

Meaning in Life, Self-Efficacy, and Subjective Well-Being among Vocational College Students in Shandong, China: A Mediation Analysis

Bi Yunxiao

City Graduate School, City University of Malaysia
Email: 860173713@qq.com

Dr. Wong Siew Ping

City Graduate School, City University of Malaysia
Email: wong.siewping@city.edu.my

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the structural relationship between life meaning, self-efficacy and subjective welfare of Shandong Vocational College Students in China based on the intermediary effect. Taking the typical vocational college as the case, fifteen units of higher vocational colleges in Liaoning with three types of SIVCs at different levels were selected; this paper investigates students from urban and rural under two dimensions through quantile method and cross-sectional survey. To measure this scale with meaning in life, self-efficacy and subjective well-being we used standardized Likert-scale instruments. Descriptive statistics, Correlation, Regression and Mediation testing have been execute to examine the proposed relationships. The results show that Meaning in Life (MIL) has a strong and significant total effect on Subjective Well-Being (SWB) ($\beta = 0.681$, $p < 0.001$). Even after accounting for Self-Efficacy (SE), the direct effect of MIL on SWB remains significant ($\beta = 0.638$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect through SE is smaller but still significant ($\beta = 0.043$, $p = 0.001$), indicating partial mediation. The results from this study offer some directions regarding promoting purpose and self-determination in VET to improve the mental health status and life satisfaction for VET students. Proposed future directions include mentorship, resiliency training, and experiential learning which promote self efficacy & meaning in life. This investigation will contribute to the literature for Chinese VCS mental health, as well as providing evidences for educational policy and practise.

Keywords: Meaning In Life, Self-Efficacy, Subjective Well-Being, Vocational College Students, Mediation Analysis

Introduction

College is an institution of higher learning for the training of qualified personnel, as well as a place where students live and study every day (Zhang 2022). So all types of education is importance but the vocational and the general education are compulsory. Since the reform and opening, vocational education has always occupied a position of importance in training talents and serving as, therefore, an intellectual patron of China's economic and social development. The new stage of Chinas development has further accelerated industrial upgrading and economic structural adjustment, all ethnic groups are more in demand for scientific and technical talents in various fields, and vocational education has become increasingly important(State Council,PRC,2019). According the Statistical Bulletin of China's Education Development in 2022, there are 250 more vocational colleges than universities nationally with as many as increased enrollment in those schools compared with traditional university (710,400 students). Based on official data, these vocational colleges enroll 10,000 students or more(Figure 3), With the rapid development of vocational education in recent years, as an independent group from the general student population, students in vocational colleges form a special and important social group Then, they have been widely discussed and studied by pedagogy, psychology, and other social science fields. The years of college are a critical time for the physical and mental health of an individual, it is in this period that undergo fast development physico-psychological to matures gradually. But, it is also the period of the transition in which one is at peak risk for mental disorders of all sort or emerge. College life is not an easy process, and the college entrance examination code has been stressed to higher professional requirements, as well as employment pressure, family pressure and interpersonal communication pressure in vocational colleges. These have led to a high degree of mental health damage in vocational college students. Another study showed that college students who are enrolled in specialty schools bear many risks and will have anxiety, low self-esteem, a damaged sense of identity and other psychological problems(Lin &Liu,2023). There is a noteworthy decrease in the experience of well-being among these groups.

Well-being is the eternal theme of life, and it is also the final purpose of all human activities. In conclusion, well-being refers to satisfaction with one's own life and is a process of promoting self-growth and self-improvement (Sun et al., 2021). Subjective well-being describes a major component of well-being. Life satisfaction, also called subjective well-being, has been in extensive research on lifestyle and economic and social development. (Zhang, et al., 2022). This has been conceptualised as how individuals view their own life when thinking about satisfaction with multiple aspects of life such as health, meaning, purpose, relationships and work (Diener and Ryan 2009). Subjective well-being measure the extent of positive mental health states and psychological development overall (Fan et al., 2012). Thus, enhancing subjective well-being is a desirable target for society overall and particularly among young adults (D'Agostino et al., 2019). Subjective well-being has been revealed as an important dimension in evaluating the mental health of an individual (Ye et al., 2021). As for Vocational College students subjective well-being, it is the key to students' mental health and also relates colleges directly or indirectly with family stability even social harmony. As a result, it is important to research subjective well-being and the drivers of that well-being.

