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Research on College Students' View of Happiness Education in Private Universities from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

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Abstract: With the popularization of higher education in China, private universities have become an important component of the higher education system. The view of happiness held by college students in these institutions is directly related to the quality of talent cultivation and to students' lifelong development. Centered on cultivating positive qualities, tapping psychological potential, and enhancing happiness experience, positive psychology breaks through the limitation of traditional psychology that emphasizes problem treatment while neglecting positive cultivation. It therefore provides a new theoretical perspective and practical path for happiness education among college students in private universities. Drawing on the core theories of positive psychology, this paper analyzes the current situation and main dilemmas in students' view of happiness, including value confusion, instrumental attitudes toward learning, and insufficient internal motivation. Furthermore, it explores the compatibility between positive psychology and happiness education in private universities, clarifying how concepts such as strengths development, resilience, and meaning in life can be integrated into educational practice. On this basis, the paper constructs a scientific and feasible practical system of happiness education, involving curriculum design, campus culture building, psychological counseling, and family-school collaboration. The aim is to provide theoretical reference and practical experience for private universities to improve the level of mental health education and to better implement the fundamental task of fostering morality and cultivating people.

Keywords: positive psychology; private universities; college students; happiness; mental health

1. Introduction

At present, private universities in China are experiencing a phase of rapid development, characterized by an expanding scale of operations and continuous improvements in educational quality. These institutions have become a significant force in cultivating applied talents and contributing to regional economic and social development. However, compared to their counterparts in public universities, students in private universities encounter a more intricate growth environment. They face overlapping challenges such as academic pressure and intense employment competition. Additionally, some students experience identity confusion and are influenced by societal biases against private universities, which can lead to feelings of inferiority, anxiety, and other negative emotions. Furthermore, under the influence of multiculturalism and the pervasive trends of digital networks, some students adopt a utilitarian and materialistic perspective on happiness. They often equate happiness with material wealth, fame, and personal gain, while neglecting the importance of spiritual fulfillment and the realization of self-worth. Consequently, issues such as a diminished perception of happiness, weakened resilience, and confusion regarding the meaning of life emerge. These

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challenges significantly impact their physical and mental well-being, as well as their holistic development.

The traditional approach to happiness education in colleges and universities has largely been integrated into mental health education, with a primary focus on "problem intervention." This approach emphasizes alleviating students' negative emotions and psychological difficulties but falls short of fundamentally guiding them to develop a scientific understanding of happiness and fostering positive psychological traits. In the 1990s, the emergence of positive psychology marked a paradigm shift. Psychologists emphasized that the core mission of psychology extends beyond treating mental illnesses to include helping individuals unlock their potential and enhance their overall happiness. The central tenets of positive psychology, which include "focusing on positivity, cultivating strengths, and constructing meaning," align closely with the educational objectives of private universities, which prioritize application-oriented and personalized learning [1, 2]. This alignment offers a novel theoretical foundation and practical framework for addressing the challenges associated with happiness education for college students in private universities.

2. Analysis of the Current Situation and Dilemmas of College Students' View of Happiness in Private Universities from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

2.1. Investigation on the Current Situation of College Students' View of Happiness in Private Universities

To accurately understand the current state of college students' perspectives on happiness in private universities, this study selected three private universities, encompassing both undergraduate and junior college levels [3]. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed, with 762 valid responses recovered, achieving an effective recovery rate of 95.25%. Additionally, interviews were conducted with 20 students, 10 head teachers, and mental health educators. The findings reveal that the overall perspective on happiness among college students in private universities is predominantly characterized by "mainstream positivity with partial deviations."

Happiness cognition: A majority of students recognize that happiness encompasses not only material satisfaction but also spiritual fulfillment and the realization of self-value. They generally agree that "striving hard to realize oneself" is a significant manifestation of happiness. However, a notable 32.7% of students still equate happiness with "high-paying jobs and material enjoyment," while 28.3% believe that "happiness is letting nature take its course without active pursuit." These perspectives reflect certain utilitarian and nihilistic tendencies in their understanding of happiness [4, 5].

