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A Study on the Cultivation of College Students' Mental Health through Teaching Innovation by Vocational College Faculty from a Positive Psychology Perspective

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ABSTRACT

As higher vocational education transitions from "scale expansion" to "high-quality development," student mental health issues are shifting from crisis intervention toward developmental cultivation and systemic governance. Guided by strengths, meaning, and flourishing, positive psychology provides a theoretical foundation for cultivating psychological capital, resilience, and positive character within authentic teaching contexts. This critical study defines "teaching innovation" as an action system integrating instructional improvement and psychological enhancement. It proposes a three-tiered mechanism: "classroom experience—team support—institutional environment. " At the micro level, classroom innovation reconstructs learning experiences to foster positive emotions, competence, and relational bonds;At the meso level, innovation teams share meaning and emotional energy flow to enhance professional growth and pedagogical coherence; at the macro level, institutional and cultural frameworks build organizational support for sustained mental health cultivation. The paper further proposes: rewriting curriculum goals through a strengths perspective, optimizing processes through classroom development, promoting synergy through team chaining, and solidifying outcomes via diverse platforms and quality assurance.

KEYWORDS

Positive psychology; Vocational colleges; Teacher instructional innovation; Mental health; Psychological capital; Classroom ecology

1 Problem Statement: Why "Teaching Innovation" Can Be a Key Variable in Mental Health Cultivation

The mental health challenges faced by vocational students are often deeply intertwined with their learning experiences and developmental contexts: expectations of professional identity, pressures of skill acquisition, fluctuations in learning self-efficacy, interpersonal relationships, and employment anxieties. This interplay transforms mental health from merely a "counseling room issue" into a "developmental concern within the teaching environment."Therefore, if mental health education continues to rely primarily on the linear chain of screening-referral-intervention, it is prone to three limitations: First, the educational subjects are narrowed down to "people with problems"; second, the educational domain is compressed to "psychology courses and counseling rooms"; third, the educational goals remain at "reducing symptoms" rather than "promoting development."

This is precisely where positive psychology offers insight: it conceives mental health as a cultivable, expandable system of psychological resources that gradually forms through daily life and learning processes.In other words, truly universal and sustainable mental health cultivation must return to the daily learning contexts students inhabit—classrooms, projects, practical training, assessments, and teacher-student interactions. It is precisely in this sense that "teaching innovation" should not be viewed merely as upgrading teaching techniques or updating classroom formats. Instead, it should be reinterpreted as a comprehensive educational mechanism centered on learning experiences, aimed at human growth, and conditioned by organizational support.

2 Dialogue with the Literature and Theoretical Stance: From "Problem Repair" to "Strength Building"

This paper's theoretical stance is grounded in positive psychology's reassessment of mental health education paradigms. Existing research indicates that the "medicalization" tendency in traditional mental health education often neglects the development of students' strengths and fosters adversarial educational relationships. Consequently, a shift is needed: from a "problem-focused perspective" to a "strengths-based perspective," from "didactic individual counseling" to "experiential group empowerment," and from "repair" to "cultivating resilience and psychological capital."Based on this, Zhou Sujun et al. propose promoting students' psychological resilience and psychological capital development through a systemically coordinated psychological support framework, providing the theoretical foundation for this paper's inclusion of "teaching innovation" as the primary channel for mental health cultivation [1].

Furthermore, within the vocational education context, positive mental health education also presents the

contemporary imperative of constructing a knowledge system. Meng Wanjin et al. emphasize the need to establish an autonomous knowledge framework centered on defining concepts and original theories, encompassing "positive mental health education," "dynamic psychological equilibrium," and the "six-dimensional positive psychological structure." This framework aims to provide psychological support for cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talent. This suggests that mental health cultivation in higher vocational education is not merely a methodological issue, but rather a holistic construction involving values, concepts, and institutional frameworks [2].

At the practical level, mental health education in higher vocational colleges has also shown a trend of shifting from "isolated initiatives" toward "systematic holistic development."Xi Wenbiao et al. proposed a "1344" practical framework centered on campus culture, mental health teams, the "Four Early" mechanism, and diverse platforms. They emphasized enhancing students' positive experiences, emotions, and personalities through campus culture and educational platforms, providing an actionable reference for this paper's discussion on the interplay between "classroom-platform-mechanism" [3].

