Original Paper

Research on the Current Situation and Countermeasures of Self-Identity Crisis among Vocational College Students

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Abstract

In recent years, the issue of self-identity crisis among vocational college students has become increasingly prominent, affecting their personal growth and career development. This paper mainly explores the current situation and causes of self-identity crises among vocational college students from the perspective of social cognition, analyzing the impact of various factors such as social expectations, self-cognitive conflicts, and educational systems on self-identity. Based on this, it proposes strategies such as social support interventions, educational reforms, and school-enterprise cooperation to help vocational college students rebuild their self-identity and achieve positive development. Through theoretical analysis and case studies, this paper aims to provide new insights and practical suggestions for the psychological health and occupational identity of vocational college students.

Keywords

vocational college students, self-identity crisis, social cognitione educational reform, psychological support

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of modern vocational education, vocational college students have gradually become a force that cannot be ignored in society. However, compared with traditional university students, vocational college students face numerous challenges in terms of social recognition, career positioning, and self-identity, which can lead to crises in psychological cognition and self-worth. Self-identity refers to an individual's perception and recognition of their position and role within the social environment, playing a crucial role in the career development and personal growth of vocational college students. A self-identity crisis not only affects students' mental health but may also restrict their future career planning and development paths. Therefore, studying the current situation and causes of

self-identity crises among vocational college students and proposing effective countermeasures is of great practical significance. This paper explores the manifestations and major influencing factors of the self-identity crisis among vocational college students from a social cognition perspective. By analyzing the conflict between social expectations and individual cognition, it attempts to reveal the fundamental causes of the self-identity crisis. Furthermore, through practical case studies and theoretical analysis, the paper focuses on how to provide support and interventions at the societal, school, and individual levels to help vocational college students rebuild their self-identity, enhance psychological resilience, and better adapt to social development needs. It is hoped that this research will offer valuable references for the education sector, social institutions, and families, contributing to the reshaping of vocational college students' self-identity and promoting their psychological health and development (Echeverria & Santos, 2021).

2. The Current Situation of the Self-Identity Crisis among Vocational College Students

2.1 Manifestations of the Self-Identity Crisis among Vocational College Students

The self-identity crisis among vocational college students manifests in a complex, multidimensional, and multi-layered manner, particularly in aspects such as identity recognition, career positioning, social expectations, and self-worth. Firstly, in terms of identity recognition, long-standing social biases and misunderstandings towards vocational education lead some students to enter vocational colleges with strong feelings of inferiority. Compared with their peers in traditional universities, they often feel "inferior," directly impacting their self-perception and behavior patterns. In their daily learning and life, these students may exhibit a lack of confidence, reluctance to participate in group activities, and a tendency to avoid publicly expressing themselves, thereby exacerbating their internal identity crisis. Secondly, unclear career positioning is another significant manifestation of the self-identity crisis among vocational college students (Liu et al., 2022). Although vocational education aims to cultivate applied technical talents, some vocational colleges have curricula that are disconnected from market demands, failing to provide students with clear career development paths. Especially during the job-seeking process upon graduation, facing fierce market competition and societal stereotypes about vocational education, vocational college students often feel confused and anxious, lacking professional confidence and direction. Some even develop a "low-status job" mentality, further affecting their willingness to pursue careers and their career development capabilities. Moreover, societal prejudice against vocational education is also a major cause of the self-identity crisis. Despite recent efforts by the state and society to promote vocational education, the social recognition of vocational graduates remains slow to improve. Some employers and companies hold biases against vocational students, often viewing them as less capable or lower in quality. This external negative evaluation deepens students' feelings of inferiority and causes identity conflicts. Many vocational college students, faced with job pressure, family expectations, and social labels, gradually doubt their self-worth, showing

symptoms of low self-esteem, anxiety, and self-denial, which impact their mental health and personal development. In summary, the self-identity crisis of vocational college students manifests in multiple aspects, with roots in conflicts between identity recognition, career positioning, and social expectations. It requires the joint attention and proactive intervention of society, educational institutions, and families (Ma & Ma, 2022).