Happiness experience: The happiness experiences of students exhibit a clear trend of "polarization." Approximately 45.6% of students report finding joy in small blessings within their daily academic and personal lives, such as companionship from peers, academic achievements, and familial warmth, which contribute to a rich reservoir of positive emotional experiences [6, 7]. Conversely, 54.4% of students frequently experience feelings of anxiety and confusion. These negative emotions are primarily attributed to academic pressures, concerns about future employment, and struggles with identity, leading to a diminished ability to perceive happiness effectively.

Happiness behavior: Many students actively seek happiness through various means, including academic pursuits, participation in club activities, and interpersonal interactions. However, 37.9% of students lack the ability to proactively create happiness, often relying on activities such as mobile phone usage and video games for temporary gratification [8, 9]. This group tends to exhibit low resilience, becoming prone to self-denial when faced with challenges. Additionally, 29.5% of students express uncertainty about how to enhance their happiness levels, indicating a lack of scientific methods or strategies to cultivate happiness effectively.

Happiness environment: Students generally express low satisfaction with the happiness education provided on campus. Only 28.1% of students believe that the

happiness education activities organized by their schools are targeted and effective [10]. The majority perceive these initiatives as overly formalistic and fragmented, failing to integrate meaningfully into their daily academic and personal lives. Furthermore, the absence of a systematic educational framework and professional guidance is seen as a significant limitation in fostering a supportive environment for happiness education.

2.2. Core Dilemmas of View of Happiness Education in Private Universities

Cognitive level: There are deviations in the understanding of the concept of happiness, with noticeable tendencies toward utilitarianism and nihilism. Influenced by the dynamics of multiculturalism and the pervasive impact of digital trends, some students prioritize material enjoyment and the pursuit of fame and gain as their sole definition of happiness, neglecting the importance of spiritual growth and the realization of self-worth [11]. Additionally, academic pressure and employment-related anxieties contribute to a lack of clarity in their perception of happiness, leading to a state of "happiness nothingness," where they perceive happiness as unattainable and lack the motivation to actively pursue it.

Experiential level: Many students experience a deficiency in positive emotional experiences and exhibit a weak ability to perceive happiness. College students in private universities often face a combination of challenges, including academic stress, competitive job markets, and identity-related uncertainties, which can trap them in cycles of negative emotions, making it difficult to recognize positive aspects in their daily lives. Furthermore, the absence of structured activities aimed at cultivating positive emotions within the school environment exacerbates this issue. Students often lack the skills to regulate their emotions effectively, which hinders their ability to accumulate positive emotional experiences and results in a diminished sense of happiness [10].

Behavioral level: There is a noticeable deficiency in the ability to actively create happiness and a need for improved psychological resilience. Some students demonstrate limited awareness and capability to generate happiness independently, relying heavily on external stimuli for temporary gratification rather than cultivating enduring happiness through personal effort. When confronted with challenges and setbacks, they often exhibit weak psychological resilience, resorting to self-denial and avoidance behaviors. This prevents them from identifying and utilizing positive resources within difficult situations and inhibits their ability to derive meaning and growth from adversity.

Ecological level: The system for happiness education in private universities remains underdeveloped, with a lack of cohesive educational synergy. Currently, happiness education is often integrated into traditional mental health education frameworks, which focus predominantly on addressing problems rather than fostering positive development. This approach results in fragmented curricula and superficial activities that lack depth and relevance. Additionally, teaching staff frequently lack specialized training in positive psychology, and both head teachers and subject instructors demonstrate insufficient proficiency in delivering happiness education. The collaborative mechanism involving families, schools, and communities is also incomplete, with limited guidance provided by families and society on fostering students' understanding of happiness. This shortfall prevents the establishment of a comprehensive and supportive environment for happiness education.

2.3. Analysis of the Causes of Dilemmas

Individual level: Students' psychological development characteristics and cognitive abilities play a significant role in shaping their experiences and challenges. College students in private universities are typically in mid-adolescence, a stage marked by psychological immaturity and the need for further development in cognitive and emotional regulation skills. This developmental phase makes them more susceptible to external influences, which can lead to skewed perceptions of happiness [12]. Additionally, a lack of self-reflection and self-improvement awareness among some students hinders their ability to recognize and leverage their strengths, thereby reducing their intrinsic motivation to actively pursue a fulfilling sense of happiness.