Given the above, sense of coherence in life is among the strongest predictions of subjective mental well-being (Frankl, 1963; Krok, 2015). Another rewarding way of experiencing wellbeing is to find a meaning in life and Purpose of life. This can provide people

with purpose, meaning and satisfaction in life, and is related to higher levels of personal well-being and happiness. Doß, 2005, Vallacher & Wegner, 1999), and since meaning is protected by strangers against existential dangers such as depression and suicide Franki (2000; = Schnell,. There is significantly strong empirical evidence, as an example that meaning in life have positive correlation which means do matter (Krok & Gerymski, 2019; Jebb et al., 2020). General understanding improved demand Life satisfaction is one of the key subjects in subjective well-being research, although few studies have been conducted on the meaning level in China.

To increase the quality of life of college students and meet the current problem of poor physical and mental health, this study specifically explores the effect of meaning in life on subjective well-being as well self-efficacy among Chinese vocational college students. Therefore, our research questions for the present study are as follows.

1. a. What are the levels of subjective well-being among vocational college students in Shandong, China?
- b. What are the levels of meaning in life among vocational college students in Shandong, China?
- c. What are the levels of self-efficacy among vocational college students in Shandong, China?
2. a. What is the relationship between meaning in life and subjective well-being of vocational college students in Shandong, China?
- b. What is the relationship between self-efficacy and subjective well-being of vocational college students in Shandong, China?
- c. What is the relationship between meaning in life and self-efficacy of vocational college students in Shandong, China?
3. a. What is the influence of meaning in life to subjective well-being among vocational college students in Shandong, China?
- b. What is the influence of meaning in life to self-efficacy among vocational college students in Shandong, China?
- c. What is the influence of self-efficacy to subjective well-being among vocational college students in Shandong, China?
4. What is the mediating effect of self-efficacy to the relationship between meaning in life and subjective well-being among vocational college students in Shandong, China?

Literature Review

Research suggests that meaning in life is related to well-being. Thus, the VA should consider Self-Efficacy as not only a significant predictor of HRQOL, but also as an potential mediator for select determinants in Subjective Well-Being. Moderating Role of Self-efficacy in Meaning in Life and Well-being. Self-efficacy has been shown in empirical studies to mediate the link between meaning in life and well-being. For instance, on the relationship of meaning in life it was shown that meaningful life was positively associated with high self-efficacy and high psychological well-being among emerging adults. Moreover, Self-efficacy had positive association to Psychological well-being. Existential meaning in life and religious significance, one dimension of meaning in life correlated as has been found for other studies with Psychological Well-being; However Presence of self-efficacy was predictor agent for psychological well-being. Meaning in life was directly related to self-efficacy which in turn had a mediated relationship with psychological well-being such that meaning in life could have influenced psychological well-being through self-evaluations (e.g., efficacy beliefs) about how one manage obstacles and the extent to which she or he can accomplish specific tasks. Self-

