

# The Influence of Discrimination Perception on Career Planning Ability of Secondary Vocational School Students: The Mediating Role of Sense of Life Meaning

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**Abstract:** Due to the low social recognition of secondary vocational school students, secondary vocational school students have become synonymous with "those who failed in the senior high school entrance examination". This stigma often makes them feel discriminated against, which leads to discrimination consciousness. From the perspective of secondary vocational school students' discrimination perception, this paper aims to explore the relationship between secondary vocational school students' discrimination perception and their career planning ability, and the intermediary role of the sense of meaning of life. The results show that discrimination perception can negatively predict the career planning ability of secondary school students. Through the group counseling of secondary school students with high discrimination perception, the career planning ability of secondary school students can be significantly improved.

**Keywords:** Secondary school students' discrimination perception, career planning ability, sense of meaning of life, understanding of social support.

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## 1. Preface

Secondary vocational education provides strong technical skills and talent support for economic and social development and industrial transformation and upgrading. However, there are some factors that restrict the development of secondary vocational education, especially the employment guidance and career planning guidance for secondary vocational students are relatively weak. Therefore, on the basis of analyzing the discrimination perception and career planning ability of secondary school students, this study explores the influence mechanism of discrimination perception on career planning ability of secondary school students and its research countermeasures. Due to the failure of the senior high school entrance examination, secondary vocational school students have experienced academic setbacks, family disappointment and social discrimination, which leads to the decrease of self-confidence and learning ability of most of them, and they don't like to participate in activities, even they don't know what they should do, and they are at a loss about life, which leads to the decrease of their sense of meaning in life. At the same time, compared with members of the dominant group, they often experience the feeling of being deprived of their rights, which will have a negative impact on their physical and mental health, and this negative emotional experience will affect their sense of meaning in life; The influence of the sense of meaning of life on individual career planning has also been found in empirical research. An individual's sense of mission or purpose in life will affect his career decision-making environment (Taylor, 2012), and when taking secondary school students as the research object, it is found that the sense of meaning in life can positively predict the future orientation of secondary school students, affect their future planning and emotional attitude, and promote their career adaptability (Luo Xiaoman, 2016; Prince Princess, 2020).

## 2. Perception of Discrimination

### 2.1. The concept of discrimination perception

Discrimination was first put forward by Fishbein, which refers to the directional infringement caused by the membership of the group to which an individual belongs. Shen Jiliang (2009) thinks that from the perspective of connotation, discrimination is a kind of stigma, and individuals and groups labeled with stigma will perceive rigid alienation, value degradation or inexplicable hostility or even harmful behavior from powerful social groups. Because discrimination is a subtle and vague personal perceptual experience, it is difficult for others to detect it, and only the discriminated can deeply understand the feeling of discrimination, so researchers put forward the concept of discrimination perception from subjective experience. Perception of discrimination refers to the unfair treatment perceived by individuals when they are in a certain group, which may be a negative attitude or an objective action, as well as unfair group norms and systems (Pascoe & Richman, 2009). Discrimination perception, as a subjective experience, reflects the level of individual perception of unfair and negative treatment due to the group to which it belongs, including two types: individual discrimination perception and group discrimination perception (Stevens & Thijs, 2018; Li Jie, Zhao Yuhuan, Dong Shenghong, 2021).

This study holds that the perception of discrimination is the prejudice and unfair treatment perceived by the disadvantaged groups by the outside groups against themselves and their groups.

### 2.2. Related research on discrimination perception

In foreign research, most scholars believe that the formation of human self-concept depends on communication with others, so the establishment of self-concept structure

often needs the feedback and evaluation of others. Because when individuals feel more and more discriminatory feelings, they are more likely to internalize these discriminatory attitudes of others into their own opinions, which will make them question themselves, thus affecting their psychology, causing personal helplessness and depression, and even depression. Some researchers pointed out that the generation of teenagers' discrimination perception will have some influence on their mental health. With the age characteristics of children and the instability of psychological development, children's perception of discrimination will become more and more acute. Therefore, in this group of secondary vocational school students, the emergence of discrimination perception will inevitably lead to an increase in their psychological pressure and a series of negative effects of school adaptation.