School level: Private universities often face challenges in their educational orientation and systems, which can contribute to student dilemmas. Many institutions prioritize the cultivation of applied talents and professional skills, often at the expense of addressing students' mental health and fostering a comprehensive understanding of happiness. The absence of a systematic curriculum and practical frameworks for happiness education results in activities that are overly simplistic and lack substantive content, failing to address students' real needs. Furthermore, the development of teaching staff in this area is insufficient, with a shortage of professionals specializing in positive psychology, which limits the ability to provide effective and high-quality guidance for happiness education [13].

Family and social level: External environmental factors significantly influence students' perspectives and experiences. In some families, an excessive focus on material satisfaction overshadows efforts to guide children in developing a balanced and meaningful view of happiness, leading to a utilitarian mindset. Additionally, societal biases against private universities contribute to identity confusion among certain students, negatively impacting their overall happiness. The pervasive influence of multiculturalism and trends in digital networks further complicates the situation, often steering students toward distorted or superficial understandings of happiness.

3. Practical Paths of College Students' View of Happiness Education in Private Universities from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

Grounded in the foundational principles of positive psychology and addressing the challenges faced by college students in private universities regarding their perception of happiness, this paper proposes a comprehensive four-dimensional collaborative framework for happiness education. The framework includes "cognitive reshaping--experience activation--behavior cultivation--ecological support" and is guided by the principles of "advantage-oriented, experience-first, practice-based, and full participation." This approach aims to assist students in developing a scientifically grounded understanding of happiness while fostering their ability to enhance their overall well-being. By integrating these dimensions, the framework provides a holistic strategy to improve students' happiness levels effectively.

3.1. Cognitive Reshaping: Constructing a Scientific Happiness Cognition System and Correcting Cognitive Deviations

Cognition serves as the foundation of the perspective on happiness. Education aimed at fostering a view of happiness should prioritize guiding students to develop a scientific understanding of happiness while discarding utilitarian and nihilistic notions. This approach ensures that students cultivate a balanced and meaningful perception of happiness, which is essential for their personal and social development.

Curriculum integration plays a pivotal role in solidifying the cognitive foundation of happiness. Positive psychology theories should be systematically incorporated into general education and ideological and political education programs in colleges and universities. Courses such as Positive Psychology and a Happy Life, as well as College Students' View of Happiness Education, should be offered to comprehensively explain key concepts, including the PERMA happiness theory and positive trait theory. These courses should help students differentiate between material and spiritual happiness, temporary pleasure and enduring happiness, and clarify the essential meaning of happiness. Existing courses, such as College Students' Mental Health Education and Ideology, Morality and Rule of Law, should be reformed to include specialized modules on the view of happiness. This integration should emphasize the alignment of personal happiness with social happiness, as well as material happiness with spiritual happiness. Teaching methods should employ diverse approaches, including case studies, group discussions, and scenario simulations, to enhance engagement and relevance while avoiding overly theoretical instruction.

Thematic activities are essential for reinforcing cognitive guidance related to happiness. Workshops and debates, such as "Happiness Definition Workshop" and "Happiness Cognition Debate Competition," should be organized to encourage students to explore topics like "what constitutes true happiness" and "how to effectively pursue happiness." These discussions help clarify students' understanding of happiness and rectify misconceptions through interactive communication [14]. Activities such as "Advantage Card Exploration" and "Shining Moment Sharing" should be implemented to assist students in identifying their positive traits and personal achievements, fostering the belief that "I possess the ability to achieve happiness." These initiatives enhance intrinsic motivation for pursuing happiness. Additionally, inviting experts in positive psychology and accomplished role models to deliver lectures and share personal experiences can provide valuable insights, guiding students toward adopting a constructive and balanced value orientation regarding happiness.

