

Exploration of the value of a positive psychology perspective for developing resilience in academic underachievement students in secondary school

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Abstract. Studies have shown that academic underachievement students in secondary school have lower levels of resilience and more problems. Positive psychology theory has been applied in different aspects of mental health education, academic underachievement students, and resilience in different groups of secondary school students, and it has implications for the study of resilience of academic underachievement students in secondary school. Therefore, this study starts from three major research areas of positive psychology, which mainly including positive emotional cognition, positive personality, and positive organizational systems. It also provides specific suggestions for the development of resilience in secondary school students in response to the current situation.

Keywords: Positive Psychology; academic underachievement students in secondary school; Resilience.

1. Introduction

In the 1970s, the concept of resilience was introduced. Since then, resilience has received extensive attention from researchers at both domestic and international levels. In China, the General Office of the Ministry of Education's Notice on Strengthening the Management of Students' Mental Health points out that attention should be paid to improving secondary school students' mental health literacy and putting mental health work into practice. According to available studies, secondary school students have a high level of resilience and a good overall condition. However, academic underachievement students in secondary schools show a lack of motivation to learn, worrying mental health, and abnormal behavior[1]. Such low resilience will make students give up their growth, increase the difficulty of school education and teaching, intensify family conflicts, and increase the chance of social problems such as Internet addiction, school dropout, and even suicide[2]. Therefore, this study provides multiple values for educational practice based on existing positive psychology research and offers new ideas for developing resilience in academic underachievement students in secondary school[3].

2. Overview of the resilience of academic underachievement students in secondary school

Resilience, also known as psychological resilience, resilience, pressure bombing. No uniform conclusion has been reached in the scholarly domain regarding the definition of the concept of resilience. A summary of the previous literature reveals that there are three main definitions: outcome, process, and quality definitions. Outcome definitions focus on resilience in terms of the outcome of the event, which means that after the threat occurs, the individual does not show severe frustration and still shows good resilience. The process definition defines resilience in terms of the process of the event, in which the individual does not exhibit severe frustration throughout the process of the threat and instead demonstrates dynamic resilience in the process of adjustment. Qualitative definitions focus on resilience in terms of the individual itself, that is, the individual has the quality of being resistant to serious threats and is able to show good resilience in the face of serious threats.^[4] Combining these three definitions, we can easily find that all three definitions of the concept of resilience share two characteristics: first, the need to experience a serious blow; and second, the need

to develop well after experiencing a blow. Hence, we can define resilience as the development of individuals who have experienced or are experiencing severe adversity, but whose minds and bodies have not been damaged by the adverse situation or are even stronger than ever.^[5]

Summarizing the existing research studies on resilience of secondary school students, it was found that the resilience of secondary school students was generally in the middle to upper level, with a high level of resilience and a good overall state. This indicates that most secondary school students are able to face adversities in life, such as difficulties and setbacks, with a more positive mindset. Highly resilient secondary school students actively seek solutions to their problems, are not defeated by adversity, and are even better able to adapt to the rest of their lives. However, there are a few secondary school students with below-average resilience, and this group of students should be of concern to us. In previous cluster analysis studies of resilience, those with average levels of resilience were the highest percentage, followed by those with high levels of resilience, and those with low levels of resilience were the lowest.^[6] The clustering analysis also shows that the majority of those with average resilience and those with high resilience are in the majority, which indicates that the vast majority of secondary school students have a good level of resilience and are in good shape overall. However, due to the population base, although the proportion of low resilient individuals is the lowest, the total number of resilient individuals cannot be ignored.

