



Evaluating the Effect of Positive Ideological Intervention on Psychological Flexibility of College Students

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ABSTRACT

Psychological flexibility is a complex dynamic psychological structure and refers to the dynamic adaptation process which appears repeatedly and matches the situation in the process of interaction between individuals and environment. In the course of their own growth and development, the positive thinking quality of college students means that college students interact with the acquired education environment to form active, positive and upward attitudes, have correct self-cognition ability, can bravely and strongly face setbacks, and have strong sense of identity with the society. It can enable college students to obtain a strong sense of self-efficacy and subjective well-being. Through the positive thinking intervention contrast, this study compares differences in psychological flexibility between the intervention group and the non-intervention group and obtains the positive effect of the positive thinking intervention on the psychological flexibility of college students.

Key Words: Ideological Intervention, Psychological Flexibility, College Students

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Introduction

College is an important transition period of life. College students are in the process of forming world outlook, outlook on life and values. Along with the rapid development of social economy, the integration of multi-culture and the popularization and application of the Internet, all of these have impacted the formation of "three views" of college students. Together with the quickening of life rhythm, college students are faced with psychological perplexity in such aspects as academic pressure, employment pressure, emotional problems, and interpersonal communication. They are prone to produce negative emotions, such as depression, anxiety, and fear when faced with various kinds of stresses. At present, the phenomenon of psychological sub-health is common in colleges

and universities of China. This requires college students to have a certain ability to withstand pressure, a good mentality of self-adjustment as well as a good psychological quality. College students with positive thinking characteristics can better adjust themselves to the changes of the environment and maintain good mental health.

Introduction to mental flexibility

Psychological flexibility is the ability to perceive and accept all things that the individual experiences, to possess memories, thoughts, emotions, and feelings themselves, and to persevere or change actions according to their own values. Block refers to psychological flexibility as ego-resilience, the ability to quickly change non - adaptive stereotype based on the needs of living situations. Posner *et al.*, refer to

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psychological flexibility as executive function, which refers to the individual's psychological and behavioral flexibility in order to adapt to changing new situations. From the definitions of psychological flexibility, although there is a great difference in name, there is a consistent emphasis on the flexible match between individual reaction and situations, and they share a consistent view that psychological flexibility is a dynamic self-regulating psychological structure (Chen *et al.*, 2015; Zhen *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, we think that the psychological flexibility is the flexible adaptation of the individuals in the changing situation, which reflects the dynamic adaptation process which appears repeatedly in the interaction process between the individuals and the environment. It is generally believed that executive function, default states and personality traits are the main factors that affect psychological flexibility in a wide range of studies.

(1) Executive function. It's the ability to maintain appropriate problem-solving strategies to achieve future goals and a key component of self-control and goal-oriented behavior. The executive function helps us keep the attention control to the specific task or the situation, and makes us refocus or change the cognition object quickly, so as to realize the purposeful attention transfer and achieve the flexible self-adjustment. In general, a strong executive function is important for an individual to self-regulate to match the situation for achieving the desired outcome. Without enough attention skills, depression tolerance, and memory, it is impossible for one to recognize which context cues are important and which responses are better for a particular context.

(2) Default states. It mainly refers to stereotype, knowledge and experience accumulated in the past, daily living habits and preferences. The influence of default states on psychological flexibility has two sides. On the one hand, the default states improves the speed of people's information processing, which is beneficial to keep people's psychological flexibility; on the other hand, if the default states excessively influences his or her judgment on the realistic situation, it will reduce the psychological flexibility.

(3) Personality traits. Different personality traits have great influence on psychological flexibility. Studies have shown that there are four major personality traits that affect psychological

flexibility: neuroticism, positive emotions, open experience, and self-control. People with high score on neuroticism dimension cannot adjust their behavior response according to feedback, showing low psychological flexibility, which makes them experience negative emotion frequently and strongly (Cheung *et al.*, 2016). When there are negative thoughts and feelings, people with high score on neuroticism tend to obstinately persist in self-focused information, at the expense of losing adaptive behavior to solve problems, and thus give up the opportunity to work hard to achieve the goal of self-worth (Yang, 2017).

