PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISM OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACCEPTANCE AND ITS INFLUENCING FACTORS

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Abstract

Higher education directly reflects the strength and potential of a country. Based on the psychology of acceptance and theories on higher education, this paper attempts to clarify the psychological mechanism of students in the acceptance of higher education and its influencing factors. First, the psychological mechanism was divided into three aspects: cognitive mechanism, emotional mechanism and will mechanism. Then, a questionnaire survey was conducted on three universities in Tianjin, China, and the survey data were analysed in details. The results show that most college students are aware of the necessity of higher education and willing to pay efforts to complete the study program; however, the college students have not fully recognized the role of higher education; the acceptance of higher education among the college students is negatively affected by factors like course content, campus culture, bad social mood, to name but a few. The research results provide a reference for improving the outcome of higher education from the psychological perspective.

Key words: Higher Education, Psychological Mechanism, Acceptance, Influencing Factors.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is an important indicator for the level and potential of national development. In recent years, with the implementation of the university enrolment expansion policy, the popularization rate of higher education has become increasingly higher. However, the employment rate of college graduates and global ranking of Chinese universities are unsatisfactory, so it’s imperative to improve the quality of higher education in China, especially the students’ acceptance of higher education.

Through analysis for relevant references at home and abroad, it’s found that currently there have been abundant research results on higher education mainly from the perspective of education subjects (school or teacher), including the characteristics, connotation, model, and training program of higher education, etc. (Trueman, Evans, Leppmann et al., 1968). Some other studies have been conducted by analysing the influence of the acceptance subject’s (college students) study engagement on the quality of college teaching and proposing corresponding countermeasures (Peterson, 1974). The research on the psychological mechanism of education acceptance is the most abundant in the field of ideological and political education, but the psychological mechanism in this field hasn’t been summarized as a whole (Breivik, 2004). Besides, there have been limited research results on the psychological mechanism and influencing factors of higher education.

Based on the above, taking the college students (acceptant subject) as the research objects, this paper divides the psychological mechanism of higher education acceptance into three parts: cognitive mechanism, emotional mechanism and will mechanism, and elaborates on them in detail. Then, using the questionnaire method, it conducts surveys on the current
situation of college students' psychological mechanism of higher education acceptance, and summarize the related influencing factors.

ANALYSIS FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISM OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACCEPTANCE

All human activities are inseparable from psychological guidance and regulation (Mudhovozi, 2010), and higher education is no exception. Cognition, emotion and will are the three basic stages of human psychological activities according to modern psychology (André, Deneuve, & Louvet, 2011). This paper analyses the psychological mechanisms of higher education acceptance from these three aspects.

Psychological cognitive mechanism of higher education acceptance

The process to reflect the phenomena and nature of objective things by the human brain is called cognition (Lohse-Bossenz, Kunina-Habenicht, & Kunter, 2013). Sensation is the source of cognitive processes and the simplest psychological phenomenon. The quantity of stimuli that can cause sensation for a certain period of time is called the sensory threshold. Physiological studies have shown that (Lustman, Sowa, & O'Hara, 1984) the stimulus can induce the recipient's sensation only when the sensory threshold is reached. The sensation is the start-up step to affect the acceptance of higher education, that is, the acceptant subjects (college student) make the first impression on the information conveyed by the educator through the sensation, thereby affecting their acceptance of higher education. Then, they'll choose educational information according to their own needs, and understand and process the information based on their knowledge and experience. Therefore, individuals with different social backgrounds and knowledge experience are not necessarily the same in the acceptance effect under the same external stimulus.

Psychological emotional mechanism of higher education acceptance

In addition to the cognition of the nature, connotation and characteristics of higher education, the acceptance subject also poses a “like and dislike” attitude towards higher education. This process is called emotional process (Altman, 1996). Emotion is an indispensable psychological factor in the process of acceptance. Without emotional process, there will be no acceptance activity. The emotional attitude of the subject directly determines the effect of acceptance activity. The acceptance subject will have a positive enthusiasm for the object meeting their emotional needs, and an indifferent or even exclusive attitude towards the object that does not meet their emotional needs.

Psychological will mechanism of higher education acceptance

Will is a form of psychological activity unique to human beings, to identify goals and overcome various difficulties for them (Logue, 2007). It plays a key role in the process of accepting higher education, which is embodied in the following three aspects:

Guaranteeing role

In the process of higher education, college students are vulnerable to the external environment (family, social environment, etc.), distracting their attention; besides, college students will certainly encounter various difficulties in the process of receiving higher education, causing them to lose self-confidence. For this, the willpower can help them adjust themselves and enhance self-confidence, thereby ensuring the smooth acceptance of higher education.

Regulating role

The effect of higher education acceptance is directly related to emotions. The will can regulate people’s emotions (Harcum, 1990). A strong will of the individual can promote his or her objective and calm judgment of things, and appropriately adjust the low mood so that the activities are not affected by the bad emotions and can be carried out more smoothly.

Active role

As the acceptance subject of higher education, college students have strong independence and subjective initiative. They are willing to accept new things, internalize them as a part of themselves, and also dare to innovate. The strong will quality is the fundamental guarantee for them to face difficulties and make the first move.
EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION AND INFLUENCING FACTORS FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISM OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACCEPTANCE

Empirical investigation on the psychological mechanism of higher education acceptance

In order to further analyse the psychological mechanism of higher education acceptance, a questionnaire was designed in this study. 250 students from Grade 1-4 in three universities of Tianjin were selected as the respondents and 242 valid questionnaires were recovered, with the effective rate of 96.8%. Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents in each grade which is basically the same.