2.2 Major Factors Influencing the Self-Identity of Vocational College Students

The factors influencing the self-identity of vocational college students are multifaceted, involving social environment, educational systems, and personal psychological aspects. Firstly, the social environment is a significant external factor affecting their self-identity. For a long time, there has been a deep-seated bias against vocational education in society, with many people regarding it as "inferior education," leading to the underestimation of vocational students' status in society. Due to the stereotypes perpetuated by public opinion, students often face unfair societal evaluations and discrimination, which profoundly impacts their self-identity and mental health. Particularly in the job market, some employers hold biases against vocational graduates, affecting their job opportunities and professional confidence. Secondly, internal factors within the educational system also significantly impact the self-identity of vocational students (Park et al., 2022). The curricula in some vocational colleges are not well-aligned with market demands, causing a disconnect between the skills and knowledge learned in school and actual job requirements. Moreover, some institutions lack comprehensive career planning and employment guidance, leaving students with unclear career directions after graduation. This "gap" between education and the market not only undermines vocational students' job confidence but also weakens their self-identity. Additionally, differences in school culture and educational philosophies can influence students' sense of belonging and self-confidence to varying degrees. If schools fail to provide effective psychological support and diverse growth opportunities, students may experience internal anxiety and frustration due to a lack of recognition. Personal psychological factors are also crucial internal variables influencing vocational students' self-identity. Factors such as family background, life experiences, and personality traits can profoundly impact self-identity. Some vocational students come from economically disadvantaged families, facing greater financial pressures and life burdens, which affect their psychological state (Ait-Bennacer et al., 2022). At the same time, individual personality traits also play a significant role in self-identity. Students with weaker self-awareness and lower resilience are more vulnerable to external negative influences, leading to a self-identity crisis. Feelings of inferiority, self-doubt, and other psychological issues make it difficult for them to actively cope with challenges in learning and life, further exacerbating their self-identity difficulties. In conclusion, the self-identity of vocational college students is influenced by multiple factors, including the social environment, educational systems, and personal psychological aspects. Improving this situation requires the concerted efforts of society, schools, and families to create a more inclusive and positive social atmosphere, optimize educational

models, and provide psychological support to help vocational students build a healthy sense of self-identity (Xiang, 2022).

3. Analysis of the Causes of the Self-Identity Crisis among Vocational College Students from the Perspective of Social Cognition

3.1 Overview of Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory, proposed by psychologist Albert Bandura, is a cognitive learning theory that emphasizes that an individual's behavior in social situations is the result of the interaction between personal, environmental, and behavioral factors. This theory asserts that human behavior is not solely determined by external stimuli or biological drives but by the interplay between personal cognition, social environment, and behavior. Individuals influence their attitudes and behaviors by observing others, receiving feedback, and self-regulating in specific situations. Core concepts of social cognitive theory include observational learning, self-efficacy, and attribution styles, which play crucial roles in shaping an individual's self-identity. Observational learning is a key component of social cognitive theory, referring to an individual's process of learning by observing others' behaviors and their consequences and then imitating these behaviors in appropriate contexts. In the self-identity process of vocational college students, they form their self-perception by observing societal attitudes towards vocational education, employers' evaluations of vocational graduates, and the expectations of peers and family members. If society holds negative views or discriminates against vocational education, students may internalize these negative external perceptions, further deepening their self-identity confusion and crisis. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to successfully complete a task or achieve a goal. According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy directly impacts how individuals respond to challenges. For vocational college students, their self-efficacy is influenced by societal evaluations of vocational institutions, educational resources provided by schools, and personal success experiences. If students lack self-efficacy during their studies and believe they will struggle to succeed in their future careers, they are more likely to develop self-doubt and negative emotions, which, in turn, hinder their self-identity development. Attribution style is the way individuals explain the causes of their successes or failures, which shapes their self-perception and behavior patterns. For vocational college students, negative societal attitudes towards vocational education may lead them to attribute their successes to external factors and their failures to their own inadequacies. This negative attribution style weakens their self-confidence and self-identity, causing them to experience a deeper crisis when facing societal expectations and career challenges. In summary, social cognitive theory offers a robust framework for understanding the causes of self-identity crises among vocational college students. By analyzing the interactions between individuals, their environment, and behaviors, it is possible to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the self-identity challenges faced by vocational students, thereby providing a theoretical basis for developing effective intervention strategies (Liang & Zuo, 2022).