In domestic research, discrimination perception has a negative impact on the mental health of floating children, floating population, disabled people and poor rural college students. Liu Xia (2013) and other scholars' research shows that there is a significant negative correlation between discrimination cognition of migrant children and community cultural adaptability. Hu Wei (2012) and other scholars have come to the conclusion that social discrimination cognition, adversity assessment and psychological adaptation of floating population are related to each other, and adversity assessment plays a partial intermediary role between social discrimination cognition and psychological adaptation of floating population. Fan Zhiguang (2020) put forward the important relationship between the discrimination cognition of the disabled and the degree of social alienation of the disabled through research. In the survey of Xie Qili's (2016) and others' cognition level of discrimination against poor college students in rural areas of China, it is concluded that discrimination perception and core self-evaluation, friend support and loneliness can predict each other, and the higher the cognition level of discrimination against poor college students, the higher their loneliness level. At the same time, in Dong Jimei's (2020) research on professional identity, psychological capital, discrimination cognition and academic fatigue of secondary vocational school students, professional identity and psychological capital have a chain intermediary effect in the relationship between individual discrimination cognition and academic fatigue of secondary vocational school students. Deng Ding (2019) research shows that more than 90% of secondary vocational school students feel discrimination.

In recent years, with the development of society and the improvement of people's economic situation, people have become more and more sensitive to various subjective perceptions, and the research on discrimination perception has gradually increased. However, the previous research on discrimination perception focused on secondary vocational school students. Like many high school students, they are in the critical period of teenagers' individual growth, self-identity and social ability. They are more likely to feel violated and offended by the troubles of their own lives and the fragility and sensitivity of interpersonal relationships, so they are more sensitive to discrimination perception.

### **2.3. Measurement of Discrimination Perception**

The measurement of discrimination perception mostly adopts questionnaire survey, that is, let individuals directly report the perceived degree of discrimination or the perceived

degree of self-harm caused by discrimination. According to the different research objects, the researchers have compiled different questionnaires to measure individual discrimination perception, and the following three kinds are widely used in China for young people. Li Wentao (2013) revised Liu Xia's and Shen Jiliang's "Perception of Individual Discrimination" questionnaire (2010), which was used to investigate the perceived discrimination of disabled people. There were 10 items, including indifference, negation, verbal discrimination and aggression. The higher the total score, the higher the degree of discrimination perception.

In this study, the questionnaire on discrimination perception of secondary vocational school students revised by Dong Jimei and others (2020) will be used for investigation and research. There are 6 items in the questionnaire, including 3 items of individual discrimination and 3 items of group discrimination. The higher the score, the higher the discrimination perception of secondary vocational school students.

## **3. Career Planning Ability**

### **3.1. The concept of career planning ability**

Chinese scholar Chuang Jianguo (2008) believes that the ability of career planning refers to the ability of individuals to determine the corresponding career development goals, formulate work, education and training plans and action plans to achieve the goals according to the subjective and objective conditions of their career development and the stages of their career development, and give them the ability to determine the time limit.

### **3.2. Research on Career Planning Ability**

In view of the current development situation of school career planning in China, many scholars believe that colleges and universities should pay more attention to the improvement of students' own abilities, focus on students' lifelong development, and tap their career development potential as the main purpose, and strive to improve students' career planning ability and mobilize their subjective initiative. At present, in the theoretical research on career planning, the theoretical research on career planning ability is rare, and the domestic scholars' research basically discusses the current situation of Chinese students' career planning from the perspective of broad career planning. In the research on the influencing factors of career planning ability, Chinese scholars have followed the research on the influence of gender on college students' career planning ability (2010) and found that there are significant gender differences in college students' career planning ability. He believes that there may be many reasons for this result, such as social factors, parents, teachers or peer groups will give individuals the influence of gender roles; Among the emotional factors, there are differences between male traits and female traits in the expectation, attitude and value of success, and male traits tend to pursue social success more than female traits.

### **3.3. Measurement of Career Planning Ability**

Scholars at home and abroad don't have much special research on the ability structure of career planning, and most of them discuss the structure of some special abilities of individuals in the professional field with the help of psychologists' research on the ability structure. Criterions (1978) mainly studies the structure of career choice ability

and divides it into five components: self-evaluation ability, ability to obtain career information, goal screening ability, career planning ability and problem solving ability. Zheng Xiaoming (2002), a Chinese scholar, holds that employability does not simply refer to a certain skill or ability, but a collection of students' various abilities, including at least learning ability, ideological ability, practical ability, application ability and adaptability. In 2010, based on a large number of documents, interviews and open questionnaires, the theoretical structure of Chinese college students' career planning ability was explored by using the method of task analysis. Through empirical research, it is found that the ability of college students' career planning includes the ability to know themselves, the ability to know the environment, the ability to determine goals, the ability to make plans and the ability to feedback and correct, and on this basis, the Questionnaire of College Students' Career Planning Ability is compiled.

