

Factors Influencing College Life Satisfaction and Strategies for Enhancement from a Positive Perspective Psychology

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Abstract. This paper explores the factors that influence college students' life satisfaction and presents strategies for enhancement from a positive psychology perspective. Life satisfaction serves as a crucial indicator of psychological well-being, closely linked to positive psychological capital, social support, family environment, and learning experiences. Research findings indicate that social support and positive psychological capital significantly enhance life satisfaction, while adverse life events can adversely impact it. Furthermore, family background, learning experiences, and cultural differences all contribute differently to shaping college students' life satisfaction. The study recommends interventions at both individual and social support levels to increase life satisfaction among college students, including curricular initiatives, fostering positive relationships, and expanding social networks.

Keywords: Satisfaction; college students; positive perspective psychology.

1. Introduction

Life satisfaction is a crucial factor affecting college students' mental health. High levels of satisfaction can reduce anxiety and depression while fostering positive cognitive and emotional responses, which help students cope more effectively with stress and challenges. It serves as a cognitive aspect of subjective well-being, with higher satisfaction linked to greater overall well-being (Jia Yifan et al., 2021). In China, mental health issues among college students are widespread, impacting 21.48% and 45.28% of students with depression and anxiety, respectively (China National Mental Health Report 2022). The Chinese government emphasizes the importance of mental health education in the 14th Five-Year Plan and the 2035 Vision, aiming to strengthen the mental health service system. Enhancing life satisfaction is critical for students' well-being and personal growth and achieving national education goals.

From a positive psychology perspective, life satisfaction is influenced by positive psychological capital (e.g., optimism, self-efficacy, resilience) and external factors such as family environment and economic conditions. These positive psychological assets significantly correlate with life satisfaction (Jia Yifan et al., 2021). Nurturing these positive traits can enhance students' psychological health and development. Positive psychology investigates human potential and virtues, focusing on a positive life orientation. It underscores the importance of positive psychological qualities and resources beyond merely addressing opposing challenges. This study examines the factors related to college students' life satisfaction and the mechanisms that influence it, drawing on existing literature—the current state of research on college life satisfaction.

2. The Present State of Research on College Life Satisfaction

2.1 Research on College Life Satisfaction

Regarding college life satisfaction, international studies have a solid theoretical foundation. Among these, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener et al. (1985) has been extensively used in research measuring life satisfaction. It primarily assesses individuals' subjective perceptions and contentment with their quality of life, consisting of five items, such as: "I am satisfied with my living conditions" and "I have obtained the important things in life." This scale has been widely utilized across diverse cultural contexts and populations in life satisfaction research.

Pilcher (1998) surveyed 72 college students using this scale. The findings revealed that affective states (such as depression, anger, vigor, and confusion), physical health status, frequency of illness, emotional stability, and sleep quality were significantly associated with life satisfaction. Notably, depression, vigor, confusion, frequency of disease, and negative affect emerged as key predictors of life satisfaction. However, the study had limitations, including a small sample size and reliance on self-rating scales.

Arslan and Akkas (2014) conducted a large-scale survey involving 1,260 students at a public university in northwestern Turkey to test a model for comprehensively assessing satisfaction with university life. This model included variables such as the quality of university life, life satisfaction, and a sense of belonging within a unified framework. The study found that social satisfaction has the most significant positive impact among the factors influencing the quality of university life. It also confirmed that satisfaction with university life encompasses three main dimensions: social, academic, and facilities and services. Furthermore, overall life satisfaction and a sense of belonging to the university significantly enhance satisfaction with university life. Additionally, compared to that in Western countries, the distribution of satisfaction among students in Turkey reveals cultural diversity, indicating that cultural background plays a crucial role in evaluating satisfaction.

There is also a significant accumulation of research on college life satisfaction in China. Most domestic scholars have utilized the revised version of the SWLS scale or self-designed scales to assess college students' life satisfaction. For instance, Liu Jie and Huang Xiting (2015) employed the time-dimension life satisfaction scale, which consists of 15 questions and includes three sub-dimensions: past life satisfaction, present life satisfaction, and future life satisfaction. Each sub-dimension contains five questions: "I am more satisfied with my past life." The questionnaire survey of 130 college students was analyzed, revealing no difference between Chinese college students' ratings of past happiness and present happiness, both of which were lower than their ratings of future happiness.

In summary, studies on college life satisfaction- both domestic and international- have yielded specific findings related to theoretical foundations, research methodologies, and cultural contexts, although some limitations persist. Scholars have made significant advancements in domestic research by incorporating foreign theories while integrating local cultural and social elements. However, the representativeness of research samples and the complexities of cultural backgrounds still warrant further examination. Future studies should concentrate on increasing sample sizes, refining research designs, and conducting detailed analyses by employing diverse methods and cultural perspectives to better understand the underlying mechanisms of college life satisfaction.

