

Coping Strategies for Negative Psychological Emotions Among Higher Vocational Colleges EFL Students in the Internet Age: A Cognitive Psychology Perspective

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Abstract. The mental well-being of students from higher vocational colleges (HVCs) is a critical concern for personal development and a nation's future. While scholars have explored strategies to address negative psychological emotions in English as Foreign Language (EFL) students in internet era, few have delved into the underlying cognitive psychology aspects. Cognitive psychology, with its focus on information processing, offers a unique perspective. It reveals cognitive biases in individuals with emotional issues, shedding light on causal relationships. By studying EFL students' mental states through a cognitive psychology lens, new avenues for mental health improvement are opened. This approach, grounded in cognitive psychology theory, provides innovative strategies for enhancing mental well-being and offers valuable insights for coping with negative psychological emotions, bridging the gap between psychological processes and behavior.

Keywords. Cognitive psychology, negative psychological emotions, Internet era, higher vocational

1. Introduction

EFL Students in HVCs often experience negative emotions such as self-doubt due to factors like the academic background of their schools and poor academic performance [1]. In addition, in the age of the Internet, the overwhelming influx of information exacerbates the susceptibility of EFL students in HVCs, who already have limited discernment and psychological resilience, to develop severe negative psychological emotions. HVCs students play a vital role in their nation's development [2], making their mental well-being a collective concern. While various scholars have studied negative psychological issues among these students and offered solutions [3-6], few have investigated the root causes of their negative emotions or applied cognitive psychology-based strategies. Cognitive psychology, recognizing individuals as active information

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seekers [7], provides a distinctive lens for comprehending human behavior. This field, evolved over decades, serves as a bridge between external actions, psychological processes, and physiological foundations [8]. It enables the integration of diverse psychological explanations, forming a holistic understanding of human behavior. Cognitive psychology centers on information processing mechanisms linked to mental health, unveiling cognitive biases in the encoding and interpretation of information in individuals with conditions like loneliness, anxiety, and depression. It also probes the causal links between cognitive biases and emotional challenges. In particular, cognitive psychology conducts thorough investigations into emotional issues and behavioral patterns affecting mental health from an information processing perspective. Delving into the theories, methodologies, and thought processes underlying this research deepens our grasp of emotional and behavioral mechanisms. Furthermore, it furnishes insights and support for mental health services and education.

Approaching the mental states of EFL students from a cognitive psychology standpoint presents a novel dimension in student mental health research. This article, guided by cognitive psychology principles, scrutinizes current negative psychological states and offers innovative strategies for coping with negative psychological emotions. It thereby enriches the landscape of mental health education for these students.

2. Cognitive psychology

Cognitive Psychology, originating in the 1950s, reached its zenith about two decades later. This period witnessed the emergence of notable figures and the refinement of theoretical frameworks, including Newell and Simon's 'General Problem Solver' model and Chomsky's linguistic theories. Donald Broadbent's 1958 work 'Perception and Communication,' notably, guided the field [9]. Cognitive psychology perceives humans as active information seekers, offering a unique lens into understanding humanity. It has evolved into a bridge, linking external behavior, psychological processes, and physiological foundations over decades [10]. This integration enables a comprehensive grasp of human behavior. Cognitive psychology, notably, investigates emotional issues and behavioral patterns impacting mental well-being through an information processing perspective. Understanding its foundational ideas, theories, and methods enriches our insights into emotional and behavioral mechanisms. It also inspires and supports mental health services and education [8].

Within this framework, individuals exhibit information processing preferences, referred to as cognitive biases. These biases, as per several theories, significantly influence the development, persistence, and recurrence of emotional issues [11]. Notable models include John T. Cacioppo's loneliness model, Michel J. Dugas's generalized anxiety model, Maree J. Abbott's social phobia model, and Aaron T. Beck's depression model [12]. Cross-sectional studies have consistently validated the presence of negative cognitive biases in information encoding and interpretation among individuals with loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Longitudinal research is increasingly highlighting cognitive biases as potential cognitive vulnerability factors in emotional disorders.

3. Current negative Psychological States Among EFL Students from HVCs

The mental well-being of Chinese EFL students from HVCs can be starkly divided into two categories: mild and severe psychological disorders, a distinction that underscores the gravity of the situation. Wang's comprehensive study meticulously categorizes and synthesizes the various types of college student suicides that are linked to internet technology [1]. This taxonomy includes internet addiction type, internet psychological disorder type, internet violence type, and inadequate internet regulation type, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of this issue.

