

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A study on the management practice of college students' mental health education during the novel coronavirus pandemic

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ABSTRACT

College mental health education plays a crucial role in the well-being and overall development of students. It is closely related to their academic progress and quality of life, as well as their adaption to society upon graduation. In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated psychological problems among college students, which directly affect academic performance and overall campus experience. In this study, the current situation of mental health education at X University was selected as the research object. A random selection method was adopted, with a research sample of 381 individuals. Sample data were collected by means of questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. The weighted average was used to measure the compliance level of students' mental health education management. The 4-point Likert scale, as shown in **Table 1**, was utilized to evaluate the compliance of mental health education management among students at Linyi University. Through the research, the measures to improve the level of school mental health education and management are as follows: set up mental health courses, establish psychological counseling service stations, incorporate life education and resilience-building education into the curriculum, conduct mental health education training for all teachers, encourage the participation of psychological counselors in the professional development of mental health education, and promote communication and cooperation between schools. Besides, efforts should be made to strengthen the coordination between parents and social support institutions to improve the prevention and intervention capacity of psychological crises.

Keywords: mental health education management level; source management; process management; result management; support management

1. Introduction

College mental health education has a profound impact on the current and future mental health of college students and their future lives^[1]. As a special social group, the mental health of college students not only affects their personal growth but also contributes to the quality of national talent for construction. Mental health education in colleges and universities is not only for the students' well-rounded growth but also for the promotion of quality education. This urgency has been particularly evident since 2020, when COVID-19 hit the entire world. The ensuing shift to online courses and strict campus regulations have exerted a great impact on the academic and personal lives of students. Some students have suffered from psychological issues such as depression and anxiety. In this context, there emerges an urgent need to improve mental health education

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management at universities.

Different from previous studies on mental health education management, this study will focus on four aspects of mental health education management amidst the pandemic era: resource management, process management, result management, and support management. The rationale behind the focus lies in the major changes to college students brought by COVID-19 to college students both in China and the rest of the world since 2020. The pandemic has taken a toll on people's mental health. Given that college students represent a special social group, the effect of college students' mental health education and management is directly related to their mental health status.

2. Theoretical/conceptual framework

This study mainly employs the following theories: source management, process management, result management, and support management. Source management involves the registration and monitoring of source utilization. It is integral in counterintelligence and human intelligence operations to ensure operational security and avoid conflicts among operational elements. Management processes are performed by managers involved in planning, organizing, directing, motivating, controlling and decision-making. These processes are also referred to as organizational processes because they go beyond an individual manager and affect the entire organization. Result management refers to competencies in handling and interfering in mental crises, such as a home-school collaborative intervention mechanism, collaboration between school mental health care providers, and an emergency management plan for unforeseen accidents. Support management refers to comprehensive support for mental health education management, such as the development of backbone teachers, especially the mental health education professional counselors, mental health education training for teachers, and support for counselors in their pursuit of further education in psychology or related mental health education courses.

3. Present situation of mental health education management at X University

The source of material and relevant ethical framework for all experiments should be clearly identified, including ethics approval and/or written informed consent. Methods already published should be indicated by a reference: only relevant modifications should be described. This implies that a full description of all the experiments described in Results and presented in the Figures/Tables is expected in this section. For each experiment, all steps need to be mentioned, along with instruments the analyses were performed on, reagents and methods to permit the replication of the work by others. We would encourage authors to submit a detailed Bio-protocol.

This study takes the students' mental health education at X University of Shandong as the research object. The total enrollment from the academic years 2019 to 2022 amounted to 43,910 students, including 6021 senior students, 8935 junior students, 13,106 sophomore students, and 15,838 freshmen.

To determine the population size (N), it was observed that there were 43,910 students. We employed a 95% confidence level ≥ 1.96 z-score; a 5% margin of error; and a 50% standard of deviation. The sample size will be calculated in the Equation (1):

Sample Size formula:

$$n = [z^2 \times p(1 - p)]/e^2/1 + [z^2 \times p(1 - p)]/e^2 \times N \quad (1)$$

- N = population size ($N = 40,000$)
- z = z-score ($z = 1.96$)

- e = margin of error ($e = 0.05$)
 - p = standard of deviation ($p = 0.5$)
- $$n = 1.96^2 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)/0.05^2/1 + [1.96^2 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)/0.05^2 \times 43,910] = 384.16/(1 + 0.009604) = 380.51$$

After computation, the sample size was determined to be $n = 381$, with a total of 381 student respondents.