The introduction of positive thinking

The term "positive", derived from Latin, originally means "actual, constructive" or "potential", and now refers to both explicit positive and latent positive. The term "positive" has been used in the field of psychology since 1958, when psychology defined "positive" as "active" or "positive". Many scholars have given different explanations about the concept of positive thought quality, for example, father of psychology Seligman pointed out: "The goal of positive thought science is to urge people to shift their focus from repairing the worst things in life to establishing active and positive qualities, turning the traditional negative research direction on removing psychological obstacles and psychological diseases to the researches of paying attention to the positive potential and the strength of the human (Qi Xiaodong, 2013). With the introduction of positive thought into China, the research group of positive thought health education believes that positive thought quality is "a relatively stable positive psychological traits formed on the basis of interaction between innate potential and environmental education, which influence or determine positive orientation of individual thoughts, emotions, and behavior patterns, and then lay the foundation for an individual to have a happy and successful life". This study endorses and quotes the proposal of this concept. Hence, the positive thought quality is a positive, optimistic, and active psychological orientation, and the positive quality can help an individual to obtain a happy life (Aine Horgan *et al.*, 2016). In that course of their own growth and development, the positive thought quality of college student means that the individual of college student interact with the acquired education environment



and form positive, positive and upward attitudes, have correct self-cognition ability, can bravely and strongly face setbacks, and have strong sense of identity with the society. It can enable college students to obtain a strong sense of self-efficacy and subjective well-being (Seligman *et al.*, 2000). The characteristics of college students' positive thought quality are mainly composed of enthusiasm, creativity, adaptability and stability (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2014). See Figure 1 for details.

Positive thinking interventions comparative study

Research objects

The college students in Changshu Institute of Technology are estimated as the research subjects: according to the 5~10 times of the variable entries provided by Kendall, 323 cases are calculated in this study as per the 9 times of the variable entries. In addition, considering the missing and invalid questionnaires during the sample collection, the questionnaires are expanded by 15%, and the sample size is preliminarily determined to be 372 cases, with a

male-female ratio of 1: 1. Totally 372 questionnaires are distributed and 314 valid questionnaires are collected, with an effective rate of 84.40%.

Research methods

(1) General information questionnaire

According to the content and purpose of this study, the researchers design the questionnaire by themselves on the basis of reference literature. The main contents include gender, age, grade, student cadres, attitude towards the current specialty, academic level, reputation and status of the school in colleges and universities, professional curriculum setting, school hardware facilities (laboratories, multimedia teaching, and language lab), academic level and professional ethics level of the teacher, performance of the counselor in caring for the students, concern about the future employment, relationship with most of the students, religious belief, parenting style of the parents, and parents' expectation to you (Wang *et al.*, 2011).