Concurrently, teaching innovation research offers structural insights into "how to achieve transformation within the teaching system." Pan Jusu et al. note that vocational teaching innovation encompasses rich dimensions, with key focus areas including talent cultivation models, classroom instruction, learning systems, and course quality assurance mechanisms. This implies that teaching innovation inherently possesses a multi-layered structure of system-curriculum-classroom, enabling coupling with mental health cultivation [4]. The classroom-centered teaching innovation pathway is also emphasized: Zhou Jiansong argues that despite challenges from MOOCs, micro-lectures, and flipped classrooms, classroom development remains crucial. He proposes enhancing talent cultivation quality through classroom innovation from comprehensive, foundational, and multidimensional perspectives, highlighting that classrooms are not merely knowledge transmission spaces but critical ecological niches for psychological quality development[5]. Finally, the organized realization of teaching innovation relies on team mechanisms: Wang Yanyi et al., using the framework of interactive ritual chains, identify imbalances in current innovation teams such as "strong context—weak interaction," "strong ritual—weak emotion," and "strong tools—weak values." They propose achieving structural enhancement and value transformation through contextual chaining, emotional chaining, and symbolic chaining. This provides a crucial meso-level perspective for this paper's discussion on "how teams can provide teacher-side support for mental health cultivation" [6].

3 Core Conceptual Definitions and Analytical Framework: The "Psychological Gain" Attribute of Teaching Innovation

3.1 Positive Definition of Mental Health: From Outcome Indicators to Resource Systems

From a positive psychology perspective, mental health is not merely the absence of symptoms but rather a sustainable psychological resource structure encompassing positive emotional experiences, sense of purpose and meaning, relational connectedness, competence and growth, and resilience in facing adversity. Its formation mechanism is typically gradual, everyday, and context-dependent.

3.2 Teacher Instructional Innovation: Reconstructing Educational Ecology Beyond Teaching Techniques

This paper defines teacher instructional innovation as the process by which educators creatively reconstruct teaching objectives, content organization, learning activities, assessment methods, and learning environments based on student developmental needs. Its core lies not in "novel forms" but in "novel experiences" and "novel relationships." Such innovation directly influences three key mediators of student mental health: First, affective mediators. The accumulation of positive emotions derived from classroom atmosphere, achievement experiences, and a sense of security. Second, cognitive mediators: the construction of learning meaning, the development of self-efficacy, and the formation of a growth mindset. Third, social mediators: the strengthening of teacher-student relationships, peer collaboration, and a sense of belonging.

3.3 Three-Tiered Mechanism Framework: Classroom—Team—Institutional

First, the micro level (classroom). Teaching innovation alters students' psychological experiences through learning activities and interactive methods. Second, the meso level (team). Innovative teams provide teachers with community support, enhancing educational consistency and continuity. Third, the macro level (system and culture). School governance, curriculum systems, and campus culture provide sustainable organizational conditions for cultivating positive psychology.

4 Analysis of Mechanisms: How Teaching Innovation "Cultivates" Rather Than Merely "Intervenes"

4.1 Classroom Mechanism: Psychological Capital Generation Through Learning Experiences

The classroom represents the most stable "routine institutionalized setting" for vocational students. The key to generating mental health benefits through instructional innovation lies not in "adding" psychological education, but in "redesigning" learning activities to imbue them with psychological enhancement properties.

4.1.1 Transform "Task Completion" into "Competence Building"

Project-based, task-driven, contextualized case studies and real-world problem-solving enable students to gain a sense of mastery and self-efficacy through achievable challenges. Competence is not a secondary emotion but a vital psychological resource that counters learning fatigue and helplessness.

4.1.2 Transforming "Knowledge Presentation" into "Meaningful Narratives"

Vocational education knowledge is intrinsically linked to workplace practice. Innovative teaching that connects skill acquisition to personal futures and societal contributions through occupational narratives, craftsmanship ethos, and value discussions enhances students' sense of purpose and goal stability, thereby reducing psychological drift caused by "value vacuums."

4.1.3 Transforming "Classroom Discipline" into "Psychological Safety"

Mental health cultivation heavily relies on psychological safety. Supportive feedback, permission to make mistakes, respect for differences, and non-shaming evaluations can significantly reduce vocational students' anxiety and self-doubt during skill comparisons. Classroom management should therefore shift from a "control logic" to a "support logic."

