

Psychological Capital and Self-directed Learning Abilities of Graduate School Candidates

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Abstract: In China, about 4.74 million Chinese have signed up for the 2023 national exam for postgraduate enrollment. More and more students will pursue a graduate school education. It's important to note that the self-directed learning abilities of the students is crucial in the postgraduate entrance exam. Therefore, the study seeks to identify the level of the self-directed learning abilities and psychological capital of the postgraduate school candidates to identify whether there is a significant correlation between the candidates' self-directed learning abilities and psychological capital.

Keywords: Psychological Capital; Self-directed Learning Ability; National Graduate School Entrance Exam

1 Introduction

In China, about 4.74 million Chinese have signed up for the 2023 national exam for postgraduate enrollment. Nearly 20 percent of university graduates are moving on to higher education amid pressure to secure employment. Over the years the number of applicants sitting for the national postgraduate entrance exam has increased continuously, from 2.01 million in 2017 to 4.57 million in 2022, an increase of 127.4 percent. (China Global Television Network, 2022). However, there is little research on the self-directed learning abilities and psychological capital of the graduate-school candidate as a main predictor for mental strength and self-efficacy of graduate school candidates. (jlenu.edu.cn/, 2022)

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2 Psychological capital

Psychological Capital or simply PsyCap refers to individual's positive psychological state of development characterized by hope, optimism, resiliency and self-efficacy. PsyCap represents how hopeful, resilient, confident and optimistic an individual is. These psychological capacities are very relevant in today's academic context which is characterized by heavy competition. The new era poses many challenges that a student has to face with grit.

Positive psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (as quoted in Kersting, 2003, p.26) noted that such Psychological Capital "is developed through a pattern of investment of psychic resources that results in obtaining experiential rewards from the present moment while also increasing the likelihood of future benefit. It's about the state of the components of your inner life. When you add up the components, experiences and capital, it makes up the value."

PsyCap can be defined as, "an individual's positive psychological state of development characterized by: (1) having

confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals, and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success" (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007).

3 Self-directed learning

Self-directed learning is vital in today's world. Self-directed learning skills are both generic and discipline-specific. Students now have access to massive amounts of data and virtually ubiquitous access to information. To survive in today's workforce, individuals must know how to take charge of their learning—to plan, develop, adapt, and change in a digital, interactive and global society. Most research on self-directed learning as a wholeistic concept comes from the fields of adult education and the study of informal and experiential learning. Malcolm Knowles (1975) provided one of the earliest, and most widely adopted, definitions. In his view, self-directed learning comprises a five-step process: Individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in (1) diagnosing their learning needs, (2) formulating learning goals, (3) identifying human and material resources for learning, (4) choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and (5) evaluating learning outcomes. (Knowles, 1975, p. 18).

Self-directed learning gives learners the freedom and autonomy to choose the what, why, how, and where of their learning. The research literature reveals four dimensions of self-directed learning. Self-regulation, Motivation, Personal Responsibility, Autonomous.

4 Psychological capital and self-directed learning

The purpose of the study is to determine the relationship between two key constructs: psychological capital and self-directed learning ability among individuals who are candidates for graduate school education among the candidates coming from Jilin Engineering Normal University, Academic Year 2023-2024.

In this study, the author adopted a descriptive-correlational

research design to identify the relationship between Psychological Capital and Self-directed Learning Ability among graduate student candidates. Psychological Capital, including its components (self-efficacy, optimism, hope, resilience) were independent variable and Self-directed Learning Ability was dependent variable.

This study is about the research skills and attitude of the senior high school students. The findings of the study are beneficial to the following:

The graduate school candidate will benefit from the development of their Psychological Capital and the self-directed learning in various ways. It positively influences motivation, resilience, problem-solving abilities, stress management, interpersonal skills, adaptability, long-term well-being, and the creation of a positive feedback loop, which will help them achieve higher academic performance and get better educational opportunities.

Educators and institutions can play a role in fostering Psychological Capital by creating a supportive and nurturing learning environment that encourages the development of these qualities in students.

Psychological counselors will get more insights on how to help the client achieve better performances in the academy and in the exams.

Specifically, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of self-directed learning ability of the graduate school candidates?
2. Is there a significant relationship between psychological capital of the candidates and their respective self-directed learning abilities?
3. What intervention program can be designed to improve the self-directed learning abilities of the graduate school candidates?

		H	E	R	O	Sm	Dfl	Sc
H	Pearson Correlation	1	.616**	.626**	.584**	.716**	.669**	.771**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213	213
E	Pearson Correlation	.616**	1	.676**	.551**	.677**	.572**	.638**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213	213
R	Pearson Correlation	.626**	.676**	1	.459**	.623**	.555**	.650**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213	213
O	Pearson Correlation	.584**	.551**	.459**	1	.660**	.646**	.654**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213	213
Sm	Pearson Correlation	.716**	.677**	.623**	.660**	1	.718**	.774**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213	213
Dfl	Pearson Correlation	.669**	.572**	.555**	.646**	.718**	1	.810**
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213	213
Sc	Pearson Correlation	.771**	.638**	.650**	.654**	.774**	.810**	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	213	213	213	213	213	213	213

** . Correlation Is Significant At The 0.01 Level (2-Tailed).

The results show that all of the dimensions of psychological capital has significant correlation with the self-directed learning ability of students, indicating that psychological capital is very important for the self-directed learning ability of students.

Psychological capital and self-directed learning ability among the candidates are moderately high and there is room for improvement otherwise it may negatively impact academic performance since results show that there is significant and positive correlation between Pschap and Self-directed Learning Readiness among exam takers, which is also consistent with the theories that are mentioned earlier. These individuals might struggle to cope with the demands of graduate-level studies and may find it challenging to engage in effective self-directed learning. Low psychological capital can contribute to increased stress and reduced well-being among exam takers. A lack of optimism, resilience, hope, and self-efficacy may make it difficult for them to manage the stress associated with exam preparation. Individuals

with low psychological capital may lack motivation and a desire for learning. This could lead to decreased interest in academic pursuits, resulting in a less enthusiastic approach to the graduate school entrance exams. Self-Management and Time Management Issues: Low levels of psychological capital may hinder individuals' adaptability to challenges. They may struggle to bounce back from setbacks, potentially impacting their ability to persevere during the challenging process of preparing for and taking entrance exams. Psychological capital influences interpersonal relationships. Individuals with low psychological capital may find it challenging to build positive connections with peers and instructors, limiting opportunities for collaborative learning and support. Therefore, the effective measures and support should be provided for the candidates to develop higher level of Psychological Capital and Self-learning ability.

5 Conclusion

Students' sense of self-efficacy should be improved, which includes enhancing their belief in their ability to successfully complete tasks and overcome challenges related to the exam.

Positive and significant correlations suggest that colleges and parents should implement programs or interventions that focus on enhancing positive psychological capital, including factors such as hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy. They should also provide training or seminars to develop and strengthen an individual's positive psychological capital.

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