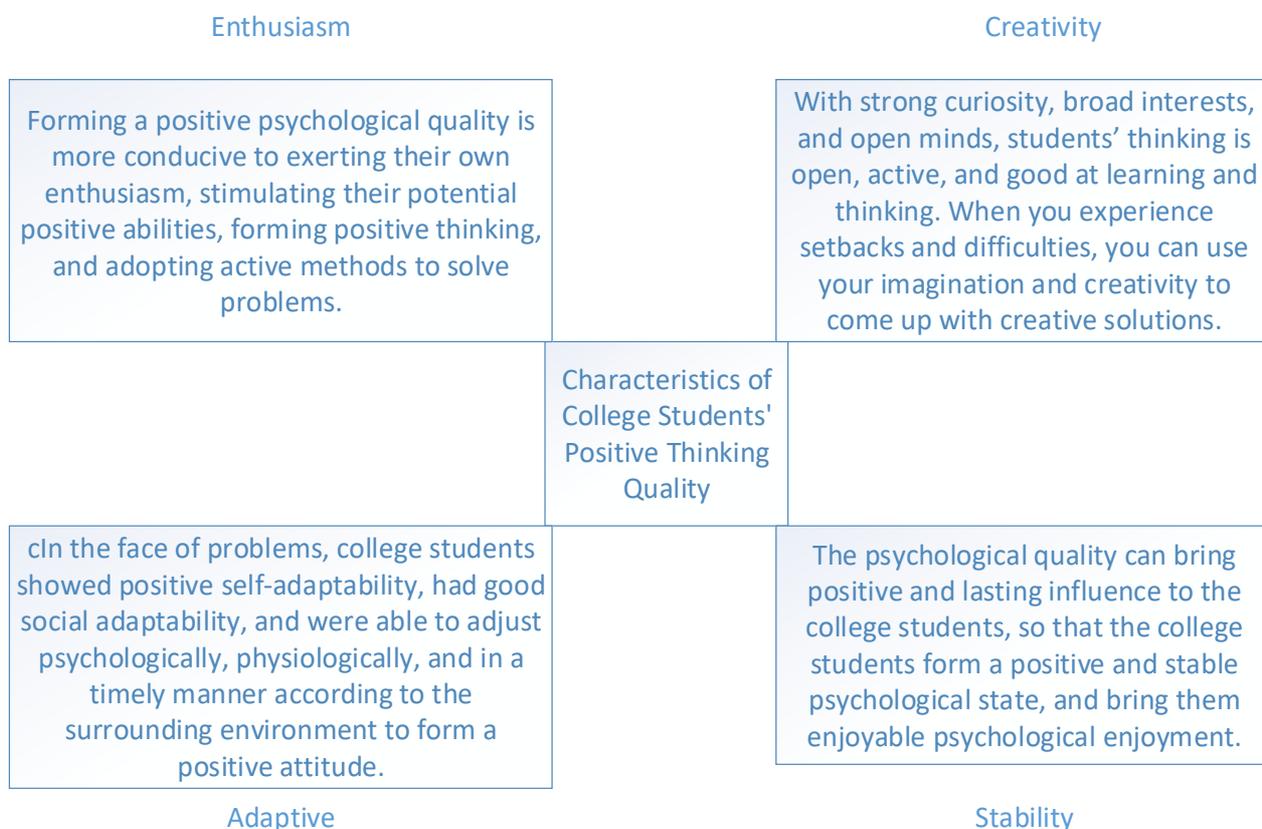


Figure 1. Characteristics of College Students' Positive Thinking Quality



(2) Quantitative research tools

1) Mental Health Health Continuum - Short Form (MHC-SF) (adult version): there are a total of 14 items, including three subscales: emotional well-being (EWB), psychological well-being (PWB), and social well-being (SWB). It adopts 6 points scoring system, and options range from 0 = never, to 5 = daily. One of the three items of EWB wherein has a higher score and at least six items of the remaining 11 items have higher scores, which is called "vigorous and upward". One of the three items of EWB wherein has a lower score and at least six items of the remaining 11 items have lower scores, which is called "decadent and dispirited." Between the two is a "moderate level of mental health." The Cronbach α coefficients of the three sub-scales are 0.92, 0.91, and 0.83 and that of the total scale is 0.94 respectively. In this study, the Cronbach α coefficient of the total scale is 0.91, and that of the three subscales are 0.83, 0.79 and 0.87.

2) Anxiety Self-rating Scale. There are 20 items in the scale, with the 1~4 scoring system, among which 5 items are reverse scores. In the SAS standard scores, those between 50 and 59 is low anxiety; those between 60 and 69 are moderate anxiety and those of greater than 69 scores are severe anxiety. SAS has higher reliability and validity, and better stability. In this study, the Cronbach α coefficient is 0.75 (Zhou *et al.*, 2015)

Positive Thinking Intervention Program

The intervention group of this study adopts the intervention mode of group tutorship. Under the guidance of the instructor, the group tutorship is mainly carried out together with classroom lecture, discussion and sharing. The intervention program designed in this study includes six aspects: exploring one's own advantages, cultivating positive emotions, establishing positive relationships, learning to respond positively, to be grateful and the meaning of life. This intervention program is mainly designed in the framework of positive thought theory, referring to Seligman's "6-week group active treatment" program and Yang Zhiping's *Positive Psychology: Guide to Group Activities (2nd Edition)*. After guidance of instructor and consultation with relevant psychological experts, we carry out constant modification and improvement, and determine the final intervention program (Barry Sehwarlz, 2000). The implementation flow of

intervention program and conventional group is shown in Figure 2.