In this study, the measurement of vocational school students' career planning ability adopts the Questionnaire of College Students' Career Planning Ability compiled by Professor Xu Haiyuan (2013). He divides college students' career planning ability into three dimensions: career exploration ability, career decision-making ability, career action and monitoring ability. The scale is divided into three sub-scales, and it is proved that the scale has good reliability and validity.

## **4. Sense of Meaning in Life**

### **4.1. The concept of meaning of life**

The related concepts of the meaning of life were not originally put forward by psychologists, but in the early literary works and philosophical theories, the important position of the meaning of life was highlighted. Crumbaugh(1973) thinks that individuals can define their direction and value through their sense of meaning in life, and in the process of achieving their life goals, they can gain a sense of value and identity. Yang Mujuan (2014), a domestic scholar, put forward the same view. Steger(2009) defined the meaning of life as "the individual's sense of meaning of existence and his perception of self-importance". He divided the meaning of life into two dimensions: life meaning seeking and life meaning experience. Life meaning seeking refers to people's efforts to establish or increase their understanding of the meaning and goals of life, and life meaning experience means that people understand the meaning of life and realize their purpose, goal or mission in life. Zhong Nailiang (2015) believes that the sense of meaning in life is the sum of the goal realization, the sense of personality integration, the sense of value and the sense of efficacy that individuals feel at a certain moment under the guidance of seeking life goals and motives. Many scholars have expounded the sense of meaning of life around the individual's feelings and pursuit of life goals and values.

This paper is more inclined to Song Qiurong's definition of the meaning of life. Song Qiurong (1992) thinks that the meaning of life endows the individual with a sense of direction and a sense of value, and in the process of realizing the goal, the individual gains a sense of identity with the value of life. The sense of meaning of life means that an individual finds the direction and goal of life now or in the future by thinking about the reason or purpose of existence, so that in the process of realizing the goal, the individual obtains the

sense of identity of "becoming a valuable person". This study hopes that by promoting and promoting the sense of meaning of life of secondary vocational school students, they can dig out their own advantages, strengthen their belief in serious life, set a growth goal and become a valuable person.

### **4.2. Related research on the sense of meaning of life**

Jin Zeqin (2012) investigated the relationship between the sense of life meaning and mental health of senior high school students. The results show that the sense of life meaning is an important indicator to predict the level of individual mental health, and improving students' life meaning can improve their mental health. Ni Xudong and Tang Wenjia (2018) believe that the reason for the "hollow disease" among young people is the lack of sense of meaning in life. Zhou Youhuan et al. (2019) found that middle school students' scores of life meaning were low, and students in orthodox and democratic family atmosphere scored higher than those in conflict, arranged autocracy and laissez-faire family atmosphere. Adolescence is a critical period to gain a sense of meaning in life. On the one hand, they are in a period of rapid psychological development, and psychological fluctuations and emotional changes will make them face negative emotions such as contradiction, anxiety and confusion. On the other hand, teenagers' psychological development is not comprehensive enough, and they are easily influenced by negative family rearing patterns, less support and help from parents and bad social atmosphere, resulting in bad behavior habits. All kinds of situations show that adolescent stage is a period of frequent psychological and behavioral problems of students, and it is also a critical period of individual development. At this stage, students should be guided to actively explore and understand the meaning of life. However, in the process of seeking the meaning of life, individuals will inevitably experience difficulties and setbacks. It is necessary to guide students to establish confidence in facing difficulties, master the methods to deal with setbacks, and construct their own life value and significance. With the increasing emphasis on vocational education, the enrollment ratio of secondary vocational schools is also increasing. In fact, after students failed in the senior high school entrance examination, because of social prejudice against secondary vocational school students and their lack of learning motivation and goals, they gradually indulge in the internet and muddle along. When they encounter pressure and setbacks, they are prone to negative emotions and psychological problems. Studies have shown that teenagers' lack of sense of meaning in life will lead them to choose to give up their efforts in the face of setbacks, resulting in helplessness and even depression, and in severe cases, they will choose suicide. Students in secondary vocational schools need to have a clear understanding of themselves, make clear their goals, and have a good expectation for the future. In the process of pursuing and realizing life goals through their own efforts, they will gradually experience the sense of meaning of life. Shen Xiangying's (2021) research shows that group psychological intervention can improve young students' sense of meaning in life, and adopts the method of qualitative text analysis to put forward effective strategies to improve young students' sense of meaning in life. At present, there is little research on the sense of meaning of life of secondary vocational school students in China. In view of the fact that secondary vocational school students will be the main force of national

economic construction and development, they are in the formation period of outlook on life and values, in the formation period of self-identity, and in the stage of constantly exploring themselves and seeking the true meaning of life, it is particularly important to explore the cultivation methods of the sense of meaning of life of secondary vocational school students.