Analysis for the psychological cognitive mechanism of higher education acceptance

Figure 2 shows the survey results on the necessity of participating in higher education. It can be seen from the figure that 81% of college students thought that it’s very necessary to participate in higher education; only 13% thought that it’s not much necessary or does not matter; 6% thought it not their business. This indicates that most college students have a correct cognition of the necessity of higher education.

Analysis of the psychological emotional mechanism of higher education acceptance

Figure 3 shows the survey results on whether higher education is useful for the growth and success of college students. It can be seen from the figure that 39.5% respondents believed that the higher education plays a great role in their growth and success; 48.6% thought it having limited effect; 6.4% believed that higher education has no practical effect on their growth; another 5.5% of the respondents cannot say it clearly. This shows that the college students’ recognition of higher education needs to be improved.

Figure 4 shows the results of the survey on whether college students recognize the curriculum and content of higher education. It can be seen from the figure that 39.7% of college students completely agreed with the curriculum and content of higher education; and 55.1% basically agreed. This indicates that the recognition of college students for higher education needs to be further improved.

Figure 1. Percentage of students in all grades

Figure 2. The need to participate in higher education

Figure 3. Is higher education useful for your growth and success?

Figure 4. Whether to recognize the higher education curriculum and content
Analysis of the psychological will mechanism of higher education acceptance psychology

Will is a spiritual power, and the will of college students is of great significance in the process of receiving higher education. Figure 5 shows the survey results on whether college students are willing to work hard to complete the higher education by combining their experience and knowledge. It can be seen from the figure that up to 85.2% of college students were willing to complete the higher education; only 2.7% were unwilling; 12.1% of college students said it’s not clear. This indicates that most college students are willing to complete higher education through their own efforts and practice.

Figure 5. Are you willing to work hard to complete higher education?

Analysis of the factors affecting the psychological mechanism of higher education acceptance

(1) Individual level
After the entrance education, college students have a preliminary understanding of higher education. But due to the individual development of students and the changes of the environment, they need to re-understand and position themselves in society. In the process of reorganizing self-awareness, the college students hope to change themselves and make themselves useful to the family and the country through higher education, while they may be sceptical about higher education and the whole society because of some special events in the society (such as rich second generation, power-for-money deal).

(2) Confusion in the fierce collision between ideal and reality
As the most ideal group, the college students hope to realize their ambitions and ideals in the future through higher education. However, in the face of complex and ever-changing real society, multiple considerations of family, school and emotion, and the mixed social phenomenon, the college students might have doubts about the higher education, making their ideals and ambitions difficult to achieve in a short period of time.

(3) Confusion in the blending of multiple cultures
In the critical period of the will formation, the college students are not stereotyped and have strong plasticity. Coupled with some external social factors, the goals of college students are often changed. The arrival of global integration has enabled Chinese and foreign cultures to integrate. When college students encounter packing foreign cultures and ideas, they will be confused and doubtful, and even negate their education.

School level

(1) Course content is difficult to trigger psychological resonance of students

Figure 6 shows the survey results on whether the course offered by the school is the main way to create talents and employment in universities.

Figure 6. Is the course offered by the school the main way to create talents and employment in universities?
ignoring emotional training and the subjective initiative of college students, and lacking of teacher-student interaction, as well as single method of course evaluation based on paper-pencil test and theoretical test, which is not conducive to the cultivation of college students’ practical ability and problem-solving ability.

(2) Campus culture construction is difficult to meet the psychological needs of college students

Figure 7 shows the survey results on whether campus culture construction is an important part of higher education. It can be seen from the figure that nearly 50% of students in all grades believed that campus culture construction is an important part of higher education and can subtly affects the acceptance of higher education. However, at present, most of China’s college campus culture lacks cultural heritage and long-term mechanism. It always uses profound theories to guide campus culture, and neglects the actual needs of the students, making the campus culture ungrounded and difficult to accept.

Figure 7. Is campus culture construction an important part of higher education?

(2) The negative impact of network culture

Western countries use the Internet to export value to Chinese college students, bringing about a tremendous impact on their thinking. As a result, Chinese college students are curious about foreign culture and education. They believe that Western education is better than China and produces psychological inversion to higher education in China. At the same time, college students are vulnerable to the influence of malicious online information, and some are even deeply immersed in the Internet, causing resistance to higher education.

CONCLUSIONS

The acceptance of higher education is directly related to the efficiency and quality of higher education. This paper attempts to study the psychological mechanism of higher education acceptance and the related influencing factors from the perspective of psychology. The specific conclusions are as follows:

The psychological mechanism of higher education acceptance was explained from three aspects: psychological cognitive mechanism, emotional mechanism and will mechanism;

The survey results on college students' psychological mechanism of higher education acceptance showed that most college students had a correct cognition of the necessity of higher education, they were willing to complete higher education through their own efforts and practice, and their recognition of the role of
higher education needs to be improved; The influencing factors of psychological mechanism were analysed on the student level, school level, and social level.

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