4.1.4 Transforming "One-Way Instruction" into "Relational Learning"

Teacher-student and peer relationships are vital sources of positive emotions and belonging. Discussion-based, collaborative, and peer-support learning not only boosts engagement but also fosters the accumulation of positive relational resources through experiences of being seen, understood, and supported.

4.2 Team Mechanisms: Emotional Energy and Educational Consistency in Teacher Innovation Communities

The impact of teaching innovation on mental health is often cumulative and cross-curricular. If innovation remains an isolated effort by individual teachers, students' positive experiences become fragmented and struggle to translate into stable psychological qualities. Thus, teacher innovation teams serve as critical intermediary structures for mental health cultivation.

4.2.1 Shared Purpose: From "Project-Based Work" to "Collective Education"

Teams must establish shared focus on student development, shifting teaching innovation from "competitive achievement displays" to "sustained improvements for student growth." When teams develop a common language and shared values, students experience consistent support and expectations across courses, significantly enhancing their psychological safety and sense of belonging.

4.2.2 Emotional Energy Circulation: From "Individual Burnout" to "Collective Empowerment"

Cultivating mental health demands sustained emotional labor from educators. Through collaborative lesson planning, peer support, experience sharing, and mutual affirmation, teams reduce teacher burnout. This, in turn, enhances positive emotional expression and patient support in classrooms, creating a positive feedback loop of "teacher positivity → student positivity."

4.2.3 Symbols and Rituals: Embedding Values into Daily Practice

When teams establish stable symbolic systems through fixed teaching research rituals, classroom observations, and student growth exhibitions, innovation transforms from "occasional" to "routine." This normalized mechanism means mental health cultivation no longer relies on isolated activities but becomes embedded within teaching organizations.

4.3 Institutional and Cultural Mechanisms

From "Psychological Work as a Departmentalized Function" to "A Whole-School Mental Health Ecosystem" To consistently generate mental health benefits through pedagogical innovation, institutionalized implementation is essential: how to design curricula, orient assessments, allocate resources, advance early warning systems, and cultivate organizational culture. The role of systems and culture lies in transforming positive psychology cultivation from mere "advocacy" into "sustainable organizational capacity." First, synergize curricula with institutional frameworks. Embed positive psychology objectives into talent development plans and course standards, making "psychological gains" an integral part of course quality rather than an extra task. Second, advance prevention measures. Establish early identification and support mechanisms for learning difficulties, adaptation challenges, and relational distress to reduce the likelihood of issues escalating into crises. Third, provide contextual support through campus culture. Utilize positive cultural narratives, role model and recognition systems, clubs, and practical platforms to offer sustained sources of positive experiences beyond the classroom, reinforcing psychological qualities across multiple settings.

5 Implementation Pathways for Higher Vocational Education: A Mental Health Cultivation Program Centered on Teaching Innovation

5.1 Goal Level: Rewriting Teaching Objectives with "Developmental Mental Health"

Beyond knowledge and skills, vocational education objectives should explicitly incorporate psychological dimensions: learning self-efficacy, career confidence, resilience to setbacks, positive relationships, and a sense of meaning. This shift in objectives marks the starting point for systemic change, determining classroom activities and assessment orientations.

5.2 Process Layer: Designing "Positive Experiences" into Classrooms

First, learning activity design. Employ a combination of "achievable challenges + timely feedback + peer collaboration" to consistently foster competence and belonging. Second, assessment reform. Increase the proportion of formative assessments, emphasizing evidence of growth and process-based performance to avoid the humiliation and helplessness caused by summative evaluations. Third, digital and blended learning. Utilize technology as a learning support rather than a control tool, enhancing autonomy and personalized support.

5.3 Organizational Layer: Driving "Cross-Curricular Consistency Support" Through Innovation Teams

Build teaching innovation communities organized by professional clusters or course clusters. Establish shared student development profiles, unified classroom support strategies, and common assessment language to ensure students receive consistent, stable support across diverse learning contexts.

5.4 Ecological Layer: Platform-Based and Institutionalized Psychological Support Systems

Establish a tiered system encompassing "classroom education—activity platforms—self-help support—counseling services": classrooms provide foundational cultivation, activity platforms reinforce experiential learning, self-help systems ensure daily maintenance, and counseling services deliver targeted support, achieving unified coverage for all while enabling precise assistance.

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