart-to-Heart Micro-Lectures", "Mind-to-Mind Mailboxes", and "Virtual Classrooms" will provide students with continuous psychological support. (2) Implement "data-driven profiling". By leveraging big data platforms and large-scale surveys, universities can refine understanding of Generation Z students' developmental needs, create personalized psychological profiles, and design integrated "Five Educations" (moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor) programs to enhance students' emotional awareness, self-regulation, and overall well-being. (3) Adopt AI empowerment. Utilize AI technology to develop voice recognition systems for depression assessment and infrared camera-based non-intrusive gait evaluation systems to help students better assess their health status. Second, universities should leverage subcultures. For instance, educators can design "Campus Stress Decoding" themed murder mystery games addressing exam anxiety, integrating psychological adjustment techniques: Students must use the four-quadrant time management method to prioritize tasks while unlocking plot clues, and assume different roles to practice emotional recognition and intervention skills through role-switching. In addition, colleges and universities should also actively develop "psychological companionship" virtual idols to achieve 24-hour emotional companionship for students, ensure that the virtual idols can automatically identify students' emotional state, and can automatically switch comfort speech according to students' state, so as to effectively prevent students' psychological problems.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, Generation Z college students constitute the backbone of social development, and ensuring their mental health carries significant practical importance. Given intergenerational cognitive differences, universities should prioritize addressing mental health challenges faced by this demographic. By implementing comprehensive measures, institutions need to establish a full-cycle mental health service system, enhance psychological education standards, and cultivate a new educational ecosystem characterized by "two-way dialogue and dynamic symbiosis." These efforts will provide crucial support for nurturing well-rounded personalities in the new era.

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