Recent findings from a psychological survey conducted among incoming EFL students in HVCs in Fujian Province present a concerning picture [9]. The survey reveals that among those participants, a staggering 30% reported grappling with mild psychological disorders, while a distressing 2% faced severe psychological disorders, accentuating the magnitude of the problem at hand. Similarly, an extensive eight-year dataset from Zhengzhou University's Counseling Center paints a disconcerting picture, showing that over one-quarter of their EFL students suffered from severe psychological disorders [6]. Furthermore, the National Ministry of Education's related surveys have unveiled alarming statistics, indicating that more than 20% of surveyed EFL students grapple with varying degrees of mental health issues [5]. These revelations have prompted education authorities to express grave concern, as the consequences of these issues are palpably tragic and far-reaching, encompassing depression, increased dropout rates, and a disturbing rise in suicidal tendencies.

Indeed, a telling reflection of the intensifying crisis lies in the results of an authoritative survey that reveals over one-third of HVCs dropouts attribute their decision to abnormal mental health issues. This number, worrisomely, continues to ascend, signaling an increasingly severe and multifaceted mental health predicament afflicting higher education students nationwide.

3.1 Anxiety Psychology

The realm of anxiety psychology delves into the profound unease and restlessness that often plagues high-achieving EFL students at HVCs. This emotional landscape is characterized by heightened sensitivity, self-confidence issues, and a pervasive sense of indecision when confronted with problem-solving [13]. It extends to encompass a pervasive discomfort and uncertainty that envelops their academic and personal surroundings. While moderate anxiety can serve as a motivating force, guarding against complacency, the insidious grasp of excessive anxiety tends to unravel well-being. In the context of Chinese EFL students from HVCs, this negative anxiety psychology materializes as dissatisfaction with chosen majors, a haunting anxiety about academic performance, financial concerns casting a long shadow, career prospects shrouded in uncertainty, eroding self-confidence, an inner monologue of self-blame, and a concerning lack of focus on their studies. Alarming, many EFL students may grapple with this affliction silently, often failing to recognize its presence or seeking the necessary help, thus perpetuating a cycle of long-term negative consequences. Here is case of anxiety psychology.

Mei, a highly anxious EFL student at an HVC in China, used to constantly battle anxiety related to her academic performance and future prospects. However, she realized that a significant part of her anxiety was triggered by the constant comparison with others on social media and the pressure to maintain a perfect online image. Seeking

help, Mei joined a support group for students dealing with similar issues and learned about managing social media use and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. She also embraced mindfulness and stress-reduction techniques. By reducing her exposure to negative online influences and focusing on her well-being, Mei started to experience less anxiety and became more confident in her chosen major.

3.2 Conformity Psychology

The intricate landscape of conformity psychology unfolds before us as a complex interplay of conformity to prevailing trends, which, at times, quashes individual talents and stifles the blossoming of independent thought. In this psychological paradigm, the desire to fit in takes precedence, constraining self-expression and individuality. This restrictive mindset becomes palpable among EFL students through their inclination to unquestioningly align with popular opinions, mimicking the behaviors of classmates who drift into nonchalance, maintaining an unsettling silence in the classroom, or stoically enduring unwarranted interference from others [3]. The enduring consequence of this conformity psychology is the dwindling of enthusiasm for learning and the stifling of the flames of innovation. Here is a good example to demonstrate this:

Jian, a talented EFL student, used to conform to the opinions of his peers, both in person and online. He realized that his online interactions with classmates were reinforcing his conformity mindset. To break free from this pattern, he decided to take a digital detox by limiting his time on social media and unfollowing accounts that made him feel pressured to conform. This allowed him to focus on his own interests and thoughts, leading to increased self-expression and independent thinking. Jian discovered a supportive online community where he could share his unique perspectives and interests without fear of judgment. Over time, he regained his enthusiasm for learning and discovered the joy of embracing his individuality.

3.3 Contrarian Psychology

The intriguing tapestry of contrarian psychology unveils a landscape characterized by resistance and rebelliousness among students. This mindset promotes independent thinking and questions the status quo but can, at times, sow seeds of negativity towards both individuals and their environments. In the realm of HVCs, many EFL students proudly display their contrarian attitude by challenging authority, disregarding established school regulations, or even inciting disruptive behaviors, such as vandalism or disruptions. The manifestations of contrarian psychology offer a double-edged sword, capable of both stimulating positive change and wreaking havoc, depending on the context and intent of the behavior. A good example to show this as following:

Cui, a vocal and rebellious EFL student, initially expressed her contrarian attitude through disruptive behaviors that were influenced by her online interactions with like-minded individuals. Realizing the potential of her passion for change, Cui decided to create an online platform where she could channel her energy and activism positively. She started a blog and social media accounts to raise awareness about various issues affecting her college and advocated for constructive changes. By engaging in online dialogue and mobilizing support, Cui found a more effective outlet for her contrarian mindset. This not only reduced the negative consequences of her actions but also led to meaningful, positive changes on her campus.

