

Review on Self-Esteem of Vocational College Students

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Abstract

Academic stratification classified students into two tracks, academic college and vocational college. The students in vocational college are considered with “stigma” like less industrious or competent. Would this affect their self-esteem? This review focuses on factors affecting self-esteem in vocational colleges and how self-esteem affects academic achievements and life satisfaction.

Keywords: Vocational college students, Self-esteem, literature review

Introduction

Adolescence is an extraordinary key period for forming self-awareness and self-concept. Among many concepts of self, the formation of self-esteem frequently affects teenagers both physiologically and psychologically, as well as their interpersonal relationships. A person with high self-esteem shows confidence and self-respect, strong ambition of achievement, greater endeavor for conquering the difficulties, good physiological and psychological condition, harmonious interpersonal relationship, optimistic and positive life outlook. What’s more, they are perceiving the meaning of life positively and never become easily frustrated and disappointed [1]. Meanwhile, there are more important choices to be made during adolescence than any other time in the whole lifetime, and the transition from junior and senior high schools to colleges and universities (academic track) or to vocational schools (vocational track) is the key life transition for adolescents, which makes them accept lots of challenge, confront more pressure and develop more stable self-esteem and subjective happiness. The level of individuals’ self-esteem during the transition will affect their physical and mental status and interpersonal relationship.

Modern society’s emphasis on education makes people tend to evaluate one’s value based on academic accomplishment. Many studies have explored the impact of academic stratification on students’ development. In fact, both in China and in the West, academic stratification will determine whether the students enter into colleges or into vocational track. It is often the case that the students with low academic ability or assigned to vocational track are given invisible “stigma” [2] 1982, that is, the society tends to consider them as less industrious or competent. Owing to this negative feedback from the public, students in vocational colleges gradually develop a low level of self-esteem. There are plenty of studies researching on self-esteem level of students in senior high schools and universities. However, less attention is paid to the self-esteem level of the group in vocational schools. This paper attempts to review studies focusing on self-esteem status of vocational college students, the factors affecting their self-esteem and the effects of positive self-esteem on students’ development in vocational colleges.

Studies Focusing on Self-esteem Status of Students in Vocational Colleges

In European education system, teenagers will face the important development choices between academic track and vocational track when they graduate from secondary school. Usually students with lower academic achievement tend to turn to vocational track [3] for further development. In some European countries or areas, they offer both academic and vocational training based on students’ academic grouping in the same secondary school. Yet in some other areas, they set up senior high schools and vocational schools to train students separately. Some studies focus on the effects of academic ability grouping on students’ self-esteem. The study of Van

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Houtte and his colleagues shows [4] that the combination of academic and vocational track training within the same school would have a greater impact on the development of students' self-esteem than the training in separate schools. That's because there are 3 sources of self-esteem: social comparison, other people's evaluation and self-attribution [5]. In the same school, students in vocational track usually compare themselves with the students in academic track, which make them feel upset and deprived, thereby decreasing their academic dedication. However, in separate schools, for instance, students in vocational schools don't have to compare them with the students who get better academic performance. Therefore, their self-esteem is not threatened and their efforts in academic pursuit and vocational training are not reduced.

Belgian scholars Houtte, Demanet and Stevens [6] did a study on the self-esteem level of students in vocational and academic track schools, and discussed the impact of intra-school and inter-school grouping on students' self-esteem. They distributed questionnaires to 5910 students from 85 schools in Belgium. The schools are divided into two categories: ordinary secondary schools (vocational track and academic track students within the same school), and vocational secondary schools (only vocational track students). The students are also divided into two groups: academic track students, and vocational track students. Rosenberg self-esteem scale was used to assess the self-esteem level of students. The results showed that the self-esteem of academic track students was significantly higher than that of the vocational track students, and the students' self-esteem level could still significantly predict the academic track the students entered into when the gender, age, economic status and parental support were controlled. There was no significant correlation between school types and students' self-esteem, but the impact of academic track on self-esteem is modulated by school types. In intra-school grouping ordinary schools, there existed a big difference in self-esteem between academic track and vocational track students, while in inter-school grouping schools, the differences between academic track and professional track students were relatively small.

The significance of this study is to verify that academic achievement has an important impact on the level of self-esteem of students. Furthermore it points out that the intra-school grouping might have larger influence on the self-esteem of students with different academic levels. In addition, the study also reveals that the school type does not affect the level of students' self-esteem, that is, the identity of students in vocational schools does not reduce their self-esteem. The author analyzes the reason why the "stigma" of vocational track students doesn't lower their self-esteem. In fact, students in vocational schools tend to adopt other strategies to protect their self-esteem, such as devaluing the significance of academic achievement, emphasizing the value of vocational skills, being actively involved into the community services, strengthening professional skills.