efficacy mediated the association between meaning in life and psychological well-being. An example of this comes from a study by Krok & Gerymski (2019) of cardiac patients, where the authors observed that meaning in life was associated with self-efficacy, life satisfaction and positive emotions. Positive emotions had a large significant direct effect on life satisfaction and self-efficacy, while negative emotions showed the opposite patterns; Meaning in life had a substantial direct effect on both positive and negative affect/ emotions as well as life satisfaction, and although there was still a significantly anti-intervention with meaning in life on self-efficacy. On the other hand, self-efficacy was also found to positively affect life satisfaction, positive emotions and negatively affect negative emotions. (Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy was also seen as an important predictor of the association from meaning in life to subjective well-being among the youths, which indirectly confirms the positive inter-relationships between self-efficacy and meaning in life and meaningful living and self-wellness argued by Hou (2016). As explained by Zeng (2020), perceived social self-efficacy, including meaning in life and subjective well-being were positively correlated each other. An Empirical Study of College Student Social Self-Efficacy and Subjective Well-Being and Its Mechanism The study by Chen (2022) shows that college students' meaning in life has a positive impact on academic self-efficacy and subjective well-being, the core of which is mainly reflected in the association between meaning in life and cognitive dimensions of subjective well-being --life satisfaction—the result was significant; the sense of school had a full mediating effect on college students' academic self-efficacy while partially mediating through self-efficacy. According to this, we need to be concerned with the purpose in life and academic self-efficacy as the means of enhancing college students' life satisfaction. The analysis of Han and Zhang (2023) indicated that general self-efficacy was significantly related to life meaning and life satisfaction in college students. Physical exercise has a direct impact on the life satisfaction of college students, and also an indirect effect mediated by general self-efficacy and meaning in life.

Conceptual Framework

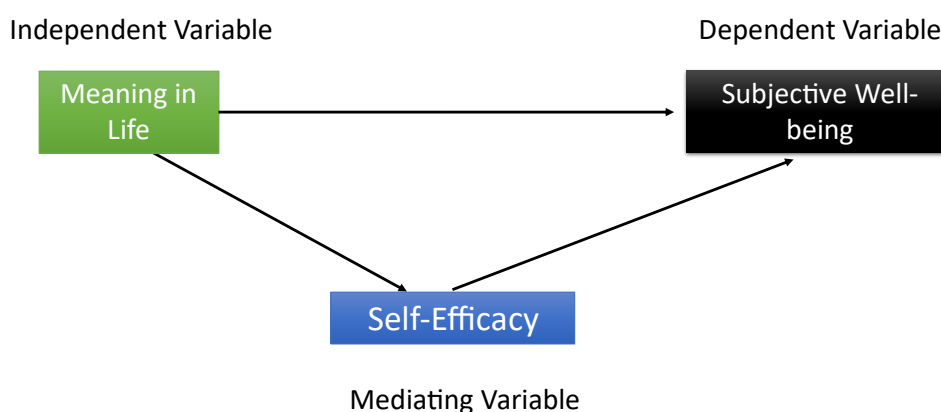


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This research makes use of a survey design that is cross-sectional. This layout works well for gathering data at a single instant, giving a bird's-eye view of the connections between self-efficacy, meaning in life, and subjective well-being. The ability to examine possible cause-and-

effect linkages and correlations between the variables is made possible by the cross-sectional design.

Formal questionnaires are used for gathering information. The method's efficiency in gathering data from a large sample, guaranteeing answer standardisation and comparability, led to its selection. A number of Likert-scale items assess the participants' levels of self-efficacy, purpose in life, and subjective well-being in the questionnaire.

The research is being conducted on a number of vocational schools in Germany and China's Shandong Province. This was complemented by the diversified vocational educational environment in this region, which set the stage for using it as a proxy sample of students attending urban and rural vocational colleges.

The Included Participants The included participants were vocational college students in Shandong Province, China. The study was multi-site, but only included participants attending the colleges because vocational educational institutions accommodate more than 1.7 million students in the province. Because of the wide range of technical or professional disciplines these students are studying, they provide an interesting set in terms of life meaning, self-efficacy and subjective well-being. Therefore, students from all academic years, genders and disciplines will be encouraged to participate in order to obtain a variety of opinions about the factors that impact the wellbeing of UCT students.