3.2 Analysis of the Social Cognitive Pathway of the Self-Identity Crisis among Vocational College Students

The self-identity crisis of vocational college students can be thoroughly analyzed through the social cognitive pathway, involving the conflict between social expectations and self-perception, as well as the interplay between external social pressures and internal psychological states. From a social cognitive perspective, an individual's behavior, emotions, and attitudes are influenced by the combined effects of external environment and self-cognition, which means that the self-identity crisis of vocational students is often gradually formed in complex social contexts. First, the conflict between social expectations and self-perception is a major source of self-identity crises among vocational college students. In traditional social cognitive frameworks, societal biases against vocational education often place vocational students in a disadvantaged position. Society tends to regard undergraduate education as the ideal and mainstream educational path, while relegating vocational education to a secondary or "last resort" option (Guo et al., 2021). In such an environment, vocational students easily internalize negative societal evaluations of their educational background as self-denial of their abilities and value, leading them to exhibit behaviors such as low self-esteem, self-isolation, and withdrawal in social interactions. Prolonged exposure to such psychological pressure causes students to doubt their career prospects and future development, further deepening their self-identity crisis. Second, social cognitive theory emphasizes the bidirectional interaction between the environment and the individual. External societal evaluations and negative labels within the environment not only affect vocational students' self-identity but also reinforce these perceptions through a "labeling effect." For example, when vocational students face discrimination from employers during job searches or encounter unequal treatment when competing with university graduates, these experiences heighten their sense of frustration and self-doubt. The contradiction between society's "low expectations" for vocational graduates and the students' own "high expectations" forms the root of their identity crisis, creating significant psychological stress and pressure. Furthermore, the social cognitive pathway highlights the impact of observational learning and role models on individuals. Vocational students, in their social interactions, observe the attitudes and behaviors of peers, predecessors, or media towards the vocational group. If they see fewer successful examples and more instances of failure or setbacks, they may lose confidence in their future development. The long-term influence of negative role models can lead vocational students to attribute failures to unchangeable personal disadvantages, reinforcing self-doubt and helplessness. This attribution style subconsciously weakens their self-efficacy, deepening their self-identity crisis. In conclusion, the analysis of the social cognitive pathway of the self-identity crisis among vocational college students emphasizes the complex interaction between social expectations, self-perception, and the external environment. The formation of this crisis is closely related to societal perceptions of vocational education, the social context individuals find themselves in, and their own psychological state. To alleviate this issue, coordinated

efforts at the societal, school, and individual levels are required to create a more positive and inclusive environment for identity formation (Guo et al., 2021).

4. Research on Strategies to Address the Self-Identity Crisis among Vocational College Students

4.1 Social Support and Intervention Measures

Effectively addressing the self-identity crisis among vocational college students requires strong social support and intervention measures. First, public opinion needs to shift away from ingrained biases against vocational education. The media and the public should focus more on and actively promote the significant role of vocational education in national economic development, highlighting the contributions of vocational graduates in areas such as technological innovation and grassroots services. Through reports on exemplary cases and the showcasing of successful experiences, a positive image of vocational education can be shaped, thereby enhancing the social recognition and pride of vocational students. Positive public opinion guidance helps eliminate negative labels placed on vocational students, creating a fairer and more respectful social environment for them. Second, enterprises and employers should assume greater social responsibility by offering more career development opportunities and a fairer employment environment for vocational students. Specifically, measures such as establishing special recruitment plans for vocational graduates and providing internships and practical opportunities can enhance students' professional confidence and skills. At the same time, companies should be encouraged to collaborate with vocational colleges, participating in the design of vocational courses, training, and skill development to bridge the gap between education and market demands (Le, 2023). By fostering such a collaborative mechanism, students' employability and professional identity can be improved. Moreover, government support is needed at the policy level. Policies and regulations supporting vocational education, increased funding, and resource guarantees for vocational institutions can create a more favorable environment for vocational education. For example, governments can implement skill enhancement plans, sponsor outstanding vocational students to engage in international exchanges and skill competitions, and thus elevate the overall societal standing of vocational education. Additionally, social organizations and non-governmental organizations can participate in providing psychological support for vocational students through professional counseling and guidance services. By building a comprehensive social support network, students can receive care and support from multiple channels, boosting their self-confidence and sense of belonging. In summary, social support and intervention measures should focus on public opinion guidance, corporate collaboration, and government policies, working together to create a positive and supportive social environment for vocational students. Only through the collective efforts of society can vocational students' self-identity crises be truly alleviated, promoting their mental health and career development (Franzò et al., 2023).