Following the step, stratified sampling was used to select samples from each year level (first year to senior year) from the academic year 2019–2020 to the academic year 2022–2023. Given that n/N is 381/43,910, which is 1/115, the random sampling size were as follows: 53 for senior students, 78 for junior students, 113 for second-year students, and 137 for first-year students, as detailed in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Sampling size of the respondents.

Year level	Stratified sampling size
1st	137
2nd	113
3rd	78
4th	53
Total sampling size	381

Based on the research, it is found that among all forms of source management, X University has paid less attention to life education and resilience-building education for students’ mental health education source management. X University demonstrates commendable adherence to MOE (Ministry of Education), with counselor teachers effectively implementing early-warning prevention and control in process management. However, there are weaknesses in the collaborative management of outcomes in mental health education across school, family, and community. Counselors lack training in mental health education in support management of mental health education.

4. The challenges of mental health education and management

The following 4-point Likert scale shown in **Table 2** was used to determine the level of compliance with students’ mental health education management at X University.

Table 2. 4-point Likert Scale of the level of compliance of mental health education management.

Scale	Weighted Mean	Qualitative Value	Description
4	3.26–4.00	Very compliant	The mental health education management is very compliant at X University.
3	2.51–3.25	Moderately compliant (Average extent)	The mental health education management is moderately compliant at X University.
2	1.76–2.50	Slightly compliant (Below average or a little)	The mental health education management is slightly compliant at X University.
1	1.00–1.75	Not compliant	The mental health education management is not compliant at X University.

In this scale, the first scale is 4-point and rated as “very compliant” with a weighted mean of 3.26–4.00, indicating complete compliance with the Ministry of Education’s Notice on the Management of Students’ Mental Health at X University. The second scale is 3-point and rated as “Moderately compliant” with a weighted mean of 2.51–3.25, indicating an average compliance with the Notice on the Management of Students’ Mental Health. The third scale is 2-point and rated as “Slightly compliant” with a weighted mean of 1.76–2.50, indicating a lower (or below the average level) compliance with the Ministry of Education’s Notice on the

Management of Students’ Mental Health. The lowest scale is 1-point and rated as “Not compliant” with a weighted mean of 1.00–1.75, indicating non-compliance with the Ministry of Education’s Notice on the Management of Students’ Mental Health.

In Source Management, teachers highlighted a notable challenge, namely, the dispersed cooperation among school, family and social education. Most parents are not aware of their children’s mental health issues^[2]. As an important component of university students’ mental health education, families also hold cognitive deviation. Some parents believe that the responsibility for mental health education lies solely with the schools. At the same time, they attach too much importance to children’s academic and daily life matters, ignore their psychological well-being and guidance, and fail to promptly identify psychological abnormalities in their children. Their insufficient psychological knowledge may leave them unsure of their child’s psychological abnormalities as well as the corresponding coping strategies and guidance. **Table 3** presents the level of compliance of mental health education management on source management to further illustrate the specific issues identified.

Table 3. The level of compliance of mental health education management on source management.

Source Management	Weighted Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
1. The school offers at least 2 credits of public required courses in mental health.	3.69	Very compliant
2. The school arranges various forms of life education and resilience-building education.	3.63	Very compliant
3. The school cultivates the positive psychological qualities of students, and integrates the important roles of sports, aesthetic education, labor education and campus culture.	3.71	Very compliant
4. The school has arranged counselors to ease the students’ academic, employment, life or interpersonal stress.	3.71	Very compliant
5. Teachers integrate knowledge of mental health in the teaching process.	3.75	Very compliant
6. Carry out group activities, strengthen students’ sense of cooperation and team spirit, improve their psychological resistance to pressure, exercise their willpower.	3.74	Very compliant
7. The school arranges counselors to relieve the pressure of students’ self-awareness, to enhance psychological resistance to pressure.	3.72	Very compliant
8. The school takes the initiative to take measures against the psychological imbalance that students may encounter to avoid causing the psychological crisis.	3.73	Very compliant
9. During the epidemic, the school offered some courses, lectures, seminars, model viewings, and science and education films for students on employment, love, study pressure, public crisis, values, and the psychological impact of the online world on people.	3.68	Very compliant
10. Collaborative education between schools and student’s parents.	3.67	Very compliant
Overall Weighted Mean	3.70	Very compliant

In process management, students rely heavily on their families. The over-dependence leads to their overly idealized understanding of society, superficial self-understanding, and inability to deal with a series of internal conflicts and contradictions in the heart, resulting in escapism. **Table 4** presents the level of compliance of mental health education management on process management to further illustrate the specific issues identified.