Sample size is achieved by a method of Krejcie and Morgan for statistical precision, and representational analysis. Given the expected total student population, we gathered responses from at least 384 students to ensure that our results were statistically valid and generalizable. However, to allow for non-response or missing data in final sample size is increased. We will adopt a stratified random sampling to achieve an even distribution of students among various type of vocational colleges (like sample universities) and thus the research findings can represent different characteristics ones of diverse kinds within Shandong Province's VET system.

Subjective well-being, life purpose, and self-efficacy are measured using standardised scales in the study tools. The reliability and validity of these scales in prior research dictated their selection. Questions on the participants' demographics and other personal details are also included of the survey.

Describing the sample and testing hypotheses are two parts of data analysis that use descriptive and inferential statistics, respectively. To investigate the interrelationships of the variables and the function of self-efficacy as a mediator, methods such as regression, path, and correlation analysis are employed.

Results

Effect Type	Parameter	Estimated effect	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	P
Total Effect	MIL → SWB	0.681	0.549	0.817	0.000***
Direct Effect	MIL → SWB	0.638	0.509	0.777	0.000***
Indirect Effect	MIL → SE → SWB	0.043	0.019	0.081	0.001**

On that note, the table reveals a powerful and highly statistically significant association with subjective well-being (SWB) for meaning in life (MIL). The direct and indirect effect combined of MIL on SWB is $\beta = 0.681$ (CI: 0.549, 0.817; $p < .001$). Or, more concisely, people who experience greater meaning in life are happier. The narrow confidence interval of this NSF probability and high level of statistical significance places it among the most reliable results, going long way to indicating that the effect is almost certainly not random.

After considering the mediator Self-Efficacy (SE), the direct impact of MIL on SWB is still high at 0.638. This effect is also strongly independent ($0.509 \leq \theta \leq 0.777$, $p < 0.001$) which means MIL still significantly contributes to SWB after accounting for SE; Integrating main and subsidiary results, approximately 6.3% of the total effect of meaning in life on subjective well-being is mediated by self-efficacy; it implies a necessity of a following study whether meaningfulness has an exclusive direct impact on subjective well-being than through the pathway of self-efficacy. The robustness of the direct effect provides evidence for how important meaning in life is to the human response to well-being.

The indirect effect from MIL to SWB via SE through the total mediating pathway is relatively small compared to the substantial direct effect (coefficient = 0.043; 95% CI = 0.019–0.081; $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that the association between meaning in life and subjective well-being is partially transmitted through self-efficacy. In practical terms, individuals who report higher levels of meaning in life also tend to possess greater general self-efficacy, which in turn contributes to an increase in their subjective well-being. However, the magnitude of this indirect pathway remains minor in comparison to the direct effect, suggesting that self-efficacy serves as a supplementary mechanism rather than the primary driver in linking meaning in life to well-being. This highlights that while enhancing self-efficacy can yield additional benefits, the principal influence of meaning in life on well-being is exerted directly. Overall, these findings suggest a partially mediated relationship in which meaning in life influences subjective well-being both directly and indirectly through self-efficacy. The dominance of the direct effect indicates that interventions aimed at enhancing life meaning are likely to have a powerful and immediate impact on well-being. However, strategies that also build self-efficacy could provide additional benefits, albeit to a smaller extent. This combined understanding supports a dual-focus approach in positive psychology and mental health promotion—strengthening both life meaning and self-efficacy to maximize improvements in subjective well-being.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study's conclusions provide valuable insights into how meaning in life and self-efficacy contribute to the overall well-being of vocational students. By demonstrating the significant associations among these variables, the findings suggest that educational institutions should implement targeted strategies to cultivate meaning in life and strengthen students' confidence in their abilities. These strategies could include mentorship programs, experiential learning opportunities, and well-being initiatives that support students' psychological development. Additionally, recognizing the study's limitations highlights the importance of future research that explores cultural influences, gender differences, and the evolving educational landscape in China. Ultimately, this chapter underscores the broader implications of the research, advocating for policies and practices that prioritize students' psychological well-being alongside academic and career success.

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