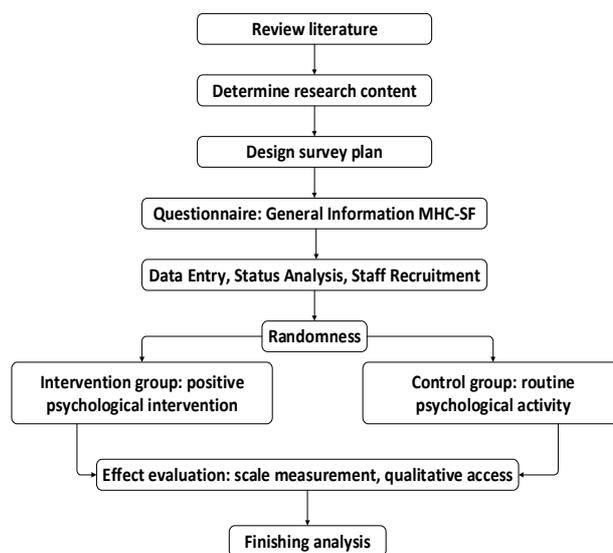


Figure 2. Intervention program and control group implementation technical route

The Results of Positive Thinking Intervention

The loss of the research objects

With posters and counselor's propaganda, 70 undergraduates from Changshu Institute of Technology are recruited as research subjects, of which 35 are in the intervention group and 35 in the conventional group. In three months after intervention, there are 34 subjects in the effective sample intervention group and 32 subjects in the conventional group, among which 1 subject in the intervention group withdraws halfway while in the conventional group, 1 subject is lost, and 2 subjects fail to participate in the activity for more than 2 times.

Comparison of the balance between the intervention group and the control group

Finally, 66 subjects are included in the study, including 31 boys and 35 girls. There is no statistical difference between the two groups in socio-demographic data ($P > 0.05$). The detailed comparison is shown in Table 1.

The Influence of Positive Thinking Intervention on Mental Flexibility

The psychological health scores of two groups at different time points (T₀, T₁, T₂, and T₃) are analyzed by analysis of variance of repeated measurement data. The spherical symmetry of covariance matrix is not satisfied by Mauchly spherical test ($P < 0.05$). Thus, the results of the



Greenhouse-Geisser correction are used (Fredrickson, 2004). See Figure 3 for details. Inter group comparison: Two independent t-tests are used to compare the MHC scores at different time points (T1, T2, and T3) between the two groups. The results show that there is no statistically significant difference in anxiety scores between the intervention group and the conventional group at different time points (T1, T2, and T3) after intervention ($P>0.05$). Intra group comparison: The MHC scores at different time points (T0, T1, T2, and T3) in the intervention group are compared by analysis of variance (LSD Post Ad Hoc). The results show that there are statistically significant differences in the MHC scores between before intervention and one month after intervention ($P<0.05$). There is no statistically significant difference between the three months before intervention and the three months after intervention ($P<0.01$). The results of comparison of MHC scores between two groups of nursing students as shown in table 2.

mental intervention and specific emotion intervention, the following is a single sample t-test of group members on the scores of the subjects in overall activities and each activity (1-5 scores for each item) in the questionnaire, and the test value is 3.