Table 4. The level of compliance of mental health education management on process management.

Process management	Weighted mean	Qualitative interpretation
11. For freshmen, a full-coverage mental health assessment is carried out.	3.74	Very compliant
12. The school conducts an annual mental health assessment.	3.72	Very compliant
13. According to the results of psychological assessment of students, the school provides special mental health counseling for students.	3.73	Very compliant
14. The school has a complete four-level early warning network of “school-department-class-dormitory/individual”.	3.73	Very compliant
15. Counselors and class teachers should visit all student dormitories every month.	3.74	Very compliant
16. The school has a psychological consultation service platform, a psychological development counseling room, a positive psychological experience center, a group activity room, and a comprehensive quality training room.	3.74	Very compliant
17. Counselors have close communication with parents to jointly strengthen psychological counseling.	3.70	Very compliant
18. Mental health education management has traditional offline communication mode and online education mode.	3.73	Very compliant
19. Counselors pay attention to whether students encounter major changes, major setbacks and obvious abnormalities.	3.73	Very compliant
20. The school regularly provides counselors with business guidance and skill training.	3.72	Very compliant
Overall Weighted Mean	3.73	Very compliant

In result management, some parents exhibit a weak awareness of mental health education activities, insufficient attention to children’s mental health, and failure to assume their role in family education guidance, making students’ psychological issues increasingly prominent. **Table 5** presents the level of compliance of mental health education management on result management to further illustrate the specific issues identified.

Table 5. The level of compliance of mental health education management on result management.

Result Management	Weighted Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
21. The school has established a collaborative intervention mechanism between home, school and society.	3.73	Very compliant
22. Schools cooperate with professional institutions, and strengthen the cooperation between education departments and schools at all levels and mental health medical institutions.	3.75	Very compliant
23. Schools cooperate with professional institutions, and strengthen the cooperation between education departments and schools at all levels and mental health medical institutions.	3.74	Very compliant
24. Students with psychological disorders such as depression are identified at the time of admission, and the school organizes relevant professionals inside and outside the school to conduct research and judgment, inform parents of the intervention plan in a timely manner, and jointly agree on the division of tasks with parents.	3.74	Very compliant
25. If any student has an accident at school due to psychological problems, the school immediately starts an emergency work plan.	3.74	Very compliant
26. If any student has an accident due to psychological problems, the school will contact the student’s parents as soon as possible, and verify the situation and deal with it in a timely manner under the guidance of the local education, public security and other departments.	3.75	Very compliant

Table 5. (Continued).

Result Management	Weighted Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
27. During the epidemic, school counselors guide students to turn their attention from fear of the epidemic to scientific cognition and active prevention and control of the epidemic.	3.75	Very compliant
28. During the epidemic, counselors guide students to obtain epidemic information from official authoritative channels.	3.77	Very compliant
29. Schools should actively carry out mental health education practice activities, such as campus psychological drama, for students with different types of psychological problems.	3.76	Very compliant
30. For students with psychological problems, the school has a psychological crisis prevention mode, which conducts the investigation of psychological hidden dangers and the intervention of psychological crisis.	3.76	Very compliant
Overall Weighted Mean	3.75	Very compliant

In support Management, as counselors serve as the psychological mentor of students, their mental health has a crucial impact on the physical and mental development of college students. At present, counselors are under great substantial work-related and psychological pressures. In such a situation, their own mental health conditions are confronted with many pressures and challenges. The lack of professional knowledge and skills among counselors leads to many difficulties and challenges in the effective implementation of mental health education for students. **Table 6** presents the level of compliance of mental health education management on support management to further illustrate the specific issues identified.

Table 6. The level of compliance of mental health education management on support management.