4. Application of Cognitive Psychology in Correcting Negative Psychological Emotions

4.1. Correcting Negative Emotional Issues through Cognitive Bias Modification

Researchers have devised Cognitive Bias Modification (CBM) programs aimed at directly addressing negative cognitive biases observed in individuals experiencing loneliness, anxiety, and depression [14]. One facet of this, known as Cognitive Bias Modification of Attention (CBM-A), concentrates on altering negative attention biases by training individuals to redirect their focus away from negative stimuli or towards positive ones [15]. This is accomplished through tasks such as modified dot-probe and visual search training. On the other hand, CBM of Interpretation targets negative interpretation biases by encouraging individuals to construe ambiguous situations in a more positive light. Various tasks like word stem completion, ambiguous scenario word stem completion, and ambiguous scenario assessment are employed for this purpose. Cognitive bias modification has swiftly found application in clinical practice, particularly in the treatment of anxiety and depression. This is due to its focus on subconscious and unintentional bottom-up information processing, setting it apart from traditional interventions like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which rely on explicit verbal expression and conscious top-down information processing. Therefore, educators at HVCs need to be trained to perceive EFL students psychological status from their verbal expression and behavior, hence, proposing proper coping strategies for relevant negative psychological emotions at earlier stage. Furthermore, cognitive bias modification interventions can be conveniently delivered via the internet, making them cost-effective and adaptable for patients with diverse levels of comprehension. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of cognitive bias modification interventions remains inconsistent, both within individual studies and across meta-analyses [16-18].

4.2. Correcting negative psychological Behavior through Cognitive Interventions

Decades of extensive research in the field of cognitive psychology have not only shed light on the intricate cognitive processes that shape human behavior [19] but have also firmly established the profound link between behavior and both physical and mental well-being [13]. Furthermore, it's imperative to acknowledge that negative social factors, such as exposure to network violence and passive consumption of emotionally charged media, exert detrimental impacts on the psychological health of students. Therefore, educators in HVCs need to attach great importance to the EFL students psychological reflection from outer negative influences and take proper actions to deal with them. In response to this complex issue, researchers have delved into the realm of Behavior Change Techniques (BCTs) grounded in cognitive principles. These techniques encompass a multifaceted array of cognitive functions, including self-efficacy, intention formation, goal setting, self-monitoring, attitude transformation, social comparison, and more. These cognitive interventions hold the potential to catalyze transformative changes in behaviors that are harmful to mental health.

Yet, it's essential to recognize that the effectiveness of these specific cognitive interventions, their precise roles in behavior modification, and the contexts in which they are most efficacious remain subjects of ongoing scholarly discourse. For instance, when we consider the concept of self-efficacy, there is a consensus within the research community about its pivotal influence on behavior. Educators and professionals have

developed a repertoire of techniques, such as goal setting, action planning, self-monitoring, and performance feedback, to enhance this critical cognitive function [20]. However, their outcomes exhibit a wide spectrum of variability, as the amelioration of negative psychological behaviors is contingent upon the unique characteristics and behaviors of the target population undergoing the intervention.

In sum, the amalgamation of cognitive psychology, behavior change techniques, and the intricate interplay between cognitive functions and behavior is an evolving area of study with far-reaching implications for enhancing mental health and well-being.

5. Conclusion

The study first categorizes and summarizes the types of suicides of EFL students in HVCs caused by internet technology, including internet addiction type, internet deception type, internet violence type, and inadequate internet regulation type. The psychological well-being of EFL students is not only vital for their personal growth but also of paramount importance for the nation's future development [21]. Consequently, prioritizing the mental health of these students is imperative in higher education. Educational professionals, alongside families and society, should adopt a cognitive psychology perspective to establish a professional, standardized, and scientific framework for enhancing the psychological well-being of HVCs students.

In the realm of mental health education, educators in HVCs must closely consider students' information processing. On one hand, educators should acknowledge that students' cognitive patterns, influenced by factors like physiological traits and life experiences, shape their perceptions of the world, subsequently impacting their daily emotions and behaviors [22]. This underscores the importance of respecting cognitive diversity among students. On the other hand, educators should recognize the adaptability of cognition and actively guide EFL students' cognitive processes during mental health education. Through activities and behavior shaping, educators can instill positive cognitive qualities in students, thereby bolstering their psychological resilience and advancing their mental well-being.

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