3.2. Experience Activation: Cultivating Positive Emotions and Improving Happiness Perception Ability

Positive emotions form the foundation of happiness. The concept of happiness education emphasizes the importance of guiding students to actively recognize and cultivate positive emotions. By improving their ability to perceive happiness, students can integrate these experiences into their daily academic and personal lives, fostering a more fulfilling and balanced existence.

Cultivating positive emotions to build a reservoir of happiness involves structured and intentional activities. For instance, implementing a "21-Day Happiness Diary Check-in" encourages students to document three positive occurrences each day, such as moments of gratitude, academic achievements, or meaningful interactions with peers. This practice not only helps students analyze the positive emotions these events evoke but also fosters a habit of recognizing and appreciating positivity in their lives. Gratitude education is another effective approach, where students are guided to express appreciation towards parents, teachers, and peers through activities like gratitude-themed class meetings, writing letters of thanks, and conducting return visits. These activities allow students to experience the joy that stems from gratitude. Additionally, emotional regulation techniques such as mindfulness meditation, smile exercises, and breathing relaxation are introduced to help students manage negative emotions. Regular group counseling sessions further support this process, enhancing students' emotional regulation skills and enriching their positive emotional experiences.

Immersive experiences play a crucial role in deepening students' sense of happiness. Designing "flow activity" opportunities tailored to the applied talent training focus of private universities allows students to engage in professional skill competitions, creative handcraft workshops, outdoor team-building exercises, and voluntary service projects. These activities enable students to experience a state of "flow," characterized by full concentration and the joy of personal growth. The creation of the "Happy Family" group counseling initiative strengthens interpersonal connections through activities such as trust-building exercises, collaborative power circles, and peer support programs. These interactions foster a sense of warmth and happiness derived from mutual assistance and cooperation. Furthermore, leveraging platforms like campus radio, official social media accounts, and informational displays helps disseminate happiness tips and share uplifting stories, cultivating a campus culture where happiness is both perceived and actively pursued by all.

3.3. Behavior Cultivation: Improving Happiness Creation Ability and Strengthening Resilience Training

Happiness is the result of active creation. The perspective of happiness education emphasizes guiding students to transform positive cognition and emotions into practical actions, thereby enhancing their ability to create happiness and strengthen their resilience [15]. This approach underscores the importance of fostering a proactive mindset and

equipping students with the tools to translate their internal positivity into tangible outcomes that contribute to their overall well-being.

Advantage application practice to realize self-value: The "Advantage Action Plan" encourages students to identify and leverage their positive traits, such as creativity, responsibility, and empathy, to develop personalized strategies for applying these strengths in various contexts. These contexts include academic pursuits, extracurricular activities, voluntary services, and social practices, enabling students to achieve a sense of accomplishment and purpose through active engagement. Additionally, the "Happiness Creation Projects" initiative motivates students to collaborate in teams to design and execute innovative activities centered on themes like campus culture, public welfare, and professional development. These projects allow students to experience enduring happiness by actively contributing to meaningful endeavors [16]. Furthermore, a "positive feedback mechanism" is established, where teachers and peers provide timely recognition and encouragement for students' incremental progress. This reinforcement fosters a positive cycle of effort, achievement, and happiness, ultimately boosting students' motivation to pursue happiness creation.

Resilience improvement training to enhance happiness resilience: The "Frustration Growth Workshop" is designed to help students reflect on challenges and setbacks encountered in their academic and personal lives. Through this process, they are guided to uncover positive experiences and growth opportunities, cultivating the ability to derive meaning from adversity. Resilience group counseling sessions further support students by teaching them effective strategies for managing setbacks through scenario simulations, role-playing exercises, and other interactive methods, thereby strengthening their psychological resilience. Additionally, alumni and industry professionals who have successfully navigated challenges share their experiences, inspiring students to adopt the perspective that setbacks are opportunities for growth. This initiative aims to instill courage and confidence in students, empowering them to face difficulties with a constructive and resilient mindset.