Support Management	Weighted Mean	Qualitative Interpretation
31. The university equipped with at least 2 full-time teachers of mental health education.	3.78	Very compliant
32. Carry out at least one special training on mental health education for all counselors every year.	3.76	Very compliant
33. Carry out at least one special training on mental health education for all counselors every year.	3.75	Very compliant
34. The school guarantees the basic funds for mental health education work.	3.76	Very compliant
35. The school arranges full-time, professional-level teachers to sit in the psychological counseling room for a long time and continuously, so that students can get timely help when they have psychological problems.	3.78	Very compliant
36. Encourage all teachers to learn psychological counseling knowledge, participate in mental health counseling activities, etc., to ensure the psychological health of teachers.	3.77	Very compliant
37. The school strengthens the construction of campus culture, creates a positive and healthy campus cultural atmosphere, creates a good campus environment, and carries out a variety of campus cultural activities.	3.76	Very compliant
38. The school has college students' mental health files to enrich the experience of mental health education and management.	3.76	Very compliant
39. A feedback mechanism for students' mental health problems has been established, and students can timely feedback the management of mental health education to managers.	3.77	Very compliant
40. The psychological problems generated by the students are fed back to the counselor and the class teacher, and the counselor and the class teacher can provide guidance and intervention in a timely manner.	3.77	Very compliant
Overall Weighted Mean	3.77	Very compliant

5. Effective measures of mental health education and management

In terms of source management, it is crucial to apply the scientific design of mental health education and teaching systems. Colleges and universities should combine the existing courses in a targeted way to continuously improve the teaching system and organically integrate the mental health content into all college courses^[3,4]. Public basic courses should pay subtle attention to the development of college students' self-esteem, self-confidence, rational peace, and positive healthy state of mind. Courses in sports and aesthetic education should allow college students to refine their personalities and fortify their determination through physical exercise, foster an appreciation for and creation of beauty in aesthetic education teaching, and cultivate their sensibilities^[5]. Professional education courses should temper the mental health education resources in professional courses according to the educational objectives of different majors. From the perspectives of the development course of the majors and industries involved in the courses and the entrepreneurial course of representative figures, college students should strengthen their ideals and beliefs and increase the humanistic and educational character of the courses^[6]. Practical courses should attach importance to the integration of knowledge and action, allow college students to confront difficulties and setbacks in innovation and entrepreneurship courses, fortify their determination in social practice, enhance their capacity for innovation and creation, and improve social adaptability.

Efforts should be made to promote mental health education according to professional characteristics. Professional courses serve as the basic carrier of college students' mental health education. It is necessary to combine the curriculum characteristics of different majors, delve deeper into the elements of mental health education, and effect the educational outcomes imperceptibly. In engineering courses, the cultivation of scientific spirit should be combined with positive psychology^[7-9] in teaching. This approach guides students to stand up to difficulties strive for excellence, and resolve difficulties with their sense of responsibility and feelings. Medical courses should focus on the cultivation of students' empathy and correct view of life and death, guide students to demonstrate respect for patients, put themselves in others' shoes, and approach matters of life and death with a scientific mindset^[10,11].

In terms of process management, it is essential to inspire patients with a sound mindset. As for innovation in home-school collaboration, colleges and universities can guide parents to shift their perspectives, enhance their mental health awareness and guide parents with certain mental health knowledge for daily life through various means. Moreover, colleges and universities should make full use of school network education, second class and other platforms to publicize mental health knowledge and share school mental health education activities. Colleges and universities can open Wechat public accounts on college student's mental health education, create special websites and columns, share professional knowledge and lectures on mental health education with parents, and highlight excellent cases of home-school cooperation to help parents understand the development of school mental health education and lay a solid foundation for home-school cooperation^[12-14].

For the establishment of a mental health education platform for deeper participation among parents, several strategies can be employed. Firstly, build an education platform for parents to improve their educational literacy. Colleges and universities should make use of various channels to popularize mental health knowledge to parents, improve parents' understanding of collaborative mental health education efforts and improve the quality of parents' mental health education. Colleges and universities can set up parent schools through the network platform, formulate special curricula, popularize the content of family education and mental health education, and share exemplary cases of mental health education cases and communication skills of excellent families. The approach will enable parents to master good communication skills and methods, timely identify the ideological dynamics and psychological changes of students, and assist in mental health issues for healthier growth and development of college students. Second, establish a platform for communication and cooperation

to encourage parents' participation in school education. New media breaks through the temporal and spatial constraints and provides convenience for home-school cooperation. Colleges and universities should use new media to build a home-school exchange and cooperation platform to facilitate timely updates on the psychological well-being of college students, discussions on mental health education, and deeper integration into related activities. At the same time, colleges and universities can set up a home-school cooperation committee and give full play to the role of the home-school cooperation committee as a bridge and liaison for parents to effectively cooperate with and supervise the school mental health education work for greater convenience.