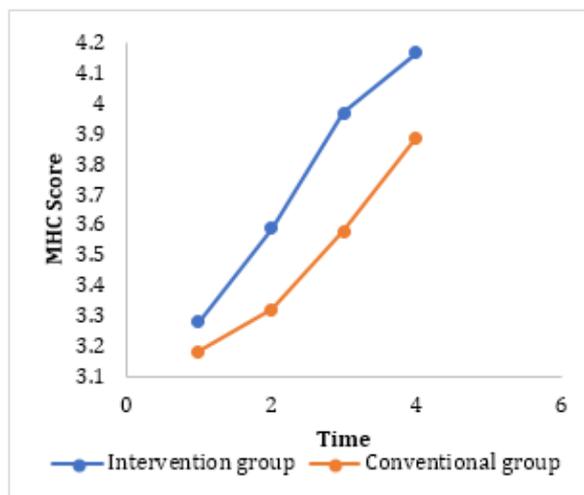


Figure 3. Nursing student MHC score intervention and time interaction diagram

Intervention effect assessment

In order to have a more comprehensive and thorough understanding of the effect of positive

Table 1. Social demographic data of intervention and routine groups

Item	Category	Intervention group		Control group		D	P
		N=34	%	N=32	%		
Gender	male	15	44.12%	16	50.00%	.00	.389
	female	19	44.19%	16	50.00%		
Grade	Freshman	15	44.12%	13	40.63%	0.12	.461
	Sophomore	11	32.35%	9	28.13%		
	Junior	8	23.53%	10	31.25%		
Student leaders	Yes	4	11.76%	6	18.75%	3.30	.171
	No	30	88.24%	26	81.25%		
Do often participate in activities?	Yes	20	58.82%	11	34.38%	.38	.564
	No	14	41.18%	21	65.63%		
Academic level	Bad	2	5.88%	7	21.88%	1.55	.753
	General	19	55.88%	11	34.38%		
	Good	13	38.24%	14	43.75%		
Professional attitude	Dislike	8	23.53%	4	12.50%	0.12	.783
	General	11	32.35%	19	59.38%		
	Like	15	44.12%	9	28.13%		
Relationship with classmates	Bad	6	17.65%	8	25.00%	0.71	.482
	General	16	47.06%	12	37.50%		
	Good	10	29.41%	12	37.50%		

Table 2. Comparison of MHC scores between two groups of nursing students

Groups	MHC				F _{Groups}	F _{time}	F _{Interactive}
	T0	T1	T2	T3			
Intervention group	3.28±0.57	3.59±0.32	3.97±0.47	4.17±0.31	1.893	3.094	1.392
Conventional group	3.18±0.47	3.32±0.28	3.58±0.29	3.89±0.38			
T value	-0.689	-0.348	1.535	1.129			
P	0.439	0.32	0.128	0.235	0.183	0.047	0.283



Table 3. Group intervention effect alone sample T test (N=20)

Name	Average value	SD	T
Overall activity	4.12	0.62	6.93
Joy	3.79	0.61	0.83
Grateful	4.19	0.57	4.97
Pride	3.94	0.75	4.87
Admire	3.88	0.86	4.91
Hope	3.85	1.03	3.39
Peaceful	3.09	0.83	4.29
Total score of activities	3.98	1.01	5.22
Behavioral activities	3.69	0.87	2.95

As can be seen from Table 3, the score on "overall activities" is significantly higher than the average score, up by 3 scores, and the item includes 6 questions, in which "more positive emotion can be experienced after activity" of the item gets 66.67% subjects scoring above 4 points. The above two aspects indicate that most of the group members greatly agree with the effect of the positive thought intervention. In six specific positive emotions, each emotion item basically contains at least 3 activities related to the emotion of the sub-theme. According to the test results, we can see that the scores of 4 emotions such as gratitude, admiration, hope and tranquility are significantly higher than 3, indicating that the group members feel more deeply about the 4 emotions and related activities. The "auxiliary activity" consists of two main forms: weekly sharing and behavioral assignment. As can be seen from the table, these two scores are significant, indicating that group members obviously get more positive emotions from these two forms of assistive activities and improve the psychological flexibility of college students.

Conclusions

The early adult period represented by college and university is an important period for individuals to realize role change and gradually form self-identity. In this period, students are faced with many pressures, difficulties and challenges, and can easily experience negative emotions such as anxiety and depression. This study shows that positive mental intervention can bring positive improvement to the psychological flexibility of college students. Therefore, families, schools and the society should provide more resources for the students to guarantee the material foundation of

the students' life and study, and school's health education and service agencies should provide more professional support and help to the students.

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