Most of the studies have been conducted to study resilience in terms of variables such as gender, grade, ethnicity, place of origin, being an only child or not, whether they are boarding at school or not, and whether they are left behind. Due to the specificity of the secondary school student population, the different measurement scales used, and regional differences, different studies on the same variable may yield different or even opposite results. For example, for the variable of gender, the findings of Bai (2017), Zhang (2016) & Zhang (2010) show that there is no significant difference in resilience in terms of gender ^{[6][7][8]}; Yang (2015) found higher levels of resilience in girls than in boys ^[9]; Xu (2015) reported higher levels of resilience in boys than in girls ^[10]. Although different studies have yielded different results due to various factors, there are still commonalities among the studies that are worthy of attention. For example, there were significant gender differences in specific dimensions of resilience, with girls scoring significantly higher in interpersonal assistance than boys.

In conclusion, there are significant gender differences in the high number of students with low resilience among secondary school students. All of these need to be focused on interventions.

Students who are academic underachievement are those who are intellectually normal and receive a normal education, but have poor learning outcomes. That is, students whose academic performance does not reach the target level of instruction or is significantly below average. ^[11] According to existing studies, students with academic underachievement in secondary schools have significant differences in their ideological understanding, behavioral habits, and attitudes toward learning and life compared with other students. In terms of ideological understanding, they generally have unclear motivation, low interest in learning, lack of initiative, and low self-expectations, and some of them have long regarded learning as their parents' business. In terms of behavioral habits, the vast majority of them have poor staying power, poor concentration, and cannot control desertion; they are used to procrastination and poor completion quality, and even do not complete their study tasks; most of them are sensitive to internal family problems. In terms of attitude toward learning and life, they lack self-confidence due to academic failure and always hold the idea of "breaking the pot"; they lack love, motivation, and gratitude, and do not actively participate in collective activities^[12].

At the same time, the mental health problems of academic underachievement students in secondary school are also more prominent. They exhibit a variety of undesirable psychologies that also require our focused attention. Due to the pressure from teachers, parents and peers, they generally have no self-confidence and are prone to inferiority complex; they also have a strong rebellious mentality because they are criticized and blamed by teachers at school and parents at home for their poor performance. Because of their poor performance, they are more often criticized and reprimanded by teachers at school and not understood and reprimanded by parents at home, and their incorrect treatment makes them have a strong rebellious mentality; they also have an aversion mentality, and

students do not do well in their main study tasks, plus the pressure from school, family and society makes students with poor academic performance have no sense of security and value at school, so they easily develop an aversion mentality.[13]

Compared to other groups, research related to the resilience of the group of secondary school academic underachievement students is severely underrepresented, and the only relevant literature available so far has mainly explored it from the entry point of causal analysis and correlational studies. One of the studies by Han(2014) pointed out that the resilience of secondary school academic underachievement students is low, their internal and external protective factors are weak, and they face a series of academic and consequent chain problems, and the resilience status of academic underachievement students' needs attention.[11]

3. The value of positive psychology for improving the resilience of academic underachievement students in secondary school

Positive psychology, which emerged at the end of the 20th century, is a field of study that focuses on positive emotional experiences, positive personality, and positive social organizational systems. Positive psychology is a trend in psychology that uses experimental methods and measurements that are now well established and effective in psychology to study positive aspects of human strengths and virtues.^[14] Positive psychology is a transcendence of the negative research paradigm of psychology, the essence of which lies in the emphasis on the inherent positive elements of human beings themselves, the value and humanistic concern of human beings themselves, and advocates the study of human potential and virtues with the goal of helping all people to achieve happiness. ^[15] Kennon M. Sheldon's definition, "Positive psychology is a science devoted to the study of positive qualities such as human developmental potential and virtue," speaks to the essential characteristics of positive psychology.