4.2 Targeted Measures by Educational Institutions

To address the self-identity crisis among vocational students, educational institutions must take on a crucial role by implementing targeted measures. First, vocational colleges need to comprehensively optimize their curriculum to better align with market demands. Currently, many vocational institutions have curricula that are disconnected from actual job requirements, leading to difficulties for students in adapting to the workforce after graduation. Therefore, schools should actively collaborate with industries and companies to jointly design courses that meet real job demands, emphasizing the integration of theory and practice and cultivating students' practical skills and comprehensive abilities. By establishing highly practical teaching modules and school-enterprise cooperation projects, students can gain real work experience during their studies, boosting their professional confidence and sense of identity. Second, establishing a systematic career planning and guidance mechanism is an urgent area for improvement for vocational colleges. Many vocational students lack clear career directions and development plans during their studies, affecting their self-identity. Schools should strengthen career planning education, providing comprehensive career guidance services from the time students enroll, including career planning courses, employment counseling, and workplace skills training. By regularly holding career lectures and inviting entrepreneurs and successful alumni to share their experiences, students can better understand career paths and clarify their career goals. Additionally, internships and campus job fairs can serve as bridges connecting students with employers, enhancing their workplace adaptability and job-seeking confidence. Furthermore, educational institutions should prioritize mental health education to help students build a positive self-identity. Vocational students often face numerous challenges in their studies and lives, potentially leading to anxiety, inferiority, and other psychological issues. Schools should establish professional counseling and support centers to provide psychological support and counseling services, helping students cope with academic pressures and self-identity crises. Organizing mental health seminars, team activities, and counseling courses can strengthen students' psychological resilience and coping skills. Teachers should also offer care and guidance in their daily interactions with students, fostering positive teacher-student interactions to build students' confidence and sense of recognition and acceptance. Finally, school culture plays a vital role in students' self-identity development. Vocational colleges should strive to create a positive and inclusive campus atmosphere, encouraging students to actively participate in campus activities and student organizations to enhance their sense of belonging and identity. By showcasing their talents through diverse cultural activities and skills competitions, students can experience a sense of achievement and self-worth. Ensuring that every student finds a place and value within the campus community is a powerful approach to alleviating self-identity crises. In conclusion, vocational educational institutions need to take multiple measures in curriculum optimization, career planning, psychological support, and campus culture development to provide comprehensive and systematic growth support for students, helping them build a positive and healthy self-identity and paving the way for broader future development.

5. Future Research Directions

Future research can be approached from multiple directions to further explore and address the self-identity crisis among vocational college students. Firstly, broader empirical studies could be conducted to collect and analyze data from vocational students of different regions and backgrounds, examining how factors such as social environment, school culture, and family background specifically impact self-identity. By using empirical data, it would be possible to more accurately identify the causes of the self-identity crisis and key intervention points, thereby developing more targeted countermeasures. Secondly, there should be a focus on multi-dimensional intervention methods and the evaluation of their specific effects. Since different students exhibit varying self-identity issues and needs, future studies could design and test diverse intervention measures, such as psychological counseling programs, vocational skill training plans, and social integration activities. Evaluating their actual impact on students' psychological states, career confidence, and self-identity through ongoing monitoring and assessment will help verify and refine the effectiveness of different strategies. Additionally, research could deepen comparative studies from a social cognition perspective, especially comparing vocational students with students at other educational levels. Analyzing differences in self-identity between vocational students and groups such as traditional university students or technical school students would help reveal the unique characteristics of vocational education and its challenges and advantages in social recognition, providing a scientific basis for policymaking and educational reform. Lastly, as the socio-economic environment continues to evolve, vocational education and the student population will also undergo changes. Future research should pay attention to emerging societal trends and policy shifts, such as the impact of digital education, industrial upgrades on vocational education, and changes in societal demand for technically skilled talent. By analyzing how these factors affect vocational students' self-identity and psychological states in connection with socio-economic development trends, better support and guidance tailored to the times can be provided, helping students integrate more effectively into society and realize their self-worth.

6. Conclusion

The self-identity crisis among vocational college students is a pressing issue in contemporary vocational education, rooted in societal biases against vocational education, deficiencies within the educational system, and complex interactions with personal psychological factors. Through a social cognition perspective, we can gain a clearer understanding of the multifaceted causes of this issue and its profound impact on students' growth and career development. This paper proposes multiple strategies to reshape vocational students' self-identity, ranging from social-level support and interventions to targeted measures by educational institutions. Specifically, active public opinion guidance, open-minded attitudes from enterprises and employers, supportive government policies, and educational institutions' curriculum optimization and psychological support are essential. Creating an

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inclusive, supportive social and campus environment can help vocational students rebuild their sense of self-identity, enhance self-efficacy, and achieve mental health and career development goals. Achieving this also requires sustained cooperation among society, schools, and families to provide a robust support platform for the growth of vocational students. Future research should further incorporate practical case studies and broader social contexts to offer more solutions to the self-identity crisis of vocational students. With ongoing attention and effort, there is reason to believe that vocational students can find their place in society, fully realize their value, and contribute more to economic and social development.

Acknowledgements

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