3.4. Ecological Support: Constructing an All-Round Happy Education Environment and Forming Education Synergy

The concept of happiness education requires the support of a well-structured ecological environment. Private universities should aim to establish a comprehensive three-in-one happiness education system that integrates "campus---family---society." This approach is designed to foster a holistic educational synergy that involves all staff, spans the entire educational process, and addresses all aspects of student development. By creating such a system, institutions can ensure that happiness education becomes a shared responsibility and a collaborative effort among all stakeholders.

Campus ecological empowerment plays a pivotal role in fostering a positive atmosphere conducive to happiness education. To achieve this, universities can cultivate a "positive campus" culture by incorporating elements such as smile walls, happiness message boards, and positive psychology corridors. These features contribute to a warm, inclusive, and uplifting campus environment. Additionally, organizing events like the "Happiness Culture Festival" can further integrate happiness education into daily campus life. Such festivals may include activities like positive psychology lectures, psychodrama performances, happiness-themed art exhibitions, and peer mutual assistance programs. Furthermore, enhancing the campus mental health service system is essential. This can be achieved by establishing a psychological counseling center staffed with professional positive psychology educators who provide personalized counseling and happiness guidance tailored to students' needs. These initiatives collectively ensure that happiness education permeates every facet of campus life, creating a supportive and enriching environment for students.

The development of teaching staff is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of happiness education. Special training programs in positive psychology should be implemented for all educators, including head teachers, subject-specific instructors, and

mental health professionals. These programs aim to improve teachers' understanding and professional skills related to happiness education, enabling them to transition from merely addressing problems to actively guiding student growth. Establishing dedicated happiness education teaching and research teams can further support this effort by facilitating research and practical exploration of happiness education through the lens of positive psychology. These teams can work to continuously refine educational strategies and teaching methodologies. Teachers should also be encouraged to incorporate positive psychology principles into their daily teaching practices, focusing on students' strengths and developmental progress. By doing so, classroom teaching becomes a powerful tool for fostering students' positive traits and overall well-being.

Collaboration among homes, schools, and communities is essential for creating a synergistic approach to happiness education. For parents, universities can organize positive psychology lectures and online sharing sessions to help them adopt a scientific perspective on happiness. These initiatives can guide parents in fostering a positive and harmonious family environment, emphasizing the importance of spiritual growth over material satisfaction. Establishing a robust home-school communication mechanism is also vital. This system allows for timely feedback on students' happiness-related development and encourages parents to actively collaborate with schools in implementing happiness education strategies. Additionally, leveraging social resources can significantly enhance the scope of happiness education [17, 18]. By involving positive psychology experts, public welfare organizations, industry enterprises, and other stakeholders, schools can offer students opportunities to engage in social practices, public welfare activities, and vocational experiences. These activities not only expand the practical applications of happiness education but also help students develop a deeper understanding of happiness and the skills needed to create it through active participation in society.

4. Conclusion

From the perspective of positive psychology, this study systematically examines the concept of happiness education for college students in private universities and presents several key conclusions. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing the unique challenges faced by this demographic while leveraging theoretical frameworks to enhance their overall well-being.

The happiness perspective of college students in private universities is predominantly characterized by a "mainstream positivity with partial deviations." However, they encounter significant challenges, including utilitarian attitudes, limited experiential opportunities, underdeveloped creative capacities, and insufficient ecological support. These issues are influenced by a combination of individual, institutional, familial, and societal factors, highlighting the need for a multifaceted approach to address these interconnected dimensions effectively.

The integration of theories such as PERMA happiness theory, positive trait theory, and psychological capital theory within the framework of positive psychology offers a robust foundation for addressing the challenges in happiness education for college students in private universities. These theories provide innovative perspectives and practical strategies to overcome existing barriers. By implementing a four-dimensional collaborative approach—comprising cognitive reshaping, experiential activation, behavioral cultivation, and ecological support—students can be guided toward developing a more scientific and sustainable view of happiness. This approach not only enhances their ability to perceive, experience, and create happiness but also contributes to the improvement of mental health education systems and the overall quality of talent development in private universities. Furthermore, this framework underscores the broader implications for educational institutions, suggesting that a holistic and proactive strategy can foster resilience, adaptability, and long-term well-being among students, thereby preparing them to thrive in diverse personal and professional contexts.

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