### 4.3. Measurement of the sense of meaning of life

The research on the sense of meaning of life in foreign countries was earlier, and some influential questionnaires were compiled or revised. By analyzing the existing related research, it was found that most measuring tools were influenced by Frankl's logotherapy theory. Some representative scales are as follows:

(1) the Purpose in Life Test, PIL)

In 1960s, Crumbaugh and Maholick compiled it based on Frankl's theory of the meaning of life.

(2) Life Regard Index, LRI)

It was compiled by Battista and Almond in 1973 to measure the individual's ability and degree of discovering his life purpose.

(3) The Seeking of Noetic Goals Test (Song)

Revised by Crumbaugh on the basis of PIL in 1977, the higher the score, the stronger the individual's motivation to pursue the meaning of life.

(4) Life Attitude Profile, LAP)

Compiled by Reker and Peacock in 1981, it consists of six dimensions: purpose, controllability, sense of consistency, emptiness, seeking goals and accepting death. It is mainly used to measure the intensity of individual's sense of meaning in life and clarify individual's motivation to seek meaning.

(5) Meaning in Life Questionnaire, MLQ).

In 2006, it was compiled by Steger and others according to the theory of positive psychology.

The researcher also analyzed the domestic research on the sense of meaning of life, and found that the scale of meaning of life adopted by most of the research was also based on Frankl's logotherapy theory.

(1) Profile of life attitude

In 1990, it was compiled by He Yingqi according to the meaning therapy.

(2) Life Purpose Scale

In 1992, Song Qiurong revised the PIL scale with teenagers as subjects, including five dimensions: enthusiasm for life, life goals, sense of autonomy, enthusiasm and future expectations.

(3) Self-transcendence life meaning scale

It was compiled by Lee Hung in 2009 with interview method, which has good reliability and validity.

(4) college students' personal life meaning scale

In 2008, it was compiled by Chen Xiuyun with college students as the research group.

(5) Middle school students' personal life meaning questionnaire.

Prepared by Liu Lijun in 2009. Including autonomy, goal pursuit and future expectation, attitude towards life and attitude towards life.

Because the theoretical core of this study is logotherapy Theory, and the subjects are secondary vocational students, after comparing the above measurement tools, combined with secondary vocational students' ability to understand and fill in the questionnaire, the measurement tool of this study is the

Life Purpose Scale revised by Song Qiurong, which is used to measure the sense of meaning of life of secondary vocational students.

## 5. Research Methods

### 5.1. Research object

This study adopts cluster sampling method, and it is expected that 1500 students from three technical secondary schools in Jingzhou will be randomly selected as subjects to issue questionnaires.

### 5.2. Research tools

#### 5.2.1. Discrimination Perception Questionnaire for Secondary Vocational School Students

In this study, the questionnaire on discrimination perception of secondary vocational school students revised by Dong Jimei and others (2020) will be used for investigation and research. There are 6 items in the questionnaire, including 3 items of individual discrimination and 3 items of group discrimination. The higher the score, the higher the discrimination perception of secondary vocational school students.

#### 5.2.2. "College Students' Career Planning Ability Questionnaire"

In this study, the part about the measurement of vocational school students' career planning ability adopts the Questionnaire of College Students' Career Planning Ability compiled by Professor Xu Haiyuan (2013).

#### 5.2.3. Life Purpose Scale

Because the subjects of this study are secondary vocational students, after comparing the above measurement tools, combined with secondary vocational students' ability to understand and fill in the questionnaire, the measurement tool of this study is the Life Purpose Scale revised by Song Qiurong, which is used to measure the sense of meaning of life of secondary vocational students.

## 6. Expected Results

The correlation results of each variable show that discrimination perception can significantly negatively predict the career planning ability of secondary school students; Discrimination perception can significantly negatively predict the sense of meaning of life of secondary school students; The sense of meaning of life plays an intermediary role between discrimination perception and career planning ability.

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

The results show that the level of life meaning of secondary vocational school students is low; After the intervention course of the sense of meaning of life was carried out for the secondary school students who perceived discrimination, the scores of the five dimensions of the sense of meaning of life, enthusiasm for life, life goals, sense of autonomy, enthusiasm and future expectations of the experimental class were significantly improved; After intervention, the sense of meaning of life and its scores in each dimension of the experimental class were significantly higher than those of the control class without intervention.

To sum up, group counseling intervention has a significant effect on improving the level of secondary school students' sense of meaning in life.

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