The application of positive psychology in the secondary school student population is more in the area of mental health education. Zhao(2008) emphasized the important value of positive psychology for secondary school students' mental health issues, arguing that positive psychology better reflects the objective requirements of secondary school students' physical and mental development than pathological psychology. In order to improve students' mental health, this study advocates combining the features of positive psychology to consider everything in the school as available resources and to build a systemic network with students as the center, school as the main body, and family, community, and society as participants.^[16] Lu (2018) emphasized that the mental health classroom for secondary school students should be guided by positive psychology theory. The classroom should aim at the development of students' positive personalities and guide them to make positive interpretations of the events that occur as a way to enhance their positive experiences and improve their mental health. This study applied the theory of positive psychology at three levels: constructing positive personal experiences at the subjective level, forming individual positive personalities at the individual level, and building positive organizational systems at the collective level.^[17]

Although studies have explored the application of positive psychology to groups of secondary school students, there is still a large research gap in studies with academic underachievement students as a group. The only article on the application of positive psychology in the group of academic underachievement students is Tan(2009), which mobilizes all available positive factors in the transformation of academic underachievement students and proposes a combination of self-adjustment and external education strategies by experiencing positive emotions, cultivating positive cognition, improving self-efficacy, and building positive personality, focusing on the positive aspects of students. The aim is to promote the transformation of academic underachievement students through a combination of self-adjustment and external education strategies by experiencing positive emotions, developing positive cognitions, improving self-efficacy, and building a positive personality. ^[18]

As for the influence of positive psychology on resilience, it is reflected in the later stages of resilience research, when resilience began to fit with positive psychology and the focus gradually

shifted from psychological problems to the positive aspects of human nature. According to Liu (2010), at this stage researchers began to define resilience from the perspective of psychological potential, which is the inherent psychological potential of individuals to mobilize all protective resources in pursuit of good development in frustrating situations. In terms of ways to promote the realization of resilience potential, researchers point out that it is feasible and effective to work on three levels: developing positive resilience traits and establishing good family and external environmental support systems.^[19]

4. Developmental paths of resilience in students with academic underachievement in secondary schools from a positive psychology perspective

This study draws on three major areas of research in positive psychology and their related theories as a means of improving the development of resilience in academically disadvantaged students in secondary schools. In particular, the increase of individuals' own positive experiences promotes the formation of positive personality, which in turn leads to more opportunities for positive experiences, and in this process, the external social organizational system is not only a supportive force for constructing positive personality, but also the most direct source of continuous positive experiences for individuals.

4.1 Conduct activities and give evaluations to increase positive emotional experiences

Positive experience is a state of mind in which individuals recall the past with satisfaction, are happy and feel the present with ease and hope for the future.^[20] Positive experiences are beneficial for academic underachievement students to increase subjective well-being, develop positive strengths and positive qualities, enhance protective factors of resilience, and better confront the past, present, and future. Positive experiences draw on the resilience of academic underachievement students in secondary schools at three main levels: collective, individual, and subjective.

At the group level, schools should actively organize a variety of experiential activities to enhance students' real-life experiences in specific activities. For example, students can be led to recall their past successes and identify their talents in the context of their achievements, so that academic underachievement students can discover their strengths beyond their academic performance and link them to their learning as a positive factor in overcoming their learning difficulties. At the individual level, each educator should guide academic underachievement students to actively participate in various experiences as much as possible, while at the same time providing affirmative comments at various levels in an appropriate manner. Adolescent high school students are very sensitive to the judgment of others, and academic underachievement students exhibit significant low self-esteem and rebellion. Educators can change the original evaluation model by allowing students with low academic achievement to experience their own strengths in the other four aspects of education besides intellectual education; in the evaluation method, in addition to positive evaluation by teachers, they can lead students to evaluate each other and self-evaluate more often, so that academic underachievement students can see their peers' recognition of themselves, build up self-confidence and overcome low self-esteem, and experience the feeling of being affirmed. In the assessment process, provide more opportunities for academic underachievement students to participate and express themselves, so that they can experience the joy of success. At the subjective level, educators should focus on guiding academic underachievement students to summarize their personal success experiences after the activities, record their positive feelings about participating in the activities, and change their self-evaluation after the activities to enhance the subjective feelings of each individual. At the group level, schools should actively organize a variety of experiential activities to enhance students' real-life experiences in specific activities. For example, students can be led to recall their past successes and identify their talents in the context of their achievements, so that academic underachievement students can discover their strengths beyond their academic performance and link

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4.2 Changing perceptions and deepening practices to develop a positive personality

As one of the core concepts of positive psychology, positive personality refers to an individual's style of consistently making positive interpretations of events.^[21] To better enhance the resilience of academic underachievement students in secondary schools, suggestions are provided based on the above theory at the collective, individual, and subjective levels.