In China, the social recognition of vocational education is still insufficient. Many students are unwilling to enter vocational schools, and those who have already entered into vocational colleges are mostly unwilling to make that choice because their scores do not meet the admission requirements of ordinary colleges.

Xiao Lijuan's [7] study shows that the average self-esteem

score of college students' is 35.55, and low self-esteem students' accounts for 9.7% of the total number. By comparison, Zhao Yan [8] did a survey in Jiangsu vocational school and the results showed that the overall self-esteem level of vocational school students was (29.63 +? 4.08), and the number of low self-esteem students accounted for 13.3% of the total number. It shows that vocational students have lower self-esteem than ordinary school students. Yin Ling [9] conducted a survey on the self-esteem level of 399 students in a vocational school and an ordinary high school in Yangzhou City. The results showed that the level of self-esteem of vocational students was significantly lower than that of high school students. However, Wang Ling [10] and other researcher's survey on the self-esteem of vocational school students indicated that most vocational students can affirm their own values and their own strength. They refuse to admit that they are life losers. And have confidence in what they are learning and doing As a result, their self-esteem level would be maintained and even promoted. The author further pointed out that "although they enter into vocational schools due to unsatisfactory academic performance, they would not adopt the negative attitude of "letting them falling behind and becoming a loser". Most students could achieve self-satisfaction through their own efforts

In general, the results of research on the vocational school students' self-esteem level are not consistent. Some studies suggest that the level of self-esteem of vocational school students is generally low. Some studies believe that entering vocational schools does not reduce the level of students' self-esteem. The inconsistency of these findings can be attributed to the differences in research participants. As vocational students in different culture, institution, region and professional fields can face different evaluations of others and social comparisons, this feedback will tend to be reflected in students' self-evaluation. Therefore, studies in different settings, with different research participants, may yield inconsistent results..

Factors Affecting the Level of Students' Self-esteem in Vocational Colleges

Self-esteem is the basic component of personality. Just like the factors affecting personality, the factors affecting the development of self-esteem of vocational college students include personal traits, family factors and social factors.

First of all, vocational college students, as adolescents, are not quite clear about their self-concept, not appropriate in their self-evaluation, or even holding wrong belief about themselves. In this period of time, important factors affecting overall self-esteem include physical image as well as academic achievements. Especially for vocational school students, their self-evaluation in academic self-esteem is not high. Therefore, they may attribute more importance to physical appearance to enhance overall self-esteem. As a result, vocational students' incorrect judgment of their physical appearance will affect their self-esteem level. A study on the relationship between physical image perception and self-esteem level of students in vocational colleges [11] shows that 58.6% of girl students are not sure about the fitness of their body image, and there is a significant difference in their perception of self-image and actual body image. The rapid maturity of the body will inevitably cause the students to pay more attention to and care about their body images, which will lead to confusion in their self-evaluation and a decline in the level of self-esteem.

Secondly, the family is closely related to an individual's socialization. And the parents are the earliest educators of their children. What kind of attitudes and methods parents adopt to raise and treat their children can easily affect their children's understanding and attitude towards themselves, hence affecting their children's self-esteem.

Zhao Yan and Yao Caiqin [12] studied the relationship between self-esteem level and the family parenting style of 393 students in two vocational schools in Jiangsu. It was found that the students group with higher self-esteem felt more emotional warmth, but less severe punishment, refusal and denial from their parents than the low self-esteem group. As can be indicated in the study, the emotional warmth of parents has a significant positive impact on the self-esteem of vocational students, and the harsh punishment of parents and the refusal and denial are not conducive to children's positive self-evaluation. Compared with mother, the father's positive evaluation and communication with the child is more conducive to the formation and development of the child's self-esteem.

Moreover, the recognition and expectations of the society for vocational school students also affect their level of self-esteem. A research report on the self-esteem level of 700 vocational college students in Zhejiang and Sichuan [13] showed that the self-esteem scores of vocational students are significantly positively correlated with the scores of social support, and the highest correlation was found between self-esteem level and social support utilization. Tang Xiaolin's survey [14] of a vocational and technical college in Liaoning also found that non-single children scored higher on social support scores than single child. Again, students' high self-esteem is significantly positively correlated with the scores of subjective support, objective support, and support utilization. A review of the above related studies indicates that the self-esteem of higher vocational students comes from the social support of others. Appreciation, respect and encouragement are the key factors facilitating the development of self-esteem. More social support should be given to students, which is an important way to improve the level of self-esteem of vocational students.

The Influence of Self-esteem Level on Students' Personal Development in Vocational Colleges

The effect of self-esteem on physical and mental health

Self-esteem is the core of mental health and has a close relationship with mental health. Self-esteem is negatively correlated with depression, anxiety and other negative emotions [15,16]. Explicit self-esteem has a positive impact on mental health. Individuals with higher self-esteem can help them better adjust their behavior and mood, and reduce the risk of neurosis and psychosis and other reactions after setback.