2.2 Factors Influencing College Life Satisfaction

In examining the factors influencing college life satisfaction, researchers in China evaluated positive psychological capital, social support, study effort, and negative life events. Jia Yifan et al. (2021) conducted a study involving 302 college students using empirical research methods. They found that the more social support an individual receives, the greater their sense of security and life satisfaction. Furthermore, this sense of security indirectly affects life satisfaction through positive psychological capital. This study highlights the indirect influence of social support on life satisfaction and emphasizes the mediating roles of a sense of security and positive psychological capital. Zhang Junjie, Wang Haibin, and Yao Benxian(2009) explored the relationship between college life satisfaction and life events by statistically analyzing questionnaires from 354 college students. Their findings revealed that interpersonal relationships, academic stress, and health adaptations negatively correlated with life satisfaction, indicating that while adverse life events impact college life satisfaction, they are not the determining factors. These findings provide valuable insights into the internal mechanisms of college life satisfaction, although the limitations of the study sample may affect its generalizability.

Chi Wentao, Sang Qingsong, and Shu Shouli (2020) surveyed 3,527 college students using a questionnaire, revealing that professional internal motivation, along with emotional and cognitive

interests, jointly contributes to the enhancement of college students' subjective well-being and life satisfaction. Wang Wenru (2011) examined the factors influencing college life satisfaction. First, objective factors showed that the stress of being away from family for extended periods and the conflict between the desire to develop strong peer relationships and a lack of practical interpersonal skills adversely affect life satisfaction. Subjective factors indicated that low self-esteem can diminish satisfaction. However, the study lacks empirical data to support these findings.

These studies utilize quantitative methods to evaluate the life satisfaction of Chinese college students. While quantitative research provides a vital foundation for understanding college life satisfaction, it also has limitations. The factors affecting university life satisfaction are intricate and varied, including several dimensions, such as individual psychology, social environments, and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, relying solely on quantitative methods makes it challenging to reveal the underlying structure and dynamic changes fully. Qualitative analysis can offer richer context and personal experiences, highlighting subtle differences and complex relationships that quantitative research often misses. Research on university life satisfaction should combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to thoroughly explore the internal mechanisms of college students' life satisfaction and offer more comprehensive theoretical support for improving their psychological well-being and quality of life.

3. Ways to Enhance College Life Satisfaction

3.1 Individual-Level Interventions

When enhancing satisfaction with college life, positive psychology suggests that school curricular interventions effectively reduce depression rates, improve learning outcomes, and foster creative thinking (Seligman 2011). For instance, the Penn Resiliency Program (PRP) promotes optimism by teaching students to remain grounded in reality and think more flexibly about their challenges. This program has benefited over 3,000 children and adolescents, with research indicating that it reduces and prevents symptoms of depression, alleviates feelings of despair, prevents anxiety disorders, and applies to children from diverse races and ethnicities in Beijing. Participants in the program reported fewer physical symptoms, fewer hospital visits, healthier diets, and increased exercise. Therefore, colleges and universities in China can enhance students' understanding of positive psychology and foster positive traits such as optimism, self-confidence, and resilience by offering relevant courses. Additionally, students can engage in various practical activities, such as volunteer services and club events, which allow them to develop their skills and boost their self-worth through hands-on experience.

3.2 Interventions at the Social Level Support

A study by George E. Vaillant found that warm, close relationships are crucial for leading a fulfilling life. For college students, family significantly affects their overall life satisfaction. Therefore, parents' understanding of their children's academic and personal lives during college, effective communication, and assistance in managing stress are essential strategies for enhancing life satisfaction. Additionally, social support is vital for college students' life satisfaction. This support encompasses help and understanding from peers, friends, teachers, and other sources. College students can actively participate in club activities, campus events, and volunteer services to expand their social networks, meet new people, and foster positive relationships with their teachers, creating a broader support network.

4. Summary

From the perspective of positive psychology, this paper examines the current state of life satisfaction among college students, the factors that influence it, and strategies for improvement. It concludes that life satisfaction is a crucial indicator of psychological well-being, closely tied to an

individual's positive psychological capital, social support, family environment, and learning experiences. Factors affecting college students' life satisfaction include social support, positive psychological capital, professional interests, interpersonal relationships, and adverse life events. Both social support and positive psychological capital significantly boost life satisfaction, while adverse life events can negatively impact it. Family background, learning experiences, and cultural differences also affect life satisfaction among college students to varying degrees. This study suggests interventions at individual and social support levels to improve life satisfaction among college students.

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