At the group level, the most effective way is to provide classroom instruction on positive personality so that academic underachievement students can learn the concepts at an intellectual level. This can be complemented by professional group counseling activities, such as discussions, quality development, and imagining adversity, which allow students to learn how to deal with adversity and develop positively in their academic life. Classroom instruction and group counseling work together to stimulate the positive qualities of academic underachievement students, both cognitively and operationally, and to guide them to develop a positive personality and strengthen their resilience. At the individual level, individual students who are academic underachievement should work on

cognitive attributions. According to Selingerman, the direct factor in personality formation is not the external event itself, but the perception of the event. [22] Therefore, academic underachievement students should correctly recognize their previous low self-evaluation under the sunglasses effect or binoculars effect, learn to correctly attribute problematic setbacks in academic life, make positive self-evaluations, and enhance the protective factor of resilience from within. At the subjective level, academic underachievement students are required to internalize external resources into subjective experiences. Positive psychology uses the enhancement of the individual's subjective experience as the main way to enhance positive personality.[23] The reason why different forms of activities such as resilience classroom instruction, related group counseling activities, and positive cognitive attribution are held is to allow academic underachievement students to experience different positive experiences, have a deeper sense of positivity, and internalize positivity as part of their personality.

4.3 Bridging among multiple environments to build an active social organization system

Active social organization system is mainly divided into three levels, the first level is the macro level, which means active social organization system, involving a wide range of contents, such as the system of the state, policies, etc.; the second level is the meso level, which means active unit or community organization system, involving the individual's life intercourse circle, such as work unit system, living community system, school system, etc.; the third level is the micro level, which means active family organizational system, which involves the core life circle of individuals.[22] The resilience development pathway of active social organizing systems for students with academic underachievement in secondary school unfolds at three levels of its composition.

At the macro level, the state can create a favorable social climate for academic underachievement students in terms of institutions and guidelines and policies. For secondary schools, the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) system has always been the center of school management and the guarantee of learning center status, so the state's adjustment at the SSPA system level will provide more possibilities for the group of academic underachievement students. At the same time, the state's support for other aspects of schooling besides intellectual education can also provide a more relaxed learning environment for academic underachievement students. At the meso level, support from schools and communities is essential. Schools and communities can provide a positive learning environment and climate for academic underachievement students, activities to feel positive experiences, understanding and companionable friends, and caring and affirming teachers and community members. At the micro level, families will play a critical role. Parents should learn to communicate with their underachieving children and become their friends; secondly, they should have a more rational understanding of education, respect the different characteristics of different children, and see learning as a way for students to grow and change; and finally, they should create a family atmosphere in which not overemphasizing academic achievement provides more security for underachievement students. Lastly, the creation of a family atmosphere that does not overemphasize academic achievement will provide more security for academic underachievement students.

5. Conclusion

Positive psychology draws on the resilience development of academic underachievement students in secondary schools in three main areas of study: positive emotional experiences, positive personality, and positive organizational systems, each of which is discussed specifically in terms of collective, individual, and subjective or macro, meso, and micro dimensions, in the hope of suggesting specific ways to draw on multiple dimensions of the same domain. This study examines the psychological developmental characteristics of students who are academically underachieving in secondary school and explores them specifically from the perspective of positive psychology. The study makes three specific recommendations: develop activities and give evaluations to increase positive emotional experiences; change cognition and deepen practice to develop positive personality; and build bridges between multiple settings to construct positive social organization systems. However, current

research on the resilience of students with academic underachievement in secondary school is very insufficient, and it is expected that increased attention to this aspect of this group in the future will provide more possibilities for development.

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