In terms of outcome management, importance should be attached to mental health education activities. College students' mental health education should not be limited to classroom teaching and individual psychological counseling. It should continue to diversify the range of activities through thematic activities, team counseling, etc., to build and expand the education platform for college students' positive psychology. The thematic activity focuses on the psychological issues of college students, centering on a single theme for each time, such as interpersonal relationships, love psychology, exam psychology, etc. These activities not only popularizes techniques to establish positive psychology but also resolve negative emotions to eventually guide students towards positive emotional experiences. Once teams are formed, pressure and encouragement are applied to facilitate deeper self-understanding and mutual understanding through sincere cooperation and achieve self-growth with mutual support and encouragement of peers.

In terms of support management, professional training for counselors is a top priority. The university must rigorously align with relevant national regulations to ensure that qualified mental health professionals are in place. The university must fully realize that school mental health education is a highly specialized systematic education work, and attach great importance to the training of mental health teachers^[15,16]. First of all, schools should create conducive conditions for teachers engaged in mental health education to receive theoretical and practical training of psychological knowledge, counseling techniques, and crisis intervention techniques on a regular, planned and phased basis^[17-19]. Secondly, the school should also formulate a corresponding training plan that integrates mental health education teacher training into the overall teacher training plan to encourage mental health teachers to actively participate in national licensing examinations related to psychological counseling. Thirdly, schools and relevant education departments should also institute a standard psychological counseling supervision system. The demanding nature of mental health education requires practitioners to maintain a consistently high level of self-conscious introspection to ensure the delivery of professional and high-quality consultation and education^[20].

A team of double-qualified teachers is of equal importance. In mental health education, the educational achievements of "double-qualified" teachers should be properly preserved and shared to cultivate professional talents for social development and educational modernization^[21]. Universities, as the main training ground for double-qualified mental health educators, must make clear their own mission. They should practice and innovate the "double-qualified" training mode, strive to produce well-rounded and high-caliber talents. Besides, they bear the historical task of enhancing mental health education to the standard of developed countries^[22]. To further expand the role and reach of colleges and universities in social functions, they, as social enterprises, must provide necessary financial and resource support, strive to achieve school-enterprise cooperation, establish a standardized and special "dual-professional" mental health personnel training system through enterprise-oriented training^[23] and strive to achieve mutual benefit and win-win results among universities, teachers and social enterprises. Enterprises, while maximizing their own interests, can also give full play to their advantages in capital and resources for talent training in colleges and universities. The efforts are of essential importance for the historical task of advancing the training mode for "double-qualified" mental health

teachers towards formalization.

According to the above suggestions, X University has taken a series of measures to improve the quality and effectiveness of psychological education management:

A. The counselors and lecturers at X University have integrated life education and resilience-building education into their teaching disciplines. They organize various activities on life education and resilience-building education for students to experience and cherish life.

B. X University has established a comprehensive policy framework for cooperation with families/parents of students and society. It has set up an emergency response team for major security incidents on campus. At the same time, proactive measures are in place to prevent and intervene in any major incidents on campus.

C. X University has encouraged counselor teachers in their pursuit of further studies in their respective professional fields. It has supported all teachers in their participation in mental health education training, seminars and workshops to ensure teachers are not only mentally resilient but also well-equipped to effectively educate students.

D. X University has developed mental health education courses based on students' needs, interests and even potential challenges. Further research should be conducted on the basis of the development of mental health education.

6. Conclusions

In light of the challenges and issues facing mental health education and management at Linyi University, the author proposes the following measures to improve mental health education and management.

Counselor teachers and other teachers should integrate life education and resilience-building education into their teaching subjects and organize various related activities for students to experience and cherish life. University should take further steps to cooperate with home/students' parents and society in order to prevent and intervene in any potential critical incidents on campus. The university should encourage counselor teachers in their pursuit of further studies in their respective professional fields and support all teachers in their participation in mental health education training, seminars and workshops to ensure teachers are not only mentally resilient but also well-equipped to effectively educate students. mental health education courses based on students' needs, interests and even potential challenges. Further research should be conducted on the basis of the development of mental health education.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, FG and MGBG; methodology, FG; software, MGBG; validation, FG and MGBG; formal analysis, FG; investigation, FG; resources, MGBG; data curation, FG; writing—original draft preparation, FG; writing—review and editing, MGBG; visualization, FG; supervision, MGBG; project administration, MGBG; funding acquisition, MGBG. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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