Gurhan et al. [1] investigated the relationship between self-esteem and physical and mental condition of 237 students in Gazi University Health Vocational School in Turkey. These students are from a variety of medical specialties, including medical examination, medical imaging, environmental hygiene, medicine and geriatric nursing. The Cooper smith Self-esteem Inventory (CSEI) was used to measure self-esteem. The Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) was used to measure their physical and mental condition. The self-designed personal information questionnaire was used to examine the socioeconomic status

of students. To be more specific, BSI [17] is a self-report scale with 53 items and 9 dimensions (somatic, forced, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, antisocial, fear anxiety, delusion, and neurosis). The Cooper smith [18] Self-Esteem Scale consists of 25 entries with a score range of 0-100 points, a score of 10-30 categorized as having low self-esteem level, 31-70 as medium self-esteem levels, and 71-100 as high self-esteem level. The survey results showed that 55.1% of vocational health school students had high self-esteem. The correlation analysis between self-esteem and physical and mental health indicated that the somatic scores of high self-esteem individuals were significantly lower than those of the low- and medium self-esteem individuals. In addition, high self-esteem individuals were shown to have significantly lower scores than low- and medium self-esteem individuals on obsessive-compulsive symptoms depressive symptoms anxiety symptoms as well as delusional symptoms.

A study carried out in Southwest University of China found the self-esteem and mental health of students in western vocational colleges was generally at a medium level, and there was no statistically significant difference in the scores of self-esteem between different genders, grades, single or non-single children. High self-esteem individuals scored higher on self-affirmation, mental health, but scored lower on anxiety than low self-esteem individuals. What's more, depression, self-affirmation and mental health had predictive effects on self-esteem. This study suggests that a high level of self-esteem is beneficial for physical and mental health, while physical and mental health could in turn foster higher level of self-esteem.

The impact of self-esteem on academic achievement

Chinese scholar Zhou Ruoyu's [19] research took five-year students from Geotechnical colleges in Yunnan Province as the research subjects. Questionnaire and Go/No-go association task were employed to investigate the influence of explicit self-esteem and implicit self-esteem on academic achievement of vocational students. The results revealed that implicit self-esteem could significantly predict academic performance, but the prediction effect of explicit self-esteem was not significant. The level of implicit self-esteem affects the academic performance of five-year vocational school students. Yin Ling [20] survey of a vocational college in Yangzhou also found the similar results the self-esteem level of vocational students with higher academic performance was significantly higher than the self-esteem level of the students with moderate academic performance. Likewise, academically moderate students showed higher level of self-esteem compared with those students who were weak in academic performance. Moreover, the self-esteem level is significantly and positively correlated with the score of life satisfaction.

The effect of self-esteem on life satisfaction

Salmela-Aro and Tuominen-Soin [21] conducted a survey on the psychological status of students entering vocational schools in Finland before and after enrollment. The survey was divided into four sessions, two sessions carried out in the semester previous to the enrollment into vocational school, and the other two sessions conducted in the first and second year after enrollment. It was found that the self-esteem and academic achievement of vocational school students significantly predicted the student's life satisfaction. Individuals with high self-esteem will experience an increase in happiness before and

after enrollment. The result suggests that when students entering vocational schools make smooth transitions from their junior schools to vocational schools, or they enter into the right track suitable to their academic achievements, their self-esteem will not be threatened, and will naturally enhance their happiness in life. Litalien, Ludtke, and Parker [22] also made a survey on 149 junior high school students in Germany. It was found that the self-goal setting of students before entering vocational schools can positively predict the level of life satisfaction and self-esteem after vocational school enrollment. The result is consistent with Self-Determination Theory, which posits that the goals set by students themselves could have a great impact on the level of self-esteem, and subsequently enhance the life satisfaction of students.

Conclusion

As attending vocational college is an important period of life development for students, high level of self-esteem will help students facilitate their academic performance, improve their physical and mental health, and enhance their subjective well-being. This requires the society, the school, and the family to jointly assume their responsibilities and cooperate with each other to give more care to the vocational school students, and to create a good internal and external environment for new generation of vocational college students [23]. In order to achieve this, the school should first change the students and parents' wrong conception that "score is the most important" and "the whole life success is dependent on college entrance examination results". Students should be also given the confidence that mastery of vocational skills is also an important way to stand out in today's highly competitive society. At the same time, schools should provide mental health education program and career planning and employment guidance for students [24]. Hopefully through the study and training in vocational schools, the students could grow up to be highly qualified employees with professional expertise. Secondly, the attitude of the family to the students is also very important. Parents' tolerance and understanding of their children is undoubtedly strong backup for students to maintain self-confidence and equal participation in social competition. Furthermore, the society should give more recognition and credit to vocational students, acknowledging their contribution to society. When vocational students realize that they are respected and accepted by the society, they can greatly value their self-worth and promote their self-esteem.

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